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The World of Tomorrow

A Sovereign, Democratic Europe – And Its Enemies

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Sample translation by Joel Scott

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1. The European Nobody

In the early 18th century, a pamphlet was published on German soil titled *The European Nobody*. (Today it is held in the Bavarian State Library). More than a hundred years before Georg Büchner's *The Hessian Courier*, it was a critical reflection upon the age in which the author lived, but with a markedly European perspective. Who was this nobody? Was it the author? Did he wish to remain anonymous? After all, he critically and scathingly reported on “all manner of confidential conversations about new and old matters of state/ court intrigues/ matters of war and peace”. Remaining anonymous may well have seemed quite advisable to both author and publisher, but in fact, “Nobody” also refers to the intended reader of the pamphlet, as is made clear in the dialectic wit of the subtitle: “The European nobody, who takes pains to insult nobody/ but be of benefit to everybody”.

Of course, a text with such an intention could have also been called “The European Everybody” – but this “everybody” needed to first be formed, by offering him the benefits of

Europe. But as long as nobody is willing, without taking immediate offence, to be supplied with information that is at odds with their prejudices, that goes against their limited knowledge and the familiar circumstances to which they have succumbed, whether with rage or resignation, then this nobody will always remain the addressee. The European nobody!

I'm reading the "16th Part" from the year 1719. It is – we are in Europe, after all – a year of wars. The Russians are descending upon Sweden, the Austrians are conquering Sicily, the French are invading Spain ... Yet at the same time, the novel *Robinson Crusoe* is published to enormous, international success, the great story of the rise of a Nobody to the status of the modern individual, somebody who, under his own steam and with no rulers looking over him, establishes a civilisation, through the free development of his capacities and the resources he has at hand and learns to appropriate. This novel is the literary incarnation of the revolution of this epoch: the emergence of bourgeois, entrepreneurial individuality and the overcoming of the rule of fate, acted out as a model on a deserted island.

At the same time, *The European Nobody* invokes a European culture in which the idea of the free individual is tempered and embedded in the social: in the midst of the clang of arms on the battlefield, this pamphlet sketches out visions of a social system that fosters peace and proclaims the freedom of each individual to "choose a way of life", while also being expected to bring their talents to bear for the good of a shared, communal life, not to merely sit at home alone being a philosopher, or an entrepreneur on a deserted island, for that matter. And the author muses ironically and good-naturedly about the fact that part of the development of German individuality consists in dressing in the French fashion or enjoying French wines. Which was a la mode at the time, 150 years before the Franco-Prussian War.

I was fascinated by this find. Its images of a peaceful, social Europe bound together in cultural diversity, with roots reaching deep into European history, articulating concrete utopias that radically extrapolate upon the new developments present at the time or stand in opposition

to the political realities they wish to overcome through critique. As a literary vision, as essayistic or philosophical reflection. Time and again, people said: pipe dreams! Of poets and intellectuals! Indeed, dreaming in the concrete sense of the term: the processing of experiences and events, the visualisation of questions that emotionally preoccupy the dreamer.

From the critique of cultural distinction to the critique of the territorial fragmentation of Europe and feudal injustices to the critique of nationalism, of its aggressions and limitations when it comes to addressing transnational problems. Does this ring a bell to nobody? It would be of benefit to everybody.

After the Second World War, the real economic and political evolution of the unification of Europe gained pace. Moving from the European Coal and Steel Community to the Economic Community through to the founding of the political European Union, just as our grandparents might have imagined it. But something seems to be standing in the way of the next steps in the path towards of European unification. Why? Certainly nobody would claim that there is a lack of *realpolitik* among Europe's leaders. So is there a lack of dreamers, perhaps?

I am the European nobody, I've no need to preach to the converted and no desire to provide ammunition for the fits of rage of the nationalists, though we do need to address the rage of many of our fellow citizens. I shall take pains to offend nobody. To be of benefit to everybody.

2. The Black Hole

Is the European Union a black hole? A realm in which matter has collapsed in on itself, through which an enormous amount of mass has been concentrated into an incredibly small space? This space is referred to as "Brussels". Twenty-seven states, almost 150 million people living in a

territory spanning more than four million square kilometres: collapsed and condensed into “Brussels”.

The EU now seems to exist exclusively as this cipher: “Brussels”, which seeks to swallow up the sovereignty of the nation states, “national interests”, and, above all, democracy (which is only conceivable as a national affair), absorbing them all into the shadowy realm known as Europe.

That is how it appears in the prevailing political discourse on Europe. But even in literary or intellectual discussions, the EU *as an idea* only exists in the German-speaking realm as a black hole of consciousness referred to exclusively as “Brussels”.

Contemporary European authors have penned books about globalisation and (post)colonialism, insightful and analytical literature about every topic under the sun, but hardly anything of a comparable calibre about Europe, about the EU, about the great transformation processes taking place on their own continent, about the foundations and frameworks that structure our lives, actions, and thinking, our hopes and our failures. Take a major intellectual like Hans Magnus Enzensberger, whose work I admire greatly. When he moved from his lucid commentary on the sixties and seventies and arrived in the 21st century, his only association with the EU this sad notion of “Brussels”, which he called a “gentle monster” – a demonstration of his critical spirit, which seemed to have no great interest in understanding what it was criticising. And in doing so, he pleased a great many people who craved precisely that: to have their self-image as critically minded individuals validated, revelling in the fact that none of their prejudices were questioned.

Winners of globalisation who don’t understand globalisation, people who profit from the EU who have no idea about the EU, victims of nationalist delusions who can only explain their misery through the idea that the nationalists they have voted for until now have just not been nationalist *enough*, and populists who don’t even serve the masses: all of them, on the left

and the right alike, are united by the perception or representation of themselves as critically minded citizens, and with their shared resentment and aggression, the only thing that divides the voters is their preferred party. (This phenomenon demonstrates what happens when “being critical” for the sake of being critical is made into a social fetish – suddenly everyone is critical, but with no shared foundations. Supposedly, there was a time when critique was based on analysis, its bread and butter were theory and method. Does nobody remember that?)

Sometimes, on Sundays, “Brussels” seems like a transcendental power to whom desperate prayers are directed, but during the week, in the day-to-day of politics, it takes on the appearance of a menacing figure, before which the heads of states and governments puff themselves up, protesting: We won’t allow ourselves to be swallowed up!

Of course, on a political level, that is nonsense. But it’s effective nonsense. Because in reality, Europe is indeed divided by the cipher of “Brussels”. On the one side, we find the Europe of shared institutions, which in the opinion of an increasing number of citizens exerts an undue and menacing influence on the lives of people in member states, seeking to quash national sovereignty and centralise the politics of the continent; and on the other side are the nation-states, still seen as natural institutions, essentially the only political form that can tend to the needs of human beings, the Europe of the “fatherlands”, whose governments resist the power of “Brussels”, taking back their sovereign rights and, if they don’t seek to completely destroy the EU, they certainly want to strip it back to a simple economic community.

I am, as I said earlier, nobody who wants to insult anybody, but I want to try to explain why I think this is really quite stupid, while being well aware that the stupid never consider themselves stupid, in fact, they think I am the stupid one. But, perhaps to everybody’s benefit: let’s discuss this!

3. Utopia and History in One Point

Some 70 years ago, with a great deal of planning, European nations consciously entered into a shared, post-national process. That is an objective fact, and nobody should be surprised if I repeat this matter, just to ensure that it is quickly and unmistakably established as a prerequisite for all further discussions about the EU: European nations consciously (!) and with a great deal of planning (!!) entered into a shared, post-national (!!!) process. And they did so not because a few politicians happened to sit down together with a generous barman and the mood struck them. In the course of just one lifetime, this generation had been through multiple, horrific nationalist wars. Having grown up in the embittered atmosphere that followed the Franco-Prussian War, they lived through the Balkan Wars, the First World War, Poland's invasion of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, followed by the Polish-Soviet War and the Second World War. And as I said, all of that during the length of one human life. In Europe.

To be sure, vigorous peace movements had emerged after the First World War, but all the beautiful slogans for European powers to lay down their arms, the manifestoes disdaining war as a means of carrying out politics, the peace demonstrations – they all came to nothing because they did not question the aggressor itself, namely the nation, as an idea and a political fact. Peace accords between nations proved to be not worth the paper they were signed on. (A fact that continues to be true today! Think of the “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership” between Ukraine and Russia, for example.) These treaties were mere exercises in buying time, allowing the parties to build up arms. Betrayal and self-betrayal, pastel-coloured bubbles that were destined to pop once so-called “national interests” became pressing: in territory disputes, or conflicts over natural resources, markets, spheres of influence, and – oh so importantly – to foster feelings of national pride and superiority.

The founding generation of the project of European unification that led to today's EU drew a clear lesson from these experiences, they identified and named the aggressor – nationalism – and developed a plan to overcome it.

Nationalism had led to the greatest crimes in the history of humanity and devastated Europe. They wanted to prevent this from ever happening again. As is well known, the idea was to weave together nations that had previously been enemies, placing their shared interests under collective control, turning them into shared interests that would then be managed collectively. At this point, a utopia emerged from historical experiences, and this utopia led to a real historical process: the work-in-progress of a post-national Europe. Without this political decision and its gradual implementation, “never again!” would be mere verbiage.

And then something happened that can only be interpreted as proof for the thesis that there is a cunning of history. The idea of establishing a post-national Europe was, as mentioned, the consequence of historical experiences. It was a project for bringing peace to our continent, essentially as a way of assuring that the events of the past could not be repeated in the future. As such, it was primarily established in response to history, to historical experiences. Of course, the founders of the project of European unification couldn't have had an idea of how the future would evolve globally. And then it turned out that the future went by the name of globalisation. A process that evolved without planning, anarchistically, and with great rapidity, it pierced national borders, destroyed national sovereignty in terms of the ability to influence the fundamental conditions of production and of the reproduction of human life. Globalisation refers to the creation of transnational production and supply chains and universal relations of interdependence when it comes to producing commodities, which are consumed equally in all corners of the globe and in all climates. Globalisation produces dramatic crises and forms of dependence that can no longer be managed through national politics (in case we were still clinging to the dream of national sovereignty).

With a nod to Hegel, that is what I call that the cunning of reason, and that should provide the Eurosceptics with a clear argument for the meaningfulness of European unification: that a process that was initiated in Europe as a consequence of recent history has proved itself today to be the only one that is suited to the future, in light of contemporary global developments. Because trans- and post-national politics has been in planning in Europe for 70 years and was developed in a step-by-step manner. As such, this process objectively predates globalisation. However, the problem is that the leaders of Europe, from the heads of the various states all the way up to the president of the European Commission, are constantly announcing that “we”, the respective populations of the European nation-states or Europeans as a whole, are a “nobody” on the global stage, with its great power blocs, and need to finally be made “fit” for globalisation – instead of realising and communicating that the EU actually had a head start and should thus be viewed as a vanguard in the world. Because in terms of the necessary and possible shaping of transnational processes, only the EU possesses years of experience and expertise.

Should have, could have, would have. If we take a look at the politicians behind the “fit for globalisation” rhetoric, we quickly realise that European politicians have not identified the advantages and possibilities of a united European politics, rather they shortsightedly struggle, plead, beg and pray for short-term national “successes”, trying to gain market advantages for their own economies. Please, Mr Multinational, invest in us and not in another member of the EU, we’ll pay for the infrastructure, we’ll make tax concessions. – No! No! Come to us, we’ll offer even lower tax rates! – And so on. Understanding this as a fitness programme for globalisation and at the same time bowing down before the nationalists with concessions is a grotesque, self-destructive contradiction, and this kind of competition for foreign investment among European states is the exact kind of politics that the project of European unification sought to combat: competition for resources with a national emphasis. Does that bother nobody?

4. The World of Tomorrow: An Optimistic Speculation?

The lessons of history and our contemporary experiences lead to the same conclusion: only a united, transnational politics can intervene, can shape and bring order to forces that would otherwise produce destruction, crime, and misery. The plan was to overcome nationalism, and of course, we can argue about how far into the future the founding generation had looked and whether they might have, in the long term, even envisaged a withering away of nation-states. If you think about it, there is an internal logic to this, and there would be logical arguments for its necessity. Through its utopia, which over more than half a century had been turned into *realpolitik*, the EU had made a number of steps in this direction. But is it reasonable to expect history to be logical? History brings devastation and miracles and then destruction and short-term consequences and forgetting. But logic? Perhaps for brief interludes.

What is indisputable, however, is that the EU is the provisional, real-world outcome of a concrete utopia, of a vision of the world of tomorrow. A glimpse into a future informed by historical experiences and a desire to shape the world. While the nationalist critique of it, on the other hand – what does it want, what kind of future does it envisage? The return to a history that never existed (a happy, ethnically defined people living in its territory free and autonomous, in peace and universal prosperity, despite all the storms of history). A return to the never-was is no future. Nationalism has no future. But it can certainly destroy the near future.

5. The Future is Popular

The idea that the world of tomorrow will (and should) be post-national, enjoyed great popularity just yesterday – certainly for two decades after the end of the Second World War. That can be surmised from some of the mass-cultural phenomena of the sixties, an example being some of

the extremely successful science-fiction novels and films that were consumed so enthusiastically by the masses, and whose specific formal elements could scarcely have been dreamt up without the experiences of nationalist wars and the real, political steps taken by Europe toward a post-national future.

In 1957, the signing of the Treaty of Rome marked the founding of the European Economic Community (EEC). It was called an *economic* community, but its decisions constituted major steps toward a *political* community. For the countries of the EEC, national borders were erased as far as trade went, and customs were abolished. What's more, the participating states agreed to joint controls on food production, in order to secure the nutrition of the populations of these countries.

On 13 August 1961, construction commenced on the Berlin Wall, that dramatic symbol of the division of the German nation, or perhaps, put another way, the pragmatic acknowledgment of its destruction. There is no need to assert here that the building of the Wall was a crime, it was a consequence of the great nationalist war and represented the definitive entry of Germany into post-national political systems: tied in with the West and the EEC on the one side and the Eastern Bloc on the other. And in early September of this very year, the first volume in the *Perry Rhodan* series was released, achieving unprecedented sales numbers for so-called "pulp" fiction. The plot begins in 1971, with the world divided up into three blocs: a Western Bloc, an Eastern Bloc, and an Asian Federation dominated by China. But people realise that competing, heavily armed and militarised blocs can do as little to ensure peace on Earth as nations can. The *Perry Rhodan* project was only superficially about jetting off to the stars; more importantly, the series sought to give expression to the desires of so many people "to finally bury the differences between nations, ethnicities, religions, and races", as one of the editors wrote. *Perry Rhodan* represented the projection of a peace project and political community into

the future, and the series transcended the Wall in the very year of its construction; without restoring the nation, it absorbed it into a post-national humanity.

And shortly thereafter, the TV channel of the public broadcaster (there were no others, at the time), produced a science-fiction series that became a blockbuster, namely *Space Patrol Orion*. In the intro, a sonorous voice said: “This is a fairy tale from tomorrow. There are no nation-states left, there is only humanity”, and I wasn’t the only one who was utterly captivated, so was my mother, meaning that I, who was not to watch television if at all possible, was allowed to watch every episode.

Critics always remark that the EU is just a project for the elites. But in the sixties, the collective imagination was already more advanced than today’s political elites.

This is revealing and marks a major historical turning point: before the Second World War, the sons of Jewish refugees in the USA, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, invented the figure of Superman, the hero equipped with extraterrestrial powers who is able to protect the USA from the forces of evil. And after the war, German authors Walter Ernsting and Karl-Herbert Scheer developed the figure of Perry Rhodan, who as a citizen of a post-national world, also sets off on extraterrestrial adventures.