ARGUMENTUM
news opinion analysis

THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT IN A NEW GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Essays by Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

ARGUMENTUM
news opinion analysis

Editorial Introduction

Europe at a Crossroads: Identity, Responsibility, and Renewal

Europe stands at a historic crossroads. The crises of our age—from the war in Ukraine and instability in neighboring regions to internal political fragmentation—challenge the very foundations of European unity and identity. Once seen as a beacon of liberal democracy, economic integration, and shared values, Europe now faces urgent questions: How can it renew its political purpose? How can it safeguard its moral and strategic credibility? And how can it remain a meaningful actor on the global stage?

In this special edition of Argumentum Magazine, Ambassador Zlatko Kramarić addresses these questions through a series of essays that are at once deeply reflective, analytically sharp, and grounded in lived diplomatic experience. Drawing on history, philosophy, literature, and European political thought, Kramarić explores the European spirit—its historical strengths and vulnerabilities, its capacity for moral courage, and its ongoing need for renewal. From the lessons of the past to the challenges of the present, these essays offer readers insight into Europe's identity, its responsibilities, and its possibilities in a turbulent geopolitical landscape.

Kramarić's essays remind us that Europe's identity has never been a simple matter of geography or institutions. Instead, it is a story of ideas in crisis and in motion—a narrative shaped by conflict and reconciliation, by disappointment as well as hope. At a time when Europe's voice risks being diminished on the global stage, these essays insist that renewal remains possible. By revisiting Europe's intellectual foundations and moral responsibilities, this edition calls on readers to rethink not only what Europe has been, but what role it must now choose to play in a rapidly changing world.

Marjana DODA
Editor-in-Chief, Argumentum.al

CONTENTS

EUROPE AS A CHALLENGE, A TASK, AND A DESTINY

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

My political and cultural heritage has always gravitated toward that strand of Croatian thought which saw, in Bishop Strossmayer's project, a vision of bridges rather than walls, of a Central European identity that Croatia too often ignored, suppressed, or ridiculed. The 1990s and the disintegration of Yugoslavia confirmed, with almost brutal clarity, that Croatia can remain stable only if it stays loyal to authentic European values.

The essays gathered in this volume were written out of a need to rethink — for ourselves as authors, but also for our societies — an idea that has shaped us for centuries, yet continues to both inspire and disappoint, attract and unsettle, elevate and frighten us. The idea of Europe has never been a simple one. It was never merely a geographical fact, nor a stable "cultural constant." It has always been, above all, an uncertain project — a continuous struggle over meaning, boundaries, and the very notion of what it means to live together as free human beings.

It is therefore no coincidence that Europe's greatest writers and thinkers — Zweig, Benjamin, Musil, Broch, Gombrowicz, Kundera, Havel, and many others — approached Europe at moments of crisis, precisely when it seemed to be falling apart. Europe reveals itself in crisis; only in crisis does it become clear what is worth defending. Their concerns were not accidental. They emerged from personal encounters with shattered continents, collapsing empires, forced migrations, wars, and ideological fires that defined the twentieth century.

From this tradition stems my own motivation. My political and cultural heritage has always gravitated toward that strand of Croatian thought which saw, in Bishop Strossmayer's project, a vision of bridges rather than walls, of a Central European identity that Croatia too often ignored, suppressed, or ridiculed. The 1990s and the disintegration of Yugosla-

via confirmed, with almost brutal clarity, that Croatia can remain stable only if it stays loyal to authentic European values.

In this respect, I also see a strong parallel with Albania today. I am grateful to the editorial board of Argumentum, and especially to my dear colleague and friend Mariana Doda, for recognizing the intention behind these texts at a moment when Albania stands at the threshold of the European Union. Accession will undoubtedly be a historic achievement, but — as Croatia's experience demonstrates — it will not resolve all "themes and dilemmas" of political or cultural history. Quite the opposite: accession often marks the beginning of a deeper confrontation with the past, with transitional traumas and the modern legacies of authoritarianism. Only then do long-suppressed questions begin to speak again.

Albanian society, just like Croatian society, will have to ask itself: how was it possible for an Enver Hoxha to emerge at all? How did such a radical model of total isolation become a national programme? And how much of that legacy continues to shape political reflexes, the culture of memory, and the deeper structures of social life? These are not historical curiosities; they are contemporary political questions.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed that all post-communist countries — Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, and others — would easily adopt Western institutions and behavioural norms. As Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes have persuasively argued, this process soon transformed into a politics of imitation: inauthentic, often pressured emulation of Western models, without a genuine social consensus. The result was predictable: disappointment. In some countries it opened the door to authoritarian or semi-authoritarian leaders; in others it generated cynicism, or even a fascination with "alternative modernities."

Albanian society, just like Croatian society, will have to ask itself: how was it possible for an Enver Hoxha to emerge at all? How did such a radical model of total isolation become a national programme? And how much of that legacy continues to shape political reflexes, the culture of memory, and the deeper structures of social life? These are not historical curiosities; they are contemporary political questions.

In the Balkans, this dynamic is further complicated by the influence of the so-called "Russian world" and its regional derivation, the "Serbian world" — a blend of anti-Western resentment, manipulated nostalgia, and geopolitical ambition. It has created the illusion that a political path separate from European values is not only possible but desirable.

This trend is reinforced by the spread of modern populism, which, as Jan-Werner Müller argues, is not merely a rhetorical style but a logic that undermines the very idea of pluralism. Florian Bieber has described the "autocratic repertoire" of leaders in our region, while Ece Temelkuran has shown how authoritarian regimes are born from the gradual normalization of myths, illusions, and nationalist emotions. All these phenomena point to a deeper crisis of the European spirit — a crisis emerging precisely when Europe needs clarity and unity.

It is in this context that the work of Albrecht Koschorke becomes essential. By analysing Mein Kampf not as a political document but as a narrative structure, he revealed how totalitarianism is born from a story that seduces — a story that promises simplicity, replaces reality with myth, and transforms fiction into programme. Today, similar narratives return in new, digitalised forms.

For all these reasons, this volume is not merely an academic exercise. It is an attempt to read Europe from within, to understand its internal contradictions, its fragility, but also its enduring strength. And it is an invitation to read ourselves — Croatia, Albania, and the entire post-communist East — in the light of what we are rather than what we imagine ourselves to be.

If this foreword is to end on a literary note, then let it be this:

Europe resembles Sleeping Beauty — a princess lulled into slumber by myths, fears, and misguided politics. And we, her citizens, intellectuals, and witnesses, must ask ourselves whether we still possess the courage for that necessary awakening kiss.

For only an awakened Europe can awaken us, too.

Zlatko Kramarić is a Croatian publicist, author, and diplomat, currently serving as Ambassador to Albania. Formerly a university professor and politician, he is known for his work in literature, cultural studies, and regional history.

Edmund Husserl and Giorgio Agamben
EUROPE BETWEEN THE IDEA AND THE END OF HISTORY

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

(An Essay on the Spirit of Europe)

Abstract

This text examines two philosophical perspectives on Europe: Husserl's idea of Europe as a spiritual–rational project of universality, and Agamben's conception of post-historical Europe as a space of the state of exception and biopolitical control. The essay compares Husserl's vision of the renewal of spirit with Agamben's diagnosis of the end of the European political and philosophical project, while also incorporating the perspectives of authors who interpret Europe through the experience of the camp and the Holocaust (Améry, Bauman, Arendt). In the tension between the "idea" and the "end," a new possibility emerges for understanding Europe — not as an empire of reason, but as a community that acknowledges its own fragility and limits.

The essay compares Husserl's vision of the renewal of spirit with Agamben's diagnosis of the end of the European political and philosophical project, while also incorporating the perspectives of authors who interpret Europe through the experience of the camp and the Holocaust (Améry, Bauman, Arendt). In the tension between the "idea" and the "end," a new possibility emerges for understanding Europe — not as an empire of reason, but as a community that acknowledges its own fragility and limits.

1. Husserl's Idea of Europe as a Spiritual Project

When Edmund Husserl delivered his famous 1935 lecture Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie in the midst of the European crisis of spirit, his "idea of Europe" was not a geographical concept but a spiritual-historical project. For Husserl, Europe represents a teleological form of the life of the spirit, a continuity of rationality stretching from Greek philosophy to modern science.

This continuity, rooted not in a mere cultural heritage but in a constant striving for universal truth, makes Europe a unique phenomenon in history. Husserl therefore calls for a "return from objectivism to subjectivity", to that sphere in which the original meaning of truth as the living experience of the world is renewed.

For Husserl, Europe is not a fact but a task, a "spiritual form" that must be continually reflected upon and renewed. The crisis of Europe arises when it forgets its foundation in critical thinking and rational self-awareness, when its science turns into technique and its philosophy into ideology. In this sense, the spirit of Europe is not a legacy but an ongoing obligation to preserve the possibility of universality and truth in a

world sinking into relativism and particularisms.

2. Agamben's Post-Historical Europe

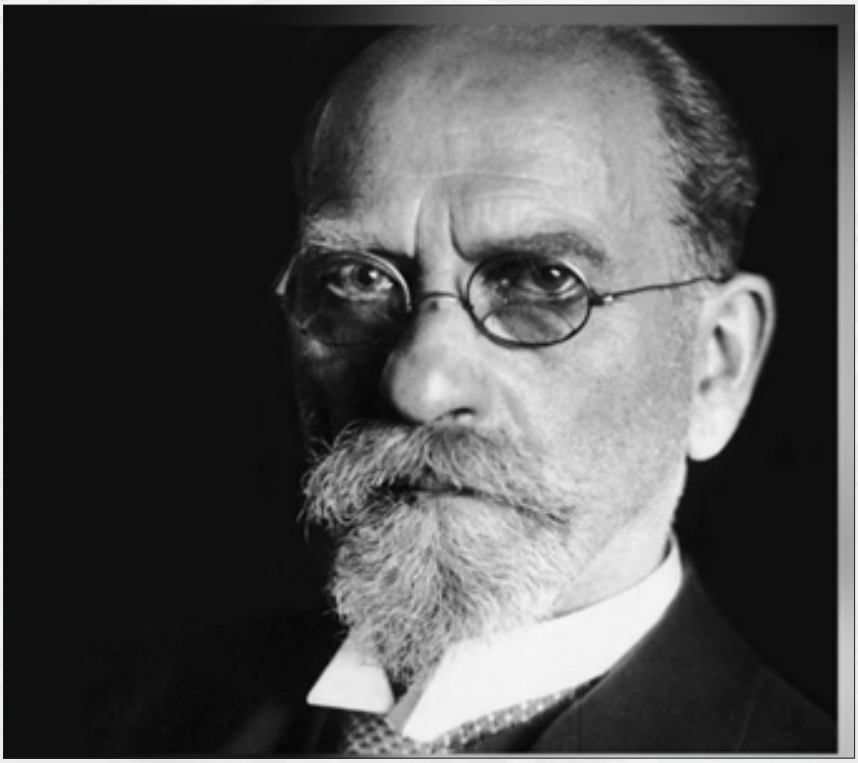
Giorgio Agamben, almost a century later, inherits Husserl's concern but radically transforms it. In his works — especially Mezzo senza fine and L'uso dei corpi — Europe no longer appears as a project of spirit but as the site of an epochal ending and the failure of political rationality.

While Husserl believed in Europe's renewal through a return to philosophy, Agamben sees Europe as a laboratory of biopolitical mechanisms that have erased the boundary between life and law, between human being and citizen.

If for Husserl Europe was a metaphysical project of universal rationality, for Agamben it has become a space of the state of exception — a continent that has replaced its spiritual idea with an apparatus of power. He recognizes that European universalism, in its modern forms, often becomes an instrument of exclusion: camps, borders, refugee regimes, security laws. In these, Agamben sees the symptom of what he calls "the post-historical condition of Europe" — where history no longer moves toward an ideal but circulates within endless administrative mechanisms.

3. Europe from the Perspective of the Camp

Agamben's reflection is not a solitary voice. As Jean Améry wrote in his Essays on the Camp, "European humanism was extinguished in the smoke of the crematoria." The camp, for him, was the negative epic of Europe — the



place where faith in Enlightenment reason and human autonomy vanished.

Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman, in Modernity and the Holocaust, demonstrates that the Holocaust was not an exception but a product of modernity itself — of its rationality, bureaucracy, and organized coldness. In short: a purely administrative act.

Hannah Arendt, in The Origins of Totalitarianism, speaks of "administrative evil," the moment when rationality separated from conscience. Even Ernst Nolte, from a different standpoint, recognized the camp as a modern form of political violence arising not from barbarism but from the very logic of historical progress.

Thus, the camp becomes the dark mirror of Husserl's idea of Europe: if for Husserl Europe was the space of universal consciousness, then for Améry and Bauman it became the space of universal dehumanization.

In this reversal, the camp emerges as the antithesis of the European spirit — the site where the limits of rationality and moral self-understanding are exposed. Agamben sees here "the center of the political space of modernity": the camp is not the past but a paradigm, the architectural and symbolic foundation of a Europe that fears its own history.

Was not the creation of Goli Otok, the Yugoslav labor camp for those who supported the Cominform

The crisis of Europe arises when it forgets its foundation in critical thinking and rational self-awareness, when its science turns into technique and its philosophy into ideology. In this sense, the spirit of Europe is not a legacy but an ongoing obligation to preserve the possibility of universality and truth in a world sinking into relativism and particularisms.

Resolution, an example of the same mechanism — born of a regime's fear of its own (criminal) past? "Either we liquidate them, or they will liquidate us!" — the dilemma was banal, the answer radical.

4. Between the Idea and the End

Yet between Husserl and Agamben — between the idea and the camp — there lies an invisible link: both conceive Europe not as an empirical fact but as a spiritual event. For Husserl, it is the event of reason's self-understanding; for Agamben and Améry, the event of civilization's self-annihilation.

Husserl's "idea of Europe" represents the possibility of meaning; Agamben's "post-Europe" represents the possibility of its end. But precisely within this tension — between spirit and emptiness, memory and forgetting — there opens a space for renewed reflection: can Europe once again find its justification, not as an empire of reason but as a community that recognizes its own fragility?

Perhaps, as Agamben suggests, the only way out of Europe's crisis is a return to life not reduced to function — to what he calls "pure use." In this sense, the spirit of Europe might be renewed not through another rational project, but through an ethic of modesty, responsibility, and measure — the very sophrosyne that Greek philosophy, Husserl's archetype of Europe, once revered.

Today, Europe stands between Husserl's idea and Agamben's prophecy — between the memory of spirit and the experience of its disappearance. And perhaps it is precisely this tension, this irreconcilable space in between, that still makes Europe possible. For, as Husserl warned, its fate depends on the ability to see in crisis not an end, but a challenge — and, despite everything, to reinvent itself as a space of meaning.

Epilogue: Europe After the Camp

If the camp was the nadir of European history, then every new Europe — political and spiritual — must think from that depth. Between ashes and ideals, between memory and forgetting, Europe can no longer speak in the tone of grandeur. Its voice must be quiet, aware of its fragility — perhaps even penitential. For we Europeans are not absolved of the capacity for evil.

In a world that has lost metaphysical certainty, Husserl's idea of Europe can survive only if it embraces Agamben's lesson: that true spirit is measured not by the magnitude of projects but by the ability to protect what is human in its vulnerability.

Perhaps the new Europe is precisely this — a Europe of remembrance, a Europe of measure, a Europe that has learned to be silent before its camps and to speak only when it finds a language that does not exclude.

Today, Europe stands between Husserl's idea and Agamben's prophecy — between the memory of spirit and the experience of its disappearance. And perhaps it is precisely this tension, this irreconcilable space in between, that still makes Europe possible. For, as Husserl warned, its fate depends on the ability to see in crisis not an end, but a challenge — and, despite everything, to reinvent itself as a space of meaning.

In this quieter yet morally deeper space, Europe may still endure — not as a triumph, but as a testimony to the possibility of meaning after the collapse of meaning.

Today's Europe is an Odysseus who no longer knows where he is returning to

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

> **The European Union is facing its own fatigue and structural contradictions. The enlargement process, once one of the most powerful tools of European transformation, has turned into a bureaucratic procedure devoid of political imagination. When "European values" are reduced to the technical fulfillment of chapters, rather than to real political culture and social change, then the Union loses what once made it attractive – its moral and civilizational strength.**

Europe is once again at a crucial historical crossroads. The war in Ukraine, the conflicts in the Middle East, the growing uncertainty in global power relations, and the increasingly visible cracks within the European Union itself require a new rethinking of its political and security architecture. After more than three decades of liberal optimism, when the "end of history" seemed to seal the triumph of democracy and the market economy, Europe is facing its own paradox – stability without vision and democracy without content.

In this context, the Western Balkans remain a space where European values are often declared but rarely lived. Almost all the countries of the region are formally committed to the European path, but their internal political reality shows a differ-

ent face: democratic institutions are weak, the media is under pressure, corruption is endemic, and power is being personalized and centralized. In the name of "stability", Brussels has tolerated authoritarian tendencies for years – convinced that controlled stagnation is less of a risk than political upheaval. But it is precisely this logic of stability without democracy that has led to the current situation: the loss of citizens' trust in European processes, the strengthening of nationalisms, and the return of discourses from the past.

The enlargement process has turned into a bureaucratic procedure without political imagination

The European Union is facing its own fatigue and structural contradictions. The enlargement process, once one of the most powerful tools of European transformation, has turned into a bureaucratic procedure devoid of political imagination. When "European values" are reduced to the technical fulfillment of chapters, rather than to real political culture and social change, then the Union loses what once made it attractive – its moral and civilizational strength. At the same time, the member states themselves no longer offer a convincing model: populism, the rise of the extreme right and the weakening of democratic standards within the EU show that Europe can no longer credibly demand what it itself fails to live up to.

The new American establishment views Europe more through the prism of transactional relationships than shared values.

The new global context further compli- cates Europe's position. Russian aggression in Ukraine has exposed the limits of European security autonomy, while conflicts in the Middle East and African migration crises show how dependent Europe is on external actors. In addition, American foreign policy is going through a phase of reexamination and loss of continuity. For the first time since World War II, there is no solid European reflex in Washington – neither understanding nor instinct. The new American establishment views Europe more through the prism of transactional relations than shared values. Senator Marco Rubio, for example, symbolizes this new generation of American politicians for whom Europe is merely a regional partner, not a civilizational companion.

Can Europe rediscover the meaning of its political mission?

All this raises the question: can Europe rediscover the meaning of its political mission? The answer, it seems, lies in the necessity of resetting European policies. Europe must renew its own narrative – not as a techni-

The new global context further complicates Europe's position. Russian aggression in Ukraine has exposed the limits of European security autonomy, while conflicts in the Middle East and African migration crises show how dependent Europe is on external actors.

cal union of regulations, but as a community of meaning and solidarity. It must stop supporting "stable autocrats" in the Balkans and start building partnerships with societies, not just governments. It must rediscover its own language of freedom, rights and responsibility. Resetting European policy towards the Western Balkans means rejecting paternalism and creating a real political dialogue. Instead of endless processes of harmonisation, it is necessary to more clearly recognise the political will, cultural specificities and democratic potential of individual societies. Otherwise, Europe will lose what little credibility it has left. It is time to rethink the strategy of "stability at all costs". Because stability without democracy is not stability, but a temporary peace before a new crisis. If Europe wants to remain relevant, it must become politically courageous again – and morally consistent.

Europe today finds itself in a strange emotional-political state: between indifference and anger, between exhaustion and latent aggression. The war in Ukraine, the rise of populism, the fear of migration, distrust of institutions and the moral fatigue of the liberal project – all this creates an atmosphere in which the distinction between justified indignation and blind rage is lost.

Europe between anger and wrath: from Homer to Sloterdijk

Europe today finds itself in a strange emotional-political state: between indifference and anger, between exhaustion and latent aggression. The war in Ukraine, the rise of populism, the fear of migration, distrust of institutions and the moral fatigue of the liberal project – all this creates an atmosphere in which the distinction between justified indignation and blind rage is lost. It is precisely this distinction, which goes back to the very beginnings of European culture, that stands at the heart of one of the most profound diagnoses of modernity: the distinction between anger and wrath. When Homer invokes in the first verses of the Iliad: "Anger, O goddess, sing to Achilles", he not only opens the epic about the Trojan War, but also the first great moral drama of Western civilization. Mēnis – divine anger – is not an ordinary emotion, but a cosmic reaction to a violation of order and justice. It is a moral energy, a righteous rage that arises when the foundation of community is undermined.

The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk , in his book Zorn und Zeit (Anger and Time), takes

Peter Sloterdijk

this very Homeric opening line as his starting point to describe the condition of modern man. According to him, the history of the West can be read as the history of anger management. Each epoch creates its own "anger banks" (Zornbanken) – symbolic spaces in which people deposit feelings of injustice and humiliation, waiting to one day be transformed into political energy. In antiquity, these were the gods, in Christianity, God's justice, and in modern times – revolutionary ideologies and great utopias. But in today's Europe, Sloterdijk warns, these banks are empty. Moral energy has been exhausted, and the remaining anger no longer has its object or purpose. What we call "the anger of the people" today is often not an expression of righteous anger, but rather an accumulated resentment – frustration without an idea, rage without meaning . While anger could once be sublimated into a political vision (as in the French Revolution or the human rights movements), today's anger is dissipated in national and identity fears, in digital struggles and anti-government movements that do not know what they really want, except negation. The distinction between anger and rage is therefore crucial. Anger in the Homeric sense is a reaction that has a measure – it is just, conscious and capable of restoring the moral order. Anger, on the contrary, is the blind energy of the mass that does not create but destroys. Europe, as Sloterdijk says, has lost the ability to "be dignifiedly angry": it no longer knows how to distinguish righteous resistance from destructive rage.

If the Iliad is an epic of anger, then the Odyssey is an epic of wanderings.

If the Iliad is an epic of anger, then the Odyssey is an epic of wandering. In this sense, today's Europe is an Odysseus who no longer knows where he is returning. Lost between universal ideals and particular interests, between tradition and the global market, it wanders, without an Ithaca to wait for it. In this wandering state, anger turns into rage, and moral restlessness into political apathy. Sloterdijk therefore calls for the restoration of what Plato called thymos – the spiritual force that stands between reason and lust, the source of courage, dignity and a sense of justice. Without thymos, people become mere consumers of desires; without anger, citizens lose the ability to act morally. Today's European crisis – political, cultural and spiritual – is not just a question of economic or geopolitical interests. It is a crisis of emotional and moral capital. Europe has renounced anger and left anger to the periphery: to radical movements, authoritarian leaders, disillusioned layers of society. Thus she lost the kind of moral energy that once drove her loftiest ideas.

Achilles, at the end of the Iliad, realizes that anger without purpose leads only to death. This is a lesson that Europe could repeat today. It is not anger that is dangerous – its absence is dangerous. When the capacity for moral indignation disappears, only indifference remains – and indifference is, as Sloterdijk warns, a silent form of civilizational suicide. Europe does not have to choose between destructive rage and sterile peace. Between these two poles there is space for what Homer would have recognized as holy anger: a righteous unrest that does not destroy, but heals . Only such anger can restore the continent to its lost dignity – and perhaps open the way for a new, wiser Ithaca.

Stefan Zweig – "At every moment in history, Europe has stood between the abyss and ascension"

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

In our previous text, "Today's Europe is an Odysseus who no longer knows where he is returning," we attempted to show how a long history of European self-awareness stretches between Homer's Odyssey and Sloterdijk's notion of "anger" – from the mythical search for home to the philosophical attempt to understand one's own rage. We could say that Europe has been searching for itself for millennia, constantly journeying between reason and wrath, hope and disappointment.

> **Europe seems to have been in a permanent state of crisis for centuries. It is a continent that constantly questions itself, that constantly "re-decides what it wants to be." In the 1930s this crisis took the form of political radicalization, economic collapse and spiritual disorientation; today it appears in more sophisticated forms: technocratic cynicism, populist anger, and moral exhaustion. Yet the common denominator remains the same – the loss of the meaning of togetherness.**

This endless return, this journey without arrival, took on a moral-political dimension in the modern age: the continent that gave birth to the greatest ideals also became the site of their most radical defeats. That is why today, after Homer and Sloterdijk, we must read Stefan Zweig again – a writer who per-

haps was the last to believe that the European spirit could be renewed by culture, dialogue, and humanism. If Homer's Europe was in search of home, and Sloterdijk's in search of meaning, Zweig's – caught between despair and hope – sought moral equilibrium between past and future.

The Greek word krísis originally means decision, judgment, differentiation. In ancient medicine and philosophy, it refers to the moment when it is decided whether an illness will end in healing or death. In that original sense, crisis does not mean (certain) disaster, but a moment of truth – a boundary between possible salvation and final collapse. Europe seems to have been in a permanent state of crisis for centuries. It is a continent that constantly questions itself, that constantly "re-decides what it wants to be." In the 1930s this crisis took the form of political radicalization, economic collapse and spiritual disorientation; today it appears in more sophisticated forms: technocratic cynicism, populist anger, and moral exhaustion. Yet the common denominator remains the same – the loss of the meaning of togetherness.

In both cases, it is a crisis of the spirit. If Europe was once a place of humanism and reason, today it is increasingly a place of fear, division, and distrust. This is precisely the diagnosis that Stefan Zweig, a writer who embodied in his own life (he committed suicide in 1942 in Brazil) the tragic fate of European humanism, formulated with almost prophetic clarity.

Zweig was a "cosmopolitan of the spirit," perhaps the last authentic European from the time before Europe. His idea of the continent was neither political nor economic but cultural-moral. For him, Europe was above all a community of conscience – a space where different nations recognize each other through a common faith in reason, dialogue, and beauty.

In his essays on Montaigne, Erasmus, Rolland or Tolstoy, Zweig creates a gallery of figures representing the best in European tradition: doubt instead of dogma, reason instead of fanaticism, peace instead of victory. These humanists are his spiritual allies, "resistant to national borders and hatreds," because for him Europe is not a political entity but a community of conscience, a place of dialogue and tolerance. Ultimately, "Europe was born from the book, not from the sword": it is a federation of peoples united by shared values, not by frontiers. Europe, in Zweig's view, is an act of conscience rather than a geographical fact. And we should never allow that spirit of community to weaken; for when culture becomes mere decoration rather than a space of freedom, Europe begins to collapse from within.

This is where the connection between his vision of Europe and the ancient Greek word krisis – the moment of judgment and differentiation – becomes clear. For Zweig, the crisis of Europe is not merely a political or economic event, but a moral test for the continent: the moment when it must choose between reason and fanaticism, between humanism and extreme nationalism. In this context, crisis is not necessarily a misfortune, but a verdict: the moment when it becomes clear what Europe is – and what it definitely does not want to be.

In his autobiography The World of Yesterday, written in exile shortly before his suicide, Zweig reconstructs a world of security – that Mitteleuropa of the Viennese spirit, where culture and civility were the foundation of identity. That world collapsed into the barbarism of the 20th century, but in his memory it remained as a moral compass: proof that Europe once existed as a community of spirit, not of raw interests.

When Oswald Spengler published The Decline of the West in 1918, the book became an intellectual bestseller precisely because it expressed a widespread mood of disappointment. Spengler saw history as a cycle of rise and decay of civilizations: every culture has its "childhood, youth, and old age," and Europe, he argued, is already in terminal decline. Culture has turned into civilization (form without soul, a technical world devoid of creative energy), art into technology, and spirit into mere calculation.

Zweig shared the feeling of crisis, but rejected Spengler's deterministic pessimism. For him, history is not a natural process of decay but a moral drama. Europe is not an organism that is dying, but a being that can recover – if it regains its faith in reason, empathy, and culture. He does not deny the collapse of the epoch, but sees in it an opportunity for moral awakening.

In that sense, Zweig stands as the ethical antithesis to Spengler. While Spengler claims that the "soul of the West" is exhausted, Zweig believes that precisely in exhaustion we may rediscover humanity. His humanism resists fatalism – he defends the right to hope when everyone else believes in the end. For him, history is ethical, not biological: it unfolds through human responsibility. He refuses the idea of the "decline of the West," because he believes Europe – however weak (and old) – still represents a spiritual possibility. Where Spengler sees the death of culture, Zweig sees a call to awakening. In this sense, he anticipates the later thought of J. Habermas, who spoke of the "unfinished project of modernity."

If we compare Europe of the 1930s with today's Europe, we will recognize a number of troubling parallels:

Economic inequality and insecurity: then the Great Depression, today the consequences of globalization and technological transformation. Both produce social anxiety

and political anger.

Crisis of liberal democracy: then institutions collapsed under dictatorships, today they are hollowed out by populism and indifference.

Propaganda and manipulation: then the totalitarian voice of radio, today replaced by digital algorithms and "post-truths" – but the result is the same: disinformation and the weakening of critical thought.

Cultural exhaustion and nostalgia: then Europe turned to its (imperial, national) past, today to an idealized "golden age" of prosperity and identity; it embraces nostalgia and pessimism, fearing its own future.

In both cases, the crisis is not merely material but ontological – a loss of meaning and trust. Zweig would recognize today's Europe as a space of moral disorientation: a continent that knows everything, but no longer knows why.

German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, in Rage and Time, describes the contemporary West as a space of "accumulated anger" – energy with no direction. Today's world, he argues, produces frustrations but not ideals. And here is the paradox: we live in an age of unprecedented material advancement, yet also in an age of profound spiritual depression. He depicts the contemporary West as a "civilization of the resigned" – driven not by great ideas but by technological optimism and emotional exhaustion. His description perfectly matches Zweig's sense of the end of an epoch – only now the end is global and devoid of tragic dignity.

Sloterdijk's analysis complements Zweig's melancholy. Both see that Europe has strayed from its foundations: efficiency has replaced reason, and markets have replaced culture. But while Sloterdijk analyzes symptoms, Zweig offers therapy: a return to humanism. Not a sentimental humanism, but an active one – expressed through education, empathy, and cultural dialogue.

Zweig's humanism is not an abstract idea, but a strategy of survival. In a world collapsing, he holds on to the one thing that cannot be destroyed: the dignity of the spirit. Seen through Sloterdijk's lens, Zweig's European humanism can be understood as an attempt to restore Europe's emotional balance – to return dignity and meaning to a world that measures everything in economic terms. His message is not nostalgia, but a call to spiritual resistance.

Zweig's vision may also be seen as a precursor to Jürgen Habermas, who in the late 20th century argued that Europe must not abandon the Enlightenment ideals of reason, communication, and universal rights – even though these ideas are under pressure from relativism and cynicism.

Thus, Habermas and Zweig form two points of a single arc: the first begins it on the eve of catastrophe, the second continues it in a post-national Europe. Both believe that the European spirit is not a geographical fact but a moral task that must be continually renewed.

In contemporary political debates, the term "European values" has become a bureaucratic cliché. But Zweig would remind us that values cannot be administered. They must be lived – through culture, dialogue, education, and mutual respect.

Europe does not collapse when it loses territory, but when it loses meaning. That is why crisis, understood in its original sense, is not a punishment but a call: to choose humanism again.

Zweig, who ended his life in exile, does not write from a position of defeat, but from a tragic faith in possibility. His melancholy is not resignation, but testimony. At a time when the "decline of the West" is once more being discussed, his testimony is a precious reminder that Europe is not a project of power, but a project of spirit.

"Europe does not disappear when it loses territory, but when it loses its spirit."

— Stefan Zweig

Zweig's vision may also be seen as a precursor to Jürgen Habermas, who in the late 20th century argued that Europe must not abandon the Enlightenment ideals of reason, communication, and universal rights – even though these ideas are under pressure from relativism and cynicism. Thus, Habermas and Zweig form two points of a single arc: the first begins it on the eve of catastrophe, the second continues it in a post-national Europe. Both believe that the European spirit is not a geographical fact but a moral task that must be continually renewed.

Claudio Magris, the Danube and the Central European spirit: small nations, borders and Europe's mission

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

1. Introduction: Magris and the Rediscovery of Central Europe

The work of the Italian Germanist and essayist Claudio Magris is pivotal for understanding the modern idea of Central Europe (Mitteleuropa), its cultural and historical legacy, and its symbolic status within the broader notion of the European spirit. His celebrated book Danubio (Danube) functions not merely as a travelogue or a literary biography of a river, but as a cultural cartography of an entire continent, a meditation on a space continually assembled and disassembled across centuries of encounters, conflicts and melancholic transitions.

For Magris, Central Europe is Europe's most sensitive laboratory, a region where the tensions and promises of European modernity become most visible: the dissolution of multi-ethnic empires, the rise of nationalism, the trauma of the Holocaust and the complex destinies of the Danubian and Balkan peoples. Central Europe thus becomes not only a geographical reference point but also a moral and existential condition of Europe itself.

2. The Danube as a Metaphor of European History

a) The river as a civilizational artery

In Magris's vision, the Danube is far more than a natural feature. It is a current of civilization. Cultures, languages and memories intersect along its banks: Germanic, Slavic, Hungarian, Jewish, Balkan. The river becomes an archive of European history, carrying the traces of empires, ideologies, forgotten cities, linguistic hybrids and extinguished communities.

b) Central Europe as a counter-model to monolithic national identities

For Magris, Central Europe offers an alternative to the absolutist nationalisms that dominated the

19th and 20th centuries. It is the world of "small nations"—often caught between great powers, yet culturally vibrant, nuanced and resilient. These nations developed a more refined awareness of historical relativity, an understanding that identity does not require a fortress but a space of encounter.

c) Marginality as a form of knowledge

Magris interprets marginality as an epistemological advantage. Small nations, repeatedly exposed to shifting borders, foreign domination or fragmentation, developed a deeper irony and self-critical consciousness. In this sense, Central Europe serves as a miniature Europe, fragmented yet coherent through its plurality.

3. The Tradition on which Magris Builds

a) The Austro-Hungarian multi-ethnic legacy

Magris draws on the melancholic world of Habsburg writers such as Joseph Roth, Stefan

Zweig, Hermann Broch and Robert Musil. In their works, Mitteleuropa appears as a paradoxical ideal: a fragile but ethically rich model of coexistence, irony and introspection. Although this world collapsed under the weight of nationalism, it left behind a moral and cultural archive that Magris reads as Europe's lost horizon of meaning.

b) Central European dissidents and intellectuals

Magris shares intellectual ground with a group of writers and dissidents who revived the idea of Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s:

Milan Kundera, György Konrád, Danilo Kiš, Czesław Miłosz, Adam Michnik.

They understood Central Europe as a cultural, not a political entity, as a memory of stolen freedoms and a zone of resistance to imperial centers and totalitarian regimes. For them, Central Europe was "the kidnapped West," a region whose cultural codes align with Western Europe, yet whose historical fate kept it at its margins.

c) The Jewish Central European tradition

For Magris, the Jewish cultural experience embodies the deepest Central European intuition: the awareness of uncertainty, irony, fragile identity and moral complexity. Kafka, Celan, Singer and many others form a spiritual vocabulary of the Danubian world, one profoundly present in Magris's ethical and aesthetic sensibility.

4. Magris and Contemporary Europe: A Counterforce to Populism

a) Europe of small histories

Magris argues for a Europe grounded not in imperial narratives but in small, local, yet civilizationally rich traditions. His conception is exceptionally relevant today, reminding the European Union that its legitimacy ultimately rests on cultural pluralism and the trust of small communities.

b) Magris against populist closures

In the face of contemporary populism in Hungary, Poland or segments of the Balkans, Magris's Central Europe offers a counter-ideological model. Against homogenization, he proposes plurality, fragility and openness as the authentic pillars of European freedom.

5. The Croatian Reception of Magris

In the Croatian cultural context, Magris holds a distinct and significant position. His interpretation of Central Europe resonates strongly with the Croatian intellectual tradition, which navigated between Mediterranean, Balkan and Mitteleuropean orientations.

Three aspects of the Croatian reception are particularly notable:

1. The Trieste connection – Croatian readers are especially attuned to Trieste as a symbol of coexistence and friction between Slavic and Italian worlds. Magris's Triestine perspective enhances his credibility in Croatian debates on identity.

2. The Danubian dimension of Croatian identity – from Strossmayer to contemporary authors, a strong sense exists that Croatia is a Danubian and Central European country; this fits naturally with Magris's cultural mapping.

3. The Krleža horizon – Croatian intellectuals often ask how Magris's conception relates to Miroslav Krleža's sharp critique of imperial, Balkan and Central European myths.

6. Magris and Krleža: A Comparative Note (Neutral Conditional Objection)

It could be suggested—as a neutral, conditional hypothesis—that the relationship between Magris and Miroslav Krleža opens an illuminating comparative field.

Despite belonging to different generations and political worlds, they share the conviction that Central Europe is a mirror of Europe's moral dilemmas.

Yet several differences may be observed:

Krleža adopts a more radical, demystifying stance toward both imperial and national myths.

Magris, closer to Roth and Zweig, writes with a gentler historical irony and a more melancholic tone.

For Krleža, the collapse of the Habsburg Empire was inevitable; for Magris, it was a lost moral possibility.

Krleža emphasizes conflict, Magris coexistence.

These differences do not diminish the deep affinities: both consider Central Europe an essential space for Europe to recognize its virtues and its failures.

7. Conclusion

Magris's reading of the Danube and Central Europe remains one of the most profound reflections on the European spirit in the late 20th century. Rooted in Jewish memory, the Habsburg legacy and modern dissident thought, Magris proposes a Europe grounded in plurality, fragility, irony and openness. At a moment when Europe faces a renewed crisis of spirit, Magris's Danubian horizon stands as one of the most valuable moral correctives within contemporary European thought.

J. J. Strossmayer, the European spirit and Croatian modernity: intellectual visions from the mid-19th to the late 20th century

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

INTRODUCTION: THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT AS A FRAMEWORK OF CROATIAN MODERNITY

An analysis of Josip Juraj Strossmayer's relationship to the "European spirit" requires that his activity be placed within a broader continental context: the revolution of 1848, Bach's absolutism, the Croatian–Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the collapse of Austro-Slavism, and the deep crisis of the political identity of the South Slavic peoples after the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy. Croatian political thought in the 19th and early 20th centuries oscillated between Central European and Balkan orientations, between imperial Realpolitik and cultural modernisation, between federalist projects and national emancipations.

At the centre of Croatia's political and cultural 19th century stands J. J. Strossmayer – bishop, theologian, patron, political visionary – whose work made it possible for Croatian cultural (and political) emancipation not to be conceived exclusively within a regional/Balkan context, but to include as well a European dimension. His famous motto "through enlightenment to freedom" is not merely a programmatic slogan, but a civilisational formula by which Croatia should become a more relevant cultural space within Mitteleuropa. (It should be noted here that the notion of Mitteleuropa in Croatian humanities and politico-cultural analysis appears as a multilayered concept: historical (Habsburg), cultural (modernist), political (the democratic-liberal models of Central Europe), and even identitarian (relations between the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Central European "civilisational code"). In the Croatian context, the term was never a mere geographical label, but an intellectual instrument for defining one's own European position.)

Strossmayer believed that cultural emancipation was the precondition for any serious political emancipation of the Croatian nation within the Habsburg Monarchy – all the more so given that Croatian statehood and legal culture were deeply rooted in Central European institutions:

the Hungarian legal system, the Catholic–Latin circle, Habsburg administrative reforms (N. Budak). Strossmayer's ideas were fundamental for the later development of Croatian modernity – but equally so for a large part of all those political delusions/wanderings that we witnessed in the unsuccessful (political) revolutions in which the Croatian nation, in one way or another, took part during the 20th century: 1914, 1941, 1945, 1971 and 1990.

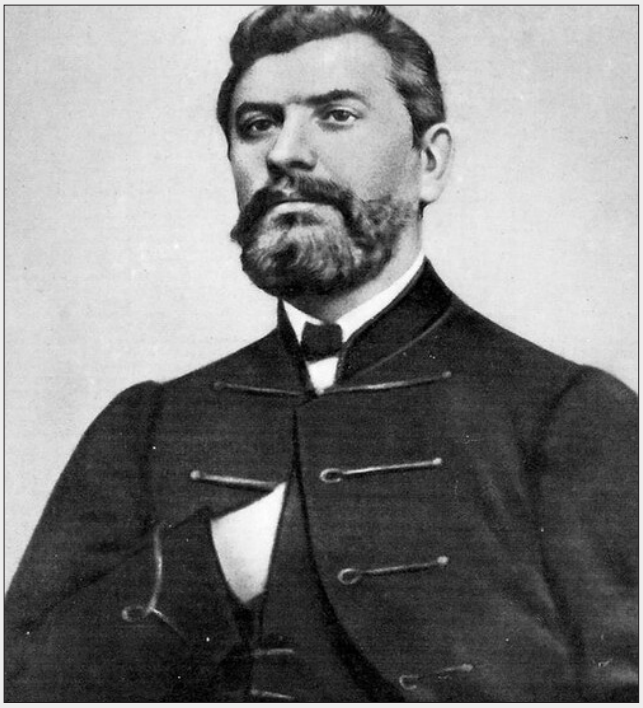
To be fair, it must be said that in some of those revolutions the Croatian nation participated not only contrary to its own political will, but also without any clearer political vision, let alone any serious strategy: both the First and the Second World War found the Croatian nation politically utterly unprepared. The consequences of that unpreparedness were, in many respects, more than tragic! And we are still in the process of confronting those dark episodes of our past, episodes which represent not only political but also moral breakdowns.

His path from Austro-Slavism to the Yugoslav idea – an idea that in no way corresponds to the interpretation of Yugoslavism held by Serbian political elites, both royalist and communist – left deep traces in Croatian political and intellectual life. Not even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 nor Croatia's full membership of the EU has diminished the relevance of his idea. It continues to be the subject of many, as a rule, erroneous – more precisely, utterly decontextualised – interpretations of an idea that, to a very large extent, shaped the entire political and cultural life of the Croatian nation in the 20th century. And these, generally sterile, interpretations are still very much present today!

Some interpreters have still not managed to free themselves from the "melancholy of the collapse" of a state community; they cannot come to terms with the permanent disappearance of the Monarchy (both of them – sic!). Others, however, are unable to understand that this unique experience of fragmentation – this narcissism of "small differences", this sense of particularity – is a fundamental element of the intellectual history of the Central European spirit, for which the frameworks of both Yugoslavias were simply too narrow. These interpreters are far more inclined to practising Balkan authoritarian and centralist models, on which both Yugoslavias were based – the first one somewhat more than the second!

His path from Austro-Slavism to the Yugoslav idea – an idea that in no way corresponds to the interpretation of Yugoslavism held by Serbian political elites, both royalist and communist – left deep traces in Croatian political and intellectual life. Not even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 nor Croatia's full membership of the EU has diminished the relevance of his idea. It continues to be the subject of many, as a rule, erroneous – more precisely, utterly decontextualised – interpretations of an idea that, to a very large extent, shaped the entire political and cultural life of the Croatian nation in the 20th century.

Evidently, such interpreters have overlooked J. P. Taylor's book The Habsburg Monarchy 1809–1918, in which the author described this "unfortunate" Monarchy as a unique Central European "laboratory of multi-ethnicity" in which, admittedly, political integration was difficult, but cultural diversity was extraordinarily fruitful. That very model was the



Ante Starčević

Czesław Miłosz

key corrective to subsequent Balkan centralism in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and in Yugoslavia, which ultimately resulted in a kind of solution to the "Croatian question" – the creation of the Banovina of Croatia.

I. J. J. STROSSMAYER AND THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT

1. Austro-Slavism and Mitteleuropa as the Environment

J. J. Strossmayer belongs to that circle of Croatian intellectuals who were culturally and civilisationally fully immersed in Central Europe: educated in Pécs, Vienna and Rome, formed within the theological-philosophical matrix of Catholic Europe, he views the European spirit as a humanistic, rational and conciliar ideal. There are three key premises of Strossmayer's Austro-Slavism:

a) The Habsburg state as the only realistic framework for the political survival of the Croats.

b) Slavic cultural emancipation within the broader framework of Central European civilisation.

c) Enlightenment (education) as the civilisational condition of political freedom.

These positions are nothing other than a specific emanation of European Enlightenment – systematically advocated in his writings by Herder, as well as by the liberal Catholic theorists of the 19th century.

Strossmayer's principles are European because they are:

- cosmopolitan (universalist Christianity, dialogue between East and West)
- enlightened (science as the emancipation of the people)
- legal-political (the state as the guarantor of institutions, rather than the charisma of the ruler).

Here he clearly diverges from the Balkan model of "heroic politics" founded on dynastic nationalism, the charisma of the leader and the political myth. It was precisely this "political myth" that led astray many Croatian intellectuals, so that A. G. Matoš had to remind them that he simply could not understand how they could place greater trust in the testimony of a blind gusle-player than in all those numerous legal and political documents that attest to centuries of Croatian statehood.

> Stjepan Radić – rural republican populism, anti-dynastic rationalism. Radić, though seemingly anti-modern, never rejected the European cultural horizon; his distance towards the "Balkans" (in the sense of a Byzantine political pattern) makes him an important protagonist of early Croatian pro-European sensibility. And it was precisely his "peasant republicanism" that was the first serious attempt to democratise Croatian society through the education and cultural emancipation of the peasantry – the creation of a "critical mass", that is, of a "political people".

2. "Through Enlightenment to Freedom" – A Civilisational Programme

J. J. Strossmayer believed that "a

people without a high culture cannot be politically free". Therefore he:

• founded the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU)

• initiated the establishment of the University of Zagreb

• supported the scholarly work of F. Rački, V. Jagić, F. Marković, Š. Ljubić, J. Torbar, I. Kukuljević Sakcinski, Đ. Daničić, N. Nodilo, V. Klaić, T. Smičiklas…

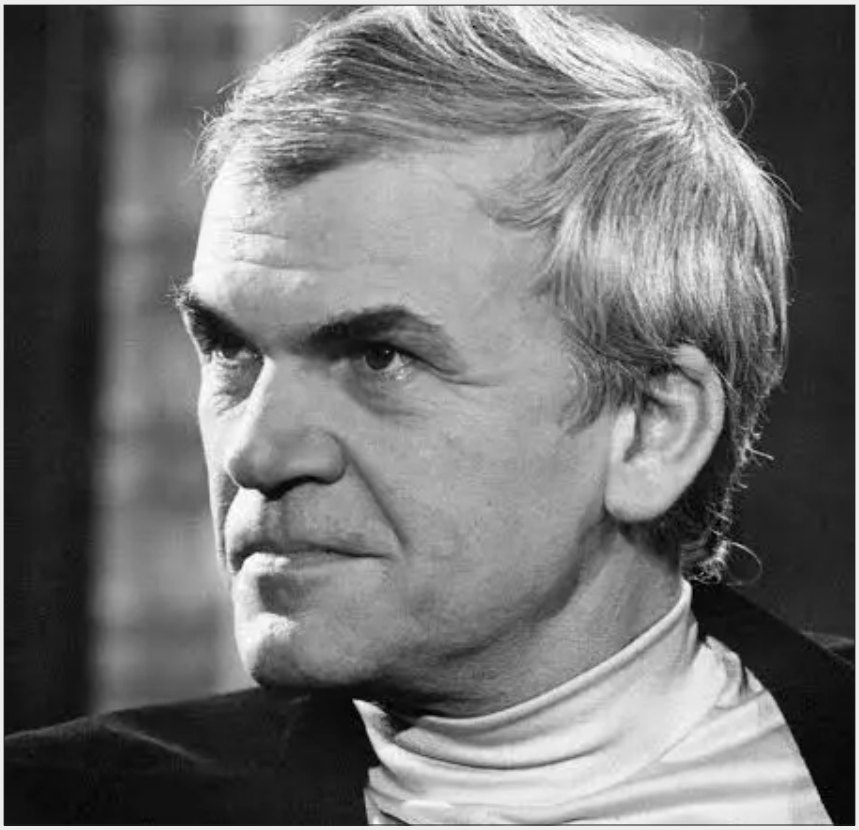
• established a scholarship policy that became one of the most important modernisation instruments in Croatian 19th-century history; he was fully aware that a national cultural and scholarly programme could not be built without an elite educated in European centres. He therefore founded a number of endowments from which he directly financed the education and specialisation of the most talented Croatian young men.

• In this way he created a new intellectual matrix of Croatian modernity – rational, philological, historical, legal and theological.

This in effect meant a definitive abandonment of particularism and local provincialism, whereby the political nation was to be formed through culture. In this sense it may be said that Strossmayer – even before state programmes and in the absence of institutional infrastructure – created the first comprehensive "intellectual investment strategy" in Croatia, one that had lasting effects on the country's cultural development.

II. THE CROATIAN PANTHEON OF MODERNITY: STARČEVIĆ, KVATERNIK, MATOŠ, SUPILO, RADIĆ

Strossmayer's Europeanism did not operate in a vacuum – it clashed, mingled and interacted with currents of radical nationalism, liberal realism, rural populism and bourgeois modernity. It is within this field that we must place and analyse the key Croatian protagonists:



Milan Kundera

In this way he created a new intellectual matrix of Croatian modernity – rational, philological, historical, legal and theological. This in effect meant a definitive abandonment of particularism and local provincialism, whereby the political nation was to be formed through culture. In this sense it may be said that Strossmayer – even before state programmes and in the absence of institutional infrastructure – created the first comprehensive "intellectual investment strategy" in Croatia, one that had lasting effects on the country's cultural development.

• Ante Starčević – advocate of liberal nationalism and anti-imperial individualism, admirer of French rationalism, a European republican, and an excellent connoisseur of Montesquieu…

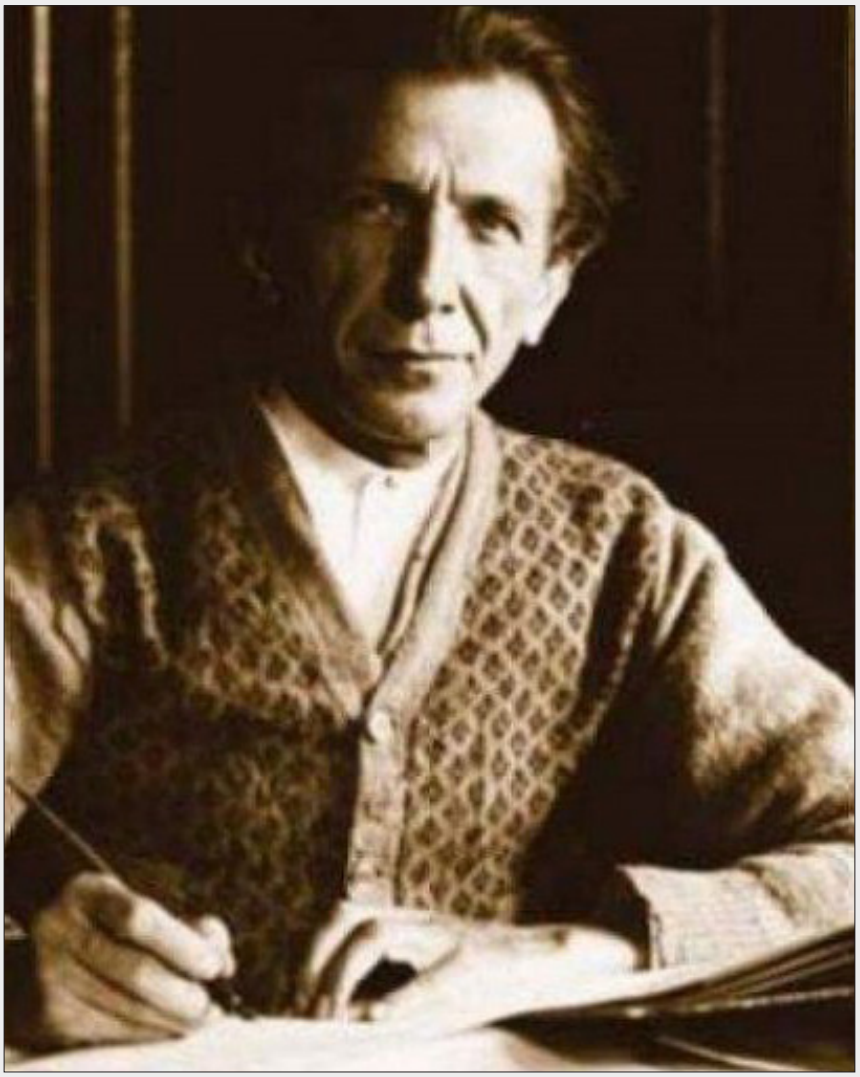
• Eugen Kvaternik – his political concepts are rooted in the tradition of European revolutionary nationalism (Mazzini, Lelewel, Czech and Polish émigré circles), rather than in any Balkan state-building model.

• A. G. Matoš – representative of fin-de-siècle modernism, who in his writings promotes Central European elitism – aesthetics as political resistance, Europe as the horizon of modernity, and the Balkans as a politico-mental obstacle, since "if Croatia loses contact with Europe, it will sink into the Balkan whirlpool". Matoš's critique of the Balkan mentality and his idealisation of Central Europe became an

important precondition for the later Pilar–Šufflay departure from the Balkans as a political horizon.

• Frano Supilo – the most intelligent political strategist of Croatian modernity, a European federalist whose breakdown in 1916 symbolically marks the collapse of Croatian Central European political intelligence before Balkan/Serbian dynastic structures. He anticipated almost all later Croatian political failures: the lack of international support, the dependence of small nations on the dynamics of great powers, and the proximity of autocratic models of rule in the neighbourhood. Like Strossmayer, he therefore belongs to the European corrective module of Croatian politics.

• Stjepan Radić – rural republican populism, anti-dynastic rationalism. Radić, though seemingly anti-modern, never rejected the European cultural horizon; his distance towards the "Balkans" (in the sense of a Byzantine political pattern) makes him an important protagonist of early Croatian pro-European sensibility. And it was precisely his "peasant republicanism" that was the first serious attempt to democratise Croatian society through the education and cultural emancipation of the peasantry – the creation of a "critical mass", that is, of a "political people".



Milan Sufflay

All of them were par excellence Europeans who, however, never managed to free themselves from chronic Croatian political delusions and miscalculations, so that "bad political solutions" were a logical consequence of those very delusions and misjudgements. We must also be aware of the "political neglect" of the Croatian people – the chronic absence of a "critical mass" which, in "borderline situations" for the nation's survival, would assume its share of responsibility and "force" the political elites to change (geo)political strategies and alliances…

III. ŠUFFLAY, PILAR AND ANTI-BALKAN MODERNISM

1. The Genesis of the Circle

The circle around Milan Šufflay, Ivo Pilar, Vinko Krišković and other Central Europe–educated intellectuals took shape:

> After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Croatian thought slowly but surely began to return to the Central European context. In his journalistic writings, I. Banac thus openly advocated Croatia's "return" to Central Europe as a geopolitical project, opposed to the Yugoslav and Balkan framework. In Banac, Mitteleuropa has a strong normative dimension: it symbolises pluralism, the autonomy of cities, civic culture and parliamentary tradition – in contrast to the authoritarian and centralist models of the Balkans. It is therefore entirely wrong to link Croatia's modernisation processes to socialist Croatia/Yugoslavia; those processes had already begun in the mid-19th century.

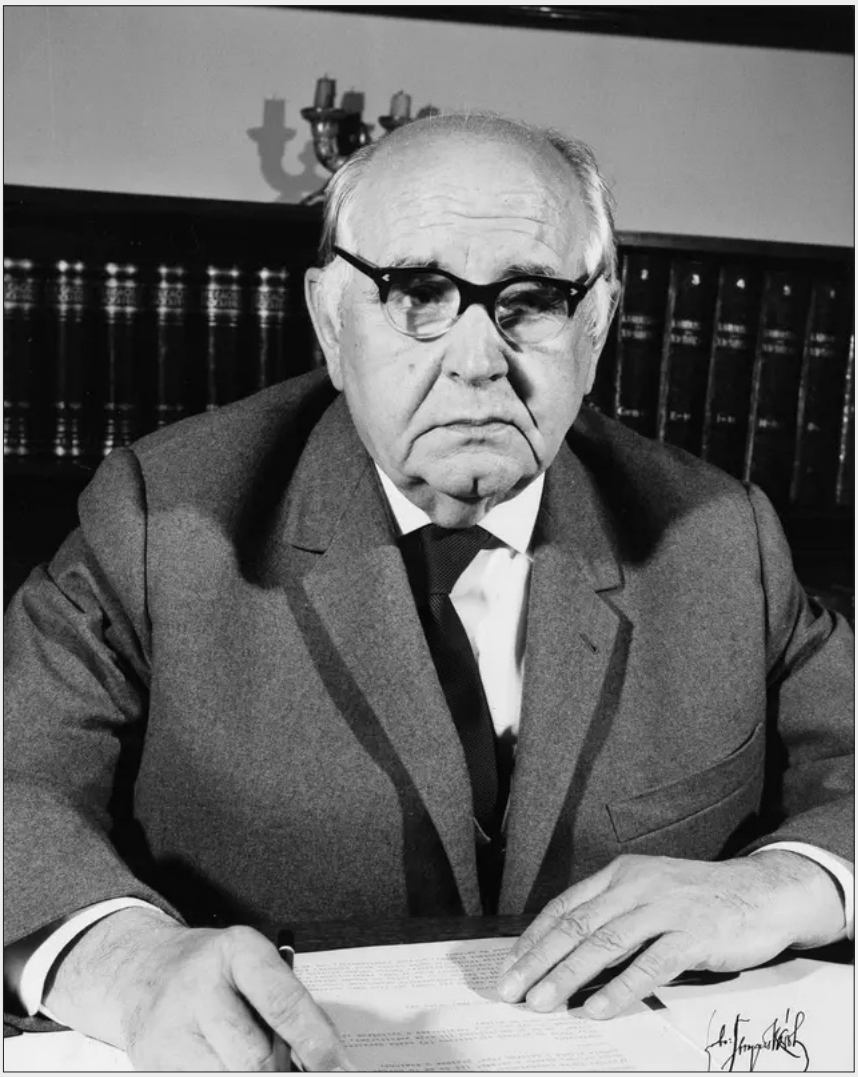
• before the First World War, but
• as a clearly articulated political and cultural circle it operated from 1914 onwards, particularly in the post-war Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes,
• in conflict with the Karađorđević dynasty, so that I. Pilar's analyses are considered the first systematic attempt to identify "Balkan political structures" as the fundamental obstacle to institutional modernisation,
• with a clearly formulated idea of an anti-Balkan civilisational orientation.

Why was this circle important? Because it consisted of individuals who were the first in Croatian political thought to formulate a modern security and geopolitical analysis (Pilar) and a civilisational diagnosis of the Balkans as a destructive space (Šufflay).

IV. THE GENESIS OF CROATIAN FAILED REVOLUTIONS: BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE BALKANS

Croatia's "revolutions" of 1914, 1941, 1945, 1971, etc., were unsuccessful due to the absence of adequate political visions and misguided (geo)political strategies – due to all kinds of wanderings between Vienna and Belgrade, Berlin and Moscow, that is, between Central European rationality and Balkan voluntarism, between statehood as institution and statehood as myth, between European federalism and Yugoslav statism.

In this sense, the intellectual and political activity of Pilar, Šufflay, Krišković and others remained unknown to today's Croatian intellectual and political elites, because for both royalists and communists their (geo)political views were far too subversive and as such represented a permanent threat to the survival of their regimes. In such a context, political assassinations (the case of M. Šufflay), arrests and the like constitute logical reactions of non-democratic regimes.



Miroslav Krleža

V. CENTRAL EUROPEAN DISCOURSE AFTER 1989: MIŁOSZ, KUNDERA, HABERMAS

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Croatian thought slowly but surely began to return to the Central European context. In his journalistic writings, I. Banac thus openly advocated Croatia's "return" to Central Europe as a geopolitical project, opposed to the Yugoslav and Balkan framework. In Banac, Mitteleuropa has a strong normative dimension: it symbolises pluralism, the autonomy of cities, civic culture and parliamentary tradition – in contrast to the authoritarian and centralist models of the Balkans. It is therefore entirely wrong to link Croatia's modernisation processes to socialist Croatia/Yugoslavia; those processes had already begun in the mid-19th century.

In this return the following European authors are crucial:

Czesław Miłosz

• defines Central Europe as a "spiritual space between empires"
• in his political-literary writings he emphasises the culture of re-

membrance and resistance to tyranny

Milan Kundera

• author of the famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" (1984)

• argues that, after the Second World War, the nations of Central Europe were unjustly "kidnapped from the West" and annexed to the East, to the Soviet Union; Kundera starts from the thesis that the Czechs, Poles, Hungarians and, to some extent, Croats are historically rooted in Western Christian civilisation, but politically sank into the Soviet sphere. This concept profoundly shaped Western perceptions of Central European identity after 1989. The "new" position of these Central European states, located between East and West, would significantly determine the political (and cultural) activity of their elites, so that all these cultural traditions would, more or less, express a deep ambivalence towards Mitteleuropa: on the one hand it offers stability, on the other it generates a constant sense of marginality. Croatian authors later inherit precisely this ambivalence when they seek to define Croatia's position in the situation "between East and West".

György Konrád

• systematically promotes political liberalism, civic courage and European conscience; in Antipolitics and some later essays he argues that Central European identity is democratic precisely because it emerged from "the rejection of political power"; his vision of Central Europe as a "republic of intellectuals" is compatible with Croatian liberal circles around Krleža's Forum and the post-socialist European course of the 1990s.

Jürgen Habermas

• sees Europe as a constitutional democracy and not as an empire

• the key elements: the public sphere, rational discourse, the post-national state

This discourse retrospectively clarifies Strossmayer's project: he wanted Croatia in Central Europe and not in the Balkans – and he did not wish for any centralised Yugoslav state, but rather a cultural union of South Slavs within Mitteleuropa.

CONCLUSION

Strossmayer's thought, combined with Croatian modernists and the post-war Central European discourse, shows that:

• Croatian political defeats → are the result of intellectual and (geo)political rifts

• Croatian political successes → are the result of European orientation, science and enlightenment

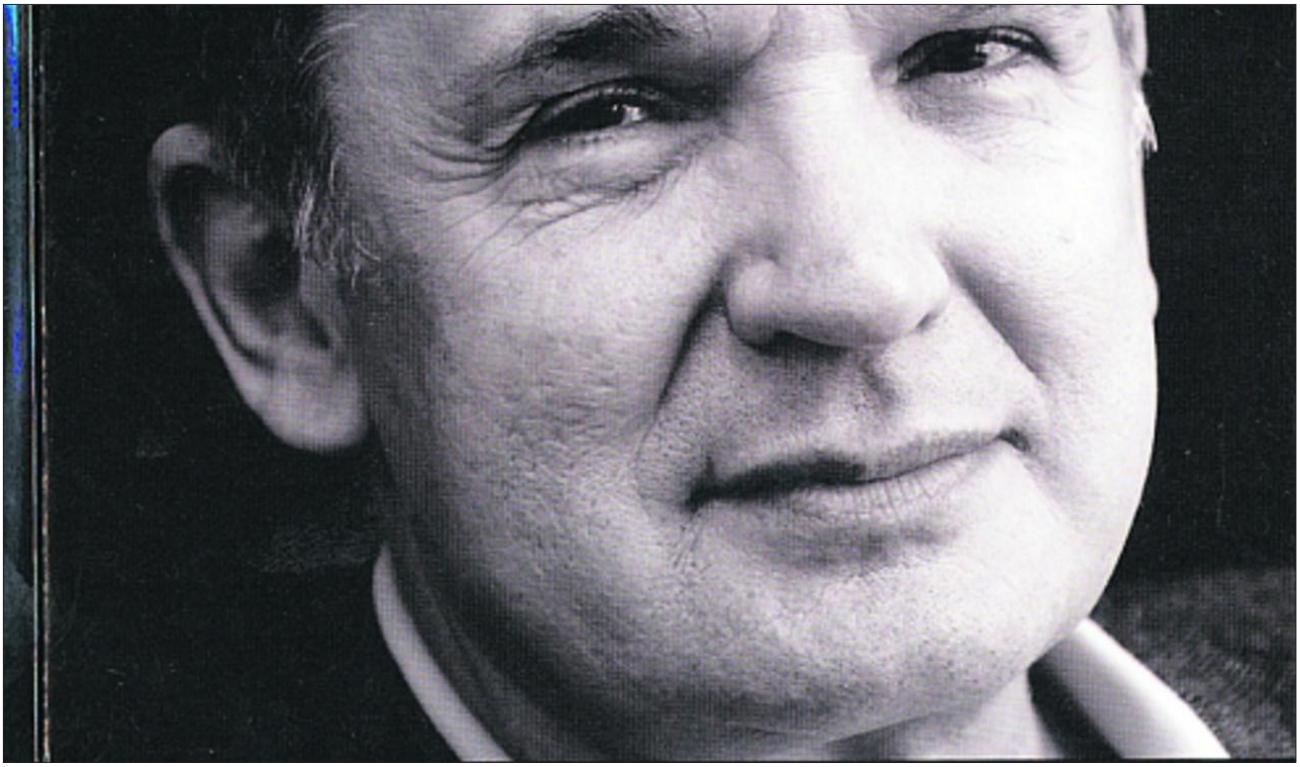
His maxim "through enlightenment to freedom" remains the fundamental formula of Croatian modernisation – and the corrective to every meandering, toasting nationalism that so profoundly irritated Miroslav Krleža. There is no doubt that his project – enlightenment leading to freedom, the creation of national institutions (academies, universities, museums, archives…), and the linking of small nations into a federal Central European whole – was the most mature Croatian European political programme of the 19th century.

And that he was right is best confirmed by the speeches of Václav Havel delivered between 1990 and 2002 (particularly The Power of the Powerless and his later presidential speeches), in which he sees Central Europe primarily as a space of "moral renewal" in which justice, transparency and responsibility are not ideological concepts but civilisational norms. Havel's concept of an ethic of responsibility strongly continues Strossmayer's educational humanism, especially through its emphasis on education and culture as the bearers of political reforms.

And that he was right is best confirmed by the speeches of Václav Havel delivered between 1990 and 2002 (particularly The Power of the Powerless and his later presidential speeches), in which he sees Central Europe primarily as a space of "moral renewal" in which justice, transparency and responsibility are not ideological concepts but civilisational norms. Havel's concept of an ethic of responsibility strongly continues Strossmayer's educational humanism, especially through its emphasis on education and culture as the bearers of political reforms.

Finally, all Croatian politicians of that period (A. Starčević, E. Kvaternik…) as well as those of the early 20th century (the Radić brothers, F. Supilo, M. Šufflay, I. Pilar…) were directly or indirectly shaped withi n that European horizon. Misunderstandings, excessive radicalisations and retrograde political programmes in the 20th century tended to occur whenever, as a nation, we distanced ourselves from this (fragile) tradition of modern, democratic, liberal European Croatness.

Camps, Memory and Ashes: Jasenovac and the Dark Derivatives of the European Spirit



By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

(This text explores Jasenovac as a paradigmatic expression of the "dark derivative of the European spirit" – the fusion of modernity and barbarism – in dialogue with Habermas and Derrida, and in the context of the author's works dedicated to the culture of remembrance and post-Yugoslav identity.)

The concentration camp, as a metaphor for 20th-century Europe, represents the ultimate point at which the Enlightenment project transforms into a mechanism of exclusion and annihilation. In this sense, Jasenovac is not an exception, but rather a symptom of the European dialectic of reason and violence. Relying on Habermas's idea of communicative rationality and Derrida's concept of "ashes" and "spectres", the text examines the camp as a moral challenge to European identity and the possibility of renewing that identity from the traces of its own defeats.

1. The Dark Derivatives of the European Spirit

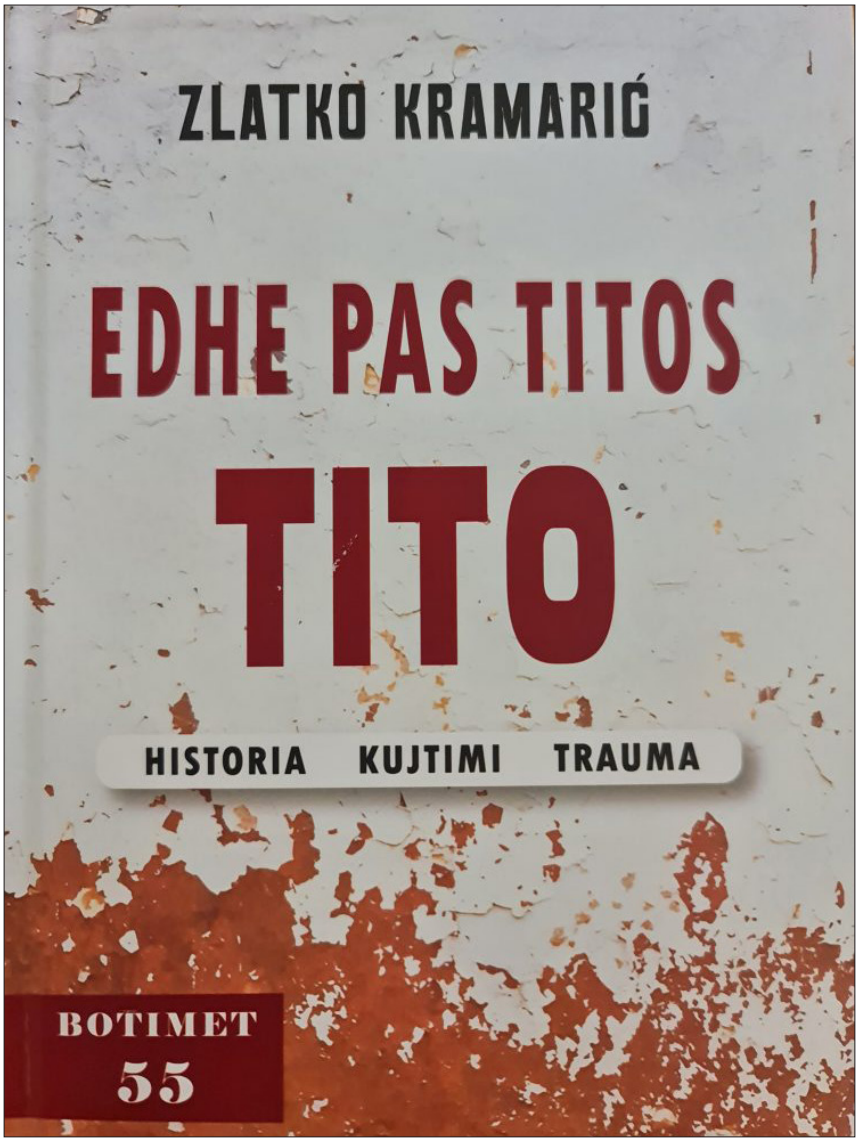
In the history of 20th-century Europe, the camp became a symbol of its internal downfall – the point at which rationality ceases to be a means of freedom and turns into an instrument of violence.

In my books The Yugoslav Idea in the Context of Postcolonial Critique, Nostalgia – A Short History of Forgetting and Culture and Trauma. A Letter to a Bulgarian Friend, I have sought to show how the idea of Europe in the Yugoslav experience carried ambivalent meanings: emancipation and disciplining, universality and control.

Jasenovac belongs precisely to this duality. It is not a "Balkan aberration", but a European consequence – a camp where

the ideal of order turned into a perfect mechanism of destruction.

Habermas would describe this as the moment of collapse of communicative rationality: a space where dialogue disappears and reason becomes the administrative apparatus of death. The camp, in this sense, is not disorder but excess order — the rationalisation of evil in the name of (criminal) efficiency. And not only that: the very existence of camps within a society (German, Croatian…) constitutes a profound incision in the identity of such societies. "After Auschwitz, we can draw our national self-awareness only from the better traditions of our history, and these traditions should not be adopted unreflectively but critically.



The national life context, which once enabled an incomparable richness of the substance of human coexistence, can henceforth be built only in the light of those traditions (in the case of the 'Croatian question', these are certainly not the traditions of either of the two totalitarian regimes, neither those dominant during the Second World War nor those linked to the other totalitarianism, the Yugoslav variant of Stalinism/Bolshevism – author's note, Z.K.), that can withstand the fearful gaze — the gaze of one educated by moral catastrophes" (J. Habermas).

The national life context, which once enabled an incomparable richness of the substance of human coexistence, can henceforth be built only in the light of those traditions (in the case of the 'Croatian question', these are certainly not the traditions of either of the two totalitarian regimes, neither those dominant during the Second World War nor those linked to the other totalitarianism, the Yugoslav variant of Stalinism/Bolshevism – author's note, Z.K.), that can withstand the fearful gaze — the gaze of one educated by moral catastrophes" (J. Habermas).

2. Archives of Ashes and Selective Memories

In Nostalgia – A Short History of Forgetting, I analysed the formation of "nations of memory" in post-Yugoslav societies. Memory is not grounded in empathy, but in competition over victimhood.

Jasenovac has thus become a field of conflicting remembrance, where the European idea reappears in its worst form – as a hierarchy of traumas and

a competition for moral superiority.

Derrida's reflections on "ashes" and "the spectres of Europe" help us understand that what was destroyed has not truly disappeared. Ash is a trace, not an absence: it demands that we assign it meaning.

From this perspective, Europe is a continent of ashes – a space where memory has yet to become dialogue and instead remains hostage to national archives, investigated either superficially or selectively. Astonishingly, even after 80 years since the end of the Second World War, we still do not know even an approximate number of those killed in Jasenovac. The wide range in estimations is deeply offensive — first and foremost to the victims. Just as any excessive inflation of numbers is a sin against every lost life, so too is any minimisation equally grave.

3. New Identities, New Tradition

In And After Tito – Tito, I sought to show how new identities in the post-Yugoslav space were constructed upon the ruins of a major political and cultural project.

These identities are born from ashes – but not necessarily as reconstruction; often they emerge as acts of revision and closure. However, if we follow Derrida's intuition that ashes may serve as the foundation of a new beginning, then remembrance of the camp can become the basis of an ethical identity, rather than a tool of ideological manipulation in which both the "left" and the "right" participate with equal fervour. Both should recognise that what they engage in is not poor historiography, but not historiography at all. Their superficial and sloppy actions are nothing but outbursts of hatred (R. Eaglestone).

Habermas's concept of post-conventional identity offers the possibility of European renewal: a form of community no longer based on myth or nation, but on an awareness of responsibility and fragility.

4. The Camp as a Moral Challenge to Europe

The camps of the 20th century – from Auschwitz to Jasenovac, from Goli Otok to Srebrenica – do not belong to the margins but to the very core of European history.

They remind us that modernity always carries within itself the potential for self-destruction. Therefore, the camp is not "outside" Europe, but its internal dialectic: the product of rationality devoid of ethics.

The memory of Jasenovac must thus transcend national frameworks. It must become European remembrance in the truest sense — not institutional, but moral and existential.

Only as such can it contribute to shaping a new Croatian and European identity unafraid of its own shadows.

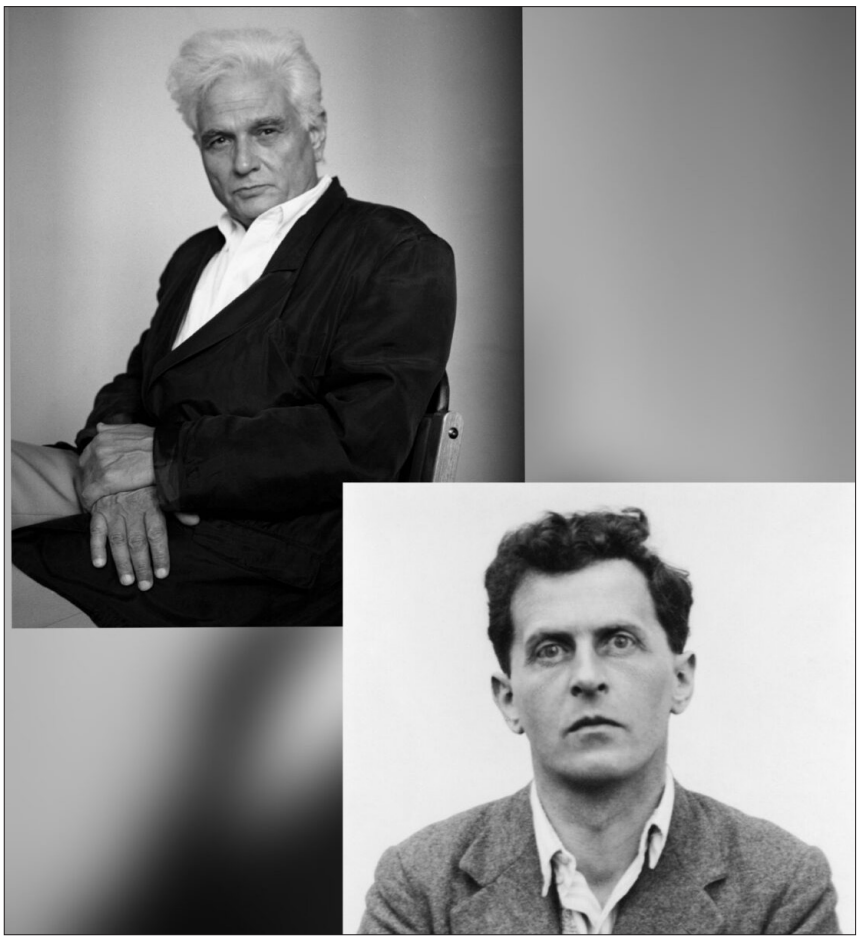
5. Conclusion: Reading the Ashes

Europe may rediscover its spirit only once it learns to read its own ashes. Those ashes — of Jasenovac, Auschwitz, Vukovar, Sarajevo — do not belong to the past, but to our present.

If from them we learn humility and solidarity, then the idea of Europe will regain meaning: no longer as a triumph of reason, but as an awareness of human fragility and responsibility towards the Other.

Derrida, Wittgenstein and the European Spirit: Language, Specters, and Unfulfilled Promises

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić



The position of Jacques Derrida in the philosophical landscape of the 20th century is singular: he belongs to the European intellectual tradition while radically unsettling its metaphysical foundations. His project of deconstruction reveals the hidden assumptions underlying Western thought and politics—not with the aim of abandoning them, but in order to open them toward a future where suppressed voices and unresolved questions still demand speech.

In Specters of Marx (1993), Derrida challenges the triumphalist narrative declaring the death of Marxism after 1989. Employing the figure of the specter, he argues that what is declared dead can return more powerfully than ever. The specters of colonialism, global inequality, and unfulfilled emancipation continue to haunt the neoliberal imagination. Thus, Derrida famously remarks: "We have never ceased being Marxist"—not out of dogma, but because Marx's questions remain unanswered. (1)

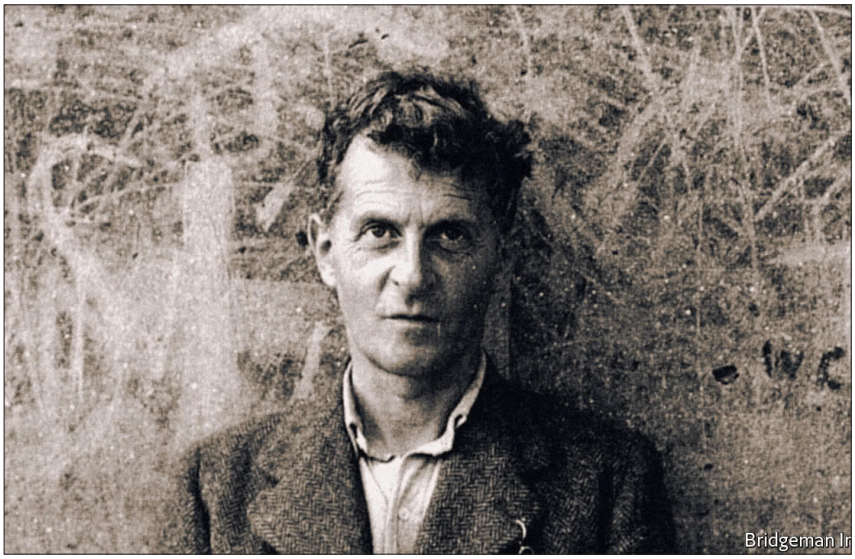
The bridge between Derrida and the "European spirit" lies in the pivotal role of language—understood as a world-shaping and world-questioning force. Here, an unexpected convergence emerges between Derrida and Wittgenstein. Both share the fundamental premise that language is not merely a tool for representation but a practice that constitutes the world itself.

Wittgenstein, in his later philosophy, introduces the notion of language-games to show that meaning arises not from reference but from use within forms of life. (2) There is no reality beyond language, only forms of articulation and practice. Derrida radicalizes this insight through the concept of différance, revealing the perpetual deferral and displacement of meaning. (3) Language does not mirror the world; it generates the conditions under which meaning and truth become thinkable.

Derrida's discussion of the politics of friendship—in which community is reimagined as responsibility toward the Other, rather than as a unity of identity or fraternity—flows directly from this linguistic and ethical insight. Language becomes the arena of politics: a site where justice may be claimed, postponed, or denied. Derrida thus remains committed to Europe—not as a completed project, but as one haunted by its own spectral futures. Like Husserl, he sees Europe as a task; but unlike Husserl, he insists that Europe must confront its metaphysical and colonial legacy. (4) If Europe has a spirit, it must be that of an unfinished promise—coming to terms with its specters in the hope of creating space for a more inclusive and just community.

Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, and the European Spirit in the Interwar Period

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić



Introduction

The European spirit in the first half of the 20th century was shaped by intense reflection on science, culture, and philosophy. Philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) and members of the Vienna Circle (Wiener Kreis) sought to develop epistemological and logical tools for understanding the world, while simultaneously reflecting on the limits of language, rationality, and metaphysical assumptions. Their contribution to the European spirit lies in establishing philosophy as an instrument of intellectual clarity, scientific rigor, and cultural critique.^1

Wittgenstein and the philosophy of language

Wittgenstein's early philosophy (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1921) established the foundations for understanding language as a mirror of reality:
> "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."^2
His later work (Philosophical Investigations, 1953) emphasizes language-games and contextual language use, implying that understanding the world depends on cultural and social practices. Wittgenstein thus built a philosophy requiring both logical discipline and sensitivity to the complexity of human experience.^3
In the interwar period, Wittgenstein's philosophy became a central intellectual reference for the Vienna Circle. The idea that clarity of language enables critical thinking formed the basis for a rational and empirically grounded approach to philosophy, essential to the European spirit.

The Vienna Circle and logical positivism

The Vienna Circle, centered

His later work (Philosophical Investigations, 1953) emphasizes language-games and contextual language use, implying that understanding the world depends on cultural and social practices. Wittgenstein thus built a philosophy requiring both logical discipline and sensitivity to the complexity of human experience.

The Vienna Circle

around Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, and Otto Neurath, developed a philosophy based on empiricism and logical analysis of language. Their goal was to construct a philosophy compatible with science and mathematics, rejecting metaphysical speculation:

> "Philosophy does not consist in the creation of theories, but in the logical clarification of the language in which theories are expressed."^4

Their work during the interwar period was a crucial contribution to the European spirit, promoting critical thinking, clarity, and interdisciplinarity, linking philosophy to scientific and cultural practice.^5

Cultural and political context

The Vienna Circle operated amid political and cultural turbulence: the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the rise of nationalism, and totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany. Their rational and empirical approach provided an intellectual anchor in a world marked by ideological conflict. Wittgenstein, though not formally a member, inspired reflection on the limits of reason and language, with implications for political philosophy and ethics.

The Vienna Circle operated amid political and cultural turbulence: the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the rise of nationalism, and totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany. Their rational and empirical approach provided an intellectual anchor in a world marked by ideological conflict. Wittgenstein, though not formally a member, inspired reflection on the limits of reason and language, with implications for political philosophy and ethics.

Cultural developments of the time – from Schoenberg's twelve-tone music, Mahler's late works, to modern architecture by Loos and Wagner – shared philosophy's quest for clarity, structure, and innovation. The Vienna Circle, emphasizing empiricism and rationality, was in synergy with these cultural currents, making the European spirit interdisciplinary and integrated.

Synthesis and specificity

Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle illustrate how the European spirit combines introspective philosophical reflection with empirical rigor. Their contribution manifests in three dimensions:

1. Philosophical clarity and language analysis – enabling critical and precise thinking.

2. Empirical and scientific discipline – connecting philosophy to scientific research.

3. Cultural sensitivity – understanding artistic and social phenomena as integral to human experience. This synthesis makes Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle key bearers of the European spirit in the modern context, bridging philosophy, science, and culture.

Hannah Arendt, the European spirit, and the legacy of totalitarianism

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

OPENING THREAD: WHY ARENDT TODAY?

To reflect on the "European spirit" at a time when the continent is once again confronted with the spectres of authoritarianism means, inevitably, to return to Hannah Arendt. Her analyses of totalitarianism, the fragility of political spaces, and the banality of evil have become indispensable tools for understanding Europe's present moment. For contemporary discussions in Croatia and the broader region, Arendt provides a double framework:

(1) a genealogy of where Europe went wrong, and

(2) a normative horizon of political freedom as Europe's most important invention.

In this intellectual constellation, Bertolt Brecht is not an accidental companion. His theatrical dissection of fascist psychology, his verses about Hitler, and his relentless exposure of everyday collaborationism resonate deeply with Arendt's model of "thoughtlessness" as the root of evil.

Finally, any European contextualisation of Arendt must confront

the intellectual triangle within which she worked: the polemicized horizon defined by Heidegger and Jaspers. Arendt stands between these two figures, and only through that tension can we fully understand her contribution to European political thought.

I. ARENDT AND THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT: BETWEEN HUMANISM AND THE FAILURE OF POLITICS

Arendt saw the European tradition as profoundly ambivalent: a civilisation that produced both the polis and Auschwitz. In The Origins of Totalitarianism, she argues that European rationalism, bureaucratisation, and imperialism constituted the infrastructure that made totalitarianism possible.[1]

At the same time, in The Human Condition, she insists that Europe invented the idea of a public political realm—a space of action, plurality, and speech—that totalitarian regimes seek to annihilate. Thus arises the central tension of the European spirit:

the conflict between freedom and system, plurality and doctrinal consistency, action and administrative logic.

II. THE BANALITY OF EVIL AND THE LOGIC OF OBEDIENCE: ARENDT AND BRECHT IN DIALOGUE

1. Arendt: Eichmann as a symptom of the continent

Arendt's controversial depiction of Eichmann as a "banal" bureaucrat profoundly shifted the moral understanding of evil. Evil, she suggested, is not primarily demonic but administrative—rooted in conformity, careerism, and the suspension of judgment.[2]

Hannah Arendt

Europe's tragedy, in this reading, is that it produced institutions capable of turning ordinary people into efficient instruments of destruction.

2. Brecht: "Do not ask only about the murderer, but about the circumstances…"

Brecht's theatrical and poetic treatment of Nazism provides a striking complement to Arendt. In Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, he anatomises fear, opportunism, and tacit complicity—precisely the microstructures of behaviour Arendt uncovers in Eichmann.[3]

Brecht's famous suggestion that "the tiger is guilty, but the tiger does not fall from the sky" points to structural factors, ideological conditioning and civic paralysis.

Together, Arendt and Brecht articulate a coherent model: Totalitarianism depends on ordinary citizens who have ceased to think; and modern Europe created the social and bureaucratic mechanisms enabling that condition.

III. EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY AROUND ARENDT: THE HEIDEGGER–JASPERS AXIS

1. Heidegger: radical metaphysics and political blindness

Heidegger occupies a paradoxical place in Arendt's life and work: a youthful intimacy, a deep philosophical influence, and a moral disappointment. She adopted his analysis of situated existence but rejected the political irresponsibility that led him into complicity with Nazism.

In her letters to Jaspers, Arendt would call him "a genius without character".[4]

Heidegger thus becomes an example of the German intellectual tradition at its most brilliant—yet

also at its most politically catastrophic.

2. Jaspers: communication, responsibility, and the ethical foundation of politics

Jaspers offered the opposite pole: rational communication, existential accountability, and political humility. Their post-war correspondence shaped Arendt's later understanding of politics as a community of responsibility.[5]

Where Heidegger sought the hidden truth of Being, Jaspers insisted on moral clarity in the public world.

3. Arendt between the two: thinking and judging

Arendt's unique position emerges precisely between these two figures. From Heidegger she learned how to think; from Jaspers how to judge.

This synthesis is one of her main contributions to the European intellectual tradition:

thinking without responsibility leads to barbarism; responsibility without thinking collapses into moralism.

IV. TOTALITARIANISM AS EUROPE'S SELF-FORGETFULNESS

For Arendt, totalitarianism was not an accident but a culmination. Europe's own intellectual and political dynamics—imperialism, racism, bureaucratic rationalisation, the collapse of the nation-state, and the cult of scientific mastery—formed the matrix within which totalitarian ideologies could emerge.

Her analysis therefore serves as an account of European self-forgetfulness: the forgetting of political plurality, of judgment, and of the fragile human condition that sustains freedom.

Martin Heidegger

V. CONCLUSION: ARENDT AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN EUROPE'S PAST AND FUTURE

Arendt teaches us that Europe is both the continent that invented freedom and the continent that mechanised destruction. Her philosophical and political reflections remain essential for any contemporary discussion of democracy, responsibility and pluralism, particularly in societies still negotiating their post-authoritarian legacies.

In this sense, Arendt becomes a philosopher of Europe's unfinished project—a thinker who reminds us that the European spirit is not a historical inheritance but a daily political task.

1. Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, 1951), 3–45. Arendt argues that imperialism and racism were structural products of European modernity rather than deviations from it.

2. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 287–289. Arendt describes Eichmann as a bureaucrat driven not by fanaticism but by "thoughtlessness".

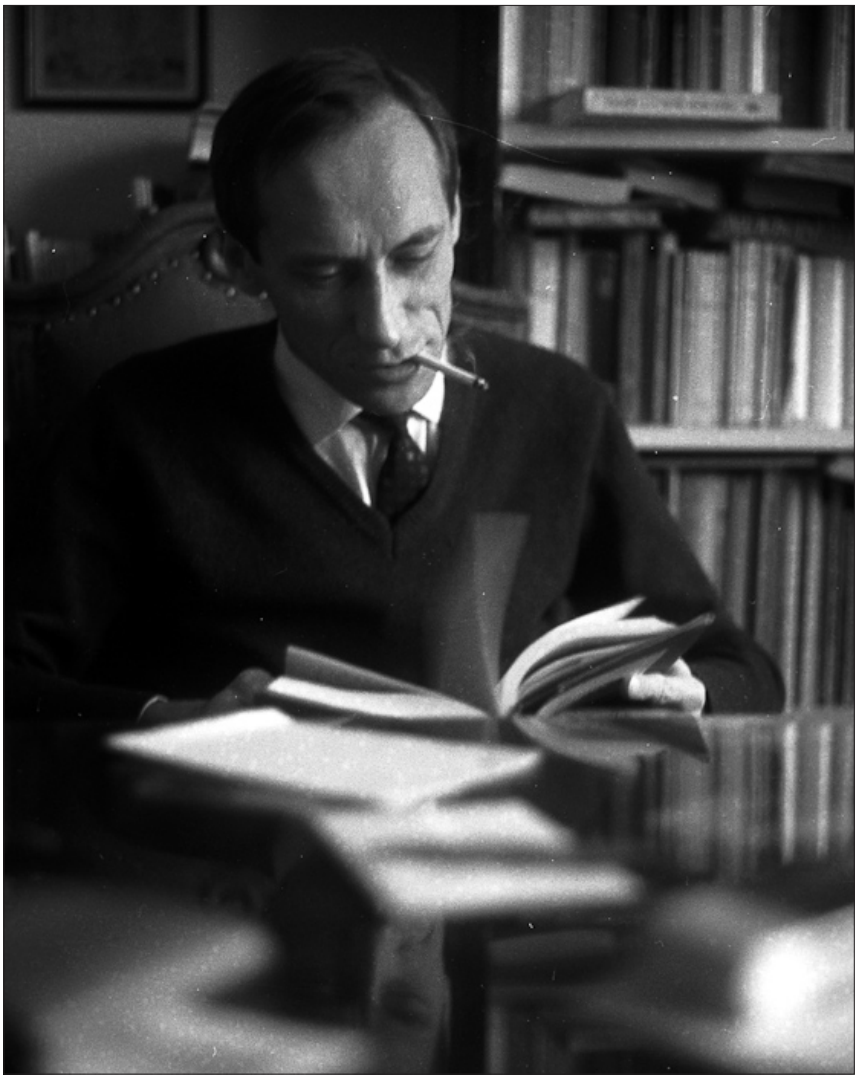
3. Bertolt Brecht, Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, in Collected Works, vol. IV (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 112–135. Brecht exposes the everyday mechanics of complicity and ideological submission.

4. Hannah Arendt – Karl Jaspers, Correspondence 1926–1969 (New York: Harcourt, 1992). Arendt refers to Heidegger as "a genius without character" in her letters from the late 1940s.

5. Karl Jaspers, The Question of German Guilt (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946). Jaspers' differentiation between criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt profoundly shaped Arendt's theory of political responsibility.

Leszek Kołakowski, the European Spirit, and the Polish Experience: From Revisionism to Europe's Open Questions

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić



The intellectual trajectory of Leszek Kołakowski stands as one of the clearest expressions of the inner drama of the European spirit in the twentieth century. This drama did not arise primarily from Europe's geopolitical division, but from a deeper conflict between promises of historical redemption and the moral limits of human action. Kołakowski was a European thinker precisely because he refused to resolve this conflict through easy answers, choosing instead to think it through—and to live with its consequences.

In the Polish context of the 1960s, Kołakowski emerged as a central figure of Marxist revisionism. After the political "thaw" of 1956, it appeared possible to conceive socialism as an ethical project compatible with Europe's tradition of critical reason and moral responsibility. Gradually, however, Kołakowski came to see that the problem lay not merely in the deformation of the system, but in the very structure of an ideology that claimed historical necessity and a monopoly on truth.

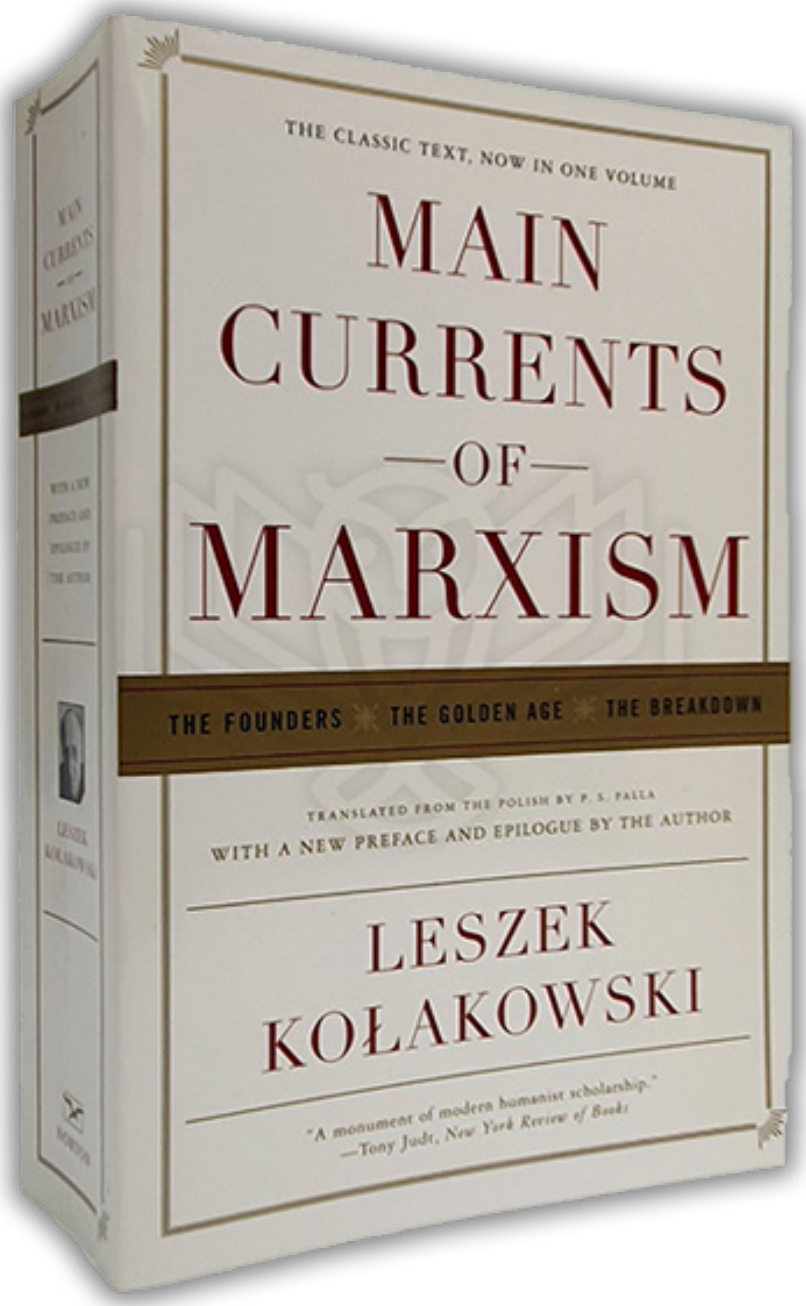
For Kołakowski, the European spirit did not mean faith in inevitable progress, but the capacity for self-doubt and the acceptance of limits to power. His departure from Marxism was neither abrupt nor opportunistic; it was the outcome of a profound civilizational judgment. An ideology that permits the suspension of morality in the name of the future, he argued, inevitably generates violence—even when it speaks the language of emancipation.

This philosophical position intersected with the political reflections of the Polish revisionist milieu, which included Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik. The Open Letter to the Party (1965) by Kuroń and Modzelewski articulated politically the same dilemma that Kołakowski radicalized philosophically: the crisis of socialism was not a deviation, but the consequence of a system that allowed moral responsibility to be suspended in the name of history.

The year 1968 marked a decisive rupture. Poland—like much of Eastern Europe—demonstrated that there was no space for autonomous, plural intellectual life within the existing system. Kołakowski was already in exile; others were imprisoned or marginalized. Yet exile, particularly in England, did not lead Kołakowski to adopt a new ideological certainty. Instead, it enabled a radical deepening of self-criticism.

His major work, Main Currents of Marxism, is neither a polemic nor a triumphalist reckoning, but an analytical autopsy of a great intellectual tradition. Crucially, Kołakowski did not spare his own youthful illusions. He did not replace one faith with another; rather, he accepted that the European spirit is marked by permanent uncertainty and an awareness of the limits of knowledge and power. It is precisely this capacity for retrospective self-critique that secures his lasting relevance.

Kołakowski's influence on Polish opposition movements of the 1970s and 1980s—including the Workers' Defense Committee and later Solidarity—was therefore ethical rather than doctrinal. It was grounded in a politics of truth, responsibility, and dignity, not in a project of seizing power or replacing one ideology with another.

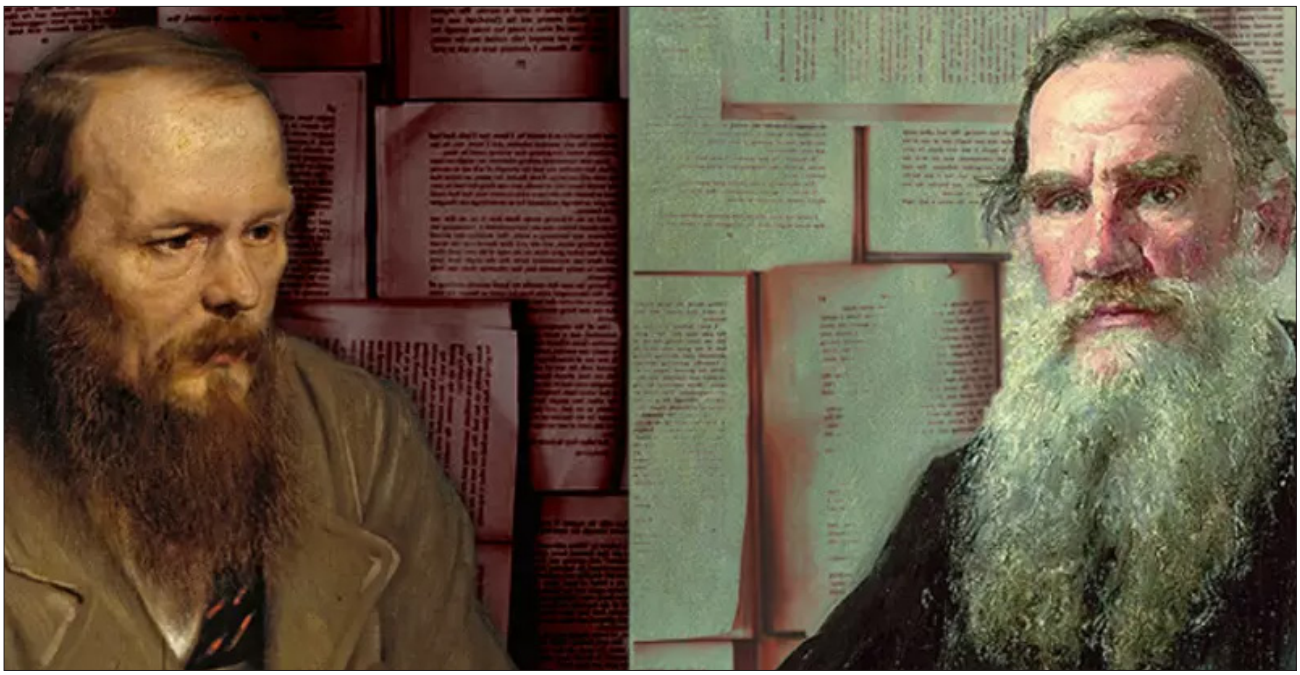


Conclusion: Kołakowski and Europe Today

If I return today to Leszek Kołakowski, it is not out of historical nostalgia, but from a need to clarify the limits of the European experience at a time of renewed certainties and recurring illusions. His willingness to abandon his own youthful convictions without embracing a new dogma reminds us that the European spirit does not rest on correct answers, but on responsibility for the consequences of ideas.

In a Europe once again confronted with ideological simplifications, technocratic confidence, and moral absolutisms, Kołakowski teaches us how to live with the tension between freedom and restraint, pluralism and responsibility. His thought offers no comfort of final solutions, but precisely for that reason it remains indispensable: it preserves the space in which Europe can remain faithful to itself, as a civilization of self-criticism rather than historical certainty. This is a lesson of the twentieth century that still awaits its full recognition in the twenty-first.

The Russian Soul and the European Spirit: Between Orthodoxy and Enlightenment



By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

Abstract

Russian culture has always existed in a state of tension between its own spiritual tradition and the influence of Europe. From Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, through Akhmatova, Mandelstam, and Brodsky, to Solzhenitsyn and contemporary political figures, Russia constantly asks: is it part of Europe, or its opposite? This article analyses that historical and spiritual tension, highlighting the conflict between "true Russians" and pro-European modernisers, and showing how Russia simultaneously rejects and mirrors the European spirit.

Keywords: Russia, Europe, Russian idea, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Slavophiles, European spirit

Europe Seen from the Outside

In previous reflections on the "spirit of Europe" — from Husserl and Zweig to Sloterdijk, Derrida, and Habermas — we spoke from within the European tradition. But Europe cannot be understood without those who stand at its threshold. Russian culture, positioned between East and West, constantly tests the borders of Europe's self-awareness. For Russians, Europe is both temptation and challenge, ideal and threat.

In previous reflections on the "spirit of Europe" — from Husserl and Zweig to Sloterdijk, Derrida, and Habermas — we spoke from within the European tradition. But Europe cannot be understood without those who stand at its threshold. Russian culture, positioned between East and West, constantly tests the borders of Europe's self-awareness. For Russians, Europe is both temptation and challenge, ideal and threat.

`The Russian Idea and the European Dream

In his Philosophical Letters, Pyotr Chaadaev described Russia as "outside of history," untouched by European revolutions. From this arises a permanent mix of inferiority and messianism: Russia as Europe's guardian, or Europe's reformer. This ambivalence becomes the structural matrix of the so-called "Russian idea."

Dostoevsky and the Temptation of the West

Dostoevsky in Notes from Underground and The Brothers Karamazov, sees Europe as a realm of rationalism without God. Europe loses its soul when it replaces suffering with comfort and security. Russia, in his view, must preserve a spiritual depth Europe has forgotten anticipating Husserl's later diagnosis of Europe's "spiritual crisis."

Tolstoy and Moral Simplicity

Tolstoy, especially in The Kingdom of God Is Within You, criticises the West for its materialism and institutional Christianity. His ideal is moral simplicity, non-violence, and faith without power. Russia becomes, for him, the place where Europe might rediscover its moral measure.

Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Brodsky — Europe in Exile

Anna Akhmatova's Requiem transforms private suffering into a universal tragedy, linked to the European lyric tradition.

Osip Mandelstam, in Conversation about Dante, evokes Dante and Ovid, seeking continuity with the humanist canon.

Joseph Brodsky, in Less Than One, famously observes that "Russia was European until it decided not to be," insisting that style, moral reflection, and irony are the essence of Europe.

These authors represent a Russia profoundly European in its sensibility, even when persecuted by its own state.

Solzhenitsyn and the Political Metaphysics of Russia

Solzhenitsyn, in The Gulag Archipelago and Live Not by Lies, combines moral and political critique. He places truth above ideology, confronting totalitarianism but also warning against Western relativism. His call for spiritual renewal makes him both European (in method) and anti-European (in his vision of a uniquely Russian path).

His thought, often against his own intention, became the source for later ideological readings of a "Russian way," echoed today in political rhetoric.

Today, the concept of the russkij mir continues the old Slavophile dream of a distinct civilisation. Yet Russia never ceases to be European, even in opposition: its self-definition constantly requires Europe as a mirror.

Philosophers like Berdyaev and Shestov show that Russia cannot escape Europe; its historical mission rests in an internal dialogue, or struggle with European values. Russia rejects Europe only to rediscover itself in that rejection.

Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky — European Revolutionaries, Russian Destiny

Lenin and Trotsky were intellectually shaped by Hegel, Marx, and the French Revolution.

Stalin turned European rationalism into a political cult, replacing freedom and conscience with discipline and sacrifice.

Soviet civilisation thus becomes European in method, anti-European in spirit. It sought to fuse Russian mysticism with European science producing a system that ultimately destroyed both.

Europe's Borders and Russia as Mirror

Today, the concept of the russkij mir continues the old Slavophile dream of a distinct civilisation. Yet Russia never ceases to be European, even in opposition: its self-definition constantly requires Europe as a mirror.

Philosophers like Berdyaev and Shestov show that Russia cannot escape Europe; its historical mission rests in an internal dialogue, or struggle with European values. Russia rejects Europe only to rediscover itself in that rejection.

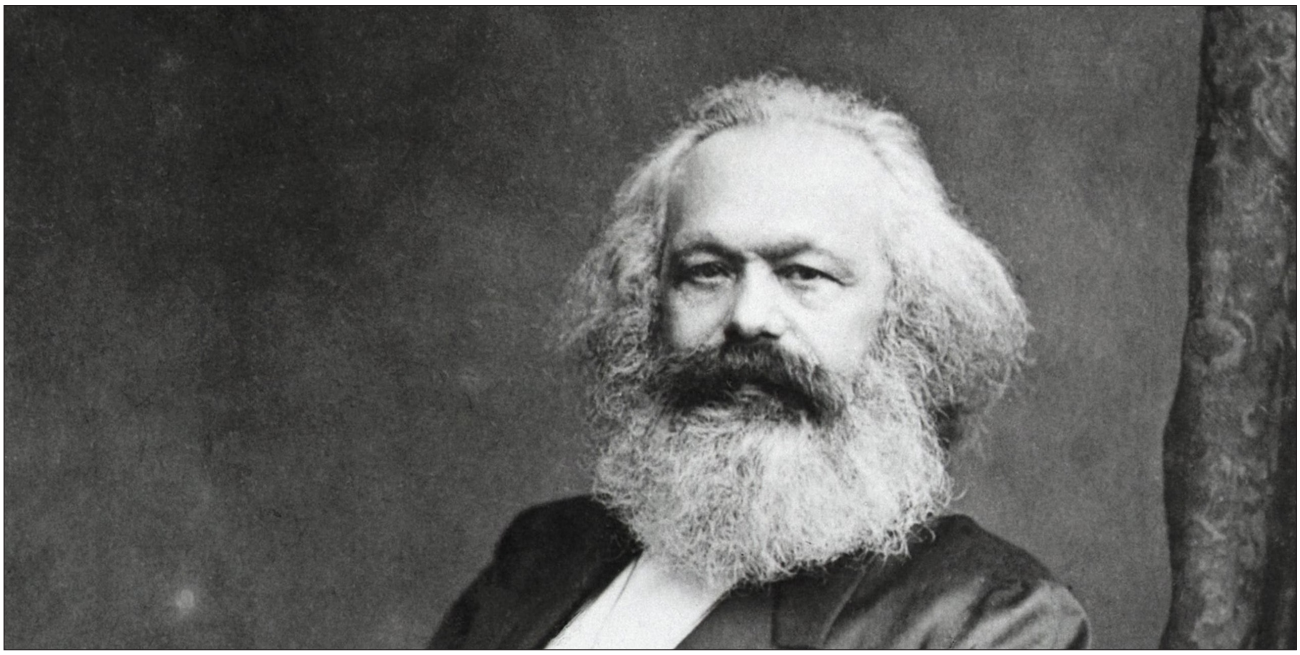
Epilogue: The Eternal Conflict Between "True Russians" and Europeanisers

At the heart of Russian thought lies a deep and persistent conflict: the tension between the "true Russians" (Slavophiles) and the Europeanisers (Zapadniki). The Slavophiles — Aleksey Khomyakov, Ivan Kireyevsky, saw Europe as a betrayal of spiritual warmth. The Westernisers, Belinsky, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, argued that Russia could not emerge from darkness without European thought.

Nikolai Berdyaev called this the "tragedy of the Russian spirit": a perpetual oscillation between holiness and revolution, humility and power. In the 20th century the same drama resurfaces among the Symbolists, the Communists, and the dissidents each searching for balance between spirituality and reason, between the icon and the laboratory.

This unresolved archetype continues to shape Russia's identity. And in that unresolved tension Russia holds up a mirror to Europe, revealing the fragile foundations of its own self-understanding.

Marx and the European Spirit: Tradition, Critique, and Intellectual Legacy



By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

Abstract

This article situates Karl Marx within the long arc of the European intellectual tradition, arguing that Marx is both its inheritor and its most radical critic. While deeply influenced by classical rationalism, Christian universalism, Enlightenment humanism and German idealist philosophy, Marx transforms these traditions through a materialist critique of capitalist modernity. The essay examines how this transformation shaped subsequent trajectories of European thought — notably the Frankfurt School, Western post-Marxism, and postcolonial theory — and evaluates the extent to which these successors remained faithful to Marx or significantly modified his ideas. By exploring Marx's dual role as custodian and challenger of the European spirit, the article outlines how Marxism became a central mechanism of European self-reflection and self-critique from the nineteenth century to the present.

> **Although Marx explicitly rejected theological explanations, his thought remains indebted to the Christian idea that all human beings share a common dignity. Marx secularises this moral horizon: the possibility of emancipation becomes a historical, not spiritual, task. His concept of "species-being" echoes Christian anthropological universalism, now reframed in materialist terms.**

1. Introduction: Marx at the Heart of the European Spirit

Few thinkers in modern history have been as deeply rooted in the European spirit, and at the same time as radically opposed to its self-image as Karl Marx. His work stands at the crossroads of Europe's most powerful intellectual currents:

-ancient rationalism, with its trust in the intelligibility of the world;

-Christian universalism, with its belief in the equal dignity of all human beings;

-Enlightenment humanism, with its insistence that society can be transformed by human agency;

German idealism, especially Hegelian dialectics, with its conception of history as a process of unfolding contradictions.
Marx does not reject these traditions. Instead, he carries them to their logical conclusion and in doing so, exposes their internal tensions. His originality lies not in departing from the European spirit, but in revealing that Europe's own philosophical foundations demand a materialist, historical and emancipatory reconsideration of society.

2. Marx as the Culmination of European Intellectual Traditions

2.1 Classical rationality and the demystification of society

From ancient Greece, Marx inherits the conviction that reality is intelligible through rational inquiry. Capital is, in this sense, a continuation of the European tradition of philosophical analysis, applying scientific reasoning to the economic and social structures of the modern world.
Marx's critique of political economy can be read as the most ambitious European attempt to unmask the hidden logic of society in line with Spinoza, the Enlightenment encyclopedists and Hegel.

2.2 Christian universalism and the moral horizon of equality

Although Marx explicitly rejected theological explanations, his thought remains indebted to the Christian idea that all human beings share a common dignity. Marx secularises this moral horizon: the possibility of emancipation becomes a historical, not spiritual, task. His concept of "species-being" echoes Christian anthropological universalism, now reframed in materialist terms.

2.3 Enlightenment humanism and the belief in self-emancipation

Spinoza-Hegel

Marx radicalises Enlightenment optimism about human agency. Freedom is no longer a philosophical ideal; it must be realised through concrete transformation of social conditions. In this sense, Marx stands in direct continuity with Kant's call for public reason and with Rousseau's critique of political inequality, but he grounds both in historical-material analysis rather than in abstract principles.

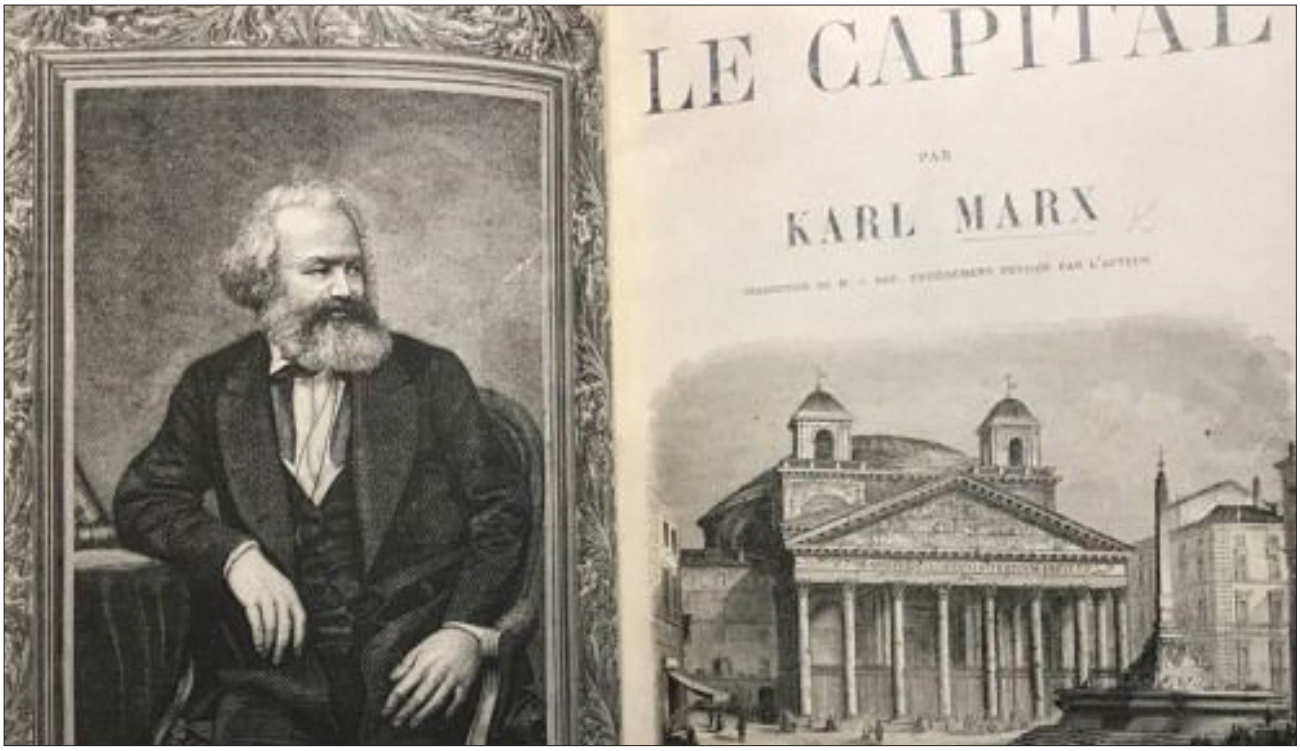
**Marx inherits the conviction that reality is intelligible through rational inquiry. Capital is, in this sense, a continuation of the European tradition of philosophical analysis, applying scientific reasoning to the economic and social structures of the modern world.
Marx's critique of political economy can be read as the most ambitious European attempt to unmask the hidden logic of society in line with Spinoza, the Enlightenment encyclopedists and Hegel.**

2.4 German idealism and the dialectical structure of history

The influence of Hegel is decisive. Marx inherits Hegel's vision of history as a dialectical movement of contradictions, but he "turns it upside down" by rooting these contradictions in relations of production rather than in the development of Spirit.
Thus, Marx is not an antagonist of European philosophy: he is one of its most coherent outcomes.

3. Marx's Originality: A Materialist Reversal of the European Spirit

What makes Marx unique within the European tradition is not his continuity with it, but the direc-



tion in which he pushes it. Marx performs what may be called a materialist inversion of the European spirit:

3.1 Materialist turn

Ideas are no longer the engine of history; they arise from material conditions. This reverses the idealist assumption, but retains the European commitment to systematic explanation.

3.2 Critique of capitalism as critique of European modernity

Marx sees capitalism not merely as an economic system but as the dominant form of European civilisation. His critique therefore becomes a critique of the West's own self-understanding.

3.3 Emancipation universalised

Marx transforms the European promise of universal freedom into a global project, transcending national and continental boundaries. The proletariat is not a European class; it is a universal class formed under global capitalism.

3.4 Philosophy becomes praxis

Marx internalises the European notion of critique but insists that critique must produce change. The famous dictum that philosophers have only interpreted the world is Europe's own rationalism pushed to its final consequence.

> **Habermas retains Marx's emancipatory horizon but shifts its foundation from labour to communication. Democratic legitimacy, he argues, requires free, rational discourse — but this discourse is impossible without material equality. Habermas moves beyond Marx, yet preserves the universalist and emancipatory core of the European spirit that Marx radicalised.**

4. Marx's Intellectual Successors: Fidelity, Modification, Transformation

Marx's legacy unfolds in at least three major streams of twentieth- and twenty-first-century thought. Each modifies parts of Marx's framework while remaining connected to his critical impulse.

4.1 The Frankfurt School: From Economy to Culture

Adorno and Horkheimer

Adorno and Horkheimer reinterpret Marx through the lens of cultural modernity. In Dialectic of Enlightenment, they argue that the Enlightenment rationality celebrated by Marx becomes instrumentalised in advanced capitalist societies.

They depart from Marx by expanding domination beyond the economic structure into psychology, culture and technology.

They continue Marx by showing that modern forms of domination are historically produced and interconnected.

Herbert Marcuse

Marcuse blends Marx with Freud, analysing repression within con-

sumer societies. Capitalism now pacifies individuals not only economically but also psychologically, by shaping desires and needs.

Walter Benjamin

Benjamin brings Marx into the domains of aesthetics, temporality and memory. His concept of "now-time" (Jetztzeit) reinterprets historical materialism as a sudden interruption, not a linear process.

Jürgen Habermas

Habermas retains Marx's emancipatory horizon but shifts its foundation from labour to communication. Democratic legitimacy, he argues, requires free, rational discourse — but this discourse is impossible without material equality. Habermas moves beyond Marx, yet preserves the universalist and emancipatory core of the European spirit that Marx radicalised.

4.2 Western Post-Marxism: From Class to Discourse

Louis Althusser

Althusser redefines ideology as a material practice enacted through state apparatuses. He rejects Marx's early humanism and shifts focus from class agency to structural determination.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe argue that social identities are contingent and politically constructed. Class is no longer a naturally privileged agent of history. Political struggle becomes a contest of discourses and hegemonies.

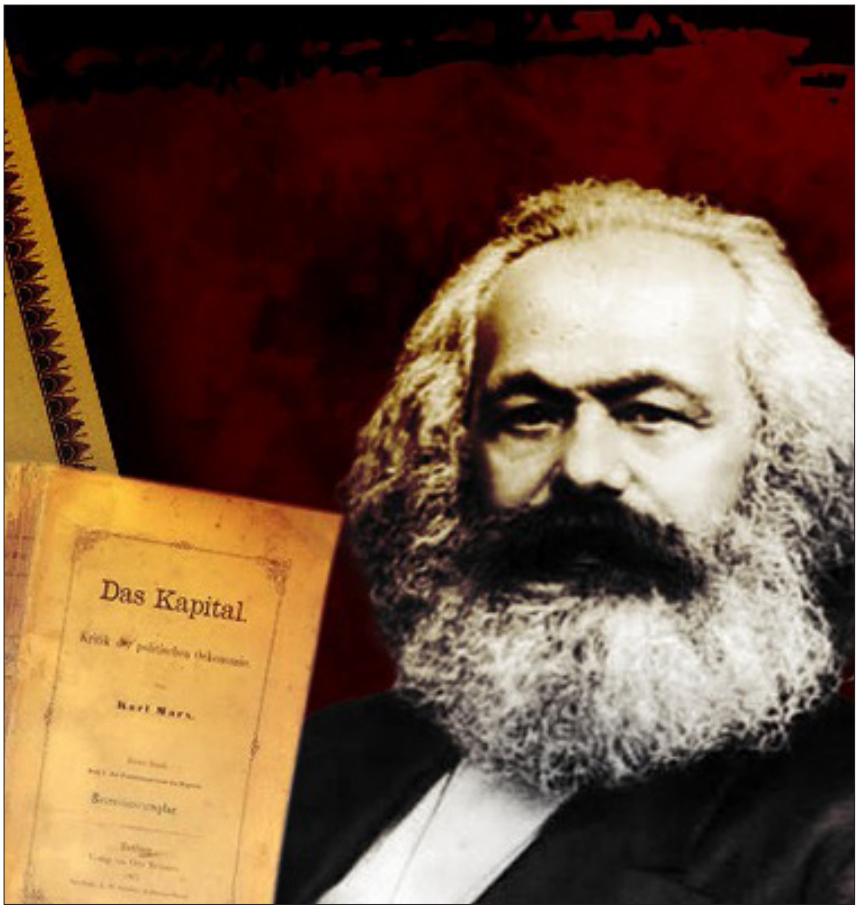
Post-Marxism therefore:

-modifies Marx's ontology of class;
-extends his insights on ideology and power;
-retains the notion that society is shaped by conflict and contradiction.

4.3 Postcolonial Marx: Decentring Europe

Frantz Fanon

Fanon exposes the psychological and existential dimensions of colonial domination, linking race, violence and capitalist exploitation. He universalises Marx's concept of alienation in contexts Marx never analysed.



Edward Said

Said uses Marx's concept of ideology to analyse cultural imperialism (Orientalism) as a discursive formation that produces non-European Otherness.

Dipesh Chakrabarty

Chakrabarty calls to "provincialize Europe," arguing that Marx's universal history remains tied to European developmental narratives. Yet he affirms that Marx remains indispensable for understanding global capitalism.

Postcolonial thought criticises Marx's Eurocentrism, but also depends on Marxist tools to analyse global inequality.

5. Conclusion: Marx as Europe's Critic and Custodian

Marx is inseparable from the European spirit because he embodies its deepest commitments:

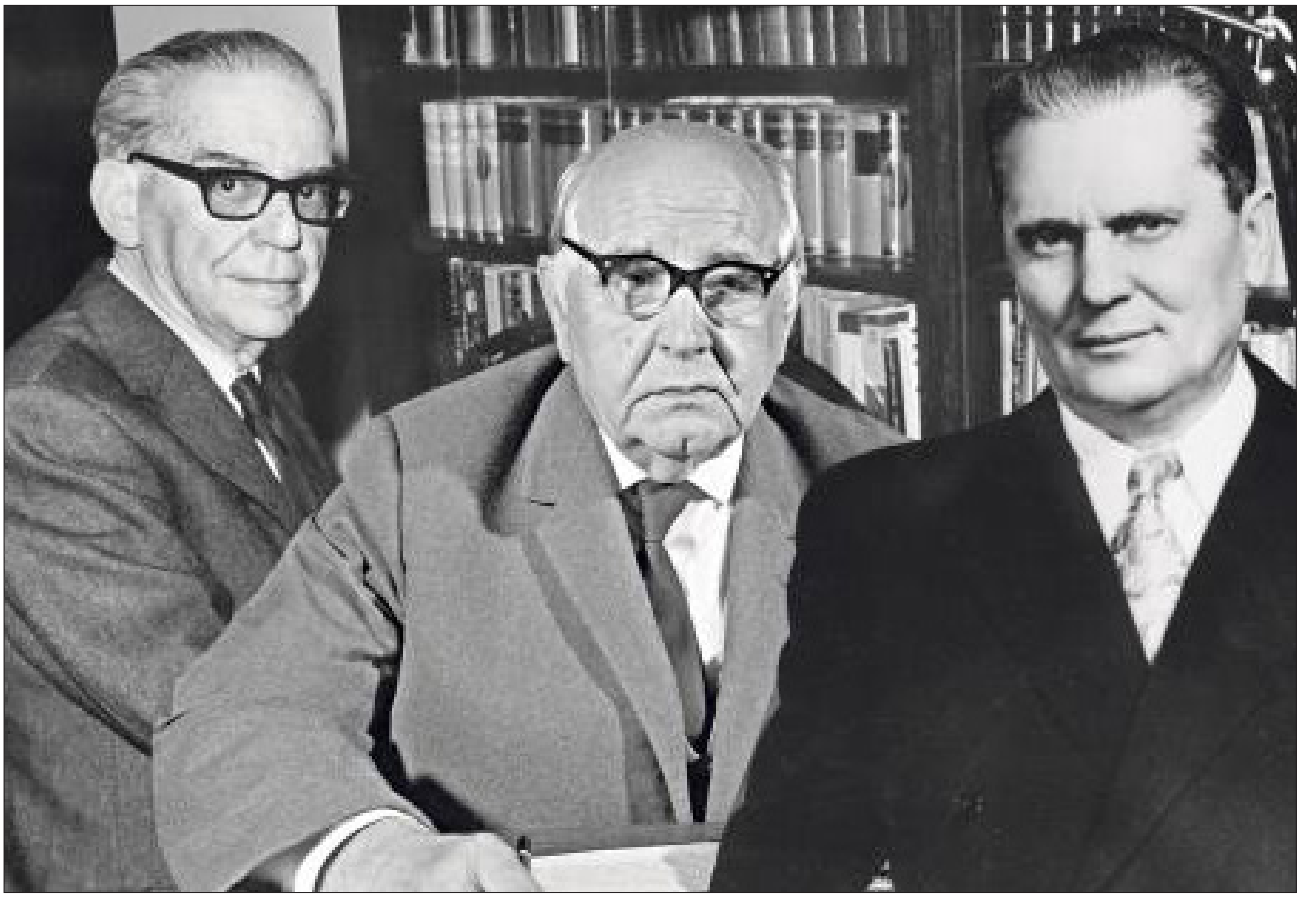
-thebeliefthathistoryisintelligible;
-the conviction that human freedom is possible;
-the imperative of critique;
-the demand for universalism.

But he also exposes the contradictions that prevent Europe from fulfilling these ideals. Marx is, therefore, not only the last great system-builder of European philosophy; he is its most persistent critic the conscience through which Europe interrogates itself.

His successors modify, reinterpret or challenge him, yet they all continue the European gesture of self-critical reflection, the defining feature of Europe's philosophical legacy.

Marx remains the European spirit thinking against itself and thereby remaining faithful to its highest vocation

Tito, Miroslav Krleža, and Ivo Andrić: Complex Horizons of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy



By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

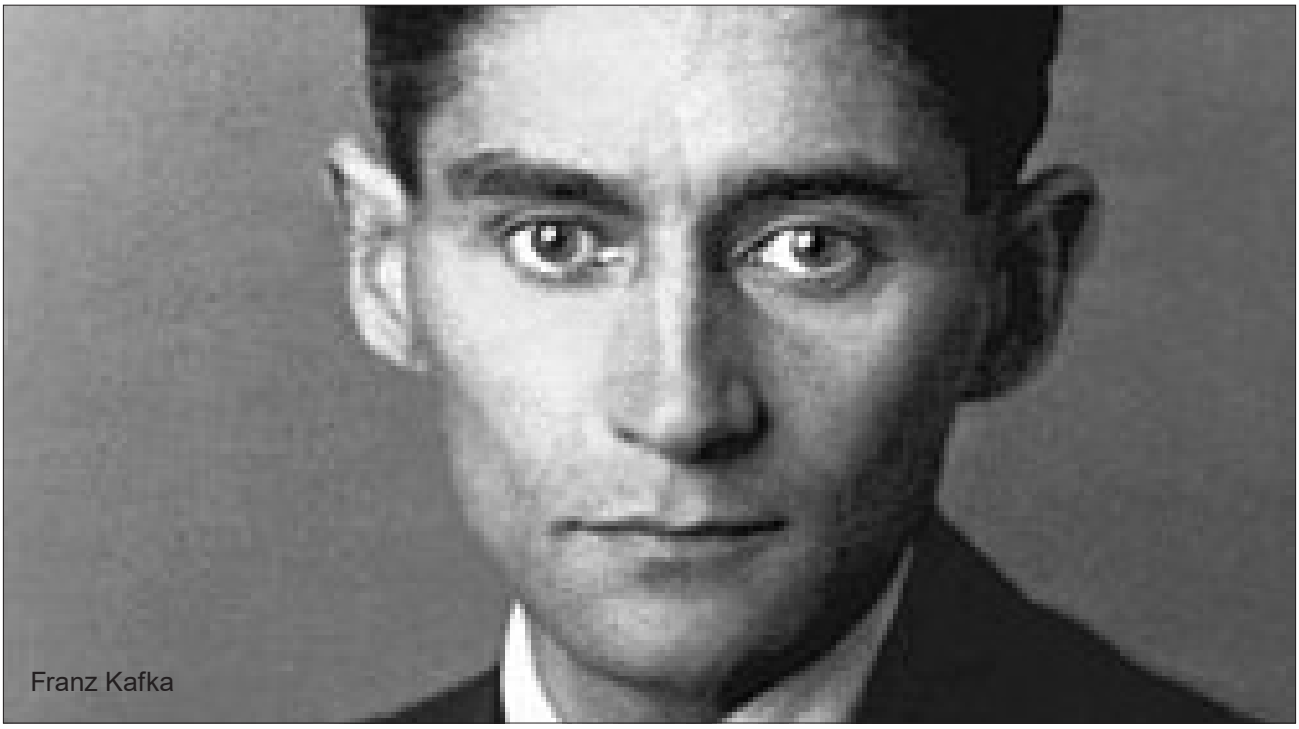
The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867–1918) was a complex political, cultural, and economic entity that simultaneously shaped and constrained national and individual identities. Three key South Slavic figures, Josip Broz Tito, Miroslav Krleža, and Ivo Andrić – developed their positions amidst tensions between the central court, modernization impulses, and peripheral localities. Their experiences reflect the multi-layered life within the empire, intertwining bureaucracy, science, arts, urbanization, and social inequality.

1. Political Framework and 1848

The year 1848 marked the beginning of modern political tensions: revolutions in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest, demands for national rights, constitutional reforms, and economic liberalization. These revolutions exposed limitations of central authority, while highlighting the potential of civil society and public intellectual life.

Tito, though born later, internalized centralism and discipline, shaping his organizational model of socialist Yugoslavia^

Krleža experienced political authoritarianism as restrictive for Slavic intellectuals, yet recognized the importance of high cultural standards and intellectual freedom.


Franz Kafka

Andrić analyzes the tension between imperial center and peripheral Bosnia, where political order meets local customs and identities^
The court and bureaucracy shaped the trio's political sensibilities`, creating a contrast between order and freedom, discipline and creativity, reflected in their later works and political projects.

2. Cultural Horizons: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Music, and Architecture

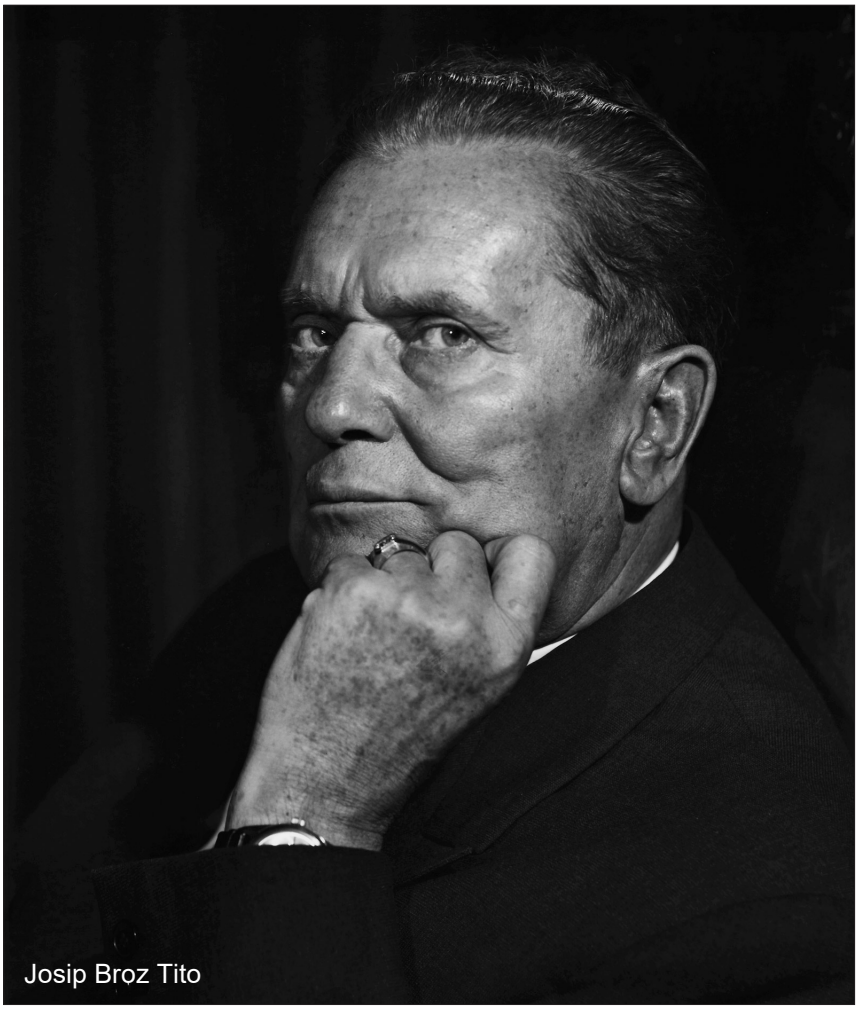
Literature and Philosophy
Robert Musil (The Man Without Qualities) and Hermann Broch (The Sleepwalkers) analyze modern fragmentation and existential dilemmas^.
Franz Kafka (The Trial, The Castle) illustrates bureaucratic absurdity, echoing imperial everyday life known to Krleža and Andrić.
Karl Kraus critiques public opinion and media; Krleža internalizes this in his cultural criticism.
Stefan Zweig chronicles psychological complexity, modeling introspective narrative styles later adopted by Andrić.
Psychoanalysis
Sigmund Freud: unconscious dynamics, power relations, and repressed desires shape understanding of identity and social control^.
Otto Weininger: gender and character theories contrast with traditional values, influencing Krleža's and Andrić's critical reflection.
Music and Architecture
Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss epitomize Central European cultural sophistication, resonating with urban modernity.
Adolf Loos and the Secession movement influenced urban aesthetics; Loos's dictum "Ornament is crime" resonates in Krleža's urban modernist critique.

Andrić analyzes the tension between imperial center and peripheral Bosnia, where political order meets local customs and identities. The court and bureaucracy shaped the trio's political sensibilities`, creating a contrast between order and freedom, discipline and creativity, reflected in their later works and political projects.

Science and Urbanization
Imperial cities (Vienna, Prague, Budapest) were centers of industrial modernization, infrastructure, and academic life, providing models of rational social organization – internalized by Tito, while Krleža and Andrić focused on human and peripheral perspectives.

3. Economic Structure and Social Inequalities

The empire featured significant economic stratification: Industrial and cultural centers vs. agrarian peripheries.
Urbanization, infrastructure, and taxation policy.
Tito views imperial modernization as a template for later socialist reorganization.
Krleža critiques inequality and bureaucratic dominance.
Andrić depicts the conflict of tradition and modernization in peripheral provinces.


Josip Broz Tito

4. Literary Works and Imperial Influence

Krleža: Povratak Filipa Latinovicza – critique of centralism and cultural elite, reflecting imperial order vs. local resistance^.
Andrić: The Bridge on the Drina – portrays imperial administrative order and Balkan identity pluralism.
Tito: biographical data (working-class background, experience of centralism) show internalization of discipline and modernization models.

Conclusion

Austro-Hungary, with its political apparatus, cultural wealth, and economic complexity, shaped the horizons of Tito, Krleža, and Andrić.
Tito internalized discipline and rational modernity.
Krleža balances fascination with critical skepticism.
Andrić synthesizes center-periphery perspectives.
Their relationship to the empire reflects the Slavic encounter with Central European hegemony, where modernizing fascination meets emancipatory and cultural resistance.

Austro-Hungary, with its political apparatus, cultural wealth, and economic complexity, shaped the horizons of Tito, Krleža, and Andric.Tito internalized discipline and rational modernity. Krleža balances fascination with critical skepticism. Andric synthesizes center-periphery perspectives. Their relationship to the empire reflects the Slavic encounter with Central European hegemony, where modernizing fascination meets emancipatory and cultural resistance.

The European Union and the Western Balkans: Enlargement as a Strategic and Normative Imperative

By Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić

The European perspective of the Western Balkans remains one of the European Union's most consequential and, at the same time, most demanding political projects. Since the Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, the EU has formally reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies within the Union. More than two decades later, however, the credibility of this commitment is increasingly tested—both in Brussels and in the region itself.

EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans should not be understood merely as a technical process of accession negotiations or legal harmonisation. Rather, it represents a strategic investment in the stability, security and political coherence of Europe as a whole. The Western Balkans are geographically embedded within the European continent, historically intertwined with its political and cultural trajectories, and directly affected by European security dynamics. Leaving the region in a prolonged state of "waiting room integration" carries tangible geopolitical risks, including external influence, democratic backsliding and renewed political fragmentation.

At the same time, enlargement is not, and cannot be, an automatic process. The European Union is founded on shared values: democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the protection of minorities. Progress towards membership must therefore be based on credible

reforms, particularly in the areas of judicial independence, the fight against corruption, media freedom and the functioning of democratic institutions. In this sense, enlargement remains a merit-based process, and responsibility lies both with the EU and with the candidate countries themselves.

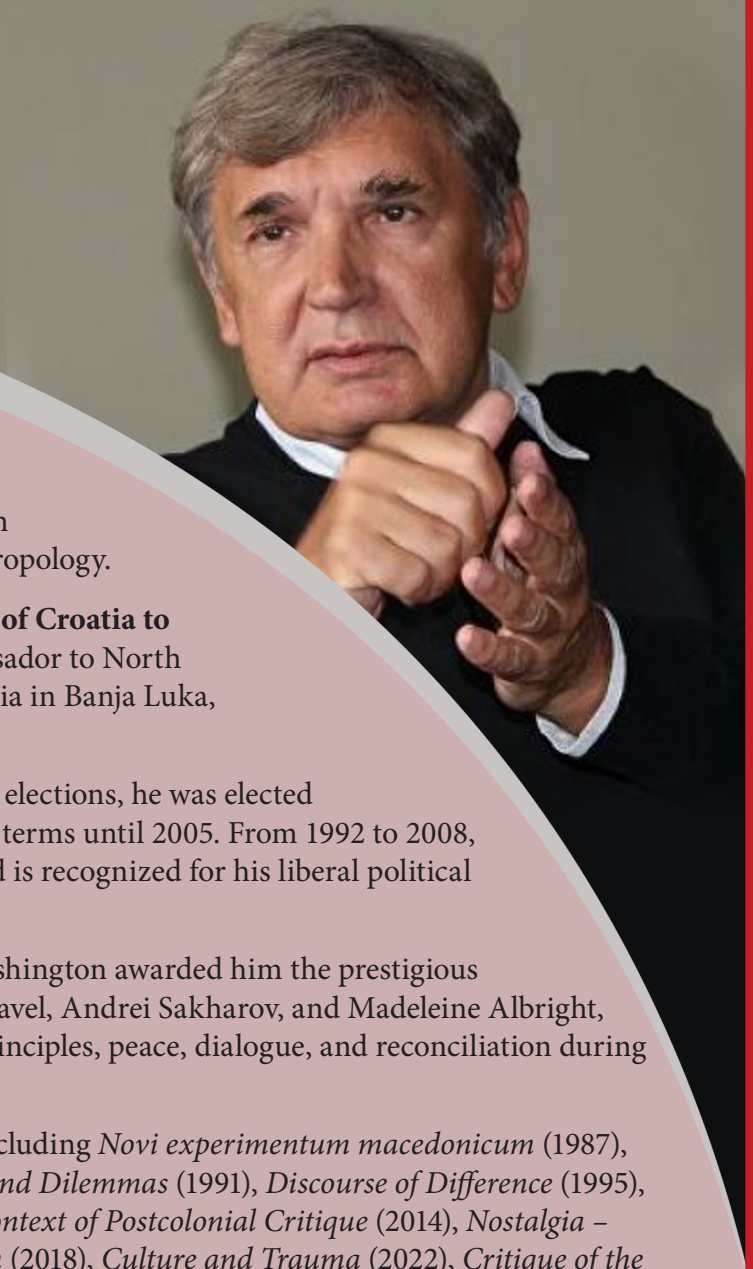
One of the key challenges in the current enlargement framework is the erosion of trust. In several Western Balkan societies, reform fatigue is growing as accession timelines appear increasingly distant and conditionality less predictable. Conversely, within the EU, enlargement scepticism persists, fuelled by internal crises, institutional concerns and fears of importing unresolved bilateral disputes. Rebuilding mutual credibility requires a more transparent, gradual and politically visible integration process, offering tangible benefits to citizens even before full membership.

The renewed geopolitical context—marked by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, heightened global instability and strategic competition—has given enlargement new urgency. In this environment, the integration of the Western Balkans is no longer only a question of completing Europe's post-Cold War unification, but also of safeguarding the EU's role as a normative and political actor. A credible enlargement policy strengthens the EU's strategic autonomy and reinforces its capacity to shape its immediate neighbourhood.

Ultimately, the future of the Western Balkans within the European Union depends on a dual commitment. The EU must demonstrate consistency, political will and strategic clarity, while the countries of the region must deliver genuine and irreversible reforms. Enlargement, if pursued seriously and responsibly, remains one of the EU's most powerful tools for transformation—capable not only of stabilising the Western Balkans, but of reaffirming the European project itself.

The future of the Western Balkans within the European Union depends on a dual commitment. The EU must demonstrate consistency, political will and strategic clarity, while the countries of the region must deliver genuine and irreversible reforms. Enlargement, if pursued seriously and responsibly, remains one of the EU's most powerful tools for transformation—capable not only of stabilising the Western Balkans, but of reaffirming the European project itself.

Biography of the Author: Dr. Zlatko Kramarić



Zlatko Kramarić (b. 1956, Osijek, Croatia) is a full professor with permanent tenure at the Academy of Arts and Culture, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, where he specializes in Macedonian literature and culture, literary theory, and cultural anthropology.

He currently serves as the **Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia to Albania**. Previously, he held diplomatic posts as Ambassador to North Macedonia and Kosovo, and as Consul General of Croatia in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 1990, following Croatia's first multi-party democratic elections, he was elected **Mayor of Osijek**, a position he held for four consecutive terms until 2005. From 1992 to 2008, he served as a **Member of the Croatian Parliament**, and is recognized for his liberal political orientation and commitment to democratic values.

In 1997, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Washington awarded him the prestigious **W. Averell Harriman Award**, also received by Václav Havel, Andrei Sakharov, and Madeleine Albright, in recognition of his promotion of liberal-democratic principles, peace, dialogue, and reconciliation during the turbulent 1990s.

Professor Kramarić is the author of numerous books, including *Novi experimentum macedonicum* (1987), *Introduction to Narratology* (1989), *Macedonian Topics and Dilemmas* (1991), *Discourse of Difference* (1995), *Identity, Text, Nation* (2009), *The Yugoslav Idea in the Context of Postcolonial Critique* (2014), *Nostalgia – A Short History of Forgetting* (2016), *The Croatian Lesson* (2018), *Culture and Trauma* (2022), *Critique of the Political Mind* (2021), and *Critique of the Dark Mind* (2023), as well as, co-authored with Angelina Banović-Markovska, *Politics, Culture, Identity* (2013) and *Politics, Culture, Identity II* (2025).

He is a member of the **Croatian Writers' Association**, the **Croatian Philosophical Society**, and *Matica hrvatska*. In 2015, he was elected a member of the **Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU)**.

For our readers:
Selected essays by **Ambassador Dr. Zlatko Kramarić** featured in this special edition of *Argumentum*, as well as other essays not included herein, can be accessed online at www.argumentum.al.

Scan the QR code to access these and other analyses online in the Albanian language.

Co-publisher: Embassy of the Republic of Croatia in Tirana

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Embassy of the Republic of Croatia
to the Republic of Albania

ARGUMENTUM

news opinion analysis

Adresa: Njësia bashkiake nr. 5, Rruga "Abdyl Frasheri", Ndërtesa 8, Tiranë, Shqipëri

Tel: +355 (0) 68 82 01 720

Email: redaksia.argumentum@gmail.com,

info@argumentum.al

NUIS/NIPT: L91415033Q

Twiter : Argumentum_al

Facebook: argumentum.al

Instagram: argumentumnews