

THE EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVE

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Conservative Breakthrough in the European Parliament?

The elections for the European Parliament, held between 4 and 7 June 2009, have been portrayed by many commentators as a decisive swing to the political right. But despite some signs that European voters are turning away from the left, it is too early to conclude the continent is ripe for a conservative breakthrough.

Editorial

On the whole, socialist parties fared badly almost everywhere, with notable disappointments in the United Kingdom, France and Austria. The Christian Democrats of the European People's Party (EPP) cemented their place as the largest political group, securing 265 seats (34.1%) in the 736-member Parliament. The Socialist group, however, still remains the second largest, with 184 seats (25.8%), followed by the Liberals with 84 seats (12.7%). The Greens (55 seats) improved their number of seats. There were also gains for the extreme, nationalist right in several countries.

One of the most interesting developments took place after the election, with the British Tories' breaking away from the EPP and forming a new conservative, eurosceptic group called the *European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)*, with a total of 54 seats. The Tories' main allies in the ECR are the Polish Law and Justice party (PiS) and Vaclav Klaus' Civic Democrats (ODS) from the Czech Republic.

It is too soon to tell whether the newly formed ECR and the slight shift to the center-right

will have much influence on EU policies. The centrist mainstream of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Liberals continue to work together on many key issues in the Parliament, and the ECR has failed to attract support from many member states.

The recent European Parliament elections had a positive outcome for one of the CER's own. Professor Ryszard Legutko (59) was elected to the European Parliament on behalf of the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS). Legutko is a member of the International Advisory Board of the Center for European Renewal. At the Vanenburg Society meeting of summer 2007 in Vienna, Legutko gave a talk on the nature of liberalism, which was later published under the title *What's Wrong With Liberalism?* in the American conservative quarterly *Modern Age* (50:01, winter 2008).

A specialist in political philosophy, Legutko has published translations of Plato and several books in Polish and English, including *Society as a Department Store—Critical Reflections on the Liberal State* (Lexington Books, 2002). During the Communist occupation of Poland, Legutko was involved in publishing the underground magazine *Ark*. He received his habilitation for a thesis on *Criticism of Democracy in Plato* and was a professor of philosophy at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the oldest university of Poland.

In what he himself has called "the adventure of an old man," Legutko entered politics in 2005 when he was elected as an unaffiliated



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member of the Polish Senate, serving as vice president of the Senate, chairman of the Polish-Israeli parliamentary group and member of the Commission on Human Rights and the Rule of Law. In 2007, he briefly served as minister of education in the government of Prime Minister Kaczynski (PiS). The elections held that year were not successful for PiS, which was voted out of government. Legutko himself was narrowly defeated for re-election. Until his election as a member of the European Parliament in June 2009, he served Poland as secretary of state in the office of the president of Poland.

In the European Parliament, Legutko has joined the European Conservatives and Reformists group. He is a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Security and Defense. ■

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Civic Institute in Czech Republic

www.obcinst.cz

The Civic Institute (CI) was founded in the Spring 1991 – a year-and-a-half after the Velvet Revolution and the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia – by a group of anti-Communist dissidents of conservative, Christian democrat and classical liberal persuasion. The most prominent founding member is Pavel Bratinka.

Roman Joch

The roots of the CI can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when the dissidents met in their homes to discuss politics, philosophy, economics, theology, culture and international relations. After the fall of Communism, they decided to found an institute to carry on those discussions.

The founders of the CI were convinced that a truly free society is a fragile entity, depending on certain moral and philosophical foundations – “pillars,” as they prefer to call them – which are not to be taken for granted. Only a tiny minority of all peoples in history lived in free societies. Most people in past ages lived under tyrannies of various forms. Thus, statistically speaking, tyranny is the normal form of human government. A free society is not easily achieved and quite easily lost, as the history of Czechoslovakia in the 20th century testifies.

The founders of the CI intended it to be an institution dedicated to the advocacy and vindication of the moral conditions and philosophical foundations necessary for a free society. They understood such a society as an

ordered liberty of individuals and families, with responsibility, rule of law, limited constitutional government, a free economy, property rights, and civic and moral virtues.

Pavel Bratinka (63) is a nuclear physicist by education and a Roman Catholic convert. Because of his anti-Communist activities, he was banned from his professional career in the 1970s and forced to work as a cleaner in the metro and Prague’s central heating facilities. These jobs provided him with free time to read. Bratinka discovered the works of Friedrich Hayek, Eric Voegelin and Michael Novak. He then introduced them to other Czech intellectuals. Bratinka translated *The Road to Serfdom* by Hayek into Czech and held what was probably the first lecture on *The New Science of Politics* by Voegelin in a country to the east of the Iron Curtain.

After the fall of Communism in 1989, Bratinka became involved in Czech politics. Since 1998, he has worked in the consulting business. Probably his greatest accomplishment, however, was the founding of the CI in 1991. Today, he serves as chairman of its board of directors.

The CI has developed through several phases. While its philosophy and political positions have not changed, the CI has focused on different issues over the years. Its first publication was a Czech translation of Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*. The second was *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* by Michael Novak. As the titles of these publications indicate, in



its early years the CI emphasized free market economics and classical liberalism. The *Anticapitalist Mentality* by Ludwig von Mises and *The Ethics of Redistribution* by Bertrand de Jouvenel soon followed.

The major political issue in the Czech Republic in the first half of the 1990s was the choice between the democratic socialism of the Swedish social democracy and the democratic capitalism, or free market economy, of a more Anglo-American variety. The CI strongly supported the latter.



Winter University for High School Students 2009

By the mid-1990s, the economic issues in the Czech Republic had been more or less settled in a compromise: the German Rhineland model, based on free market economics but with a substantial public sector.

The focus of the CI then shifted. Having published two more theoretical books, *Conservatism* by Robert Nisbet and *Liberalis* by John Gray, the CI began stressing cultural issues more than economic ones. By the mid-1990s, the CI was the first Czech think tank to discuss the importance of traditional families, family values and family policy. The CI began cooperating and networking with many other pro-family and pro-life institutions around the world, publishing studies and policy papers.

During this period, the CI also published two other theoretical works *The Conservative Mind* by Russell Kirk, and *Democracy and Leadership* by Irving Babbitt.



The Seat of Conservative Institute in Emausy Monastery

After 11 September 2001, the CI preserved its pro-family orientation, though in less explicitly religious terms and added international relations, foreign affairs, security issues, Islamic terrorism and existential threats to the West to its portfolio of issues.

The CI has published studies and organized dozens of conferences and seminars around issues like U.S. foreign policy, the role of America in the world, the war against Islamic terrorism, missile defense, Islam in Europe and demographic challenges in the West.

The CI conducts its work in several different ways. They have a very active publishing program. The CI publishes a monthly bulletin containing a lecture or essay by domestic or foreign authors on issues of political philosophy or public policy. The CI also publishes public policy studies and papers on various political issues, ranging from restitutions of Church property stolen by Communists, to immigration, privatization, crime, family values, feminism, foreign and security policy, political correctness and EU integration. The CI publishes conservative classics in Czech, most recently *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers. A Czech translation of *Ideas Have Consequences* by Richard Weaver is currently in the works.

The CI organizes seminars and conferences. University students and grammar school pupils aged 17 to 18 are the target audience. The CI also organizes seminars for MPs, Senators, government officials, public policy specialists, journalists and the Prague diplomatic corps. The latter seminars tend to be less focused on philosophy and more on policy.



LtCol John A. Nagl on 5 Years of War in Iraq

The CI operates a reading room and a library of conservative books, magazines and literature, available to students and anyone interested in ideas. CI fellows lecture at Czech universities as part-time teachers. CI fellows are also invited to other Czech and Central European think tanks and political associations as lecturers and debaters. CI fellows serve as commentators in Czech media, contributing op-eds to newspapers and magazines or speaking out on political issues on radio and television.

CI fellows serve as advisors to several Czech statesmen. The director of the CI is a member of the Academic Council of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served as advisor to the former Czech deputy prime minister for European affairs. The director of programs at the CI was a member of the Czech government's Human Rights Commission and advisor to the deputy minister of labour and social affairs on issues dealing with the EU. The director of the CI's Family Values Program was an advisor for family policy to the last two ministers of labour and social affairs.

The CI attracts hundreds of right-leaning young students and scholars, who attend events and volunteer to serve as organizers, assistants, lecturers and advisors. Many alumni of CI events have gone on to careers in media as columnists; in politics as aspiring politicians or staffers to senior politicians; or in academia as assistant professors or professors. Alumni include a prior of a Dominican monastic order, a former minister of justice of the Czech government and a vice president of a private university.

The CI is perceived by the mainstream political and media establishment of the Czech Republic as a fair and acceptable right wing voice in the political spectrum of a liberal democracy.

This is fine by the CI. They enjoy their position as a 'happy warrior,' pushing the public and intellectual discourse — and the whole society — as far to the right as is reasonably possible. Born out of the resistance to Communist totalitarianism and having opposed socialism and moral relativism, the CI now fights against the ideologies of multiculturalism, radical feminism and political correctness. They fight for Western traditions and values and, above all, for ordered liberty. ■



Dr. Roman Joch

*is executive director of the Civic Institute (Občanský institut), a conservative think tank in Prague. Joch (1971) received an M.D. from the Charles University in Prague in 1996. He has worked as a fellow of the Civic Institute since 1996, becoming executive director in 2003. Joch lectures, gives commentary and publishes on political philosophy, international relations and national security issues. He is the author of a booklet *American Foreign Policy and the Role of the U.S. in the World (Prague, 2000)* and two books *Why Iraq? The Causes and Consequences of the Conflict* and *The Revolt against the Revolution of the Twentieth Century — a treatise on the political thought of Frank S. Meyer, an American libertarian-conservative thinker and former senior editor of National Review*. Joch was appointed to the Academic Council of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006 for a 4-years term and served on an Advisory Council of Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra, dealing with the Czech Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2009.*

The 4th Annual Vanenburg Meeting

May 8th - 10th 2009 | Budapest, Hungary

During the 20th century, Budapest has been the scene of horrific crimes against humanity. Under Fascist and Communist regimes alike, no efforts have been spared to try to destroy the Hungarian capital's traditional local cultures and Christian legacy.

Thus, it seemed appropriate for the Center for European Renewal (CER) to hold the 2009 meeting of the Vanenburg Society — titled **What's Left of Our Culture?** — in this magnificent city on the banks of the Danube. During walks up the Buda side of the city and down the river-side embankments of Pest, participants at this year's meeting could survey the remains of this former outpost of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For some, the story of Hungary could be viewed as the story of Europe, writ small.

Alvino-Mario Fantini

As in previous years, the 2009 Vanenburg Society meeting brought together conservative thinkers, scholars and writers from around Europe and across the Atlantic for three days of presentations, discussions and fellowship. Organized this year by the Hungarian members of the CER and sponsored by the XXI Century Institute and the House of Terror Museum Foundation (which provided a villa in the hilly part of the city), the meeting focused on the meaning of culture and explored its relationship to religion, economics, art and education.

There were five roundtable sessions over three days, with a plenary speaker providing a brief introduction to the topic of each session.

On *Friday* afternoon during the first session, participants addressed the topic *Culture: What is it? Have we lost it?* The American who gave the introduction began by considering several different ways to think about culture. Culture, he said, is obviously not a material substance. But it can be viewed as something people and societies do with their freedom. Culture is about “the good life lived in freedom,” he suggested, though it must also serve as the “guardrails of a society.”

He noted that not all conservatives understand or value the concept of culture. Neoconservative



Discussion Panel

followers of political philosopher Leo Strauss, for example, do not typically talk about culture, preferring instead to focus on the sovereignty of politics. This explains one of the mistakes that President George W. Bush made with Iraq: thinking he could change the institutions and structures of that country and then change the culture. In contrast, traditionalist conservatives like Russell Kirk adamantly believe that while politics is more important than economics, culture is more important than politics.

Another insight into the meaning of culture can be found by comparing the Ciceronian view of the *polis* (as something constituted by formal agreement among its institutions and members) with the Augustinian view (which sees it as something that emerges from the bonds formed by agreement on the object of love). Culture, then, is the consequence of a love that is shared among members of a community.

A lively discussion about these understandings of culture ensued, with some participants noting that the Left often ignores the idea of culture, while the Right seems to have discovered it only after the French Revolution. But most participants seemed to agree that the love that used to be held in common among members of a cohesive society today seems to have been forgotten — or, what is worse, privatized. In fact, along with the rise of the ‘liberal regime’ there has been growing belief in the principles

of ‘justice’ and ‘rights.’ As a consequence, the public sphere in which the Augustinian ‘love in common’ was shared has been replaced by impersonal contractual relations based solely on reason and choice.

To understand the erosion of culture, it is also important to consider the role of technology and science. Culture used to be passed down between generations, from fathers to sons, with the implicit understanding that some things were permanent and eternal. Today, however, technology makes us think that progressive change is the norm and that nothing is permanent. Conservatives need to challenge these ideas of permanent change and ineluctable progress. “We need to overcome the perspective that the future will be better than the past,” said one participant.

In addressing the problem of the erosion of culture, the role of education is fundamental. Progressive education policy, with its emphasis on independent freedom and relative values, has done much damage. It has undermined the teleological perspective of reality and left children and many young adults without answers to the most basic questions about human existence.

Fortunately, as one American participant observed, there are some encouraging developments in the field of education. In the US, there are ongoing attempts to revive

older forms of education, in addition to the highly successful 'home-schooling' movement. There are also now more than 700 'classical' schools. All of these developments are helping to counteract the legacy of the 'apostle of progressive education,' John Dewey.

Most participants agreed that without a renewal of education, there will be no restoration of the importance of culture in the development and growth of civilization — and the world will be reduced to barbarism. A Dutch academic explained that we should be aware of three types of neo-barbarism. First, there is the barbarism associated with 'pure capitalism,' which reduces all human beings to either producers or consumers. Second, there is the barbarism associated with ethical and moral relativism rooted in the nominalist revolution of the 14th century, which denied the existence of eternal essences of good and evil. Third, there is the barbarism associated with total dominance of the state—such as Nazism and other forms of totalitarianism—which reduce citizens to simple, dehumanized parts of a greater, corporate whole.

The session's closing statement came from a Dutch academic responding to numerous comments about the need to preserve different national cultures. "The mistake we are making is when we think of 'culture' in the plural," he said. "That is pure Herder Romanticism." He went on to elaborate that 'culture,' as it was to be understood during the meeting, has more to do with knowledge of virtue and of a life embodying those virtues. Culture has to do with a society made up of civilized men and women, regardless of background or national identity. "Virtuous men and women in Sweden are not different from those in America," he noted. In other words, what is important in the end is to have culture and not barbarism. He emphasized that this is what must be kept in mind throughout the meeting.

A second session that same afternoon took up the subject of *Culture, Cultus and the Place of Religion*. The Dutch lawyer who gave the introduction was purposefully provocative, drawing from writings designed to stimulate vibrant discussion. "European society is dying because wholesome Catholic culture has been replaced [by another]," he stated. After quoting several other conservative thinkers, many of whom lamented the decline of

European Christendom, he asked the group of participants, "How is it that [European culture] has been hollowed out from within?"

The discussion that followed took in various related themes — such as Europe's negative population growth, the growth of Muslim communities and the overall transformation from pre-modern to modern industrial societies, many of which increasingly have dismissed traditional religious practices as outdated superstitions. Several participants thought it important to note any discussion of Western civilization cannot solely be about Greek and Roman influences, or even Greco-Roman Christianity. When talking about culture — and about the universal ethos embodied in the idea of virtue — one is also talking about Chinese, Muslim and other cultures, as well.

Unfortunately, it is this tradition of virtue, around the world and through the ages, that has become weakened by the so-called process of modernization and globalization, noted some participants. And with the loss of religion, there has been a return to the barbarism discussed earlier, suggesting that civilization itself does indeed depend on religion. As one participant put it, "a post-Christian culture is not possible."

In the evening, the legacy of 20th century attempts to create barbaric post-Christian societies was described by the Director-General of the House of Terror Museum in Budapest. She then turned the floor over to a local Hungarian political scientist who gave participants an illuminating overview of *Conservative Politics in 21st Century Hungary*. After dinner, participants broke up into informal groups to continue discussions late into the evening.

On *Saturday*, the first session examined *Leisure, Culture and the 24-Hour Economy*. The introduction, delivered by a Danish academic, described the Greek idea of leisure as solely the mark of free men. But with the development and rise of the global capitalist economy, and the invasion of all spheres of life by what Juergen Habermas calls the "cash nexus," the idea of leisure has been practically destroyed. In fact, while the pursuit of wealth

has always been nominally important to some people, it is now a common pursuit for most societies, many of which increasingly find themselves in 'overdrive' with people expected to be available around-the-clock. The traditional idea of leisure has itself now become defined solely by consumption-based activities, rather than by contemplation, speculation or the enjoyment of 'high culture.'

During the lunch session, a German participant offered a solemn commemoration of the life and work of *Caspar Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing*, a founding member of the Vanenburg Society, who passed away in early 2009. His contributions to political thought in Germany and to the study of conservative political ideas were extensive and profound. This eulogy was followed by several informative Country Reports — on Hungary, the Czech Republic, Italy, France, Sweden and Bulgaria — which described the political, economic and cultural state of affairs in each country.

The afternoon session, introduced by a Hungarian academic, focused on the *Western Tradition after Communism*, exploring the ruinous legacy of Communism in the societies of Eastern Europe. In most cases, as the two Eastern European discussion leaders explained, not only were national economies destroyed but religious traditions were suppressed and indigenous local cultures destroyed. The legacy of those years is still felt in many countries. A formal dinner was held later in the evening at a traditional restaurant where participants were also treated to a fascinating presentation by a Danish art historian on Hungarian Art: Old and New, illustrated with colorful slides.



The final session *Sunday* morning took up practical concerns, addressing the question: *How to revitalize our Culture?* With the admonition “[Europe] is in decline,” a Dutch academic opened the session by offering a summary of the main challenges:

First, there needs to be a renewed focus on the importance of having and raising children. With population growth in Europe at below replacement levels, Europeans need to think urgently about how to reverse current trends. However, there are many obstacles, including the socio-economic systems and welfare states of Europe, which have facilitated the rise of childless couples. Another related problem, said the speaker, is that, “We’ve put our careers—and self-realization—first.”

Second, there needs to be a new emphasis on the role of education — and on the importance of rebuilding schools and universities across Europe. The facilitator noted that without falling into nostalgia, there must be a restoration of traditional European schools and a return to the classical idea of a university. The fundamental role of education in sustaining and renewing culture simply cannot be overstated.

Third, the most important task is ‘raising consciousness’ among Europeans about the many challenges being faced. For example, Europeans need to be better informed about the dramatic decline of the family, the continuing deterioration of schools and the ongoing debasement of Western culture. Informing others about these destructive trends should also be combined with a critique of both the welfare state *and* free-market capitalism. “We are not market fetishists,” the discussion leader reminded participants.

In tackling these different challenges, efforts should not be aimed at the general population. Rather, education and ‘consciousness raising’ should be aimed at young people—ideally, those between 18 and 25 years of age—with

leadership potential, young intellectual leaders who are capable of changing ‘mental direction.’ In short, said the speaker, “[W]e need to raise a new European intellectual elite.”

In closing, the speaker said that the CER and the annual Vanenburg Society meetings need to continue. The success of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) in the United States should serve as an inspiration, he said. The CER and the Vanenburg Society should strive to teach young Europeans about the meaning of the good life, the principles of a good society and the need for virtuous men and women.

After the final session, before farewells were exchanged, participants were taken by bus to a tour of the House of Terror Museum in downtown Budapest. This museum is the only one in world that presents the terror and fanaticism of both the Fascist and Communist governments in Hungary. It served as a moving reminder that when normative culture is lost, savage barbarism will emerge.

The 2009 Vanenburg Society meeting, like previous ones, was an opportunity to re-examine the principles, ideals and traditions that underpin Western civilization. By looking at the role and meaning of culture at this year’s meeting, participants were able to discuss how traditional principles and ideals have been subjected to sustained attacks over the latter half of the 20th century by the scourge of Communism in Eastern Europe and by progressive liberalism in Western Europe. The CER hopes that through the dialogue and cooperation fostered by the Vanenburg Society meetings, broad-based European efforts will be made to stand athwart this tide and renew European culture. ■



Alvino-Mario Fantini

is a writer living in Vienna, Austria. He previously worked for the World Bank. He has written for The American Spectator, The Far Eastern Economic Review, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Times. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Fantini holds Master’s degrees in international development, public policy and financial journalism. He is a member of the Philadelphia Society, serves on the board of The Dartmouth Review, and is a fellow of the 21st Century Trust and the Salzburg Seminar. He is a founding member of the Vanenburg Society.

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