Panel 2: Freedom and Its Adversaries: Perspective of Central Europe

Timothy Garton Ash: The last session was called *Freedom and Its Adversaries: the Perspective of Human Experience*. We're now going to go a little broader and talk about the perspective of Central Europe. Because as you know, Central Europe it's not just a place; it's also a kingdom of the spirit. And on this panel, Russia and even Britain are included, so it's very broadly defined.

It's a huge pleasure to be back in Prague, 20 years after participating in the Velvet Revolution. I remember one moment, when in the Laterna Magica, during the meetings of the Civic Forum, a delegation of students suddenly appeared - I think you remember, Václav - in the uniforms of young pioneers, Communist pioneers. They called themselves *the Committee for the Better Future* and they carried with them little mirrors which they gave to each of us to look into and to remind us of who we are. I still have my little mirror. And in a way, I think perhaps that is what we are trying to do today, among other things; to look in the mirror, 20 years on, and to think about what the new enemies of freedom are. That is our question. I have it here in a letter from Václav Havel: "We will answer a seemingly simple question. 20 years ago, it was the Communists who were our common enemy of freedom. Who or what is it today?" And that is the question before this panel, which is extraordinary, brilliant, distinguished, unique and also highly disciplined. Because if each of us on this panel spoke for just 10 minutes, there would be no time for you, the students, to ask questions and we want you to have time to ask question. I was invited to give some introductory remarks. I am going to renounce those to give a good example to the people. I'm also going to be very brief in my introductions and then each of the panellists is going to speak for an absolute maximum of 5 minutes, so that we have time for discussion. And to enforce that, I have something which is in the universal language of today's world; that is to say in the language of football, called a red card.

The panel: Jacques Rupnik, the outstanding specialist on Central and Eastern Europe in France and, may I say, probably the leading specialist on Europe in the Czech Republic. Adam Michnik, a legendary figure of the Polish opposition, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and since yesterday *doctor honoris causa* of this university. Martin Bútora, a distinguished sociologist, political intellectual writer, former ambassador to the USA and a major figure of the Gentle Revolution in Slovakia. Andrej Piontkovsky, a remarkable political scientist, political writer, analyst and a true friend of freedom in Russia, which is more than one can say for everyone in Russian politics today. His last book was entitled *Another Look into Putin's Soul*. And on my left is Tom Stoppard, one of the most celebrated playwrights in the world today, whose plays are most watched, most loved and someone of Czech origin. Several of his plays have actually come up from the Czech and Central European experience: *Professional Foul*, I remember vividly most recently the wonderful *Rock´N´Roll* and someone who has been very much engaged in the affairs of the Czech lands for many, many years. That is our wonderful panel. I will take them in the order on the program. As I said, they will speak in their introductions for an absolute maximum of 5 minutes and then we'll have a chance for discussion. First of all Jacques Rupnik.

Jacques Rupnik: Thank you very much, Tim. For me it is strange to talk in English in this situation here but I have to succumb. I am going to be very disciplined. I have to talk in English and have to talk less than five minutes because all those who will outreach this limit will be declared to be freedom adversaries, of freedom of speech at least.

It's quite easy, after 1989, to identify the obvious enemies of freedom. I will say a couple of words about them and then probably move to the less obvious ones. Some of the more obvious ones have already been mentioned in the previous panel; legacies of the Communist period, the old Communist structures and networks. André Glucksmann said, *the Milošević syndrome*. "Nationalism as a supreme stage of Communism," Adam Michnik once famously said. That was clearly the idea of collective identity, of collective freedom at the expense of individual or minority freedom. Then we had a third, more recent

variety with the populist backlash in the Central Europe itself; this was no longer just the Balkans but we had that in Poland with the Kaczynski brothers, in Slovakia in various other forms, elsewhere. The idea that basically, political elites were challenging the liberal predicament that had been established after 1989 and they could afford to do so because they were now in the European Union, the goals were achieved and they challenged very overtly the liberal institutions that we have. Nationalist rhetoric came with it and we have most recently seen that between Slovakia and Hungary, I will not speak about it because I suppose Martin Bútora will, what we have between Slovakia and Hungary is really a particular worry. Milan Šimečka said, "If words were bullets, there would be bloodbath between Slovakia…" You know, a mild overstatement but still we have to take it seriously. And when I see my friends Peter Kende in Budapest and my recently deceased former teacher François Feuilletespeak in Budapest about Fascists, well then I take these things seriously.

OK, these are the authoritarian nationalist threats to liberal democracy, if you want the predictable ones. Therefore, I will move very promptly to the less predictable ones because I suppose we will have a chance to discuss the first category. The less obvious ones are the ones who use the language of freedom, who in fact are a part of the recovery of the democratic order and market economy after 1989 but they did it after 1989 while discarding what I consider to be the key legacy of dissent and of 1989; that a democracy needs a civil society and the rule of law. And their view of freedom was something that could basically do without it. Isaiah Berlin used to distinguish between negative freedom, that is, a lack of interference from others and from the state, from positive freedom, which involves action and free choice to do something in the public sphere and that requires some kind of civic engagement, something we call civic culture, civil society, all the things that Tocqueville wrote about particularly in the American context. So, after the great achievement of post-89, we have an unprecedented level of freedom, of negative freedom in Central Europe; we have never had it so good. So let nobody be mistaken about what I will be saying after; we have never had it so good. We have all these freedoms; freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom to consume, the freedom of consumer society, we have all of that. But we have a freedom where people feel there is less intrusion in their lives but they have very little influence on the government and on public affairs. This is basically what we have. This is if you want democracy according to Benjamin Constant; *democratie de jouissance de liberté.* You enjoy your freedoms and you leave the public sphere, you leave public affairs to others. Politics, this is for the people who get bored at home, that is basically the message from the liberal. Why was this possible? Because after 1989, the state was decreed as the enemy. Both political liberals and economic liberals and the free marketers converged on the idea "we have to dismantle the state", because the state was the enemy of freedom. Wasn't it, under the Communists? So they converged on this idea quite successfully and they managed to create the conditions for a free market; but that became a code word for non-transparent, politely said, privatizations, plunder basically, to put it more brutally, and unrestrained greed. And there was an ideology, just to use one phrase from Margaret Thatcher, that they adopted and faithfully imitated, that there is no such thing as society. There are individuals and there is the state and we don't need anything else in between because the only thing we have in between is the market. So that is one reason why we have abandoned that space of freedom.

Is my time up? Nearly, so I will have to be even quicker on the second aspect.

Another legacy of dissent was the language of rights. That it is very good to have freedoms granted in constitutions but if you don't have the institutions, if you don't have the state, the *rechtstaat*, the rule of law to be implemented, well they are useless. So when I hear Professor Cepl, when I hear Mr. Přibáň, when I hear others saying: "Never in the last 20 years have our constitutional freedoms been as threatened as they are today", I take it seriously. I take it seriously because we have constitutional freedoms but we despise and we ill-treat the constitutional institutions that are supposed to guarantee and implement them.

And since my time is running up, I will therefore come to a conclusion.

How was this possible, that we ignored these legacies of dissent that are vital for our freedom, for civil society and for the rule of law? Because we opted for the quickest way to a free society after 1989, which was through imitation. There was a well-tried model in the West, it was a well functioning market economy etc. and the idea was “no experiment, the third road leads to the third world”. You remember all those phrases. Don’t think too much, just imitate. Well, the result is that today, we have exhausted that cycle. Our political elites are exhausted, there is not a single idea, a new idea that I have heard in the past ten years, at least. No new people, no new ideas; they are burnt out, completely burnt out and exhausted. We have the democratic shell, the institutional shell, but inside it is hollow. All substance has been emptied. Yes, we have created a market economy but bad luck, it is now in crisis. So perhaps this is the great thing about crises; they force us to revisit the fundamentals. This is a great chance that anniversaries like this give us. But if we do so, we can do two things... Red card, OK, two sentences. One is, in doing so, keep us from those great friends of freedom that lead us to abandon the civil society and the rule of law in the name of just one dimensional view of it, because we will handle the enemies. That is my conclusion and perhaps, if in this crisis, with people we have here, we will have the chance, in our discussion, to revisit these fundamentals that might be in our modest use on anniversaries like this one for the discussion about democracy today. Thank you.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much, Jacques. Adam Michnik.

Adam Michnik: I don’t really like to look into the mirror that Timothy mentioned but I know one thing; that in the five minutes that have been assigned, you can do only one thing and that is to commit suicide.

I want to say one thing, that I honestly agree with everything that has been said by Jacques, so I’m not going to repeat what has been said. And I also agree that now, we have a sort of a vacuum state, we have an empty state. I think the state is empty but when I look at Fidel’s Cuba, when I look at ayatollah’s Iran and Putin’s Russia, I think this state is filled with something.

What is the trap in freedom? I believe it’s the corruption, which is a permanent element of the political structure in the democratic state. On one hand, corruption leads to nihilism and cynicism and on the other hand, it leads to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is the answer to corruption and fundamentalism feeds on anti-corruption slogans. On one hand, we see and face ethnic fundamentalism, or in Poland we see all the time a religious fundamentalism and on the other hand, we face market and monetary fundamentalism and we hear that money should decide not only about what is happening in the market but also about what is happening with us. We also face a phenomenon of Putinism and I think it is just another name for sovereign democracy. What does it mean, *sovereign democracy*? It means that I, Putin, will make a sovereign decision and put everybody in jail who I believe is my enemy and no Strasbourg or Hague or Brussels will ever tell me otherwise, so it’s my suverenity. We now listen to Putin’s ideologies, which say that in the past, the oligarchs decided who would be a minister. Now it’s the other way round, a minister appoints the oligarch. So if we say that Chodorkovskij was not good enough to be an oligarch, we put him in jail and we appoint a new one. Berlusconism is the answer to Putinism, in my opinion. What does it mean, *Berlusconism*? It means that Berlusconi starts off with money; he proceeds to gain media control and political power, so it’s a different path. But what really surprises me, or what is strange, is that they are always best friends with Putin. What I think is disturbing and what I think is one of the key issues in this part of Europe, is the role of secret services, or special services, because it doesn’t matter if they come from the previous regime or if they are new ones; they try to influence and impact the political scene in the countries of Central Europe. What I think we are facing now is the democracy of man-eaters. What I mean by that is that whoever wins the elections eats the losers. In Poland, we had this situation for two years when the government, who are the winners, was trying to eat the losers; but luckily, they choked. My final remark is that another danger is the historical policy by anti-Communists with a Bolshevik face. It’s history written according to Bolshevik standards. It’s the policy of destroying photos and pictures because they depict very disturbing meetings. One of the biggest and most aggressive revisionists in my country, in Poland, the anti-Communist with a Bolshevik face, is Antoni Macierewicz. The biggest worry of this gentleman, who is a

former Minister of Internal Affairs, is a picture taken in 1979 when he was spotted sitting on a bench with Jacek Kuroń and Václav Havel. But I will never destroy this picture. Thank you very much.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much, Adam. I think actually in the Polish original it was about 5 minutes, so you have proved that one can do something little more than commit suicide in 5 minutes. I'd like very warmly to welcome Secretary Madeleine Albright, who has just joined us here in the room today. And Jan Urban has also asked me to say, and I think it deserves a special mention, that the journalist of whom he spoke so movingly, Sasha Podrabinek, is also with us today. And perhaps we could give him a round of applause.

Martin Bútora.

Martin Bútora: Thank you for inviting me here and it is just a coincidence that Secretary Albright has arrived, because it was actually she who a couple of years ago, more than a decade ago, called Slovakia, with a certain bitterness, a black hole. So I'm coming from a country which also thanks to people like Madeleine, like Václav, like many in this room, but obviously, I also say thanks to people in Slovakia, a country which is definitely not a black hole. What it is and what are the threats for freedom and democracy, in a very brief summary.

What was important in our case was that we were definitely not the best pupil in the class, we had our ups and downs, we came through series of defeats and failures; but at the end of the day, the society showed the capacity for self-learning and somehow, we have done it. We caught up and we are now, paradoxically enough, as for the integration, the most successful state – EU, NATO, OECD, Schengen, the Eurozone. But if you look at society, one view would see the glass half full and the other would see the glass half empty. We at our institute are writing rather about the empty glass because what we see is: yes, we have a set of institutions but those institutions are not inhabited by genuine democrats, the rule of law is drastically violated and what one can call, what Jacques was talking about, the constitutional spirit, is very, very far from people who are actually belonging to the ruling elite in Slovakia. But at the same time, paradoxically, what has helped us was a deep crisis. And I think this makes the difference between Czech and Slovak societies.

I agree with Jacques and with many others. We are writing about it, we see it in our everyday experience; one of the greatest threats is this gradual resignation in participating in the public space. Part of the explanation is that people really do not feel that they can influence the big political decisions, that they really have a say. And this leads to gradual decline not only in elections but in many spheres of participation, in many public areas we see this decline. I don't think it is only the politicians who should be blamed for this because it is also perhaps that people do not feel the urgency of these problems – "Well, we are on the safe side of the river, practically everything is more or less OK, so why should we care?" Then what we see is obviously the rise of individualism; people have to care about their careers, their families and this somehow distracts them from more participation. But leaving the public space and being convinced that we cannot influence the developments leads to a certain new combination of what we used to call, in the 80s, *the syndrome of civic helplessness*. Now it is a combination of a certain civic helplessness plus civic indifference, so all in all, in medical terms it could be something like *civic frigidity*, if you combine indifference and helplessness.

After 20 years, many people have somehow adapted to what is now called *real capitalism*. You remember what Communists used to say – "This is real socialism, forget about Scandinavia and so on, be happy, this is what we have and this is the real socialism". And I'm afraid there's even a mentality, a mentality sort of emerging, which has been gradually more and more accommodating to this, to what could be called in a negative term *real capitalism*.

Then, what I perceive as a threat and maybe you will be surprised by it, is a drastic devastation of one important profession and that is the profession of politicians. We speak a lot of civil society, of civic actors,

the importance of civic actors. This is important but I'm convinced it is not enough. If I ask you in this room whom you consider to be a good and honest politician, probably your response would be very sceptical and very pessimistic. But I think societal change cannot be achieved just by civic actors; the politicians must also be involved in it.

Then there is another element. There are a lot of discussions and debates about the 20 years of the Velvet Revolution in Slovakia and elsewhere. When I am attending meetings with young people, I am surprised a bit with what I would call a lack of imagination. There is a lot of scepticism, a lot of pessimism, a lot of deep criticism, but I do not always see this star and this spark of imagination, which simply says that human beings have certain qualities and one of that qualities is that they won't be satisfied with their living conditions and if they won't be satisfied with their living conditions, they will change them. And I think we must allow our imagination to be more involved in solving the issues.

And my final remark. I think the problematic point is also a relatively low trust to small entities. But there are really small entities whose ideas matter, leaders matter and small entities matter. We used to call them *islands of positive deviance* in Slovakia and the challenge was to create from those islands a critical mass. Critical mass doesn't mean 80%, it doesn't mean 50%, it doesn't mean 20%, it is much, much less. But it starts and goes and it is nurtured by those islands of positive deviance, if they are inhabited.

So finally, 10 years ago, the Czech Republic was embraced with those protests and the key slogan at that time was in Czech: "Děkujeme, odejděte!" ("Thanks, you should leave!"). I think it should be changed. If I were to have a recommendation, the recommendation would be: "Prosím, přijďte!", which means, "Please, come!". And especially those young people who are sitting here. Come! If you will come and if you will join, you, and the others together, you can really achieve necessary societal change.

Thanks.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much, Martin Bútora. Andrej Piontkovsky.

Andrej Piontkovsky: Thank you, Tim. I come from the country which President Havel delicately described this morning as a big neighbouring one. From the country which is run and which is owned simultaneously by dedicated enemies of freedom, by cheeky kleptocracy erected by Mr. Vladimir Putin. There is a tremendously widespread misunderstanding of the nature of this regime in the West. There is a very popular argument of defendants and apologists of Putinism: "Well, what's the most important for Russia now is not abstract democracy. Capitalism is important. With the development of capitalism, the middle-class will appear and this middle-class will, sooner or later, demand political freedom and so on". This reasoning completely ignores the nature of the Putin's regime. This mutant is very different from classical socialism or capitalism. The right to property in Russia is entirely conditional on loyalty to the government, on the loyalty to Mr. Putin personally. This system is evolving not in the direction of a post-industrial open society but in the direction of feudalism; when a sovereign distributed and could at any moment take back lands from his vassals. The only difference is that Mr. Putin is not distributing and taking back lands but rather gas and oil companies. In Friedrich Hayek terms, Putinism is a *third road to serfdom,* after Communism and Nazism. And this system is corrupting European neighbours as well. You know that a group of former chancellors, of Prime Ministers from great European countries are walking to Putin's gas stations now for miserable 2 million EUR a year, betraying the interests of both their nations and the Russian people. Another widespread illusion in the West is the expectation for something like Khrushchev's thawor Gorbachev's perestroika in current-day Russia. It is impossible because, and by the way, Medvedev's feeble speech from two days ago proves it, because any perestroika begins with the opening up of the media. But any opening up of the media is extremely dangerous for the current leaders because a discussion of their personal corruption immediately jumps from internet sites to the first channels of TV, which would have very unpleasant consequences for them. These people, they keep their tremendous wealth in Western banks, Western real estate, Western companies but at the same time, they are fostering,

on their TV, their animosity and hatred towards the West, presenting it as an enormous threat to Mother Russia, as a force which is seeking to dismantle Russia and so on. They need the image of Russia as an encircled fortress and of the West as an enemy. Because it is the only justification and the only legitimization in the eyes of people for their regime, for their kleptocracy. And no*resetting*, Madame Secretary, would change these fundamentals. They will always need the West as an enemy. Especially vicious attacks are made on those neighbours of Russia who chose a rapid path of development, who chose the road of freedom; Georgia and Ukraine. It is the Ukraine, in particular, who represents an enormous threat to Putin's regime. Not because NATO tanks will appear in the Ukraine tomorrow as Putin's propaganda claims but because a Ukrainian success story on the road to European integration would inflict a mortal blow to Putinism; because the Ukraine and Russia are very close by mentality And I assure you that two years of an unquestionable success story in the Ukraine would affect hearts and minds in Russia tremendously.

For my last point, I want to pre-empt the inevitable question that we will be asked. I always ask the Western audiences; what can we do to help democracy in Russia? Russia is too big to be helped but I know a very efficient way to help Russia; please help the Ukraine. Four years ago, after the Orange Revolution, the Ukraine chose the path of freedom. And the stupidity of European bureaucratic institutions is that they don't, to this moment, provide any political, economic, psychological or moral help. A new Ukrainian government will be elected in a couple of months and it could change the fundamental make-up of the Eurasian continent; it could provide the mortal blow to the enemy of freedom. Thank you.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much, Andrej.

Tom Stoppard: Oh, thank you, I am not technological myself. I think Andrej and I are the two among the six of us who do not know any Czech and can operate in English. So I just want to start by thanking you for the enormous courtesy of having this affair in the English language, I am really quite touched by that.

I think England does have something to teach the Czech Republic and Central Europe, but rather in a negative sense, I'm afraid. Over the last century we've gotten used to an assumption which no longer holds**,** and it is that freedom gets lost and possibly regained in overnight acts of great drama and possibly violence. The problem now is that freedom gets lost by a thousand cuts and it gets lost almost invisibly, inaudibly and imperceptibly but it aggregates to a similar kind of crisis which in the end would be a catastrophe.

I woke up too early, in order to come here yesterday morning, to read the newspapers. But British Airways supplied *The Daily Telegraph* and I noticed, and I should say it for emphasis, that in parentheses, I'm not going to engage in this debate on the level of geopolitics, I'm simply not equipped to do so**.** I noticed that a woman in England and her daughter had been fined for feeding ducks in a park where one should not feed the ducks and I also noticed that somebody had produced, by authority, a ninety-page book showing policemen how to ride a bicycle, including how to put on and remove their protective hats. The trivial sidelights on society are not necessarily frivolous, as a matter of the fact, in at least one of the scenarios I've mentioned. In fact the combination of them do point to a kind of tango, which has been danced by our society, as it approaches I would not say a precipice, but a swamp of some kind. The society tends to, almost wishes to divide between an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, a sense of protectiveness on the one hand, and a fear which in the end becomes an inability, a fear to take responsibility and to make responsible distinctions between specific cases under a general heading. The problem for the park warden and the duck feeder was, how do you stop a woman and her child from feeding the ducks? There was some rationale to this, because where ducks eat, they excrete which makes the ground slippery and apart from being unpleasant, you could slip and hurt yourself. This was stated in the story. The solution was to charge the adult with littering, throwing bread, because the distinction between bread and orange peel or toffee papers is not a distinction which any individual feels disposed or strong enough to make. In the case of the child, there was absolutely no way to stop the child littering, because the child was only six years old

and therefore below the age of possible prosecution. And of course the worst possible thing that you could do in English society would be to lay hands upon the child and deprive the child of its bag of bread and even possibly give the child a clipper over the ear for being smart. Life and newspapers are full of incidents and reports which are risible and yet the smile rather does freeze on one's face.

In the great period of the study of philosophy, the great questions were enormous or perhaps unsolvable to reconcile - abstract concepts like equality and justice. Now I think we've come to a point where the huge question turns out to be the tension between individual autonomy and collective responsibility, which is a sinister phrase I don't like. The phrase I like is *the sense of responsibility* or*awareness towards one's neighbours*. The ideal which we seem to project, without any volition on our part, is this cynical ideal of a society of non-responsiveness, which allows deep sea changes to happen during its waking hours as well as its sleeping hours. In physiology, there's a phrase in English – *the conditioned reflex*, you know, they bang your knee and your leg kicks up. The conditioned non-reflex appears to be the subconscious aim of authority in the contemporary world. There's a lot more to say, my red card is about to appear and I look forward very much indeed to your questions afterwards. Thank you for hearing me so far.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much, Tom. I think we've had a fantastic set of introductions and indeed have now a plethora of new dangers to freedom, ranging all the way from Vladimir Putin, to inconsiderately excreting English ducks. Of all the many dangers mentioned I would just like to emphasise one, which I think has been common to a lot of these presentations, and that is the overwhelming sense across the whole of the post-Communist Europe that corruption in very many different forms is actually poisoning the air of freedom and making it more and more difficult to breathe the air of freedom. Corruption which, to put it another way, is a weakness of the rule of law. And this has been said many times, but I do think it's worth saying again: I remember vividly when we set out after 1989, we had a kind of *Holy Trinity*. We always said: "Democracy, market economy and civil society." And that was absolutely right, but there was one missing, which was an explicit emphasis on the rule of law, the hard rule of law from the word go. John Locke did not just talk about liberty; he talked of liberty under law. And I think a really vital question is how you re-establish a really strong rule of law, when so much has not been done, when it should have been done, when the foundations should have been laid more strongly.

Now I wonder if any of our panellists would like briefly to respond to anything anyone else said. This is not a necessity, because we could then proceed to questions, but if anyone is burning with a comment... we are burning to hear you, right, your time has come.

There are roving microphones. Students have absolute priority. Don't be shy, you can also ask in Czech, if you like, I am sure it can be translated to the panel. Who would like to kick us off and ask the first question? Please, don't be shy. There we are, if you could just wait for the microphone.

Audience: Thank you, my name is Jan Fingerland and I'm not a student, but still I would like to ask Mr. Piontkowski a question. First of all I would like to thank him for his courage. Not because I think that he would be necessarily persecuted in Russia, but since I visited Russia a year ago and I saw that the society has made an enormous progress, at least materially over the past years, and what's connected to it is that I saw that Russians are quite content with what they have today. Or at least this was my impression; I visited Moscow. So my question is: to what extent do you think other Russian intellectuals share with you this very critical opinion about contemporary Russian society? My impression was that it is very unusual and that it is very much against the Russian tradition of supporting the state against the very idea of being Russian. Thank you.

Andrej Piontkovsky: When did you visit Moscow you said? Last year? A year ago. I'll think about what has changed since then – a year ago there was a sense of triumphalism among Russian political elites. The glorious war against Georgia, it's point number one, the success in European Soccer Championship

point number two, and the concept of island of stability untouched by the world economic crisis. These are the three great themes of Russian political triumphalism or Kremlin political triumphalism a year ago. A lot of things have changed and especially since this September a very unusual phenomenon appeared. A lot of commentators who disagree with me strongly and very mainstream people belonging to the so called *Medvedev camp* began to publish very critical articles in papers about corruption, about lack of democracy. And the culmination was an article, which was signed by pseudonym Dmitri Medvedev, some months ago, the article *Vperjod Rossia* (*Go Ahead Russia)*, which is just quotation from my book. And everyone was expecting something very dramatic from Medvedev´s speech two days ago. It's become understood that the idea of that Putin period was a catastrophe for Russia, because Medvedev himself, or so-called Medvedev wrote, that there was endemic corruption, outdated petrol state economy and population dying from drugs and alcoholism. And everybody is looking to what to do in this situation. But the Medvedev message was very disappointing even for his followers inside Kremlin. So this mood of complaisance among ruling, not among opposition, but among ruling political elite has changed drastically, but as I mentioned before, they do not dare make perestroika, because they are afraid of being exposed in the course of perestroika of their absolute corruption.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. Who else would like to? Yes, there in the white shirt.

Audience: The problem of corruption was mentioned here, especially the causal linkage leading from corruption that is the consequence of corruption for democracy. But what should be addressed in my opinion are the linkages leading to corruption – how it emerges, what are the factors enforcing it. I believe in multi-causality, so I don't thing there's a single one cause for corruption. But let me add a suggestion, one which may sound provocative in this hall, and namely, that among the factors that reinforce corruption is the entire political atmosphere, especially in the Central-East European region. I think the logic functions as follows: that the expectations in politics and in politicians are so low that it almost produces a fatal incentive for their behaviour and all those claims about immoral and selfish and, I don't know, bad politicians turns into self-fulfilling prophecy. What do you think about this unpopular and maybe provocative thesis?

Timothy Garton Ash: Have we got the politicians we deserve? Who would like to tackle that? Jacques, would you like? And then maybe Adam?

Jacques Rupnik: OK, I'll let Adam first.

Adam Michnik: I think all societies have the politicians they deserve. I sort of developed a *Polish complex* when for two years we had Kaczynski brothers rule Poland. And now I sound I am a megalomaniac type, because after two years we showed a red card to Kaczynski brothers. So I keep on telling Andrej Piontkowski that Russians have reasons to be optimistic, because Putin doesn't have a twin brother.

Jacques Rupnik: Just a couple of additional remarks. Why was it possible to develop first of all? Well because the main mantra after 1989 was "speed is of the essence". You must do it quickly, without regard, we don't need too many rules, you know, do it.

Timothy Garton Ash: Speed is more important than accuracy.

Jacques Rupnik: Exactly, speed is more important than accuracy. So, of course, if you have that, you end up having a very corrupt process. Second thing is, there's the legacy of the past. There is the whole

Western literature about how important social capital is for democracy, how civic ties, or civic networks, are important to build trust in democratic institutions. In this part of the world, the social capitalism is of a very different nature, because it is a social capitalism inherited from corrupt networks from the old days, which were meant to get around the law. So if you have corrupt networks built in order to get around the law, well you have social capitalism that actually undermines the rule of law, undermines the trust in democratic institutions and no wonder that politicians and political elites, which are really part in this plundering of state assets, take their advantage in this. And all this works so long as the economic prosperity is there, because there's been a formidable growth. And when this country for six month**s** didn't have a government, and became the largest NGO in Europe, well people said: "It just proves these guys are useless". But it didn't matter, because the going was good. In a context of crisis this becomes, corruption becomes, unacceptable, intolerable and there is now a chance perhaps to confront it.

Martin Bútora: I think an important challenge is not just to leave it on some NGOs that are doing their job. In Slovakia, the whole political class is horrified before *Transparency International*. If they come with a finding, they publish it and they are criticized by everyone. But I think what is more important is to not just to rely on those who are doing their job, but to start, it's the same as with ecological behaviour, to start with each and every individual; to embrace it as an anti-corruption behaviour, to embrace it as a personal code; then start to address the public and the readers to associate and simply, that's why I spoke about lack of imagination, simply being convinced that this will lead to visible and strong results. At the beginning obviously it's incredibly complicated, it's incredibly hard, but I think that without those personal involvements, personal input of each and every individual, we won't change it.

Tom Stoppard: Yes, I too used to be an optimist about human nature, and I'm still trying to retain my optimism about human nature, because it seems to me that the only hope for the age-old quests of a decent society is that it should take the form of and that every individual should have the attitude of its being a contest of generosity. I too would like to think of a society, even a new society born in a convulsion, having within it a preponderance of selfless instincts. And I take back my initial remark; I'm still an optimist, but it's getting harder.

I would like to say one short thing about the question itself. The gentleman, he asked us to consider as it were, what comes in front of corruption, rather than the consequences of corruption. I think the absolute central necessity is an alert-free press and media. Without that there just isn't any freedom of any kind at all. Full circle, because I'm not sure that people preponderantly do actually have selfless instincts, I'm sorry to say. I have them and you have them, but they don't.

Adam Michnik: I think corruption isn't specific only to young democracies. I think when we look at Western Europe, I believe our young democracies have a lot to learn in terms of corruption. Let's have a look at Germany where Chancellor Schröder first negotiated the pipeline and then he became one of its bosses and getting a lot of money for it. Let's have a look at France and President Chirac, the former President, who is just about to be put on trial for corruption. Let's have a look at Great Britain where politicians on both sides have been accused of corruption. Italy is too trivial to even talk about. Simply put, corruption is like prostitution, it will always be here with us. There is no single drug for corruption. When I went to Estonia, everybody told me and presented Estonia as a big example and the most successful example of transformation. I asked my taxi driver what was it like to live in such a successful country. He said: "Well, they steal." Then I replied: "They steal, so what?" And he said: "Well OK, let them steal, but not this much." In my opinion, the only way how to limit and eradicate corruption is to take legal action. The more acceptance for officials, the more space we leave for corruption. But I believe we should beware of people who promise to eradicate corruption with police forces, because I think they will only limit our freedom then.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much.

Andrej Piontkovsky: Very short terminological qualification. What is going on in Russia is not strictly speaking corruption, because corruption presupposes two subjects – businessman giving bribes to a state official. In our case it's the same person. That's why Russian political elite, I continue answering this question, are intellectually ripe for perestroika. They understand that this system is not working, but they're paralyzed by fear of losing their billions and millions of dollars grabbed in this practice.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. I think I want to come back to the hall and what I'm going to do is to take a few questions and collect them and then come back to the panel. The first question is from, if I may say, a somewhat mature student, František Janouch.

František Janouch: My question is directed to Adam Michnik, shall I speak better in Czech, or in English? OK, English. You said that corruption is inevitable, like prostitution. My question is, what is admissible – socially, politically admissible – level of corruption? I mean in percentage of the national budget. Well I know that for prostitution it will be somewhere close to 1‰ or one millionth, I don't know, but what is the size, the percentage that is acceptable? Thank you.

Audience: Hello, Rostislav Valvoda, a student of this University (Charles University). I think we can all agree with the description of the bad situation we're in, about the corruption of society etc. And my question will be simple. What in your view is the source of potential political change of this bad situation? And please don't say it's the young generation, because it's the popular belief and it's been repeated on and on especially in connection with this anniversary that it is the young generation, the bright young people, who would come and save us. It's not going to happen. The attitudes of the young generation are mostly the same as the old generation was. It's shown by the recent surveys; I'm a student activist and it's not any easier to get younger people involved in demonstrations than the older generations. So please don't say this simple answer that it's the younger generation which is going to save us. Thank you.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. The lady here, if you have the microphone. Keep your hand up.

Audience: Thank you very much. I'm actually going to react to the point made previously. I also feel the exhaustion and the syndrome of burning out and the indifference that you have mentioned, thank you very much for that. But my question is, from the functional, strictly functional point of view, what is the difference between a country or an international union that the citizens believe in and what is the difference between the country that the citizens don't identify themselves with? That where it is hollow, just like Mr. Rupnik mentioned. Thank you. And my other question is, frankly, does the today's European Union or a modern state, do they need their citizens, or is the machinery too independent on them? Thank you very much.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. Right up the back down the left.

Audience: Is that me?

Timothy Garton Ash: If you have the microphone then it's you.

Audience: Thank you very much. Michal Pečeňa, I'm also a student. And I would like to ask a question about a thing that I've missed here quite a bit and that is the question of courage. Because it seems to me that courage is necessary in order to preserve freedom. And still, especially in Europe, or rather for example in Europe, we see, I believe, lack of courage, mainly among the politicians. We can see how

populist they are. The European countries are pulling their troops out of Afghanistan, just to mention one example. My question is, what can I do as a citizen to make my politicians more courageous and less cowards.Thanks.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. Last question, there in the pink shirt, keep your hand up there, if you could grab the microphone.

Audience: Thank you for the microphone. My name is Josef Müller and I am a student as well as an NGO representative. We have heard today from the distinguished panel “Please come!”. My question is, whether it is possible to come and whether anyone can really get anything significant done, without either being poisoned by the current system and let’s say the corruption, and without being kicked out on the way. Thank you.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. Adam.

Adam Michnik: In my opinion, no level of corruption is acceptable. When a certain businessman approached me a while ago with a corruption offer, I made such a big scandal out of it that we had to change our government. Many of my friends told me: “Adam, you’re such an idiot, you’re just harming yourself.” I said OK, let me be an idiot, but I believe that fighting corruption has to start with yourself, has to start with you and not only toask other people to fight corruption. So, as a citizen, my answer to František Janouch is that I do not accept any level of corruption. But being a historian, unfortunately I know that the corruption will always be here. You’re just pulling the rock up the hill, but I know that one day it will fall anyway. The biggest illusion of the honest Communists was that it’s possible to create an ideal society. And as Lech Walesa used to say, the Communism would be an excellent system, but people were just bad for it. So as a diligent reader of Karl Marx and Frederik Engels, I can say, that an ideal society is not possible. Now it’s just a question of motivation, what can change the situation? So let me just remind you that before 1989 in our country nobody believed in change, nobody thought that change was possible. In Russia it was called *the period of stagnation*. In our countries I think we can call it *black hole*, so it was not Slovakia that we could call a black hole, I think we could refer it to ourselves too. Pessimism and cynicism were in fashion then. It was a very simple solution, because pessimists were always right. I don’t agree with that. I said: “No, I couldn’t agree with that. I will wait and I will put a stone around the neck of the Communists. I don’t know how I will do it.”

This is a story I was told by my Russian friend Sergej Koroljov: Once KGB was interviewing a friend and they asked him: “Why are you fighting with this system, it will last for 300 years.” And he said: “300 years only? Then I’m happy with that.”

When I arrived in Prague for the first time in 1989 I met a lot of people including President Václav Havel. It was my first time in Prague and I said: “Václav, this city, Prague, is not suited for Communism; it’s not a Communist city.” And he replied: “Adam, Czechs are not Poles, they are stuck between Švejk and Kafka.” And I said: “No, no, trust my words, in the end of the year you will be the President.” Everybody thought I was crazy, but my words came true. History is interesting, because it is not like mathematics. There is always an element, a component of surprise to it.

And one final remark on courage. In my opinion, it’s a formal virtue and it depends on the context if you’re supposed to be courageous and why to be courageous. In my view for example President Klaus is a courageous man, because he says things I would never dare to say myself.

Timothy Garton Ash: Thank you very much. I think Adam Michnik has comprehensively answered all these questions, but I think some of the other panellists did want to make a few comments. Martin Bútora.

Martin Bútora: I would like to respond, and perhaps to challenge a bit, what some of the young people, the young leaders are telling us here. And in that sense, listen, in 1995, 1996, 1997, no one from the Slovak educated classes would believe that it could be possible to remove Mečiar. The opposition was disunited, there was the kidnapping of president's son and so on and so on. And there was really a deep depression in society. And yet it was possible to make such a change. So if you ask, and if you say that, "Well, we would like to come but they do not allow us", of course they will not allow us. There will be obstacles; there will be barriers, both hidden and visible. But only if you try, only then will you know what the result will be; only if you enter into it.

And now, if you look, and this is the same for the Czech Republic, or the Czech lands and Slovakia, if you look from the half of 19th century to any generation of political leaders, let it be Jungmann, Havlíček, let it be Palacký, I do not know, let it be Švehla, let it be Masaryk or Beneš; if they were allowed to live not only twenty years, because we are entering another decade, maybe two decades, and in such incredible conditions with so many freedoms, so many possibilities to act, to step in, and to influence. I think they would just pray for getting conditions like this.

And I think you will be also asked by the next generation, as we were asked, "How could you allow Communism, why did not you do anything against it? How could you live with this funny, grotesque regime? You could have practically won, if you had gotten together and if you had resisted". And I think that you will be also asked, as a young generation, in twenty years. Those who are just being born now, or will be born tomorrow, they will ask: "You had all these favourable conditions for changing society. So how did you do it? What are your successes?" And I think that you have to live with this understanding, with this emotional involvement and also with the expectation of these questions from the next generations.

Timothy Garton Ash: Tom Stoppard.

Tom Stoppard: Well, three questions, thirty seconds. Number one: five per cent. I know somebody who has a shop and you calculate five percent; they call it slippage, they do not even call it theft. And number two: you know, you do not have to be waving a banner in front of soldiers to demonstrate courage. I think that the only act of courage which is being asked of people is, and here I am simply referring back to the writings of Havel himself, that if you can just live truly, just live true to what you believe, it is actually, in certain circumstances, a certain kind of courage, it is an active courage. It is question of how contagious your act of courage will be. Nobody wants you to die or to be injured.

Finally, a great deal has been said about the Russian Federation, as though the Russian Federation represents a country which is dangerous, as it were an example of the things to be feared. I do not really agree with that. The Russian Federation is completely overt and brazen and without shame. It is a kind of quiet joke, at which nobody is openly laughing but at which they are laughing up their sleeves. There is no secret about what we have been told today, about what has been lost in the Russian Federation.

What you have to be worried about, and I am really sorry to come back full circle, is what is happening in countries where these things are not overt, where they are barely registering. My country is one of them. You have to think about France, Germany, Britain, countries where there is no scandal. Yes, we have MPs' expenses (I know I am out of time) that is not the insidious threat. The insidious threat is the invisible threat, to which nobody is actually responding and it is the lack of response, which is the triumph of venality in power.

Thank you.

Timothy Garton Ash: Andrej.

Andrej Piontkovsky: May I combine the concept of corruption and courage and, in experience of my country, introduce a new form of the *corruption of courage*. In the Stalinist period, people who challenged the regime risked their life. In the Brezhnev period, the risk was to jobs. In our period of Putin, the only risk for key, elite individuals is to lose their fortunes; and it turns out that their courage is corrupted by these risks.

Jacques Rupnik: One word. There was a question about what to do about the hollowing out of democracy. Either you take the laid back view, "Oh, we already suffer from the same symptoms of democratic fatigue as in the West; distrust of politicians, low participation in elections, corruption. All things, we have the same symptoms. Therefore, we made it, we succeeded, the transition is truly complete, since we already suffer the same ills, so we must really be part of it". Or you take the more worried, concerned view, that in new democracies, where you do not have the sociological, institutional, and the political culture, you do not have the underpinnings of those institutions. Democracy is more vulnerable, according to this anxious view. We have a Europe reunited in the fatigue of democracy. And, therefore, the joint task is to look for answers. But this is your job and all you need to do in this country is to go back to your president, to Václav Havel, to go back to Masaryk: "Nebát se a nekrást." ("Not to be frightened and not to steal."). That is a good start.

Timothy Garton Ash: Ladies and gentlemen, Už je to tady (It´s here at last). For lunch. But before we go to lunch and before I thank our panel, I want to say two things. Firstly, I think the general consensus of this panel is this: This is a crisis which is too good to waste. And I, maybe it is just a sign that I am getting old, but I am very pleased to see that in the Czech Republic, a new generation is coming along, making an inventory of democracy, saying what has been achieved, what is still to be done; and I think that is terrific. The same is happening elsewhere in post-Communist Europe. And you will have a chance to continue that conversation with Madeleine Albright at two o'clock in this room. And I hope you will come back for that.

The second thing I wanted to say before thanking our panel is just to reinforce what Tom Stoppard just said. I, like Tom, come from what is arguably the oldest free country in the world, with due respect to the United States. And what you have to watch out for, you have not gotten to this yet, but if you do not watch out, what will happen, is taking liberty for granted. Because what is happening in my country, in the oldest free country in the world, is that our civil liberties are being eroded in quite an extraordinary way, like the famous salami, cut for cut. And nobody is really standing up and resisting because we all say to ourselves that it is a free country, isn't it? So you can never, ever take liberty for granted. Do not ever do that. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance and I hope you will remain vigilant in the defence of liberty. And in saying that, let us all also please thank our panel for what I think has been a wonderful discussion. Thank you all.