

The role of memorial landscape and education in avoiding of revitalization of totalitarianism

1. Dear Neela Winkelmann, dear colleague Laslo Tökes - thank you for organizing this important event! Distinguished guests!

The purpose of today's conference is to highlight the need for the pan-European memorial for the victims of totalitarianism to be erected in Brussels.

I particularly welcome also those who join us today due to announcement of a competition.

Within this important project, let me present some wider reflections. I would like to stress the importance of what should be done in order not to repeat dark sides of our common European history.

Let me start my contribution with a thesis, that culture and particularly education play key roles in strengthening of democracy and fighting against radicalization as well as against restoration of totalitarianism, the one that has been already known and also the one that appears in new forms.

By the way, allow me to remind you that in 2011 the public hearing in the EP was organized by MEPs Sandra KALNIETE, László TÓKÉS and myself. The title of the hearing was: **What do the Young Europeans know about totalitarianisms?** This public hearing echoed around Europe. Many other events and projects have been organized at the European level as well as at the national level.

2. Dear friends, as we all know, the situation in the world is becoming less stable, geo-strategic picture is not plotted in the right direction. Wars, terrorism, reaffirmation of totalitarian forms of government represent to democracy - which ought to-be a global process - increasingly difficult obstacles.

It seems quite shocking that former dictators like Stalin, Ceausescu, Tito, Mao Zedong, Mussolini etc. in the public awareness still enjoy the status of "good guys". According to the results of public opinion, the Russians in Stalin once again recognize the most important positive person in their history. In another study, young people from the United Kingdom recognized Adolf Hitler as a football coach. On the other hand according to the Czech study by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (Winkelmann) young people want to know more about the totalitarian past.

In many post-communist states are still very strong political forces that do not allow truth and reconciliation. More over, there are lots of examples of reaffirmation of totalitarian symbols, names, actors, monuments, positive evaluation in media, curricula and textbooks.

Shortly: current cultural mood is not the most favorable for the preservation and development of democracy.

3. Anyway, in spite of these ongoing dilemmas and worrying facts on the other side we could sense the growing awareness of the fact that peace, democracy, safety, stability, rule of law... are not simply given or set in stone.

If we want to protect democracy, we need to invest more in young people. Democracy demands informed and critical thinking people. Are European democracies supported by enough critical, informed and active citizens? It seems many people nowadays take democracy for granted as if it was timeless. But, future of democracy depends upon the past, which is always at work in the present. The key problem of the democratic spirit is the lack of historical consciousness.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

4. The crucial question is: What can we do?

We need short-term measures, as for example is a memorial in the heart of Europe. We also need legal confrontation with the crimes. We need political condemnation of totalitarianism. But the long-term task has been proper education that will equip people with truth, knowledge and values on which is based the most humane civilization in the world.

It is about our culture, which gives us meaning. Culture is essential in building of identity, political awareness, enabling us to act politically. The European project will never succeed if it does not recognize culture as its main *raison d'être*. In my opinion much is to be done in the field of judiciary, historiography, politics, but the most important is education. And education, when addressing culture, has a strong impact on the creation of the so-called software of mind.

5. Let me conclude with the role of memorial landscape.

We live in a world full of symbols. Simply said, the society defines itself as a community of people with the same understanding of the meaning of symbols. Of course, evaluations of them may be different, but the basic meaning is the same.

Memorials thus have an important place in culture, in a so-called cultural landscape or memorial landscape of each culture.

Slovenia is the only state in the EU that has survived all three totalitarianisms: fascism, Nazism and communism. While the first two have practically disappeared, the process of degradation of communism has been too slow.

I come from the state which has very rich cultural heritage. On the other side the cultural landscape is suffering under the countless of monuments from the communist era although it is well known that communist regime has been responsible for mass extra-judicial killings after the Second World War. /Slide 1 and 2/ What message is thus transmitted to the young generation?

Ladies and Gentlemen, two years ago I proposed a memorial plaque for the victims of mass killings after the WWII in Slovenia in the EP in Strasburg, near the already existed memorial of the Baltic victims caused by the Soviet regime in 1941. My idea was prevented by the Slovenian Prime Minister. His response was that I blame the Slovenian nation, state and its people for the war and killings! The former president of the EP commented that my proposal need political consensus in Slovenia. And I wish you success in seeking it, he concluded. My mission thus seems to fail. That is the reason I would truly like the initiative we are discussing today to succeed.

We are all aware of the fact that for democratic future are therefore important relevant curricula, textbooks, workbooks, films, online multimedia tools etc. everything that creates democratic atmosphere. But equally important are monuments and other remembrance that make up the so-called civilized memorial landscape.

Thank you for your attention!