

Athens, March 19th 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests

Thank you very much for the invitation. This is my first political conference in my life. So far I could participate only in scientific conferences so perhaps my today's contribution will be not that structured. I work as a political analytic in the Czech Republic and I live in Finland so I can observe political situation in two different European countries.

Many topics I wanted to address here have been recently said by others and I do not see any reason to repeat them. Therefore, I limit myself to really few comments pronounced from the Central East European (CEE) perspective.

If we are speaking about change, it is perhaps good to say that it should be a systemic change or a revolution, a word disappeared from our dictionary. Instead many speak of transformation. But my region was being transformed over 20 years. This transformation was based on neoliberal designs. And now we see all these negative consequences of such *a transformation* in relation to the refugee's crisis for example. Thus, people are tired of this word. It has no political potential.

Then, to be able to change and make real all these great plans we are talking about, it is necessary to mobilise people and win the elections. And here is the problem. We need a political language to address people. I would add something to what Gabi Zimmer said. She said that "The Left will lose", but I am afraid that the Left is losing already at least in the CEE region. And something must be done about it. The next stage of neoliberalism is the neo-fascism of the 21st century. So far, the winners are rightist populists with some xenophobic features who are able to address people and often use for it originally Leftist notions. The Left has to find or re-invent own dictionary and to change negative energy into the positive energy. There are terms which are hijacked by competitors (e.g. solidarity and freedom) and we have to liberate them or take them back. For example, the refugee crisis in its cultural articulation has enabled those politicians connected with failures of neoliberal transformation such as Václav Klaus to gain back

his public authority in the Czech politics. This is what is happening - the neoliberals are reconfiguring their political language.

One of the possibilities I am thinking in the Czech context would be – as an example - to take seriously the idea of national food self-sufficiency in order to resist the transnational corporations and transnational food industry locally. Less quality food is imported to the EU region of CEE in comparison with the Western European part of the EU and the European commission – by the way – says it is OK. This is showing the EU based on systemic inequalities. Perhaps, this one example of taking the local and national in our hands could contribute to push the change of current perception of social and economic problems in terms of cultural war (blaming the Islam/the other in Europe for everything) and nationalism. This *othering* of the immigrants/Islam is paradoxically an ideological mirror of Western othering of the Central Eastern region.

As Attila Melegh has said already: the EU is not equal Union and CEE region is in specific situation – it is competing for Western privileges and thus feels vulnerable to the newcomers-immigrants. This is an important point in understanding refugee crisis dynamics on the European and regional scale.

However, the essential fact is that we share common problems. The problems of CEE are European problems now, and the EU or Europe has become – no doubt - our problem too.

Thank you.