

REVIVAL OF THE EUROPEAN SOUL: POST-SOCIALIST EUROPEANS - NEGLECTED BUT NOT NEGLIGIBLE

[Ambassador Jiri Marvan](#)

Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Greece
Czech Republic

The battle we are waging today is the battle for the human soul and its outcome will determine the survival of humankind. Let us thank the organisers of the International Sakharov Festival, which contains the very essence of Andrei Dimitrievitch Sakharov's freedom fight and its ultimate goal, which is its spiritual dimension.

Elena Bonner, in her touching speech at the opening of this conference, urged us not to forget such small, yet important components, of our common culture and destiny, as the Ingushi and Karabakhi of the Caucasus area and the Tadjiks of Central Asia. Let us, as Europeans, remember that with our arrival in the Americas and Australia, a never-ending process of decline started which involved the ultimate death of hundreds of indigenous cultures which is still taking place today. In Australia, at least one aboriginal language dies every year, taking to its grave a part of the legacy that the oldest traceable human culture, going back 30,000 years, offers us. What a loss for us, but also - what shame on us!

What of our continent, which considers itself the cradle of modern civilisation? Our history goes back about 5,000 years, to our pre-Indo-European ancestors. They survive, but we would hardly recognise them if they were to behave in a civilised manner. I am referring to the Basque freedom fighters, who can reach our minds and consciousness through the media only if they burn something or kill somebody. Consider the recipe for survival that modern journalism provides: only if you are an arsonist, a murderer or even better a mass-killer and war criminal, do you stand a chance of being listened to! Who has ever heard of the pre-Indo-European Livonians, who were once, about 2,000 years ago, the main peoples of Latvia, and whose language is dying before our eyes, and who survive only in a couple of villages west of Riga. This grim scenario indicates that we are on the brink of the collapse of our own civilisation. Is there any hope for us?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the hope is concealed - and not yet discovered - in the endless suffering of 300 million Europeans who are liberating themselves from the Communist tyranny. We can only hope that their message is being understood and acted upon by the other parts of Europe. If they listen to it, it will be in their own interests. Furthermore, and here, Sakharov's spiritual legacy is relevant again, this endless suffering will acquire a new, very positive future.

The transformation of people as a result of Communist ideology, into mere tools of production deprived them of the right to their individual being, to their private lives, to their inner, spiritual existence. Not having had a nuclear disaster such as Chernobyl, Western society has not experienced a spiritual disaster of this magnitude and is neither, technically nor psychologically prepared, to assist the post-Communist nations in the recovery of their human dignity and national pride.

A very curious paradox can be observed in ecology. The highest values we possess, the values given by God - air, nature, health - are taken for granted and only if they are endangered, almost when it is too late, do we notice them, do we worry, do we try to do something about it. And at that precarious moment we ask ourselves: Would it not be better if we had prevented this from happening?

The same paradox applies to the spiritual environment, to spiritual ecology. And this is the prevention; before it is too late, here comes the hope. Europeans who experienced the Communist assault on their souls, their basic spiritual values, on their linguistic, national and cultural environment, are acutely aware of the dangers their Western fellow-Europeans might be facing within several generations. Their experiences provide the warning, they provide the definition of a spiritual environment, of spiritual ecology. Let us help them with the recovery of their wounded soul, to find a solution which would help us all.

The extent of the problem is vast. The human tragedy of Bosnia is a result of negligence involving basic spiritual values, the basic principles of a true, human, spiritual ecology. It is negligence for which the Communist East and Capitalist West must share the blame. The question must be asked if all the meetings of presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs were devoted to a peaceful and friendly Czech-Slovak division, instead of to the war crimes in Bosnia, would not that be proof that they loved peace more than war? Would that not be a promise of a better world in the future? Politicians appear to spend much more time anticipating war than peace.

The following question must also be asked: if all the money and human effort invested in this conflict had been used to create a scholar's research centre to educate this continent in the field of human ecology, would not this world be far better than it is today? Would not peace be cheaper than this war, or any other war? And would it not be a good idea to reserve the first year of studies at such an institution for our top

journalists, politicians and diplomats?

It is not one culture and language but the diversity of cultures and language which has the potential for unifying and saving the world. With full confidence, I claim that every culture and language conceals a unique value inherent in the community of the people who use it. Every culture and language is a remarkable artefact of indivisible human history, which deserves at least as much attention and affectionate care as the endangered species of the non-human world attract, without anyone questioning their pragmatic purpose. For the same reason we should stop talking about language use and start thinking about language ethics and ecology. There is no treasure in the world which can buy back the cultures and languages lost to antiquity, yet much scholarship and money is devoted to this task. Most of all, however, there is, and there will be, no excuse for wasting the time and, perhaps, the bare chance for survival of future generations, as a result of our lack of care and love for Homo sapiens, the most precious species of our universe.

To conclude, in the spirit of Sakharov's contribution: Let the unprecedented suffering under the yoke of Communism, the suffering of three hundred million Europeans, in whose liberation Andrei Dimitrievitch Sakharov played such an important role, become not just a warning for humankind, but also a programme for its spiritual revival. A programme of spiritual ecology, a road on which the barbarian and killer of the past, and the technologist and civiliser of the present, will be transformed into the human being of the future, God's image on Earth.

Ambassador Jiri Marvan, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Greece, completed his tertiary education at the Charles University Faculty of Philosophy, in Prague, and has since, spent close to thirty years teaching in universities in Sweden, Australia and the United States. His teaching and research activities have focused on linguistics, sociology, and European studies. Upon his return to Czechoslovakia, in 1992, he held a position at Charles University, before joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the capacity of Ministerial Counsellor. Ambassador Marvan is the author of many books and articles on scholarly topics, journalism and poetry. He is Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and Professorial Fellow at Monash University in Melbourne. He is also recipient of several awards, including the Fellowship of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (1983) and the Golden Cross of Merit (1992) for the Promotion of Polish Culture and Economy. His name appears in over ten international biographical dictionaries, including the Who's Who in the World (Marquis, Chicago).