

interview \_\_\_\_\_

## Fredrik Langdal

Researcher in Political Science at the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), Stockholm



Mr. Langdal, at SIEPS you are in charge of several projects dealing with a wide array of important EU topics such as the EU Presidencies. What is your opinion on the effectiveness of the changes brought by the Treaty of Lisbon to the EU institutional system?

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has been struggling with handling the causes and the effects of first the financial and then the economic crisis. Without over emphasizing the importance of the present I do think that the last two years have put extraordinary pressure on the policy-making machinery of the Union and it is therefore too early to give an answer to the general question of efficiency. However, it is during times of crisis that institutional and constitutional robustness are really tested and here I think that we can make some interesting observations. First, it seems quite clear that the European Council - as intended - is trying to provide political leadership to the European Union admittedly with mixed success. Secondly, as it has been illustrated by the decision-making in the last 18 months and by the draft of the Treaty on a consolidated economic union (*Editor's Note: The final form of the interview was agreed upon on 17 February 2012*), deficiencies remain particularly in the area of economic governance. These weaknesses are to some extent being addressed by the Euro-plus pact and the proposed Treaty but one should be aware of that these 'solutions' also risk introducing new tensions between the 27 member states of the Union. [...]

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analysis/opinion \_\_\_\_\_

## The Russian presidential elections

Immediately after Vladimir Putin was declared winner of the presidential elections in the Russian Federation with 58.3% of the votes, militants in the opposition manifested against the results, based on allegations of extended fraud of the electoral process. The elections took place in a general context dominated by large manifestations against the prime minister of that time, the most significant street manifestations since the collapse of the communist regime. After the demonstrations following the parliamentary elections in December, Vladimir Putin ordered [...]

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[...] What we see is an increasing propensity to act outside the confines of the EU Treaties combined with a very strong role for Germany.

If one were to speculate on who has lost out in this process of crisis management and prevention one is tempted to single out the European Parliament, the national parliaments and to some extent also the Commission. This may seem paradoxical as the parliamentary dimension of European integration was meant to be strengthened through the Lisbon Treaty. It is, however, a familiar story of emphasizing efficient decision-making over democratic decision-making and even stretching constitutional rules in times of crisis. However, looking at policy-making beyond the crisis, the parliamentary dimension has been strengthened even though the national parliaments still have some way to go before they live up to their potential in terms of democratic accountability and influence. The crisis and the Lisbon Treaty have also affected the powers of other actors such as the ECB and the rotating presidency.

Another centrepiece reform of the Lisbon Treaty to enhance efficiency and coherence concerned foreign policy and the creation of the High Representative and her European External Action Service. To say that this has been an outright success would be an exaggeration. Rather the first year of existence has been characterized by organizational challenges - turf wars according to some - coupled with a dramatic foreign policy environment which leads to the conclusion that the external representation of the Union still has some considerable way to go before it can be described as efficient. The difficulties in this area are of course based on the intergovernmental characteristics of the policy area, but there are other explanations as well ranging from across the spectrum from actors to institutions.

**One can see that the public opinion attitude towards EU is changing. What is the current opinion in Sweden about the last wave of enlargement?**

First it is important to note that the public opinion of the Swedes regarding EU membership as such is indeed changing. Since 2005 support for EU-membership has increased steadily during

„[...] the external representation of the Union still has some considerable way to go before it can be described as efficient.”

Fredrik Langdal is a researcher in political science at the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS).

Before joining SIEPS in 2002 he was a PhD researcher at the European University Institute in Florence and he holds a Master of European Politics from Lund University.

His areas of research include European constitutional politics, democratic accountability and the effects of European integration.

He has published on, *inter alia*, the rotating Council Presidency, constitutionalism and on the debate on a Turkish EU-membership.

the second half of that decade, but when one looks at the most recent data from the government agency Statistics Sweden one sees a marked decline between 2010 and 2011. However, according to the latest figures, those in favour of EU membership (47 percent) clearly outnumber those against (25 percent). It might also be worth mentioning that the support for introducing the Euro has absolutely plummeted over the

last two years. Concerning attitudes to enlargement we have data from Eurobarometer 75 (April 2011) which shows that Swedes continue to be positive towards enlargement with 59 percent in favour and only three percent against. However, it is worth pointing out that the support for further enlargement varies significantly between different prospective members.

**How do you think SIEPS and EIR should develop cooperation relations in order to consolidate the EPIN (European Policy Institutes Network) and its objectives?**

The EPIN network will hopefully have a successful year 2012 fully utilizing the fact that European affairs will remain high on the agenda in all member states. Thus, the demand for high quality policy and institutional analysis will be there and EPIN can use this fact in three ways. First, through promoting comparative projects like the one initiated by Elcano Institute on the European External Action Service where researchers from many of the member institutes take part in a genuine comparative effort. SIEPS is for example presently considering the possibilities of launching a comparative

study on the fiscal compact making full use of the EPIN members. Second, EPIN can develop through implementing the plans for a high quality newsletter where EPIN and the individual institutes of the network can promote their work to a European wide audience. Thirdly, I think that an initiative spearheaded by CEPS - as coordinator of the network - for a new project focusing on the institutional development would be actively supported by the steering committee and welcomed by all members. I think that the network should be in a fairly good position to attract funding for such a project especially if we were to strengthen the academic component and link up with a few universities.

Interview by **Mădălina Magnusson, Oana Mocanu** (agreed upon on 17 February 2012)

## The Russian presidential elections

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than 91.000 electoral constituencies. Nevertheless, a series of incidents in different constituencies determined the opposition militants to consider this measure as insufficient in order to put an end to frauds<sup>1</sup>.

The real issue at stake of the presidential campaign which recently finished in the Russian Federation was the very legitimacy of Vladimir Putin's mandate. However, numerous national and international policy analysts consider that the re-election of Putin at Kremlin does not guarantee him a mandate without protests or significant political challenges from the opposition.

The last presidential campaign was monitored more attentively than any other elections, and the debate revolving around the election topics reached an unprecedented level. The demonstrations which followed the March elections remained small-scaled. If before elections the lack of a formal or even informal leadership at the level of protesters contributed to extending street manifestations, now this factor seems to work exactly on the contrary. At present, the political stake seems to have moved to the level of the opposition, which tries to materialise its following steps, by setting up, creating or formalising some political movements already shaped up. Mikhail Prokhorov, who obtained 8% of votes, strives to create a party, while it is expected that figures such as Mikhail Kasyanov and Boris Nemtsov register their PARNAS party, but with lower chances of success. The communist party should not be overlooked, which is to pass through a changing process as concerns the generation of leaders; should young

leaders be appointed in leading positions, this party may represent an important opponent for the current power.

To this effect, an unusual initiative of the current Russian president Vladimir Putin was to present what can be called an unofficial electoral program in a series of articles published in the main Moscow newspapers between January - February this year. In these articles, V. Putin undertakes to approach a series of important issues for the socio-economical future of the Russian Federation. On 30 January, he published an article in *Vedomosti* which included the main ideas for the country's new economic policy. Another one, published in *Kommersant*, presents the opinions of the Russian leader on democracy and on the governance principles in general. Other topics tackled, in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and, respectively, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, referred to social policies and army reform. Finally, the article published in *Moskovskie Novosti* brought into discussion the interests of the Russian Federation in relation to events on the international scene. The Russian leader tries to answer every topic brought into discussion through concrete measures; thus, by the end of this decade, the Russian Federation should witness a decrease in poverty, the creation of 25 million new jobs in sectors based on research, innovation and the use of high technologies.

At the same time, the state undertakes to take measures in order to ensure housing at decent prices in large cities, to attract qualified migrants, in an attempt to counteract the actual trend of demographic decline. The great challenge, beyond the publication of these articles, is the implementation of the proposed measures and policies. As for the instruments to achieve these objectives, V. Putin considers that "the ample discussion of the draft laws, decisions and programs adopted at all the levels of the government"<sup>2</sup> constitutes an adequate mechanism, which may give all citizens the occasion to participate to public debates, including over the Internet.

The manner in which the Putin administration will understand, on one hand, to manage the consequences of the protests which took place after the presidential elections and, on the other hand, to tackle the socio-economical problems of the country will have an impact upon the Russian Federation's future.

The European leaders, still concerned about the economic and financial crisis, and in spite of having watched the elections in Russia, preferred to keep silent on this issue. To this effect, the analyst Dmitri Trenin considers that "Western leaderships need to use whatever influence they have to encourage the continued peaceful and orderly nature of the Russian political process. (...) And they need to do nothing that could be construed as interference in Russia's domestic affairs"<sup>3</sup>.

Agnes Nicolescu

<sup>1</sup> The Guardian, Hundreds detained after Moscow anti- Putin protest, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/blog/2012/mar/05/russian-election-reaction-putin-live>, accessed on 12 March 2012

<sup>2</sup> Katri Pynnöniemi, *Vladimir Putin writes a lot but says very little*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 27 February 2012

<sup>3</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Protests in Russia*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 29 December 2011

## The Spring European Council: Brussels, 1-2 March 2012



The Spring European Council, held in Brussels on 1-2 March 2012, took place in an atmosphere of harmony, highlighting a team spirit necessary for the adoption of important decisions for the European Union, which is still going through a difficult period. A broad range of issues were discussed: on the first day, the European Semester, granting Candidate Country status to Serbia and reviewing the course of Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the Schengen area, based on which the Council of Justice and Home Affairs will make a decision in September, and, on the second day, Syria, the Southern Neighbourhood and the signing of the Stability Pact. At this summit, Mr. Herman Van Rompuy was designated President of the European Council for a second mandate.

**The European Semester** is the main tool for the annual policy coordination, which adopts country-specific recommendations starting from the Commission's annual survey on the development perspectives of the European area. The Spring Summit, scheduled in mid-semester, recommends to Member States elements of strategy concerning their budgetary and economic policies.

This spring, the Council discussed the **boosting of economic growth and employment** across Europe. The discussions focused on two directions: the first one aimed at fiscal consolidation and the perspectives of growth and employment and the second was the increase of competitiveness.

**Fiscal consolidation** and its connection to the perspectives of growth and employment were tackled from various angles, starting from the Swedish experience: carefully examining expenses, by strengthening the function of activating unemployment benefits; analysing revenues, by fighting against tax evasion and fraud. At the same time, as regards investments, Member States must ensure that, while bringing budgets under control, they continue to invest in the future, in education, research, development and innovation - by making the right choices on the way towards fiscal consolidation.

Increasing competitiveness implies that Member States must work together, making efforts to obtain the maximum of benefits from the single market. Other progress must be achieved by making efforts at national level. On this topic, some of Germany's experiences were shared at the Council: reducing tax burden on labour force, especially on low income persons; opening protected sectors such as professional and retail sale services; improving the business environment and reducing bureaucracy through digital public administration.

For 2012, the Commission's Annual Growth Survey identifies a series of priorities for the actions that should be taken both at the EU and national level:

- pursue differentiated, growth-friendly, fiscal consolidation;
- restore normal lending to the economy;
- promote growth and competitiveness;
- tackle unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis;
- modernise public administration.

These five strategic orientations are supported by the European Council that will monitor closely their implementation.

**The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance** in the Economic and Monetary Union was signed at the summit. It is an important step towards re-establishing confidence in the euro area and returning to economic growth and employment, which are paramount economic and social objectives.

As its name indicates, the Treaty has three objectives: *stability, coordination and governance*. Stability aims to avoid a repetition of the crisis, firstly by strengthening budgetary discipline. As regards coordination between economic policies, the purpose of the treaty is to strengthen the economic element of the Economic and Monetary Union. Finally, the treaty aims to improve governance, by formalising euro area summits.

The treaty on stability, coordination and governance requires national budgets to be in balance or in surplus. This rule is to be incorporated into the national legal systems within one year after the entry into force of the treaty, namely from its ratification by at least 12 euro area Member States. Transposing and complying with this rule is subject to control by the European Court of Justice, whose decision is legally binding and can be followed up with financial penalties if the Member State concerned does not implement it.

According to President Van Rompuy, the treaty manages to ensure a series of balances, especially between responsibility and solidarity. While it is more in the nature of a responsibility mechanism, it also shows a direct link with the Treaty establishing the Stability Mechanism, which is a solidarity mechanism. The concept of the treaty itself shows a balance between the legal innovation required by the situation generated by the lack of consensus between Member States and the existing Community law. It indicates the need to make additional efforts in order to incorporate this treaty into the Treaty on European Union.

The European Council stressed the determination of Member States concerning Syria and that they will ensure that the persons responsible for the atrocities committed are held accountable for their actions. At the same time, it was highlighted that Member States work closely on matters of foreign policy, a fact which is often underestimated. The EU has a common position on Iran, Syria and Libya, the world's most dangerous region.

For details, please see:

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/128520.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/128520.pdf)

Julian Oneaşcă

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: 12-15 March 2012 Strasbourg Plenary session

### *Europe is our future. That is why we need to strengthen its unity*



The conclusions of the 1-2 March European Council were debated with the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, and the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. While the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, appreciated the fact that, this time, the works of the Council did not focus exclusively on crisis management, many MEPs considered the Council's commitments to restore economic growth as timid.

The topic of equality between women and men in the European Union, also called the **gender inequality in the EU**, was tackled in the European Parliament by the approval of several proposals to reduce the gender pay gap, to establish quotas to increase female representation in company management bodies and in political bodies. Through the resolution on the 2011 Annual Report on gender equality in the European Union, the EP called for the drafting of EU laws introducing these quotas, if national measures should fail to achieve this. Inequality can only be approached through initiatives and action, since it is not a spontaneous phenomenon. The EP resolution condemns gender discrimination and human trafficking and draws attention to the low percentage of 24% female representation in national parliaments and 23% in the governments of some member states. The resolution refers to the complexity of factors generating inequality, such as access to care services for children, elderly persons and other dependent persons, which is essential for ensuring equal participation of women and men in the labour market, in education and in training courses; since people who provide care to family

members are discriminated by not taking into account their years of service with a view to grant pensions and other rights.

MEPs debated on the need to take coordinated action to stop the **spread of the Schmallenberg virus** and to reassure the public and its business partners on this matter. Moreover, MEPs criticised the fact that Russia and other countries imposed restrictions on imports of EU meat and live animals in response to the outbreak, qualifying these restrictions as being unjustified and calling for their removal. The MEPs called on the Commission, among other things, to speed up research on vaccines and even to grant compensations to the farmers affected by the virus. The outbreak - in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom - of this virus, which causes congenital malformations in herbivores (cattle, sheep and goats), has caused losses to more than 1 200 farms in the EU so far.

The European Parliament gave its consent to renew the International **Cocoa Agreement**, which aims to make world cocoa trade fairer and more sustainable, while drawing attention to the problem of child labour in cocoa fields. In the adopted resolution, MEPs stated that the European Union, as the world's leading consumer of chocolate and home to many major chocolate manufacturers, must help ensure measures for the prevention of child exploitation in this sector. The rapporteur called on political decision makers, producers and owners in the field to ban child labour in the cocoa industry.

The Report "**A competitive low carbon economy by 2050**", concerning a roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050, was presented and put up for debate. The relevant aspects of the report were energy (alternative and renewable), energy efficiency, air pollution caused by vehicles and ozone, from the perspective of climate change. The report represents the consent of MEPs regarding transport and the creation of a Single European Transport Area in which reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050, compared to the 1990 levels, is possible. Interim targets must be drawn up by the Commission in order to ensure that sufficient measures are adopted in a timely fashion.

The debates on the **Bologna Process** and student mobility highlighted the fact that the costs of services, such as university fees, vary from one member state to another, which distorts free movement.

Pursuing debates on the measures necessary to **mitigate the crisis**, the European Parliament also considered in this session the new **two-pack** (following the pack for the governance of the objectives of



Member States' budgetary policies, known as the *six-pack*). The European Parliament will monitor macroeconomic imbalances in the euro-area Member States, as well as deficit prevention.

The European Parliament approved the setting up of a special committee, with a year-long mandate, dedicated to **organised crime** issues. In order to put an end to "the beef trade war", the EP approved an EU-USA agreement stimulating imports of high-quality meat, maintaining the ban on imports of hormone-treated beef.

MEPs also condemned the **xenophobia** fueled by a Dutch web site offering the public a space to post complaints about persons coming from Central and Eastern Europe. MEPs called on the Dutch Government to take an explicit stand against this site.

Given the fact that the costs of health problems related to diabetes represent about 10% of the healthcare expenditure, this disease being considered a real "epidemic", the EP drew attention, in a resolution, that a strategy for prevention and early diagnosis is necessary.

For details, please visit <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

Mariana Bara

## opinion

### New Eastern Europe – looking to the future with an eye on the past

Besides my capacity of employee of the Romanian State within the EIR, which occupies most of my professional activity, I also consider myself a traveller on the world's roads and a pilgrim on life's alleys. My last visit, at the end of February, was to a country which has been fascinating me for a long time and which I was looking forward to discover - Poland. Although my travel had a strong personal character, inclusively as for the financing, I succeeded to slip among the moments of history, sacred and profane culture, a meeting which connected me to the world of European affairs with which we are struggling at EIR.

Thus, one of the most fruitful moments of my travel proved to be the meeting I had in Cracow with a part of the team building one of the newest and most interesting editorial appearances for this corner of the world: **New Eastern Europe (NEE)**. A quarterly magazine (now at the 2nd issue), NEE covers a large area of topics - political, social and cultural events of Central and Eastern Europe, a geographic region not very extended, but definitely rich in nuances.

This region of Europe and of the world, at the crossroads between Western pragmatism and Eastern effervescence, was always caught in the force game of the great powers. Its mosaic of ethnic groups, cultures and peoples proved to be a genuine checkerboard on which were decided the destinies (sometimes millennial) of nations hardened by barbarian invasions and fratricidal fights. The frontiers of the states in the region were reconfigured with every new civil, regional conflict or world conflagration, any mutilation or territorial gain resulting in tensions between neighbouring peoples and was quantified in massive loss of human lives. Detecting such a historical landscape in the current context of the European integration is not at all an easy task, but the NEE editors and authors (of East and West) manage to achieve this.

The novelty of *New Eastern Europe* consists in its relaxed and open approach of analysing some really complex issues specific to this region. Its greatest advantage is the lack of rigid formalism and academic jargon tending to turn the resort publications into an instrument strictly dedicated to specialists. Thus, the articles, reviews and interviews published in NEE become intelligible for a large public, not specialised, but interested in understanding the realities of Central Europe. This does not mean that the NEE articles lack depth; on the contrary, they contain pertinent analyses and various opinions offering the reader a large spectrum of ideas helping him/her to form a thorough vision about the events in the region.

One of the articles included in the most recent number of NEE is dedicated to the *Solidarity trade union* (under the leadership of the emblematic Lech Walesa) and to its significance in the present Europe. Written by *Basil Kerski*, director of the *European Solidarity Centre* of Gdańsk, the article summarizes the history and significance of the unionist movement at the beginning of the 80s which triggered the domino effect generating the fall of communism (in Europe, at least), its turning into a political party, the divisions that characterized Solidarity in the following decades and its recent return at the unionist roots, becoming again a non-political organization strictly interested in defending the rights of workers.

In his article's conclusion, Mr. Kerski makes a more than convincing plea for the concept of solidarity understood at large scale, not only through the lens of class struggle, correctly indicating there is no incompatibility between the values of liberalism and those of social solidarity.

Another challenging article is written by *Shana Penn* of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, deploring the "concentration camps tourism" generally offered to young American people of Jewish origin. These travels focused on



the horrors of Nazism avoid places and topics showing the richness of the Jewish population's secular contribution at the Polish history and culture, as well as the vitality, the deeply European spirit of present-day Poland breathing beyond the shadows of death and desolation covering the fields of Birkenau.

Without claiming objectivity, not having (unfortunately) Jewish or Polish ascendancy, although I understand and appreciate the merits of this article, I must confess nevertheless that the visit to the *Auschwitz-Birkenau* museum was one of the moments which left a deep impression on me. You don't have to be Jewish, Polish or Roma to identify with the sufferance and tragedies that took place there more than seven decades ago. It is enough to be human. Even though it is said, wrongly, in my opinion, that sensitivity is a women's attribute, I do not think that there is such an insensitive soul not to be affected, at least intellectually, by such a path of horror.



Masterpieces of world cinema, like „Schindler's List” by Steven Spielberg or „La vita è bella” by the master Roberto Begnini, help greatly to understand the dramas of history, but nothing compares to the direct experience of the mountains of human hair used by the Nazis in their profound and diabolic efficiency to make SS uniforms. It is striking to see thousands of suitcases in which people from all over Europe hastily gathered things of an extreme banality like pots, toothbrushes and clothes (including for children!!!), but which prove their sacredness only in such a tragic context.

More than one million five hundred thousand people reached Auschwitz after travelling in conditions which are offensive to human dignity, hoping in vain to find a new temporary home, but their destiny was death by gasification, starvation or fatigue due to forced labour. Beyond the feeling of inability and incapacity to understand how human beings were capable of committing such acts of bestiality, I also had a feeling of hope seeing the demographic diversity of the visitors in the museum - from people from Russia, Netherlands or Japan, and also pupils from Great Britain. The Birkenau monument has a simple but profound message, written in the languages of all the ethnic groups which were victims of the stain of shame in European and world history which is Nazism. Here is the memorial tablet in the Romanian language:

*Forever let this place be a cry of despair and a warning to humanity, where the Nazis murdered about one and a half million people, mainly Jews from various countries of Europe.* [editorial note - translation in English]



Although we, the Romanian people, do not like to recognize very often and to assume collective responsibilities, we cannot afford and we must not forget that there were victims of Nazism deported even from Romania. We could though have reasons to be proud - Elie Wiesel, one of the Auschwitz survivors and Nobel Peace prize laureate, was born in Sighetu Marmăției.

I am happy to notice the two Romanian contributions to the pages of the first two NEE issues. *Filip Florian* makes a more than interesting radiography of the multiple attitudes of Romanian intellectuals towards the Eastern space, to which many relate with either disgust or resignation, or as „dreamers” (like Filip Florian and I dare to situate my humble self in the same category), recognizing and embracing the fascination and magic which still characterises a part of these regions.

Moreover, in the latest issue of NEE, *Ana Maria Sandu*, through a personal testimony full of candour and authenticity, also presents the complex situation of the various generations of women in Romania - persons of mature or old age like her mother and grandmother as well as adolescents on the streets of the capital city and abandoned children in the villages. Although they experience different problems (family dramas caused by the illegal abortions during communism, absent parents who left abroad or are preoccupied by career and money), all these women and girls seem to be in a perpetual search of some truly fixed landmarks in a country and times they feel they do not belong to.

My visit to Poland inspired a comparison not always convenient to Romania. There are many things that connect us, beyond the similar experience of the communist regime and the common statute of EU Member States, but there are also many aspects that distinguish between us.

Both countries claim their vocation to be bridges between West and East, but if Romania is from the linguistic point of view a Latinity island in a „Slavic sea” and from the religious point of view for the most part an orthodox country, Poland, although of Slavic language, has a deep Latinity derived from its Catholic confession. Other two destinations of this adventure of the soul, as proved to be my travel to Poland, were *Czestochowa* with the Black Madonna's *Jasna Gora* Sanctuary, the patron saint of the whole country, and *Wadowice*, the birthplace of Pope John Paul II, son of Poland and of the Church who contributed not only to the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also to the reunification of Europe which only now succeeds or at

least tries to breath with „both lungs”. I was impressed by the piety and religious practice of the Polish people which have nothing to do with the ignorance, superficiality and superstitions which unfortunately dominate some of the pseudo-religious experiences in our country.

Beyond the spiritual component of my travel, I observed the hospitality and order specific to the Polish people and I understood better why Poland succeeded to have an infinitely better absorption rate of structural funds than Romania, why the shock therapy at the beginning of the 90s imposed and induced by Balcerowicz’s economic farseeing was fruitful and how the Polish economy, built especially upon small and medium enterprises, succeeded to create a “thermal” comfort zone protecting it from the consequences of the global crisis.

Romania still has many steps to take, even from the point of view of the civic spirit and political and social attitudes to reach the level of Poland, but cooperative efforts, like the five events organized by the European Institute of Romania together with the Embassy of Poland in 2006 - 2011, may help the constructive exchange of experience and the transfer of know-how which is valuable for us.

An objective I did not reach during my visit was a graffiti drawn on the walls of Cracow which is a post-modern version of *Silva rerum* - a chronicle of the Polish nobility of the 16th -18th centuries. This unattained objective is an alibi for a future travel.



The five days spent in the region of Cracow were among the most interesting of my life and helped me understand a country I already loved, Poland, but, in a strange and maybe paradoxical way, this travel has restored my slightly dented pride to be a daughter of Romania AND of (Eastern) Europe.

I went to Poland looking for God, but I found man - in all his glory and splendour when he submits himself to the values of truth and justice as the Polish people often does, but also in his abyssal cruelty when he falls prey to ideological illusions and evil impulses.

Returning to Romania, I felt frustrated because we do not share more of the Polish people’s features, but I succeed to overcome this feeling when I remember the familiarity I felt travelling by minibus from Wadowice to Cracow, crowded just like here, and the slightly childish satisfaction that they are not perfect either and even there things are not working quite smoothly.

Identity is a fluid notion in today’s world and even more so in the European Union where the national, regional and European identities overlap sometimes harmoniously though not always.

You can read more on this subject in the interview given to NEE colleagues by Mr. *Hans Gert-Pöttering*, the oldest member of the European Parliament and former president thereof. You will also find there interesting articles about the political situation of the Republic of Moldova and the unexplainable silence of the Brussels authorities with regards to the democracy and Europeanization simulacrum of the country, as well as about Georgia, Belarus and Russia.

Therefore, I warmly recommend you to read New Eastern Europe <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/>, to visit Poland, as for the concentration camps... if you cannot reach them, you should at least visit the museum site [http://en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com\\_wrapper&Itemid=85](http://en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=85) because „those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it” (G. Santayana).

**Alina (Arhire)**

Professional traveller and EIR columnist

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