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## **The Western Values After the Fall of the Wall**

According to the Oxford Dictionary values are “Principles or standards of behavior; one’s judgment of what is important in life. In other words values are supposed to be the frame that shapes and often motivates our actions. (When people start to talk too much about things so intrinsic it shows that something is not OK!)

**The question is: Is there a crisis in the Western Value system?** The fact that people who were given the chance to achieve what other people are dying for on the way to Lampedusa leave it and go to fight for ISIL is a symptom if not of a mere crisis at least of something having gone wrong.

I personally believe that the achievements of the West are not only spectacular but worth defending and even disseminating them. Years ago when I was much younger I finished a booklet with the words: “The best way to defend freedom is to expand it”. Now I have to admit that this is not that easy. But still I believe it is worth trying, though success is not always guaranteed. However,

*- some confusion may have occurred indeed during the past half a century when we claim to have achieved decisive moral success,*

*- which does not mean that the Western civilization has lost the validity of its value system*

*- but demands a certain scrutiny of the aberrations we have developed.*

Talking about **the value system** one is naturally tempted to go to the realms of philosophy. The present day Western philosophy is stuck in lovely concepts like “communitarianism”, “original positions”, “reflective equilibria”, etc. In fact a good part of the philosophical imbroglio of the past decades is a desperate effort to find a way to **moral values without the concept of God.**

To avoid this difficult topic I would try some more down-to-earth examples.

- The first signal that something was going wrong came in 1989 from **Fukuyama** with his bold pronouncement that history might have come to an end. This statement was much more than intellectual confusion or mere arrogance. First it showed a delusional tendency of self-deception, which was maintained in one form or another long after Fukuyama's essay was torn to pieces by critics — the self-deception that every problem can be solved, every conflict — resolved and that reason and tolerance can always bring us to a “yes”. The intellectual effort of millennia, in which the story of Job is only an episode was just dismissed, and skill building was proclaimed a substitute for difficult wisdom. Second it showed that the idea of coming to a happy end of social development - an idea that is basically Kantian (see *The Eternal Peace*) but, even more, Marxist, does not seem bizarre even to a thinker who claims to be conservative.

- Another signal to me was the opening of the **EU Parliament in January 2007** when a most prominent EU leader declared that “Democracy and violence cannot go together” and was met - to my utter embarrassment - by a wave of applause. Fortunately it remained just words - no army or police force had been dismantled since then, no penal court - disbanded.

- I have already mentioned the **ISIL volunteers** who chose the path of war against our values after they had enjoyed the fruits of what we consider most admirable in our civilization - our educational system.

- However the most embarrassing fact remains to be the situation in **Lampedusa**. The challenge is not that people are ready to risk dying for reaching a place where life seems better. They have been doing it often in the past seven or eight thousand years. The challenge is that we who claim merit-based fairness and equal opportunities for all are faced with the realistic impossibility to open wide the door of our coveted union. Even the extent to which it is open already creates tensions. Does it mean that there is something unrealistic in our promises? Or expectations?

I would like to touch upon four things: **A) what seem to be the Western and European values; B) how we define them; C) what do they look like after the Fall of the Wall; D) What problems do we find in their communication** and what are the small **things that we can do** to make them easier to comprehend.

**A) Western and European values;**

### a) Universality of our system of values?

There is a tacit claim that our system of values is in a way universal. We even called the ***Declaration of Human Rights of the UN*** that practically embodies the Western idea of the main personal (human rights) and political values ***Universal***. Values may be intrinsic, but if you really consider them a most important thing in life, it would be a bit strange to claim that sticking to the opposite “system of values” is OK. (Indeed it is difficult to challenge its universality, if it is derived from God, but human deeds and convictions are naturally imperfect and can only resemble the universal.)

In any event the **Western values have been globalized** (which is not the same as made universal) and officialized to a large extent through the work of the UN. And we have done our best to make them sound as acceptable for everyone as possible.

Still today their universality is challenged by at least the ISIL and Boko Haram. There exists now an entity that claims to be a state, covers a large territory and attracts a number of young people born and educated in the West that challenges almost all our values from right to life to right to marriage; from equality of faiths to freedom of expression.

**b)** There is a pending discussion about **European versus Western values**. To be on the safe side I have chosen the term “Western”. Oxford Professor Timothy Garton Ash believes there is no such thing like European values, because the values cherished on both sides of the Atlantic are the same. Charles Grant, director of the Centre for European Reform, believes that there is a difference, and it is that European values are “more social” (meaning more state regulations) and “also more secular and liberal” (meaning less emphasis on faith, family and traditional restrictions), and “ finally, Europeans tend to support the [Wilsonian?!] idea of a rules-based system of global governance, and strong international institutions.” I am personally rather sceptical towards quantitative criteria for distinguishing values. No surprise that one can easily get confused. In any event as Europeans anyway have been recently more explicit in the proclamation of values and principles I will by necessity revisit some formulae made in Europe.

### c) Credibility. Personal v/s social.

Putting down catalogues of values is of little use if they lack credibility. The credibility of any value system is connected to how real (or realistic to be followed) it is and to what an extent it can be internalized, i.e. how it can be defined and accepted on a personal level. However dealing with documents inevitably puts an emphasis on the community dimension. Still values are supposed to be more a matter of a personal experience than of sociological measuring. If we take for an example the 19th century value system of the Europeans it can be easily identified through any Verdi opera in which the three recurring themes are **AMOR, PATRIA** and **LIBERTA**. Even though these are very personal values they mark the connection with others — the beloved, the community and, because of these, freedom — sounds not merely individual, but rather connected with others. No surprise. Whether you believe in God or not the biblical story is deeply ingrained in our understanding of life. The Judeo-Christian God has bestowed on human beings a particular gift of highly cherished individuality but at the same time the Lord's prayer says: “**give US OUR daily bread .... and deliver US from evil**”.

In the representation of these values **Death** (the most personal experience) was most often present. And indeed if values are intrinsic one can be expected to maintain them even at the expense of one's own life. This was Verdi. John Lennon however (who was inspiring my generation as well as the following ones) was dreaming of a world in which there is nothing to kill or die for. We may long discuss if such a world of pastoral serenity with happily grazing cows (or human beings) is a desirable one, but a few generations (following the one that invented the high value charged slogan “better red than dead”) have admired *Imagine* at least as much as *Aida*.

Values being such a complicated philosophical issue, it is always difficult to find the measure, i.e. when the ratio social/individual is not tilted too much to the one side. Because then people may stop taking it seriously. One could have invented the best theoretical system of morality, but if people do not find it credible, it just does not work. So let us see how we define our values. There are no more spiritual or founding fathers and academics are far too many to reach a common opinion. So we have to resort to

**B) Legal documents** (though by definition they are only an authorized approximation)

a) **Art.2** of the Treaty on the EU stipulates:

The Union is founded on the values of **respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities**. These values are common to the member states in a society in which **pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men** prevail.

**Art.3[1]** points out the European Union's Objectives, which reinforces the idea that the previous article defines the values: **"The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples."**

b) This somewhat frugal definition, just repeating Art.6 of the MAASTRICHT Treaty (1992), can be explained with the fate of the **Berlin Declaration** of March 2007. The German Presidency then took the initiative for a more elaborate declaration on the EU values, which stated that: **"We are striving for peace and freedom, democracy and rule of law, mutual respect and shared responsibilities; prosperity and security, tolerance and participation, justice and solidarity."**

I admit I like this attempt to imply at least in some of the coupled notions the idea of complementarity of the issues, which shows respect for their complexity. The problem is that the Declaration, though stating that the individual is paramount, was again too shy to make explicit the complementarity of rights and responsibilities as well as to mention the price one would be supposed to pay for sticking to one's values. But not this was mentioned as the problem of the Berlin Declaration. In fact one of the criticisms came from Pope Benedict XVI for not having mentioned Christianity. Remember the "secular" character was part of the meager distinction of the European values as compared to the American. The Declaration however was not signed by the Member States (lost in translation<sup>1</sup>) but only by Mrs. Merkel (then performing the Presidency of the Union) Mr. Barroso,

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<sup>1</sup> A certain confusion occurred with the translation of a German term of [a present] wellbeing which was interpreted as too conceited.

President of the Commission and Mr. Pietering, President of the European Parliament (as a matter of fact all of them Christian Democrats).

The Berlin Declaration is also interesting because a) it points out that the individual is paramount (which not all doctrines represented at least in the EU Parliament take for granted<sup>2</sup>), and b) because it mentioned — together with rights — responsibilities. Behind this topic is a big debate connected with the more and more casuistic presentation of the Human Rights issue by both NGOs (whose one sidedness is understandable and we may even say legitimate) and politicians (whose desire to please everybody is if not excusable, at least understandable). It is then natural that if no debate is initiated by independent academics, both the majority of academics and civil servants — each for their own reasons — can easily continue down the same path.

c) But particularly interesting is the fact that in the **Bulletin of the EU Delegation to Washington** among the core values appears market economy. Certainly a market economy can hardly pass for a value itself, but to me this addition betrays the necessity to find something that at least remotely reminds us of what we have in almost all EU Constitutions — maintenance of private property. Can this be a value? I immediately remember the US Founding Fathers who “in support of this Declaration....pledge[d]...our lives, our fortune and our sacred honor”. Their fortune - bigger or smaller - was worth putting to the stakes for an act of high moral meaning. (I am avoiding the word “honor”, which is now banned in order to avoid people abusing it which they have been doing with so many other high concepts in the past seven or eight thousand years.)

Of course neither Rousseau nor Marx would have liked a phrase bringing private property into the realm of values, so in order to keep their spirits in peace we may afford to miss it too. A small problem that occurs as a result is the mixing of equality before the law with equality fortune wise. The result is that occupy, bloccupy and other similar movements can boldly claim that they fit into the value system of at least the EU.

### **C) After the Fall of the Wall**

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<sup>2</sup> Marx, after all, believed in the priority of “society” and class to the individual.

During the quarter of a century between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the present moment, the conceptualization of our values underwent a certain development, which is worth mentioning. The Cold War was providing us with an adversary on a daily basis and the Reaganite formula of the Evil Empire was only re-echoing with the thoughts of common people (mention, I did not dare say normal people!) for whom Good and Evil exist and a powerful enemy can well serve as an embodiment of Evil. Such a concept, which is now often called *Manichean*, implying that it is at least old fashioned if not uneducated and morally wrong, was in fact not considered contrary to Western Values. As a matter of fact, if late Winston Churchill could hear present day politicians and academics rejecting “Manichean” thinking, he would probably feel somewhat embarrassed.

**The Fall of the Berlin Wall started a process of “adjusting” the normal Western Values** for the following reasons:

1) **The enemy was gone.** There were of course adversaries: failed or rogue states, persons and even groups who rejected the new establishment, but they were deviants in a global world system of values. They were no enemies, meaning rival antagonists in their own right whom you may respect (even love) but have to beat [defeat]. They were defined as criminals challenging a legitimately established world order. On the other hand enemies are expected to maintain their views while criminals can be reformed and a final reconciliation can be reached. There was no immediate threat for the Western world and the natural hope for peace could be translated into a somewhat naive mantra that people and countries can always come to a “yes” if only they do not stop the dialogue, negotiate, avoid zero-sum games and properly handle a conflict resolution process, which is widely taught in schools.

2) To a historian this might remind one of the three decades of peace after the Napoleonic wars (1815-1848), but there was a fundamental difference. The post Napoleonic peace was “global” too, to the extent that Europe was then considered the civilized world but it was a conservative peace, aimed at containing the forces of revolution and change with their dangerous popular enthusiasm. The post-Cold War peace fulfilled the aspirations of the Eastern European peoples for freedom and was at least partly the result of genuine popular movements. The challengers of a conservative peace are progressive and revolutionaries. Treating

them like criminals opens a societal gap. The challengers of a **liberal peace** that creates the illusion of global consent are retrograde deviants and that makes it easier to label them as criminals. Wars can be forgotten. There will be only operations fitting into Roosevelt's idea of global policing. Optimism becomes mandatory, because everything is a matter of whether people do their jobs properly or not.

The conservative peace makes bureaucracy over-suspicious, the liberal one demands that it should be always cheerfully optimistic. Every event that is not a full-fledged disaster is deemed success. New beautiful phrases are coined, such as "we have agreed to disagree." An incessant march towards peace and further cooperation is the order of the day. Under these circumstances bad political news becomes highly inappropriate. The denial of the Russian aggression in Georgia as well as the utter surprise with the military conflict in Ukraine can serve as good examples of the latter.

(These days I hear official statements that Russia is not a partner for NATO *any more*. This is somewhat perplexing, because it means that there was nothing wrong with the approach of recent years, only that right now something has changed and those who were forewarning that our approach is unproductive and were therefore labeled "remnants of the Cold War" should get no vindication.)

3) The revolutions in Eastern Europe developed with little violence, which not only reinforced their "legitimacy" but also created the mood of optimism that **peaceful protests** are the natural way to achieve political ends. The idea that one can protest without much risk and that clashes are due to bad policing thrived in the so-called civil society. At the same time dissatisfaction with governments remained, in fact it was increased because in a global world which has the right concepts and standards people should feel happy, and if they don't, there is no enemy to blame, so to blame are only the governments. The natural further step is to become *indignado* and go occupy Wall Street. Things however proved not that easy everywhere and to our utter surprise [again!] peaceful protests started turning into violent clashes.

4) The necessity to keep calm the passions of the Eastern European revolutionaries reinforced the particular emphasis on reconciliation.

**Reconciliation** with a generous opponent who chose to step down peacefully was naturally desirable. What is more, the reconciliation within the former Communist countries, which was to a certain extent inevitable and to a certain extent fake, supplied the Western world with cohorts of former - and recently “reformed” — Communists who joined the ranks of not only the Left of Europe. Western Marxists who have been bearing the burden of the Soviet Union’s bad name could now feel relieved. Not surprisingly many of them were ready to embrace their reformed colleagues from Eastern Europe as much as many of them were ready to embrace a reformed Russia, even when it claimed to be conservative.

Thus the Fall of the Berlin Wall almost finalized the process of **de-ideologization**, which has started back in the 1960s. Ideologies are rather coherent concepts based on an idea about good and evil, so ideological fanatics (as any fanatic whatsoever) claim righteousness and are impervious to the arguments of others. To avoid fanaticism, a number of academics and politicians started scourging ideologies *per se*, claiming that it was the ideologies of Nazism and Communism (and not the people who embraced them readily) that started the most devastating (and somehow predetermined) war in the history of mankind.

While the threat of the Soviet Union was still there, keeping some ideological distinctions between the Communist and the Democratic World was unavoidable. With the Fall of the Wall and the emergence of China as a partner, this distinction turned into a burden for many players. The political correctness of the day turned to a mixture of ideas (at times quite contradictory), which can hardly boast a level of coherence any closer to that of ideologies, which is at least one of the reasons for losing the distinction between traditional left and right.

5) A unique phenomenon was the development of the **Eastern European populism** — a combination of left and right anti-systemic approaches, which well deserves the label “red-brown phenomenon,” at times preaching nationalism and nationalization in one and the same breath. Its “intellectual” background is the de-ideologization. It often toys with anti-communist rhetoric, but its main targets are NATO and the EU, depicted as colonizing powers. So though a specifically East European phenomenon, it was from its very dawn instructive of what might be expected to occur all over the place.

As a simple reaction to joining the Western World on the part of the East European, countries this populism is strongly anti-Western. And in Eastern Europe it is almost invariably pro-Russian. But its most disturbing characteristic is the rejection of any Government. People tired of the hardships of the so-called transition — like their correlates in the Western European countries after the 2008-10 economic crisis — are easily convinced of the utter corruption or incompetence or subservience of any Government. To claim that any Government is problematic is part of democracy. To claim that Governments are all corrupt and incompetent or don't care for their people is an aberration, periodically bursting into social reality and bringing no good for anybody. Eastern European populism might not have affected directly similar trends in Western Europe, but it at least shows a general path that some parties in Eastern Europe might have followed more easily and more swiftly, but which is available for similar ones all over the place. Whether such tendencies can or cannot be tamed peacefully is something still to be seen.

6) The issue of corruption is in fact an ultimate reason for rejection of any government - and indeed the cheapest way to attack it. Whether **corruption** indeed has become more disturbing in the last decade, or it is chosen as the issue that can most easily be communicated to angry people and dealt with by sacrificing a prominent figure here and there, is something I cannot tell. All estimations of corruption (in which Transparency International is particularly active) are estimations of perceptions. However the natural suspicions towards the political culture of the New Democracies made corruption a most legitimate topic whenever they are discussed and then — gradually — a mandatory topic of any discussion.

A study of the Center for Liberal Strategies in a number of Balkan Countries a few years ago showed, however, that the more one fights corruption on TV, the more a perception is stimulated that *“if anyway everybody steals, should I be the only fool who does not?”* Still Corruption is fought at every corner with the same enthusiasm with which Plutocracy was attacked in the 1930s.

7) However, most indicative is the way we define the political system we are living in and which is designed to provide the ground on which our values can be defended, i.e. how we define democracy. The opinion of Churchill *“that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have*

*been tried from time to time*” is well remembered — and I hope no one would dare challenge the fact that he was a democrat and one of the prominent ones of recent history. In fact the full quotation is: ***“Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”*** (The poor guy might have been castigated by some pundits of today for talking about a world of sin and woe. Sin is not a politically correct concept and in our optimistic world woe as a defining feature is not permitted any more.)

What Adam Przeworski<sup>3</sup> pointed out in 2000, was that in our recent conceptualization, democracy starts to designate what is *“normatively desirable”*, or to put it in more down-to-earth words — the Kingdom of God here on Earth. No surprise that people psychologically need an embodiment of their value system (which in times distant was performed by the City of God), and using the state as such is no news since the time of Hegel. But unrealistic definitions are misleading and create only confusion.

I am putting an emphasis on democracy, because, as you can see, the European values as stated here are mostly defined in community terms. **The individual** of course peeps out from behind the human rights, and he/she and his/her dignity are mentioned in the Berlin Declaration, but even there they sound like something that is owed to him/her, not as a creed of the individual. Amor, Patria and Liberta are what *the individual* can strive for. His rights and dignity are what *the community* has to respect.

In other words: When I was still a boy, late President Kennedy said: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Now, half a century later, I am trying to imagine the statesman who would dare utter such words as well as the grave political consequences he/she will have to bear for such an old-fashioned statement.

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<sup>3</sup> Przeworski, Adam, Mihael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, Fernando Limongi (2000) *Democracy and Development*. Cambridge University Press

The *shared responsibilities* are the more timid way of expressing the notion that the individual also owes something to the community, and it is more than just paying taxes. Only that they are immensely unpopular as compared to the human rights.

This can open a very long discussion, but I do very humbly believe that in essence what we are talking about now remains present in the Western system of values. Only that we have lost the capacity of saying it in modern learned politically correct language. Or the politically correct language deliberately lacks the capacity of expressing such notions?

#### **D) Communication and Remedies?**

As I have already mentioned I hope the main problems are with communication.

a) The claim that **democracy should be perfect** supplies the antidemocratic populists or fundamentalists with an argument that we are hypocritical. With the mirage of an all-knowing, omnipotent and morally impeccable democracy at hand, they can attack every institution, every endeavor, every far-reaching decision and claim its incompatibility with it.

b) The claim that in our politics there will be **no double standards** based on common sense and political interest backfires in accusations of inconsistency. A lot of time and money is spent on conferences where people have fun denouncing the faults of the West for not having been fair enough to those who by the end of the day turn to be its adversaries.

c) The demand for **total transparency** turns people like Snowden and Assange who need to face justice for exposing security secrets of their countries into heroes.

d) The repeated demand for **more equality** gives birth to absurdities like: How do they dare insist that I pay my debts when everybody has the right to a nice house. And indignant occupiers burst into the streets.

e) Respect for human rights is a main achievement of Western civilization. However, the more we describe them as a potential lawsuit claim, the further they drift apart from the concept of liberty, tempting political correctness to take the

role of an enlightened benevolent tyrant who gives protection to its incapacitated subjects.

f) Respect for the rights of the minority is an absolute requirement for liberal democracy. Involving the minorities in decision-making is wise. And of course an active minority is supposed to be able on many occasions to involve and even lead the not-so-active majority. However democracy is about making decisions by majority, and consensus is a desirable, but a rather rare occurrence. Seeking consensus always means seeking a half-way compromise. It may be very practical in a number of cases but to postulate it into the framework of the rule of law is ridiculous. And trying to marry reforms with consensus betrays ignorance in both.

Europe shows a notorious propensity for consensual parliamentary decision-making based on the inevitable coalitions of a large number of parties elected on a proportional (party-list) electoral system. And all this for the sake of better representing minorities, for giving every voter the possibility to find his own niche and hence — to every party the possibility to drift away from what it has claimed to be its creed because the need for coalitions and consensus demands it. (The only European countries that still manage to ignore this “consensual” requirement and maintain a majoritarian [one-seat constituency] electoral system are the UK, France and [partly] Hungary.) Needless to say that the inevitable distrust for such a model and for the parties involved in it does not help much the defense of the Western values.

g) The claim that we should live in **a world without enemies** and all who attack us should be treated like just a transgressor serves both the admirers of some strong leaders (who do not conceive of them as transgressors) and the permanent negotiators who are ready to abandon one position after the other only to be able to brag that they have managed to keep the dialogue with those who have not yet committed (fully?!) the act of aggression.

In conclusion: I think there are plenty of positive signs in the direction of clearer communication these days. The somewhat complicated situation around the world helps us find more adequate terms for naming the facts of life. I believe that a more realistic formulation and presentation of our core values will make

especially young people feel more at home in our civilization, to which they belong.

Civilizations — like people — grow and age. But aging is not necessarily a devastating process. Elderly people nowadays can keep more and more in good shape and compensate for the less amount of youthful vigor with experience and wisdom that come with age. But the trouble comes when they forget what youths feel like striving and fighting for.

**If we use the wisdom of age to maintain our credibility, we are not doomed to leave the vigor of youth to the populists.**