



## **The Samizdat Archipelago** Wolfgang Eichwede

Wolfgang Eichwede, professor and director of the Research Center for East European Studies, University of Bremen, explains that samizdat was not possible under complete totalitarianism but came about only when society was under pressure to modernize and the state's ability to rule and govern was diminished. Through the dissidents and their samizdat the world of Eastern Europe was changed. Published in The Ukrainian Weekly, June 4, 2006, No. 23, Vol. LXXIV

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When I visited the Prague historian and civil rights activist Miloš Hájek in the late 1970s for the first time in his apartment, he met me with the words: "You can speak freely, my apartment is completely bugged." As soon as we had sat down, the ceremony began that was soon to become an integral part of unforgettable meetings: curtains were drawn to obstruct the view of telephoto lenses positioned in the house across the street from Hájek's apartment, the "Symphony from the New World" – or was it the "Brandenburg Concertos"? – was turned up loud on the record player, we took paper, placed a large ashtray on the table and conversed by pushing small letters to and fro across the table, which we burnt immediately. Walks were obligatory in the alleyways of the old town, which were, due to their many angles, predestined to deceive directional microphones. Meeting in the hullabaloo of a children's playground had the advantage of getting a fix on our position impossible with the state-of-the-art technology available at the time.

### **Typewriter and Carbon Paper**

Even today I still remember the excitement I felt when I held the first "Information about the Charta" in my hands in the city on the Vltava in 1979: the sixth or seventh carbon copy of the typewritten bulletin of the Czechoslovak human rights' movement. A world all of its own opened itself up to me, shrouded in legend and mystery. The typescripts had obviously passed through many hands, the gossamer-thin paper was already well-worn, exhorting the reader to be careful, very susceptible to damage – and yet, in the self-consciousness of its authors, more powerful than entire armies of security agents trying to hunt them down. From a well-protected stack of documents emerged the "Historical Studies", the journal of the Prague historians in the underground, 200 pages strong, which continued to appear for years, in spite of all the harassment and persecution that was directed at it. The texts were written under unlikely conditions, often edited in constructions workers' sheds, authored by academics who, having been expelled from faculties, academies and universities, were condemned to make a living boilermen or woodcutters. The fact that they, unlike hundreds or even thousands of authors in the countries of the Soviet bloc, did not lapse into silence filled the pages, and soon the bookshelves, of Samizdat.

The term and *concept* of Samizdat go back to a copyright notice of sorts devised by the Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov as early as the 1940s. As there were no publishing companies that would have printed his work, he added the notice "samsebyaizdat" to the title pages of his slim, typewritten volumes of poetry: to publish oneself, to publish one's own work. Later, people only spoke of "publishing oneself, publishing by the author himself": "All you need is a typewriter, paper, and carbon paper." What sounds so amazingly simple could not have been more explosive. The omnipotence of censorship was called into question. If texts that had been written in quiet studies could circulate without the censor's stamp of approval, this would shake the unshakeable. Often the first edition was produced in a "print run" of only 8 to 12 carbon copies in order to preserve the appearance of "manuscripts for personal use" and satisfy the requirements of official rules; however, the "self-published" texts soon took on a life of their own. People wanting to read them declared their willingness to make further copies.

The system of reading and passing on lived from the snowball effect. The definition of Samizdat was expanded. Publishing by the author turned into duplication by the reader. In Czechoslovakia, "Editions" brought together prohibited authors, in Poland and Hungary "unofficial" publishing companies were founded that did not submit their output to state censorship. With the aid of a wide range of printing techniques they reached print runs which could number several thousand copies. What could be done easiest of all with the written word continued in music via cassette tapes, in film via copies, in the fine arts via reproductions. Secretly, entire networks of independent activities were institutionalised,

which could not be contained by the police authorities any more. "One is powerless against this, one is just as powerless against the distribution of tape recordings of our troubadours, minstrels and songwriters, which are declared illegal by the radio committee, but which enjoy great popularity with millions of people. And even if you order mass house searches, if you confiscate all tape recordings, all written copies, if you arrest all the authors and 'distributors' – *one* copy will escape your vigilance, will be preserved and duplicated, in greater numbers than ever before, because forbidden fruit are the sweetest. ... This process of liberating the arts from all 'instructions from above' is branching out and spreading more and more, trying to resist it is as unwise as it is senseless, it is the same as if one were to prohibit tobacco and alcohol."<sup>1</sup>

A triumphant undertone can be discerned in Georgii Vladimov's letter to the presidium of the Soviet writers' union. Written as early as 1967 in support of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, it celebrated Samizdat long before Samizdat had come into full flower. Even if small circles passed texts from hand to hand already in the 1950s, the first real forums of a literary public sphere in the underground were only established in the early 1960s. The Writers' Trials of 1966 in the Soviet Union merged nascent Samizdat culture with the struggle for human rights. The thinking of a group of people that was as courageous as it was, initially, modest fused together the call for artistic liberty and the knowledge about one's own inalienable rights to form a "historical alliance", which was to rebuild the cultural and political landscapes of Eastern Europe from the ground up within two decades. The phenomenon that began in the USSR led in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia from the mid 1970s onwards to a creation of "parallel structures" or "underground worlds", which let the official orders appear more and more as empty, brittle facades. From now on, not only politburos wrote history, but prohibited manuscripts as well.

### **The Stamp of Glavlit**

The liberating force of Samizdat was of a double nature. On the one hand, the medium of Samizdat virtually undermined the censorship authorities and created alternative ways of publication, on the other hand it provided a platform from which *censorship* could be attacked openly and explicitly. Threatening and outspoken verdicts had choked intellectual life in Eastern Europe for decades. Yefim Etkind branded the condemnation to "silence" as the "civil death" of the writer. The "Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets"<sup>2</sup>, better known under the acronym "Glavlit", had the obligation to "prevent military secrets, war propaganda and pornography from reaching the reader". According to Etkind, everything was deleted that seemed to be "doubtful or harmful, in one case it is mentioning the Creator or the Mother of God, in a second the glorification of alcohol, in yet another the name of an emigrated composer, in a fourth case an erotic episode. A Soviet citizen may not publish a single printed word without the stamp of Glavlit, i.e., without the censor's permission. Even a business card, an obituary notice, a birth announcement or a sales advertisement have to be censored, and the procedure is

<sup>1</sup> All quotes were translated from German quotes by the translator; bibliographical data was omitted due to time constraints.

<sup>2</sup> Translators note: "Glavlit" was the acronym of the first name of the authority in 1922, which remained in semi-official use during the existence of the USSR: Главное управление по делам литературы и издательств при Наркомате просвещения РСФСР; subsequent changes were: 1946: Управление по охране военных и государственных тайн в печати при СМ СССР; 1953: Главное управление по охране военных и государственных тайн в печати при СМ СССР; 1966: Главное управление по охране государственных тайн в печати при СМ СССР.

always as strict and as serious as if the censors were dealing with a political leaflet." The assumption that Glavlit is the only controlling authority is illusory. "Censorship is a multistage institution." From the editor of the publishing house over the party secretary to the KGB, Etkind identifies a total of twelve authorities which manuscripts have to pass before publication, not counting self-censorship.

In his (since become legendary) "Open Letter" of 1967 to the Soviet writers' congress, at which he – even though he was under a barrage of intense criticism – did not receive permission to speak in his own defence, Solzhenitsyn demanded the abolition of all of these authorities. Censorship, "not envisaged by the constitution", "is illegal". It gives "people without culture the possibility to take arbitrary measures against writers. ... Something transitory tries to seize hold of the eternal and separate good books from bad". Artistic creations cannot "be divided according to categories of 'permitted' – 'not permitted'. Literature that does not reproduce pain and agony of society, which is not allowed to warn in good time of moral and social dangers does not deserve being called literature, it can only be termed a forgery". Solzhenitsyn was excluded from the Writers' union, but the publication of his works as Sam- and "Tamizdat" – "*tam'*, over there" in the West – could not be prevented.

### **The Great Lie**

One and a half decades later, the Hungarian writer of fiction and scholar György Konrád classifies censorship as "the Great Lie", the sustained "achievement" of which "lies in the comprehensive stultification of the people". It fatigues people and etches "boredom in the faces, a boredom born of fear and conformity." The task of censorship is not to demand enthusiasm from authors, but to impart exact knowledge of what may not be said. It was a question of impeding the joy of thinking. And yet: "Censorship is only powerful if we fear it. Whenever a society stops being afraid, censorship loses its power". Konrád notes – 1983 – a scene change for Central Europe. People were beginning "to learn the art of defence against state arrogance". The number of "independent spirits" is growing, "uncensored channels of communication" were being opened everywhere. "Let them bug our telephones, we will articulate our opinions all the same. Let them prohibit our thoughts, we will exchange them nevertheless. There is only one antidote against censorship: ignore it." A "desire" to open up, to form networks and to build ones own fundamentals was passing through Europe. Censorship had passed "its zenith", it was on the "retreat".

The period between Vladimov and Konrád is the time when the networks of Samizdat were developing over all of Eastern and Central Europe. Many hopes had to be abandoned – the Prague Spring was smashed, the policy of détente was in doubt, Solidarność was forbidden. However, the liberating experience of one's own autonomy and the certainty of having one's own identity kept those together who dared to protest. Within them was the "Archimedean point", to which party and state had no access any more. Václav Havel likened the dissident "from the point of view of the substance of the issue a little bit" to Don Quixote: "he writes his critical analyses and demands liberties and rights all on his own – with only pen in hand – in the face of the gigantic power of the state and its police; he writes, calls out, shouts, demands, invokes the law – and knows that sooner or later he will go to jail for this." There is something of the "Fool" about him.

Indeed, means could hardly have been less equal. On the one hand, the concentrated arsenal of a dictatorship against the open word – on the other hand, unconditional conviction against the brittleness of a worn out ideology. According to Havel, the dissident sees his "mission more in the protection of man against the pressure of the system than in the conception of better systems." He nourishes dreams, not utopias, but

lives in the vague hope that “‘politics outside of politics’, ‘politics outside of power’” has “meaning”, “that – no matter how hidden or complicated the ways may be by which this happens – it will also provoke something, achieve something, accomplish something.”

Opponents of the worlds of Samizdat were the Soviet authorities between Stalin and Gorbachev, dictatorships which were not functioning, bound to an ideology that may have been useful to found its rule but which blocked economic rationality again and again; this in spite of the fact that the communist leaders had taken up the challenge decades earlier of catapulting their countries into the modern age with a tremendous exertion. Up to Stalin’s death in 1953 they had tried to perfect their capacity to act by unleashing terror and repression, “purges” and permanent mobilisation. After Stalin’s death, they felt compelled to defend their power monopoly by hesitant retractions of violence, all the way to semi-reforms. The will of the people was as nothing against the supposedly “iron laws” of history. In fact, however, the systems were running into a modernisation trap, from which there was no escape. Dissenting economists presented scathing analyses on this topic. Concomitant to economic progress, if it did happen at all, the complexity of the economy increased; this however led to a decrease in the state hierarchies’ ability to control state and society. Their “vertical” logic dramatically impeded the demands on “horizontal” networking, as Hungarian sociologists diagnosed in their discussion circles early on. Even successful achievements provoked an increase of confusion and dysfunctions. The transition from extensive to intensive forms of growth quite simply did not succeed. If however failures occurred and the defined goals could not be met, an already fragile legitimacy broke down even more.

The fact that the socialist dictatorships organised their de-Stalinisation themselves initially inspired hopes and created reserves of loyalty. That they remained dictatorships nevertheless, again and again ready to sever a proclaimed “new course”, soon led to the resources melting away. Terror covering entire states was ended – paternalism and repression continued. Levels of consumption were raised – deficits and privileges persisted. Campaigns to bolster socialist legality filled the pages of the dailies – transparency did not materialise. The jungle of impenetrable apparatuses (“black boxes”) continued to proliferate. Incapable of directing internal contradictions into productive channels, the socialist systems slowly turned into paradoxes. While they clung to authoritarian basic principles, they could no longer ignore parcelled free zones and private interests in the labyrinth of institutions. The rudiments of a “pluralism” of bureaucratic structures remained fragmentary. Distrust and suspicion spread, whitewashing glossed over unpleasant reality. In societies that suffered from a preponderance of collective aspirations, the tendency arose to privatise certain areas of one’s life in the famous “niches”. “Soviet man” turned out to be a private citizen living a dreary life, with an imagination that was skilled at exploiting the omnipresent shortages of everyday life for personal ends, a “petty bourgeois” without private property. “Sealing off” oneself off from the outside world and the existence of grey markets compensated for deficits in legal protection and an economic basis. A Samizdat author counted no less than six “market forms” beyond legality, from the bazaar over networks of relationships to simple pilfering. Deviating from mandatory paths became part of the system. It could be dysfunctional to follow decreed norms, whereas it could be functional to disobey them. Even if breaching the rules was per definition subversive, it did have a stabilising effect, being vital to overcome bottlenecks.

Common traits of the entire “bloc” are differentiated by the prism of the countries. The history of the individual nations and cultural spaces of East and Central Europe is so colourful that not even Stalinist terror was capable of eradicating it. Soon afterwards, catchwords such as “polycentrism”, own ways and – somewhat bolder – “diversity in unity” started circulating. However, a precondition in official parlance remained: the hegemonic power of the Soviet Union and the leading rule of the communist parties had to be respected. While the Brezhnev doctrine was able to keep the “bloc” together on the outside with the threat of violence, it was already incapable of bringing all countries into

line on the inside. It was the dilemma of the USSR that it twice initiated an opening-up of the system, with the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and 1961, only to suffocate them and to again punish thoughts which had been permitted only a short while before with prison. With hardly any democratic roots, a dictatorship going back for generations, a multiethnic state threatened by centrifugal forces, overstretched as a world power: while the necessity of reforms became a categorical imperative, the Soviet leadership lost perspective and concept. The Soviet Union was on the way to degenerating to a conservative power. Voices from the inside of Soviet society which called for change were accused of "anti-Soviet agitation" and branded as enemies.

During the "Cold War", the countries of eastern Central Europe were labelled as "satellite states", although this is hardly adequate to describe either objectively or figuratively their status of destroyed, then limited sovereignty. Whenever there were, after 1953, carefully measured attempts at liberalisation in Budapest, Warsaw or Prague, they were combined with the attempt to demand a little bit more autonomy from Moscow. Populations, usually at a distance to their governments, applauded: national-liberal overtones served as a boost to legitimacy. Limits for this were narrow indeed, but there were differences from country to country.

In Hungary the suppression of the revolution of 1956 by Soviet troops left an embittered society. János Kádár, who had played a notorious role himself, sought a solution with strategies of depoliticisation and economic flexibility: elements of an authoritarian non-chalance which led György Dalos to write his book "The Goulash Archipelago" ["Archipel Gulasch"].

In the People's Republic of Poland the regime of Władysław Gomułka was deliberalised soon after October 1956, but had to accept the Catholic Church as a counter-power which offered protected space to the critical intellectuals. When striking workers entered the societal stage, an oppositional triangle emerged that had the capacity to thoroughly disturb balances and reason of power.

Czechoslovakia, which like no other country of the Soviet "camp" could look back to bourgeois traditions but was less able to cast off Stalinist chains in the 1950s than its neighbours, became a great hope for Europe in the era of Alexander Dubček, 1968. Both East and West were seemingly rehearsing a new beginning at the same time. The suppression of the Prague experiment by the armies of the Warsaw Pact ushered in two decades of persecution: devastating, yet in vain. Even without a "protecting power" the oppressed intellectuals were able to defy "normalisation".

Last but not least, the GDR never was able to escape its special position as a state that was only part of the German nation. Initially under the pressure, later in the pull of West Germany, tied to the USSR for better or worse, regarded with suspicion by its own allies, it built a questionable symbol of stability in the shape of the Berlin Wall. In its shadow the Stasi, the state security service, perfected its surveillance methods, without being able to prevent the emergence of independent circles associated with Church and cultural institutions. Détente between the two German states did not move the leadership in East Berlin to practice a policy of peace inside the GDR.

All "Soviet type" regimes had one thing in common: they had less and less to pit against the continuing or growing attractiveness of the West. Some of them even lived on credit. Just as the outlines of the systems differed, so the forms of resistance were varied. Nowhere could it be stamped out completely. Be it intense repression or simple inability to integrate the dissenters – each and every variation of trying to maintain power inevitably led to a drain of resources.

The socialism of the Gulag turned into the socialism of facades and appearances, no longer able to convince societies of its merits, let alone act as a driving force for these societies or keep the economy going. According to later analyses, Stalin had created an "ascetic socialism", the hallmarks of which were renunciation and sacrifice, whereas

Brezhnev had created a "cynical socialism", the substance of which was the lie. All dogmas had lost their meaning, yet one's commitment to them was required – avowals of loyalty as exercises in subservience. Friedrich Schiller's Wilhelm Tell comes to mind – in the play, people were required to pay respect to the mere hat of the reeve Gessler stuck on a pole, in the Soviet bloc countries, people had to pay respect to the empty husks of ideology.

## **Doublethink**

Václav Havel's imaginary greengrocer, a figure in the essay *The Power of the Powerless*, does not put up the banner "Proletarians of all countries, unite!" among the "onions and carrots" in his shop window because he is an internationalist and committed to the slogan, on the contrary: he wants to be left in peace and not to step out of line. If "classic" dictatorship lived off "enthusiastic violence", the "post-totalitarian" dictatorship of the Soviet bloc lived off the "lie", which extended from the very leadership of the state to the greengrocer. Vladimir Voinovich calls the "[party] meeting ... an activity event where a lot of people gather, some of whom say something they do not think, while others think something they do not say." Andrei Bitov lets the protagonist of his *Samizdat* novel "Pushkin House" grumble that "society is collective dishonesty". "A definitive person, an open person becomes the prey of the world ... Do not show yourself, do not show your own – that is the principle for hanging on." In literature, the term of "doublethink" is adopted, which permeated everyday life of "real socialism", a life by mimicry, a game of hide-and-seek at all levels. One author even speaks of "biculturalism" or of a "bilingualism that has become second nature", Polish sociologists note "social schizophrenia", whichever however does not merely threaten to hollow out the existing power structures but also to destroy personality structures. Erosion of the system and paralysis of resistance at one and the same time. By its logic of dishonesty "doublethink" endangers as well the small autonomous spaces that it intended to protect. What inevitably undermined the socialist systems in a historic perspective was nevertheless able to prolong their last reprieve. An overall picture of authoritarian orders emerges, with many cracks and chinks in their armour, but which nonetheless clung to police state methods. In order to analyse them adequately, Lev Kopelev once suggested replacing Sovietology with a "science of cracks".

## **Responsibility of the Individual**

The civil and human rights movements broke through the network of subservience, conformity and deceit. When Andrei Sinyavskii already in 1966 declared in court that he was simply "different" but no enemy, he underlined the fact that he could not be taken in any more by the system and the ritual of submission of auto-criticism. Only a few years later Solzhenitsyn formulated the appeal that was to become a well-known quotation: "Live not by lies!" As the regime was protecting itself more by lies than by violence, Solzhenitsyn said, every single individual was capable of decisively influencing change by not participating in lying. It was not even necessary to do something, it was sufficient to not do something; neither was it necessary to "to swarm out ... and loudly preach the truth", it was merely necessary to not say anything which one did not believe in. "Our way: do not support lies consciously in anything! ... Do not glue together the dead little bones and scales of ideology, do not mend the mouldy rags – and we will be amazed how quickly and helplessly lies will decline". More than against the regime that had imposed lies, Solzhenitsyn's polemic was directed against arranging oneself with it, against dishonesty and against the double thinking in society. Václav Havel follows this up directly when he calls for a "life by truth", for a "rebellion" against the "world of appearances". As, according to Havel, the ruling order relied on the "demoralisation" of its citizens, winning back "dignity" and "identity" takes on an extremely political dimension. According to the words of the philosopher Jan Patočka, "Charter 77" "once more" let people "know" that there "are things worth suffering for". Both rationales circumvent the question of power as cautiously as they do explicitly. While Solzhenitsyn

might be able to be reconciled with the absence of liberty on the outside if inner freedom is gained, the opposite holds true for Havel: he sees inner dignity as a precondition for the struggle to formally institute civil rights. Thus there are worlds between the two approaches, which all the same meet in tailoring societal relations to the responsibility of the individual. However, a fair amount of rigorousness is connected to the postulate for truth. No one quite lived up to the demands of such rigour as Andrei Sakharov, who fought for the "liberty of the spirit" with unshakeable honesty and was prepared to cut short his peerless career as a nuclear physicist for this idea.

Whenever possible, Central and East European human rights' activists invoked the constitutions of their countries. Applicable laws were to be made the most of and authorities and governments to be measured by the standards of their own laws, as long as these laws conformed to internationally recognized norms. In addition, international conventions and pacts were consulted to provide a frame of reference. At the latest since 1968 the UN Charter of Human Rights of 1948, which was basically not available in official publications, circulated in Soviet Samizdat. The Chronicle of Current Events expressly quoted the document on its title page; the manifesto of "Charter 77" referred to Czechoslovakia's obligations under international law which had been declared national law by an act of parliament. Due to flagrant violations of individual paragraphs, people whose views did not coincide with those of the government became "victims of an apartheid", freedom of opinion and private spheres were thoroughly disregarded and "hundreds of thousands" of citizens denied "freedom from fear". Charter 77 saw itself as an "open society", as a kind of "citizens' action group", not as a political or opposition organisation, and offered the regime a "constructive dialogue" in order to document concrete human rights' violations and find possible solutions.

The formulation of standards for a legal culture that were combined with the offer of discourse delineated the contours of a historically new, strategic concept. Already in 1976 the Polish "Workers Defence Committee" (Komitet Obrony Robotników, KOR) had taken over the legal protection of the people persecuted after the strikes in Radom and Ursus. From now on, Chronicles and Messengers, Bulletins and Informations recorded acts of injustice and arbitrariness. Everybody in the authorities, said Patočka, should know that "injustice and discrimination would not go unnoticed any more". No matter the publications were visually unimpressive and their print-runs low – in spite of numerous arrest waves the most important of these bulletins continued to appear for 12 and 14 years and thus made European legal history. After petitions to the governments went unheard time and again, the international public became more and more the "court of appeal", for which the Final Act of the Helsinki "Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe" (CSCE) had created a quotable basis in 1975. The conference also gave impetus and name to new groups in the USSR, amongst others in Moscow, Kiev and Vilnius.

When the term "new evolutionism" became popular among parts of the Polish opposition at this time, its proponents had, as Adam Michnik pointed out, an evolution towards civil liberties and human rights in mind. "Revising" socialism from the inside or reforming the system with one's own resources were not mooted any more; hopes for a reform of the system had been crushed at the latest by the tanks rolling against the Prague Spring, but had also been worn down by the insidiousness of the imposed order. For years, dissidents of every shade had appealed to the rulers to allow more information flow and criticism – in vain. This led to the realisation that de-Stalinisation did not automatically lead to democratisation. Dismantling the dictator faltered more than once and this very process also turned out to be an instrument to defend the power monopoly of the party. The fact that the system of Stalinism as a whole belonged to the past did not exclude the selective use of Stalinist methods in the present. This made the development of independent structures all the more urgent, which was achieved by Samizdat as an institution and human rights as a basis for argumentation. Form and content of dissent referred to one another.

## Change via the Public Sphere

The concept of an evolution of state and society implied a refusal of revolutions. Revolutions were considered to be not only unrealistic but also fatal. If one wanted to establish the rule of law, one could not support a way that consciously included violence or at least accepted it. Instead, on the one hand, state power was to be disciplined, and on the other hand society to be enlightened. Structural transformation via the public sphere – what happened from the 1960s onward in the underground of Eastern Europe evokes the pioneering book by Jürgen Habermas not only in name. In fact, both cases (taking into account all differences in societal structure) were historic attempts at changing the character of the existing regime via the creation of autonomous public spheres and the initiation of independent control mechanisms. Using modern vocabulary, one would term this concept “visions of civilising society”. Indeed: if prototypes of civil society existed anywhere in a divided Europe, it was in the discussion circles of the dissidents in Prague or Leningrad, Krakow or Budapest. By placing their confidence in the strength of the public sphere and the example, of insight and argument, they were children of the European enlightenment through and through. They would have nothing of analyses of interests and power calculations. Their strategy was “anti-politics”; however, thanks to what György Konrád called Central European “scepticism”, they never discarded their appreciation for reality and for moral courage.

The fact that Samizdat authors fought as valiantly for the rights of the individual as they did acquires real significance only in a historical context. Not only was it necessary to overcome the upheavals of the Soviet years with all their collectivisms and “organised irresponsibility”, previous epochs left much space for democratic traditions in the political systems of the countries concerned either (with the exception of Czechoslovakia). In many cases, urban milieus had been destroyed during the Holocaust; even in countries where emancipatory movements had traditions going back all the way to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, concepts of liberty were often buried by national myths, negated in agrarian or peasant national movements or permeated by “anarchisms”, which impeded a pluralistic conception. On the other hand, insurrections and draft constitutions, politics of compromise and republican ideas were part of the resources that could be mobilised. During the resistance against German occupation in the Second World War veritable underground states had emerged, which lived on in both collective and individual memory. Thus, history offered a rich reservoir, albeit one not free of contradictions, which gained a new focus in the struggle for human rights.

In Poland, “parallel structures” merged into one of the great, maybe the greatest social movement of post-war Europe. Solidarność counted ten million members. A people organised itself as a society. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century they learned the will to persevere, from the Second World War the country-wide networking, and from the Communist epoch a sense of sound judgement. While the regime was caught up in political dependence and economic woes, the forces of resistance acquired a new self-confidence, especially after the election of John Paul II to the Holy See. Most important of all – in opposition to the system’s canonised lack of perspectives they succeeded in creating symbols, which set free society’s own potential to act. Sociologists have proven in empirical studies that skills that had lain dormant and feelings of dignity that the official Poland had ignored suddenly had a chance to assert themselves. A euphoric mood gripped the country.

The fact that the new beginning did not turn into an uprising, that the revolution, in the words of Jadwiga Staniszkis, imposed a limit on itself, is the hallmark of the events of 1980. According to Adam Michnik, “any attempt to rule against society” is doomed “to result in catastrophe”, but “every attempt to topple Communist rule in Poland” is incompatible with the interests of the USSR and therefore equally doomed to failure. The one remaining viable strategy would be “to organise our independence from the inside”,

but "not to tear the Polish state to shreds: while it is not a sovereign state, it is a state without which our fate would be incomparably more arduous". Once more, the "underground press" [drugi obiegi] provided forum and liberty for public communication and self-definition; nor was the underground press silenced by martial law, imposed on the country in December of 1981. The underground printing shops were experienced in working under conditions of persecution.

### **Monologue by a Gagged Mouth**

Everywhere in Eastern Europe where state authorities got on the trail of Samizdat papers they reacted harshly. While the dissidents had offered a dialogue, more than a "monologue ... by a gagged mouth", as Andrei Amalrik so aptly formulated, was not possible. Manuscripts and their copies were hunted down, authors and readers harassed, flats equipped with bugging devices all the way to the toilet, interrogations and harassment were employed systematically and methodically. The security services created special departments, even veritable research laboratories, in order to identify typewriter characters and the penetration of their touch – the "Erika" [typewriter manufactured in the GDR] became famous once more. Carbon paper advanced to being a matter of state. Probably rarely in modern history have states spent so much budget money to track down lyrics and poetry. For decades, archives of the security services became treasure troves of the literature which was categorised as questionable.

What is regarded today with incredulous amazement was extremely serious reality during the late period of the Soviet regimes. Solzhenitsyn and Etkind have described the mechanisms of surveillance, discrimination and eventual ostracism in minute detail. Employment bans and public campaigns were some of the more "harmless" means of persecution. In many cases, flats were searched and property confiscated, there were break-ins and attacks by anonymous gangs of thugs, even murder cases that were never solved. Accusations and sentences by the courts which could mean ten years or more in jail, the camps and banishment, defined the everyday routine of state repression. By the banishing of Andrei Sakharov to the "closed city" of Gorkii 1980, which was against all legal norms, the civil rights' movement lost its focus and symbol. In the USSR, the "psychiatrisation" of the opposition became notorious: healthy people – generals, electricians or poetesses – were forcibly locked away as mentally ill in mental institutions on the basis of false medical opinions. Expulsions and forced emigration were a further means at the disposal of the authorities.

Often, only the measures taken by the state turned dissenters into open critics. By placing authors who were merely concerned about creative freedom a priori under suspicion, the security organs produced exactly the kind of contradiction which they then felt obliged to persecute. The fact that "non-books" – Samizdat editions that were officially non-existent – sometimes became a political issue was due not only to the talent of their authors but also to the narrow-mindedness of the rulers. The structure of the system stood in the way of tolerances. For many writers and human rights' activists the conditions under which they could act thus became very limited. Having set out to oblige the authorities to adhere to legal principles and to give moral courage a place in public life, they were reduced time and again to defending themselves. It was of course inevitable that phases of exhaustion and situations in which there was a danger of societal marginalisation occurred. However, the message could not be silenced any more.

### **Counter-Worlds**

What made Eastern Europe so fascinating during these decades were the counter-worlds, the breaking of taboos, the risking of new ideas, one's own styles and new ways. Not every criticism was banished from official media. There were innovations in the official media too, e.g., in the fine arts, the sciences and in music. The borders between permitted, tacitly accepted, not-permitted and prohibited worlds were not clear-cut. They

could change from area to area, from period to period. Nothing would be further from the truth than to view, from the perspective of Samizdat, with suspicion everything that passed censorship and was not subject to persecution. Samizdat per se was no guarantee for quality and innovation. Great underground authors in particular have cautioned against idealising Samizdat. Every instance of playing off literatures, the officially possible and the non-official literature, against each other, every dichotomisation or division of cultures according to "Glavlit's" stamps would not do justice to the multitude of realities at all levels. The fact that the scenes were so colourful, the production of Samizdat so convoluted, the impulses they gave so exciting, not to be caught or disciplined, had its origins in the existence and spread of parallel structures and underground publications. If they had not managed to persevere, and to create rudimentary institutions against all the blows dealt them by the security organs, the development of the entire region, its intellectual and political fate, would have taken a different turn. Here, the "cunning of history" lent a helping hand. The more closed and united the regimes, worried about their omnipotence, tried to appear, the easier it was for a single person, a single letter, a single poem to hit them where it hurt.

In hindsight it becomes obvious that Samizdat writing occupied a broad spectrum of functions. It defended individuals, it fought for minute individual freedoms, and it snatched the memory of terror away from the danger of oblivion, in the Soviet Union just as much as in other countries. Entire literatures survived, such as in Czechoslovakia. Societies and peoples found their media, such as in Poland and in other nations. Communication with the Western world became a building-block of the interior world of Samizdat – the underground as a bridge in a global context. On the other hand, we also have to take note of opposite tendencies. In the Soviet Union, Russian nationalist circles declared that Russia enjoyed a position "particularly close to God". Public spheres arise in a thousand little parts. Plurality does not come without dissonances. At the same time, one's own "powerlessness" was qualified by the experience that independence was not merely demanded, but practiced. Samizdat meant acting.

The theoreticians of oppositional thought themselves reflected sociological aspects. Dissidents were outsiders. In addition to state repression, in many cases they had to endure isolation in their societies, more often, by a large margin, in Russia than in Central Europe or the non-Russian republics of the USSR, where not immediately obvious yet pervasive moods of a national consensus made their presence felt. By fostering privatised yet conformist-subservient lifestyles without consciousness of individual rights, the Soviet systems could make the dissenters appear as troublemakers, as the people who pilloried all the daily compromises and disturbed the peace and quiet of the little "lies". On the other hand, in the long run the private sphere needed legal protection, so that there were starting points for cooperation. In propitious moments, when cracks appeared in the wall of compromises, the admonishers could even be agents of fermentation for their societies. National movements disposed over considerable reservoirs of sympathy from the outset. The defence of a national language and culture, as well as the right to self-determination, memory and mourning, could mobilise entire peoples. Their struggle, as well as the struggle of religious communities, is a great chapter of dissent, deserving a separate narration.

### **The Dream of the Free Word**

Samizdat was a place for intellectual debate. In its milieu, I heard, from Rudolf Slánský, at a fairly early point in time the thesis that the Soviet Union, being the last multiethnic empire in Europe, would not survive the process of modernisation up to the end of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century. In the same place – in Prague – I took part in discussions in the early 1980s about the desirability of German reunification. However, the questions covered even more territory. Without written memoirs and oral history we would know far less about the history of the Soviet Union. Biographies served to dismantle pathos and coercion of socialism. With Let History Judge, Roy Medvedev wrote a classic analysis of

Stalinism. In Russia there was once more a debate about the relationship to the West (with Solzhenitsyn versus Sakharov as opposing poles) and the role of the Intelligentsia, in Poland the Yalta Settlement and therefore a divided Europe and one's own place within the continent were the subject for discussion, in Czechoslovakia and Hungary "Mitteleuropa" demonstrated its particular attractiveness. The struggle for new securities was carried out with agonising self-doubt.

In Budapest, the philosophical discourses developed around a stable core in the shape of Lukács' disciples. György Konrád's and Iván Szelényi's analysis *The Intelligentsia on the Road to Class Power* established new models of thought and set widely noticed trends in European intellectual discussion. *The Alternative*, by Rudolf Bahro, which circulated more in the Samizdat publications of other countries than in the GDR, tried to trace the chances of a "surplus consciousness". On the other hand, Roy Medvedev advocated a "socialist democracy" along conventional-critical lines, while Amalrik formulated his doubts whether the Soviet Union would survive the year "1984". In Poland, the relationship between critical (traditionally leftist) intellectuals and the Catholic Church was redefined, with a strategic purpose. After 1980, not a few historians and sociologists became advisers of Solidarność. More than once, academics did not confine themselves to merely reflecting realities, but intervened in order to change them.

Samizdat literature belongs to the epoch of a divided Europe, yet it has done more to unite the continent than many other events. If the West wrote the European history of unification, Eastern Europe wrote the history of liberty. If economic success and the energy of high politics set the course over here, it was the struggle for the free word over there that caught one's breath. Whenever I entered human rights' activists' and dissidents' circles: it was their dream to regain sovereignty over their languages. In the words of Adam Michnik: "In this question, all compromise is forbidden to us." According to him, an intervention is an intervention and not "brotherly love". Only when it became possible to call a compromise a compromise, would it be possible to conclude a compromise; but for now it was necessary to protect language as a good that was as sensitive as it was valuable. No journey between Moscow and Odessa, between Leningrad and Tallinn, Budapest and Warsaw was too arduous in order to acquire copies of a novel that was unavailable in one's hometown. When I, in 1980, discussed international relations for half the night with old Yevgenii Gnedin, once press speaker of Soviet foreign minister Litvinov who went on to spend a quarter of his life in Stalin's camps, we were suddenly interrupted by his wife Natasha, who told us with tenderly trembling voice that she was reading for the first time a poem by Marina Tsvetaeva she had known by heart for forty years. Samizdat authors were surprised that typewriter and carbon paper would contribute to unhinging the European post-war order and toppling dictatorships. Their life had taught them caution. Many a biography goes back far into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many cases, resistance against German occupation was followed by rebelling against Soviet occupation. In between there were often long experiences in communist parties, initiated with sympathy but which turned painful. In the stories of many of these dissidents, epochs seem to converse with each other. Their thinking is at home in many cultures.

Hanka Mejdrova, an ardent historian in the research groups that existed around the Czech "Historical Studies", voiced the opinion in 1984 that it would hardly be possible for her generation to induce change. However, she was not disheartened. Her perspectives had been far bleaker when she had to flee Prague in 1938. She knew that it was worth continuing unflinchingly on "her" way. She had confidence in the younger people around her. We listened to the songs of John Lennon with her right next to Charles Bridge. When we saw how the militia tried to disperse the singing seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds and the guitar continued to play all the same, a feeling of joy and pride lit up Hanka's face: "They' cannot succeed any more. 'They' will lose."