

CENTRAL EUROPE, THE EU AND MYSELF

(REMEMBER THE FUTURE)

Today is 23rd October 2089. I'm 88 years old. I am looking at the raising flags of Hungary and the European Union from my room's window on Kossuth Square, in Budapest. I haven't thought that I would be living on the 100th anniversary of the political changeover, but here I am to tell you a story, our story.

Thinking about the past, the first thing many people remember is the struggle for freedom. I could learn about the fall of communism only from the history books or from the stories of my grandparents. I was born already as a European citizen. Of course, at that time, I did not really understand the weight of the responsibility and compassionate empathy entailed. The political changeover itself began in 1989 with a shocking series of events, the re-burial of Imre Nagy – prime minister during the 1956's rise-up against the communism, and the death of János Kádár – de facto communist leader of Hungary for 32 years. From people's point of view this symbolized the transition from communism to democracy. In the same year, a few months later, the Third Hungarian Republic was proclaimed on 23rd October. At this moment of fresh start, everyone hoped for a new era, for a new life. The whole society experienced the wind of change, not only in Hungary but also in other countries of the so-called Eastern block. Instead of being locked and selfish, we began to open up to other cultures and started making friends with each other. Well, I was really impacted by this change. Even today, I am getting goose bumps thinking that our ancestors did all this for coming generations, for us. For this I acknowledge their struggle and I am grateful to them.

From 1st May 2004, Hungary officially became a member of the European Union. Sometimes a picture of me flashes as the flags of blue and twelve golden stars flutter enthusiastically on the streets of our cities. That moment was a vast celebration for all the Hungarian citizens. We were then the youth and children of the European community. Many of the elderly people had tears running down their faces, saying, "We're free!" Suddenly, everyone became proud of their being European.

Of course, as in all new Member States, there were initial difficulties. These were most obvious representing the behavioural changes of the whole society. We had to understand that from then on, we are not lonely wolves in a never-ending war. We had to be able to accept and feel the spirit of other cultures, and as well as in every good friendship, form and seek common ground. No-one said it was going to be easy. And there were the ones who feared for the independence of the country's national identity, who would rather have closed our borders again.

In 2010, a right-wing national conservative party won the elections with a large margin. As far as I recall, in the early days people said a lot of good things, especially to us, students. They promised to reform the education system and to reduce the burden on teachers and students. At that time Hungarian society was lagging Western societies. Hungarians felt that change was no longer an option! It is necessary! They really believed in the words and promises of the great leader.

In 2015, Europe was hit by a global migration crisis. It is important to note that migration has always been there and will always be! This is mainly due to various armed conflicts, political and religious persecution and the economic impossibility of citizens living in extreme poverty in their

own country. Syria, Iran and Afghanistan were the most affected countries in the Middle East. In the case of Africa, Nigeria and South Somalia, where parts of the country were controlled by Islamic groups, and Eritrea, where the government pursued repressive policies and disregarded human rights. The European Union was working hard to find a solution to the refugee crisis, but it is no secret that this led to internal friction between the Member States. Mainly because of the migration quota debate which would have allowed the distribution of immigrants by population of each state. Unfortunately, some countries' governments, ideologized with nationalisms and Euroscepticism, rejected the quota, including Hungary. The Hungarian government built a fence – like the iron curtain and created a wall – like the one separated Berlin for decades – for those fleeing the war. At that time, I often asked myself: The ones, who built the walls, what would they do if they were escaping from the war? For this question I have the same answer to this day: They would be the first to flee, to leave the people behind. For me, a Europe against human identity, personality, and self-determination, it is not Europe! It is a Cultural suicide!

In March 2020, I was only 19 when a worldwide public health epidemic broke out, caused by the coronavirus. In fact, all of Europe was under a blockade, no way in, no way out. Member States have closed their borders and introduced strict controls in all areas of life. 10 years after the 2010 elections, despite the great promises, my country's health care was still underdeveloped to stop an epidemic. Pharmacies and hospitals did not have enough quantity and quality of equipment. It was the moment, when I lost confidence in my country. In Europe, the epidemic was gradually growing and taking more and more victims, until the Member States once realized the most important values...

I asked myself many times: Why do we reinterpret the functioning of our society only during threatening times? Honestly, I still think about it even today. Maybe human nature does never change? Would that be the European man? In the 30s, I tried to write a book about it, though I felt the things in it might have gone too far back then. In any case, we survived the epidemic, but we had to say goodbye to many of our fellow citizens. It is reported that there was an elderly patient in Italy who said: "Give the ventilator to the young!". It's strange to be European. We are against each other in times of peace, but we stick together in trouble. I think we learned a lot during these times. We have learned to look into each other's eyes without envy and evil. We understood that we were interdependent and needed to help each other. Later, we reassessed the entire European community at a global level. We have been looking for new ways in which Western and Eastern Europe have really come together.

We did the same with environmental issues. The initiative started in Sweden thanks to a young schoolgirl. Her words travelled around the world. Member States have pledged to become climate-neutral by 2050 and will seek to supply their country's energy needs with renewable energy only. There were obstacles in the beginning, most countries were worried about their own economies, but as I said, we have come to a point where self-interest did not override the interests of our community.

Talking about community! Modern European people have finally realized how good it is to belong to a colourful society, a multicultural community, while respecting the personality and diversity of the individuals. When I was a schoolboy, it was uncommon for high school students from other nationalities to study in Hungarian secondary schools. Since then, everything has changed. In fact, I had not thought long ago that the Hungarian community would be able to transform its own

mentality. Well, as they say, it takes at least 60 years to transform a society! Instead of dislike and xenophobia, we became receptive and understanding. We are looking at something, to be human in the strictest sense of the word. Under the rays of this, we have shaped our education system, shaped by human rights, and received a great deal of advice from our friends who had chosen this path earlier than us. Among others, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. I like to make jokes and I often say we are the happiest member of UNE.

Yes, now I think you are asking what is UNE.? Well, my dear friend, the union has flourished so much that we now live in the United Nations of Europe. As a federal organization, I reassure you that in all Member States, statistical indicators measure the same level of happiness. Oh, yes, we already have a Ministry of Happiness. We have achieved everything that the European man has been consciously waiting for decades. What is it like to live like this? I'm having a great time ...

Dear friend! Let me say goodbye by sharing a valuable thought. The strength of our states is not reflected in the size of our army or the technology we possess. We did not get here because we dressed our politicians in expensive suits. But we remained Humans in the hardest times. The suit is worthless if your heart is not in the right place. Maybe, for an 88-year-old, it sounds weird and I'm not a big man, but I'm talking about universal laws! You know what's most beautiful about it? I am sure I will die as a man, as a Human!

This is my Europe; this is our Europe! Together through the worldhistory!

"I'm almost ashamed,
that I live in such peace while
others are struggling and suffering! "

/ Albert Einstein /

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Máté Dénes Bozóky'.

MÁTÉ DÉNES BOZÓKY