

The Future of Psychoanalysis in Europe. East-West Integration.¹

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It is highly symbolic that we are meeting in Trieste, the place of intersection of many cultures, languages and ethnic communities. It is very characteristic of contemporary Europe with its dynamically shifting map, that the National congress of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society has brought together a multicultural and multilingual group of analysts from West and East Europe to discuss matters of international concern. The psychoanalytic community in Europe is presently experiencing a moment of noticeable change. The disappearance of the Berlin wall has led to impressive development of psychoanalysis in Eastern Europe. At least in my own country, Russia, which I am in a position to talk about more or less freely, since the very first contacts with Western psychoanalysts were established, an enormous distance has been travelled.

To be fair, psychoanalysis was not completely dead under the Soviet regime. In Moscow, for example, a few enthusiasts, like Sergey Agrachev, were able to begin pursuing their new career as far back as the late 1970-s. In secret of course. However they and those who joined them later never saw a real Western psychoanalyst in the flesh until the end of the 80-s.

Describing the position of these colleagues Sergey Agrachev (1998) noted fear of three things:

- 1) Fear of the past, that they were starting from scratch, without any roots or tradition behind them.
- 2) Secondly, fear of the present, fear of the reality that could at any moment break into the consulting room.
- 3) Thirdly, fear of the future, the future they had dreamed of and which had now arrived: disappearance of the Iron Curtain, free intercourse with foreign colleagues and the inevitable feeling of shock and professional humiliation. As a defence against the danger these colleagues tended to devalue what had been discovered in psychoanalysis since Freud's time.² The attitude toward Western psychoanalysts was highly ambivalent.

And indeed, our first encounters with the psychoanalytic West, though highly necessary and inspiring, were not without their painful moments. To avoid dwelling excessively on my own experience, let me cite one or two passages from Milan Kundera, a well-known Czech novelist and essayist, who since the 70-s has been living in Paris. Certain themes in Kundera's fictions seem to be at

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² Although Freud's works had been removed from general circulation in public libraries it was not fully impossible for these colleagues to read some of them. At the library of the psychology department of Moscow University, for example, interested students could in the 70-s and 80-s obtain without any difficulty photocopies of Freud's works published in the 20-s.

least partly determined by his traumatic experience from Eastern Europe and by the period of his adjustment to life in the West.

In his novel “Slowness” (1995) a grotesque scene of quite a clumsy meeting between “East” and “West” is set in an old French castle, where an “international” event – a scientific meeting of entomologists is taking place. One of the characters, is a scientist from Eastern Europe, a former dissident by accident, who for over twenty years was robbed of the opportunity to work in science and was forced to support himself as a menial worker. Now he is in the government in his country. Naturally, Kundera makes this scientist with an unpronounceable East-European name a compatriot of his, a Czech. This is the first time in many years that this man finds himself among Western scientists. He experiences mixed feelings – excitement, pride, great embarrassment and humiliation. He realizes that his paper on the insect he discovered years ago – the “Prague fly”, is hopelessly out of date and of little interest. At the same time he understands that his life story is something to be proud of. When called on to present the paper he lets his feelings get the better of him. He makes an impromptu emotional speech about his past sufferings and his happiness at again being able to speak to colleagues from the free world. His audience gives him a standing ovation and the omnipresent television camera appears. And only when listening to the next speaker does he realize, with horror, that he quite forgot to deliver his paper about the “fly” he discovered.

Kundera is even more scathing about the stereotyped and fictionalized Western representation of the East. The book shows a group of Western relentlessly public intellectuals, whom Kundera refers to as “dancers”, people who live for public visibility and who make themselves into symbols of political correctness and social consciousness. During the coffee-break one of these dancers, a Parisian intellectual named Berck goes up to congratulate the Czech scientist on his paper and says:

- *Let me assure you that, that I took all that happened in your country very much to heart. You were the pride of Europe which has no reason to be proud of itself <...> It was you, yes, you, the intellectuals of your country, who persistently resisting the communist oppression, displayed the courage we all too often lack. You showed such a longing for freedom, I could even say such a passion for freedom that you became an example for us to follow. I would also like to tell you, - he says giving his words a touch of friendly familiarity, - that Budapest, is a magnificent city, so vibrantly alive and allow me to stress this, so European.*

- *You meant, to say Prague?* – the Czech scientist ventures to ask.

Oh, damn geography, Berck realizes that he has landed in an idiotic position, and suppressing the irritation, caused by his colleagues tactlessness, says:

- *Of course I meant to say “Prague”, but I could equally well have named Krakow, Sofia, St. Petersburg. I am thinking of all those countries that have just broken out of an enormous concentration camp.*

- *Don't talk to me about concentration camps. We were often in danger of losing our occupation, but no one put us in concentration camps.*

- *All the countries of Eastern Europe were covered with concentration camps, my dear fellow. Whether real or mental makes no difference!*
- *And don't talk to me about Eastern Europe, - the Czech scientist continues to object - Prague, as you know very well, is no less Western a city than Paris. The Charles IV University, founded in the fourteenth century, was the first University in the Holy Roman Empire. As you well know one of the teachers there was Jan Hus, the predecessor of Luther and great reformer of Church and spelling.*

What flee has bitten the Czech scientist? He keeps correcting his colleague, who is infuriated by this correcting. Although he manages to keep his voice friendly, Berck says:

- *Dear colleague, don't be ashamed of the fact that you hail from the East. France has always been in sympathy with the East. You have only to recall the emigration from your country in the 19th century...*
- *There was no emigration from my country in the 19th century.*
- *Well, what about Mickiewicz? I am proud of the fact, that in France he found his second homeland...*
- *But Mickiewicz was not a Czech – the Czech entomologist persists.*

This is of course an exaggerated and grotesque picture. But, when first presenting papers at East-West gatherings, we not infrequently experienced some ambivalent feelings – embarrassment at our discovery of by then in fact long known psychoanalytic “flies” and pride in our tribulations, which made us apparently so interesting in Western eyes. A measure of that ambivalence persists to this day. This may be partly due to a tendency to look on colleagues from Eastern Europe as “exotic specimens” – as experts in some topics fashionable in society and in our profession such as totalitarian regimes, or let us say the all-pervading corruption or the Russian mafia. On one occasion even our popular humorist Michail Zhvanetsky was asked in the West whether he would not come through with some jokes about the Stalinist oppression.

No doubt the situation in countries with a disrupted culture could be seen as a natural laboratory (Piccoli, 2001) for examining a number of problems very important to our discipline. To mention just a few there is the role of external reality, the links between the individual mind and the social context and the interrelations between individual and social psychopathology. Therefore accounts of the state of affairs provided by analysts from the East, offering insider's view into these conditions, are of great importance, I am sure.

However, I'd like to indicate that casting colleagues from Eastern Europe in the exclusive role of experts on totalitarianism and post-totalitarian context could impoverish the normal professional give-and-take between the two parts of Europe.

I quite understand that my spontaneous turning to a thinker like Kundera raises yet another topic – that of understanding the similarities as

well as the differences between different East European countries. The question of the inclusion of or exclusion (or self-exclusion) of a particular country from the European context may be seen as another aspect of this problem.

As far as Russia is concerned, for Kundera and a number of others, whose countries suffered from Russian or Soviet Imperialism, Russia is not Europe. This view, which has been disputed by others (including the poet Joseph Brodsky) is not expressed only in political terms, but is set in a wider cultural context. Not without reason Russia is seen by those who hold this view as a vast unpredictable area, which denies traditional European rationalism, and with it the distinction between art and life, and even between life and death (Groys, 1990). Russia is pictured as a realm where feelings are regarded as values in themselves, as criteria of truth, which supplant thought (Kundera, 1984), as an area “from which both Dostoevsky and those Soviet tanks have come” (Brodsky, 1985; see also Joseph Brodsky polemic with Kundera). This kind of symbolic geography is reminiscent in a way of Freud’s second topic, in which the Ego is counterposed to the Id.

In Russia, strange as it may be seen, similar views have always been held by critics of the West. Russia’s “separateness” from the West, her unwillingness to be part of Western culture, is a recurrent theme of what is known as Russian philosophy. Features of the same tradition are detectable in the policy of some newly formed State-oriented Russian psychoanalytic institutions and their leaders. One may find in the press, including professional journals statements like: “We cannot copy the West. We are different. We need to develop a purely Russian psychoanalysis to understand ourselves” (see for example “The New York Times” December 1996 or “Russia”, Illustrated Monthly Magazine, 5/1998). It is claimed that “the Western psychoanalytic setting is unacceptable”, that “the Western technique is not for us”, that “Russian psychoanalytic technique must proceed from Russian patterns of social intercourse”, that “Russian spirituality has always been different” (Psychoanalitichesky vestnik, N1(7), 1999).

In this tradition the usefulness of IPA certification in the Russian context is always questioned. These views derive from realistic perception of the difficulties encountered by psychoanalysis in the West, from political commitment, and from a feeling of humiliation and envy of Western colleagues and of the few compatriots, who have been able to obtain some training in the West. One of the well known opponents of Western psychoanalytic standards told me in a private conversation that he would not be able to go even to a Summer School, because he had worked for a long time for a hush-hush military institution, and was not allowed to leave the country.

In my view the main reason for the dissatisfaction with Western psychoanalysis is lack of accessibility of sound psychoanalytic training for the many interested colleagues all over the country. Even so, psychoanalysis

is a developing process. One could say that Europe too is a developing process. When we speak of the future of psychoanalysis in Europe we have both these processes in mind. As far as Russia is concerned, these processes have been difficult and painful, but also inventive and rewarding. The very fact that, thanks to the help received from the West and also to fruitful contacts with our “Eastern” peers, after only a few short years, we have 3 IPA Direct Members and about 30 Candidates, what is a sign of how far we have come in both processes.

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