

## **Konstanty Gebert zu Gast bei Lorenz Gallmetzer**

### **„From Solidarność to the Orange Revolution: Poland and the Ukraine”**

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#### **Rudolf Scholten**

I would like to welcome all of you to our today's invitation under the title **„From Solidarność to the Orange Revolution: Poland and the Ukraine”**. With this evening we start a new series called “Zu Gast bei ...”, and following that order I would first like to welcome our host of the night, Lorenz Gallmetzer. Before we start the discussion we see a short documentary which Lorenz Gallmetzer did recently in the Ukraine. But before doing so I would like to welcome our guest of honor. He is founder of a union which became part of Solidarność, co-founder of the Jewish Flying University, co-founder of the Polish Council for Jews and Christians, and namely columnist, reporter I was told of Gazeta Wyborcza. Welcome Konstanty Gebert. He was already here in 2003. At that time he was guest of Andreas Stadler who is with us tonight. In 2003 he was cultural attaché in the embassy in Warsaw, and is now in the team of our President Heinz Fischer. I want to thank the Kultusgemeinde for the cooperation. We have a very close cooperation, and we are very glad about that. And I would like to welcome the Polish Ambassador in Vienna.

#### **Lorenz Gallmetzer**

It is my first time here in the Kreisky Forum and I am very honored to have Mr. Gebert as my guest. Looking at the audience I feel somehow embarrassed because many, like Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi for instance, were active witnesses, if not actors in the story we are trying to discuss. The reportage that we have chosen to show was done for the Weltjournal, a couple of days before the third term of the election in the Ukraine, trying to understand the feelings, the mood and the soul of the people, but also the role of the United States, some non-governmental organisations and specially also the effect the previous revolutions in Serbia and in Georgia had on the Ukraine.

This was right before the real victory of the orange revolution in the Ukraine. I think that before we go into details we tried to at least put the question in this reportage about the role of Western societies, the American Dollars, or also the tactics that have been more or less the same, very organised although it was spontaneous in Belgrad 2000, in Georgia and the in Ukraine. I think we could go back and ask how come that it was Poland, the first country and the first democratic movement which was successful. We have seen Budapest in 1956, we have seen Prague in 1968 and a lot of other minor movements. But why was it Poland, why was Solidarność successful?

### **Konstanty Gebert**

Well, there is an ocean of answers to that. We can argue about that till kingdom comes. But just to pick up one theme that was present in this documentary. Yes, it was also money. The money that the Polish communist regime owed to the West, and which limited its freedom of manoeuvre, limited its capacity in the second half of the seventies when the opposition was just starting to engage in sharp repress of behavior. And this created the foothold we needed to convince people that they need not be afraid. This was the beginning. The second factor was a miracle. A Pole got elected Pope. I very vividly remember his first visit to Warsaw the summer of 1979 after he was elected Pope. Not only hundreds of thousands of people were there to greet him. We organised it all, the visit, the set-up, all that was organised by the church and volunteer service. And we suddenly discovered, we don't need them. We could cope with it ourselves. And also we discovered just how many we are, especially when watching the evening TV news which showed small groups of elderly peasant women as the main crowd that greeted the Pope. Well, half a million people were there and could see with their own eyes the difference between falsehood and reality. It was a combination of extremely propitious factors that did lead to an opening of the flood gates. Enough people were willing to stop being afraid. Enough people realised that yes, we are capable of self-organising. And the government had to be restrained enough because of its credit liability to the West. And then of course nobody remotely imagined what will happen, not even during the great August strike of 1980 which twice almost petered out. Twice they were on the verge of signing a deal, a local deal which would improve conditions either in the courtyard or in the city. It is only now in retrospect that we see a kind of historical logic in action. We were practical engineers trying to do things one step at a time.

### **Gallmetzer**

The role of the Polish Pope was maybe an emotional and even ideological symbol. But it was more than that. What was the creed and programmatic advantage that Solidarność for example could have from this? The Polish church in Poland itself, especially the international solidarity.

### **Gebert**

Well, this is the second stage. This is when Solidarność actually set up, to its own surprise becomes ten million. We never expected that, we never planned for that. I actually was quite worried. I had this naive vision, okay we have won, the revolution is over, now what we need to do is learn democracy. And you don't learn democracy in a ten million organisation, so I tried to keep my union out of Solidarność, which had my friends explaining years later that I was not an agent provocateur, but a bloody idiot. But once Solidarność got its speed, yes, the international support we got. And the fact that it was so ecumenical from the Vatican to socialist trade unions, from Berlinguer to Ronald Reagan. It was very difficult to pin us down. They are getting this particular political support because they are in their political interest. Yes, we were in the political interest of Berlinguer and Reagan and the socialist trade unions and the Vatican. There is not much those four parties could agree on, but they could agree on that freedom is better than tyranny. And this was essentially about as sophisticated as we ourselves were. We weren't much different from the people you saw on that screen. We knew what we do not want, and we had precious little idea about what it actually is that we want or indeed can do. I feel almost instant recognition when I watch the orange revolution, well this is barely a quarter century ago.

### **Gallmetzer**

How can you explain the difference to previous movements? How come that after this compromise with the regime, and the first so-called free election, a spontaneous but organised and sustained movement could come to the point to end up as a bloodless revolution.

### **Gebert**

First of all, the fundamental change towards non-violence took place immediately after the coup in the early weeks of post-December 13. Actually the military were expecting armed resistance. In the port city of Gdansk they prepared 1500 hospital beds for the wounded. They were expecting armed resistance, logically so. This is what Poles have been doing over centuries, right. We had cavallery charges against tanks. So this time we would be charging tanks in basked ball shoes, right. And had we done that I would not be here today. I don't know if I would be alive, but very probably I would still be a citizen of a communist Poland, possibly one in which the civil war is entering into its third decade. Mercifully we got smart. I think that historically one of the reasons was the experience of the second world war and especially the ultimately doomed Warsaw uprising of 1944 in which 200.000 people were killed in 63 days. So frankly, no, we did not believe that it is better to die standing than to live on your knees. We actually believed that it is better to live on your knees because then one day you will have the opportunity to live standing. There is no profit in dying standing. This was a surprise for the military. They went through us like a fist goes through a junk of butter, right through. So what next? The butter is still there. There is only so much you can do with a fist which is covered with butter. They had a problem. My first serious job in the underground was to track down three young workers that had stolen some dynamite from a factory, and they contacted us asking for orders whom are they to use the dynamite against, which tank, which ministry, which what. And I had to track them down, convince them not to use the dynamite and then the most difficult thing smuggle the dynamite back into the factory. Because you see, workers were not checked leaving the factory. But the contrary, the regime expected them to steal. Apart from everything else, a thief does not make a good resistance fighter. But they were checked on the way in because they might be smuggling leaflets. I was just thinking, forget communist Poland, if I would be caught trying to enter the factory with those sticks of dynamite no judge on the face of the planet would ever believe that I was simply restituting stolen factory property. This was the scariest thing I did in the underground. But that was a strategic decision. It was part history, part church teaching, and part the fact that we had actually discovered ways of doing things that made sense and still did not involve running around forests with a rifle, like producing underground newspapers, like organising self-education groups, like teaching workers to stand up for their rights. All this worked. Now fast forward to 1989. Why was the compromise possible? Because both sides were loosing control. It is as simple as that. The great strikes of summer of 1988 not only caught the government by surprise, they caught us by surprise. This was a new generation of workers. And interestingly enough, since the underground movement relied so heavily on personal trust this meant that if you were young you could not really fit in, nobody could vouch for you. So the young guys essentially said, okay forget those Solidarność guys, let's do something ourselves. We jumped on the bandwagon at the very last moment and said hello, we are the guys who are running the strike. But this was more or less the last moment when we could try to control a social movement. Similarly on the other side the entire structure of power was crumbling. On the one hand the secret police very candidly said okay, all this can yet be stopped, with violence yes, with killings yes, but it can be stopped. The minister of interior and the guy who was running the secret policy, asked the politburo, if we use violence are you willing to support us? And the politburo said yes and no and maybe, and that is when they started their contacts with Walesa. Both power structures were loosing control of their base, loosing influence. If something could be salvaged, that was the moment. And why a compromise? Because it is very easy today to project what we know now on then and say, as

say the opponents of the round table, and there are many of them in Poland, the round table is a sellout. Instead of negotiating with the communists you should have waited a year and the power would be out on the streets for the picking. Well, I was not that smart then. I have not heard many people that smart then. But more to the point, we voted in our semi-free elections on Tian An Men day. That was the alternative. And yes, it is possible that had we waited, power would be just picked up from the streets. So maybe we would have had a Havel as the Czechs had or maybe we would be shooting the Ceaucescus. It was not preordained.

### **Gallmetzer**

So by all estimation and respect to the spontaneous or very organised democratic movement how decisive was the fact that in Moscow changes were taking place since 1984/85, with Gorbachow, Glasnost, Perestrojka, first steps of reform and maybe also weakness, not so much implosion, but weakness of the Soviet system. Maybe this was decisive compared to 1968 or 1956?

### **Gebert**

It was both decisive and secondary. Decisive in the sense that without the change of power, had the Soviets resurrected another Tchernenko, the Polish communists would not be willing to negotiate. This was the crucial turning point. When Jaruzelski and his closest collaborators convinced the central committee to start the round table negotiations, what they did is they decided to have consultations among the local party organisations to have a feel for what the base wants. And they returned from the consultations, the members of the central committee said, hello we are not going to negotiate with the revolution. In plain speaking, our asses in the sling, we don't want to take that risk. To which Jaruzelski told them that Gorbachow had told him that this time the red army is not going to save their asses, they are in it on their own. This forced the party to negotiate. And ultimately of course this made the entire break down of the system possible. The Soviets could have stopped it. It would not have been effective, but it would have been bloody. But secondary in the sense that had there not been Solidarność and not only as yet another uprising but an underground that cannot be crushed, they would have no incentive to rethink their foreign policy. Why should they give up something they still control? So it had to be a combination of both. There had to be a factor outside the Soviet Union which made them loose control, and there had to be a leadership intelligent enough to realise that they cannot pay the price for reimposing control.

### **Gallmetzer**

We have seen the similarities. You said you feel like this is twentyfive years ago. What is the lesson? Are these more or less peaceful revolutions- rose, orange or whatever -, going to be supported by the European Union and the Americans especially in Ukraine? Is this interference right? Or is it an interference in internal affairs like Putin says? How long to the orange revolution in Moscow?

### **Gebert**

There has certainly been Western interference in the Ukraine by governmental support for non-governmental organisations there, by training of leaders, transfer of funds, political support. Frankly, unless and until this involves supporting criminal organisations I see no major problem in organisations in one country being supported by another country. And it is only fair to say that contrary to what the lady was telling us, Russia had invested much more money and direct political pressure into the Ukraine than the collective pressure of the West was able to mobilise. So there was interference on both sides. Of course, I would prefer a clean election with nobody interfering. But had that been possible in the Ukraine there would be no reason to interfere. The idea that the West has too many Euros and too many Dollars, so

that they don't know what to do with them, so just dump them on the Ukraine, doesn't strike me as terribly convincing. Also my movement was financed by the West in a much more direct way and with much more violation of international norms. We were an underground movement which was considered criminal by the government, and we were getting funds not only from Western NGOs or social movements but from governments, including the CIA. I did not know at that time that the money that was passing through my hands was CIA, but had I known I would have still accepted every Dollar. I needed that money. I had absolutely no moral qualms at having accepted it. I am very grateful, and I just hope I have the opportunity to repay the debt by passing on money into Kasakhstan or whatever. This interference, both in terms of money and in terms of political support, is important and can be vital, but it is a very new thing. One of the tragedies of Serbia was that during the war the democratic opposition could not get any support from the West - nd I mean any support - ince there was an embargo on Serbia. The independent radio B92 in Belgrade could not get a sat phone they wanted to equip a correspondent with to send him to Sarajevo so that each evening he could broadcast from Sarajevo to Belgrade about what is happening in that city. B92 was denied the possibility to get a sat phone because there was an embargo to Serbia. More suicidal than that you are already dead. It was in our fundamental interest to have the people of Belgrade realise what is happening in Sarajevo. So we learned the lesson. We are still learning it. There was more involvement in Georgia. It was essentially George Soros. There was not much governmental involvement there. My feel is that contrary to what some commentators would have said, Washington was much more worried by the perspective of destabilising the Caucasus than by the hope of replacing the aging dictator with that promising young figure. And time will tell whether he was such a great improvement. Ukraine, yes, there was substantial state involvement which countered even more substantial Russian state involvement. Eventually I think that the principle of non-interference in other people's affairs remains binding as long as they are other people's affairs. For me as a citizen of Poland it is certainly my affair whether our big neighbor to the East will be governed by a criminal with a prison record and with strings going all the way to Moscow or by a candidate who at least does not have those defects. It is my affair. And I am willing to interfere in my affair to make sure that the bad guys don't win. The fact that somebody is an undesirable choice does not make the alternative a miracle. I assume all of us have had the experience during elections of holding our nose and voting for the least bad candidate.

### **Gallmetzer**

The second question was when is the orange revolution in Moscow?

### **Gebert**

Not anytime soon. First of all, Russia is probably the one country in the world where you really can't interfere from the outside, it is much too big. The physical size of the country, the sheer scope of the resources that would be necessary to make a change is daunting, even if you are willing to disconsider that you are meddling in the internal affairs of the world's largest nuclear arsenal. I wouldn't. I very much want to see regime change in Moscow. I don't like provoking bears with nuclear weapons. But second, precisely because it is so huge the structural imbalance between the central authorities and those who could challenge them is so great that I do not see an orange revolution getting the momentum, getting the power necessary to force a regime change. In 1991 during the Yazov coup more people were shopping at the GUM than defending the White House. And that was Moscow. And now think about the provinces. But Putin is not taking any chances. The first consequence of the orange revolution is a vicious crackdown on media that you have not been hearing about because it is now a crackdown in the provinces. The media in the big cities are already at the government or mafia control, or it does not make any difference which one it is. Now it is

going down to the provinces with the secret police visiting newspapers that have had contacts with the West, and Poland is West, so say newspapers I have been working with. By the way you know that this Polish visitor is an American spy. He is not taking any chances. The crackdown is continuing. I don't expect anything terribly dramatic, Putin is not an idiot. But our hopes for a more democratic and liberal Russia are dashed for the time being. Not for always, of course. And I am not a prophet. I can't judge how long will he be able to continue doing this. But for the time being those hopes are dashed. And frankly this breaks my heart. Because as opposed to all the previous times in history, you have a generation in Russia where democracy was almost within reach, and then they suddenly discovered that the post has been moved way beyond reach. All those generations did not have much knowledge about the outside world, and basically believe that this is Russia, you cannot change it. Today's Russians are extremely savvy about the world, and they know exactly that there is no reason why they should be condemned to live in an ineffective and authoritarian and corrupt society. No objective reason. And still they see their hopes dimming by the minute, as we speak. It breaks my heart. They are wonderful people, they are very brave people, they have been fighting much bigger odds than we had, running much bigger risks, and they are in for another defeat. The crucial question is just how many defeats can a society take before it goes nuts. I am impressed with their patience.

### **Gallmetzer**

Maybe we can open up in the general discussion. I invite you to ask questions.

### **Question**

When you mentioned Solidarność you mentioned also the Polish regime. How do you see the tension between being friendly to the communists, kind of smothering them to death or being tough to them and threatening them.

### **Gebert**

Excellent question. I don't really think that doing anyone to death in any way is a very sensible strategy because the person being killed eventually realises what is happening. Of course, the American military build-up was a main factor which accelerated the decomposition of Soviet power, and therefore influenced the necessity for a Gorbatschow to take new stock on the situation. I was answering why in the seventies, before all that build-up, the Polish government hadn't not cracked down on us. And this clearly was an example of the European strategy working. Although as far as I know the Europeans instead of saying what a great victory, we wasted 40 billion Dollars, but Konstany Gebert is out of jail, they did not seem to care about me out of jail, they wanted their money back. I don't think it was an intentional strategy, it was a complete by-product, but it worked. There are not fixed rules. One has, I think, in dealing with dictatorships simply take the engineer's approach, see what works, this tool doesn't work, let's take another tool. It is not about ideology, it is about practicalities. But one has to be willing to use the entire arsenal, both ends, which for instance in today's situation means that the Europeans should be willing to threaten Teheran and the Americans should be willing to do business with Teheran, whatever works. And I think on both sides there is still too much of a commitment to what, well Mars and Venus.

### **Question**

I am certainly not an expert in the Ukraine. But for me there is a general problem in all these developments. Those who are the new leaders are never the best ones. And then here we receive them as if everything was okay, and we are supporting them. We also discourage somehow the better ones from the next generation.

## Gebert

I am not sure if I agree with you. We had a disastrous first president. Actually, the first president Jaruzelski was not all that bad, his successor was a disaster. But the Czechs had an excellent first president. So first choice need not always be worst choice. What regards Juschtschenko, he is problematic, but he is the legitimate winner of a contested and democratic election. He deserves at least the same kind of credit as the apparently legitimate winner of an apparently legitimate election who is running the country next door to the East. We cannot deny Juschtschenko the legitimacy And Juschtschenko's democratic credentials are, I would say, at least as good as others. Second, I don't think it really matters in the sense that whatever the Western reaction to this or that leader will be. It can matter to his ego, it can matter to his supporters. Ultimately it is almost irrelevant to the future of their project. It is what their supporters will say of them six months after the revolution, a year after the revolution, that matters. It is not about what we think of Juschtschenko. It is about just how much do we care about a democratic Ukraine. Because this might be the only chance we get. A democratic Ukraine is not assured, an independent Ukraine is not assured. Half of the population of the country has serious second thoughts about whether they want to be independent at all. This is not going to be solved by a split, this is not Czechoslovakia. So either or. Either we believe that is in our fundamental interest that Ukraine remains independent and democratic, and this means a lot of money, a lot of political effort, and a lot of will to stand up to Putin. Or else, we don't think so. We think that we can live with a union of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, de facto if not de iure, sitting on the Eastern border of the EU. And then we can save the expense and the effort and learn Russian fast. I mean I should say it is a good thing to learn Russian anyway. Of course, I am exaggerating, and that is foreseeing the Russian invasion any time soon. But it really is either or. Either we support what seems to be Ukraine's best chances now with money, with political support, with solidarity in their confrontation with Moscow. At the moment I think that what Brussels is hoping for is that this is an exotic problem of who would go away. It is not going away, it is rooted in geography. And with what regards Juschtschenko's esteem, a very mixed bag. Juschtschenko himself personally is to the best of my knowledge honest and he was a relatively competent central banker. This is a good thing because it means he has basic administrative skills which is more than some other presidents I could name. Having said this good thing about Juschtschenko, it is very clear what Juschtschenko is against. It is also very clear what values he believes in. I believe him when he says he is for freedom and democracy, and free enterprise. It is supremely unclear how he wants to get from here to there. It is not as if he is keeping it a secret, I don't think he knows. We certainly didn't know when we found ourselves in his situation. We muddled through. He will be muddling through as well. But his prime minister is corrupt. The Russian accusations against her are not forgeries. She says to her defense that a) everybody else is, and b) she stopped. This is better than most other corrupt businessmen. For the prime minister of a democratic country to my eyes is not good enough. But then again there are some prime ministers whom I will not name who seem to have amassed bigger fortunes than Ms. Timoschenko in at least as doubtful circumstances. And at least she doesn't own the TV. She is a shady character, and it doesn't augur extremely well that she was able to force herself in the position of prime minister. Yes, Juschtschenko promised her, but then the consensus seemed to be that she realised that she will be a liability. It might have been vanity. it might have been self interest, it might have been sheer lust for power. But there she is, she will be a liability. But most importantly, Juschtschenko does not come with an army of personnel. We in Poland in a way were immensely lucky to have had martial law. We had a hundred thousand strong underground movement, and we were able to test our guys just exactly how good are they, at risk management, at administration, at political prognosis. So when we sat at the round table our team was easily better than theirs. And our first administration was easily better than theirs or any that followed. Juschtschenko

simply does not have this kind of people. He will have to rely on the apparatus which is there. Of course, it is corrupt. Of course, as we know it has been engaged in illegitimate actions. This does not necessarily mean that this is the way they want to run their lives. We were able to integrate a substantial part of the communist party, and discovered that people who had done bad things with their lives actually enjoyed the chance of being clean for a change. But for that he needs role models, political power is money. He has neither. And very soon he will start – probably has – to make practical decisions like, okay he promised to stop corruption. Stopping corruption first of all involves paying your cops, prosecutors and judges much more. To get that money means no pay rises for the steel workers who froze their asses to get him elected. Is this the Ukraine we fought for? So that cops get more money, and the man in the street gets screwed as always? I could rouse a rabble with half a dozen slogans like that. And we have seen this kind of political phenomena happening. So I think he is in trouble. I think he needs help. I think that Poland has been admirable in the way it has mediated. And I think that there is not one chance in hell that Poland can do it alone. The Americans are otherwise occupied, for once that might not be a very bad thing. So it is either EU or nobody. And in theory I would say hey, what a great moment for Europe, if it were not for the fact that I remember somebody say, l'heure de l'Europe a sonné, 13 years ago. That cost a quarter of a million people their lives. And I see this same lack of seriousness in the European approach to a completely new reality as I saw 13 years ago. In a way yes, it is unfair. We are just getting our house in order. We have just added a new annex. We brought in the extended family. And now we are supposed to drop all that and go rescue somebody that we barely know. It is unfair. Life is. But if we decide to abandon Ukraine we should at least know exactly what the consequences will be. And they will be pretty scary.

### **Question**

I totally agree that the Ukraine needs help, and I agree that the European Union should help. What is your position on the tricky issue of what happens after revolutions? How much should you collaborate with the old regime, how much do you need to remember things? We have different experiences in the Czech Republic, Poland. We can talk about the Austrian case after the second world war. What is the best strategy from your experience?

### **Gebert**

I would say that collecting all the different experiences from Poland to Austria after the war, to Spain after Franco, to the Czech Republic, to Greece, to whatever, the logical conclusion is don't have dictatorships because they have messy aftermaths. I have not found one way which I would find morally, politically and aesthetically satisfactory. Each of the solutions endorsed seems absolutely fraud with danger, and Murphy's Law applies. Everything that can go wrong will. And then we also need to define ourselves. The policy of the thick line that you referred to did not mean that we want to forget the past. What it meant and what Mazowiecki meant when he said it September 11, 1998, in the Polish parliament when he assumed the position of prime minister. He said, from this moment on we are responsible, we cannot be responsible for the past, but we are responsible for the future. It did not mean that we want to forget the past, cover it up, and not be interested. I haven't seen one single instance where the past could have been forgotten. I remember being invited by the mayor of Zvornik, a Bosnian town in Serb occupied Bosnia, for the glorious ceremony of blowing up a Turkish mosque, which was standing there from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And the mayor said, finally we had our revenge. You don't bury a past, you don't forget a past, you can domesticate it, you can housebreak it, you can treat it like the kind of old annoying aunt that it has to have its appearance every now and then, but still you can live with her. But if anybody has had an old annoying aunt and try to forget her you know the consequences are dire. And the same is true of the past. I tend to believe that overall the Polish solution was not a bad one. We decided this is not a revolution,



that to the extent it is possible we are maintaining the continuity between the previous communist state and the new independent Poland, because for instance otherwise laws on everything would have to be passed from scratch. There was this wonderful idea of declaring the Polish People's Republic illegal. And I would be very happy that it be declared illegal, it was a nasty state. But that would mean that all the laws passed in the Polish People's Republic are illegal as well. Of course, lawyers would make a killing. And I probably still could not have a passport because people could not figure out what law applies to giving me a passport. So we could not declare the Polish People's Republic illegal. Therefore we had to accept that its laws are still binding unless amended by democratic parliament. We decided not to declare communism illegal. Three million adult Poles were members of the communist party in its hayday. You do not build a democracy which is based on the exclusion of three million people. But this meant we were willing to accept a moral charge. The bad guys got unpunished. We decided to limit access to secret police files. Under the martial law those who could have access were either people who were victims of the regime or bona fide researchers, historians, journalists. And also there was a special vetting system for a number of high positions in the state. When somebody was a candidate for this high position he had to make a statement whether he was or not collaborator of the services. For example, if I were to run for parliament I would have to make such a legally binding statement. Now if I declare that I had been an agent this does not bar me from running, but it has to be on all the electoral material, as an information which is important for voters. We had people in the previous elections, like an independent candidate for president who admitted not only that he had been an agent, but at having been an agent of communist economic intelligence in the 1980's which to my eyes qualifies him to the lunatic asylum, and still got 18% of the vote. But if somebody states that he or she was not a collaborator of the services and is proven to have lied, then he would not go to jail but for five years he will be prevented from holding any elected position. I found the system admirable. But all this is skirting one fundamental problem. The transitions are not only about procedures, laws, respect of minorities and whatever. Transitions are fundamental psychological experiences. And what we failed to realise in Poland in 1989 is you do not make even a transition, let alone a revolution, without taking the bastille, without having a symbolic event that will have the same psychological impact as say December 13, the day that Jaruzelski pulled out a stance. We were extremely careful not to take any bastille, not to provoke the big bad bear. And in doing so I think we were limited by our own psychology. People who were sitting at the round table for two and a half months, us win, them loose, realising that they know that we know that they loose. After two and a half months of that our desire for vengeance is over. I remember when a reporter for Warsaw TV wanted to interview on one of the first days of negotiations one of the Solidarność leaders. It so happens that this reporter run during martial law one of the truly most outrageously disgusting propaganda programs in which he specialised in slandering people who are in jail or in the underground, spreading juicy gossip about what the wives do while those guys are in the underground, slime. This guy was running the government's TV team at the roundtable. And he walks up to Fraseniuk, puts a microphone in his face and says, so Mr. Fraseniuk, would like to comment for Warsaw TV today's negotiations. Fraseniuk looks down on him, also physically down, the reporter was sitting rats size, and says, you know what, when I was in jail they made us watch your programs, and I promised myself that when I go out I am going to track down the son of a bitch and I am going to spit in his face, and now I am looking at you and I see there is nothing to spit on. And then cool as a cucumber he delivered his political commentary.

### **Gallmetzer**

And this was broadcast?

## **Gebert**

No, this was not broadcast. But it was recorded by one of our cameras and eventually got out. You get this kind of diet for two and a half months, all desire for revenge was over, which enabled us to be magnanimous with them. Beautiful. Except that 40 million Poles were not present at the roundtable. They did not have the psychological experience that nothing will be the same as before. They did not have the one symbolic day when they could see in their eyes the fear they have felt for 50 years. We did not give them anything, except yes, we have built a free, independent Poland. That is not enough. And the fact that frustration fever has gripped Poland once again, a journalist has taken out from the Institute of National Remembrance, which is the Polish state institution which inter alia is the custodian of the secret police files, and released a list of 162.000 names which is the total address list of the personal files in the custody of the institute. These include files of secret police functionaries, secret police informers, and people whom the secret police would like to turn into informers. By reading the list there is no way you can tell who is who. And the overwhelming majority of the people on that list are obviously bad guys, either secret police functionaries or informers. My name happens to be on the list because the police tried to draft, to turn me during one of the interrogations. I can say I wasn't turned, I remained true. I got the right to demand that anybody believe me just because I say so, because had I been an agent this is exactly what I would say. So this puts me in a situation in which I should check my file. I refused to do this until now because I do not want to know who informed on me. I know from a historian who by chance had read my parent's files that the person who informed on them was my mother's closest friend. For years month after month she would write monthly progress reports about how they are doing, how their marriage is doing, does my father have a lover, was my mother reading. I don't want to know that. Twenty years ago I would have paid all the money in the world to get my file, because this would have meant security. I would have known whom to mistrust. And also I would not have spared myself the pleasure of punching that person on the nose. But you don't give bloody noses now. It is over. The war is over. So I would be left with the kind of horrible feeling of what do I do. Do I pretend that nothing happened? Do I make a public scene and say I refuse to shake your hand? Do I say I forgive you? None of that is true. I don't want that knowledge. But more to the point, I refuse to be put in the position in which I have to prove my innocence. It is not fair for anybody to have to prove their innocence. What I did is, I made a public statement about being on the list and why, saying that I would be more than happy to sue anyone who will dare to say in public that I was an informer, and the court can have access to my file, and have them try to prove that there are allegations. But I am a journalist, I am a public figure and I know exactly what is in my file, without reading it, because I know exactly what I did. For me it is easy. But imagine if your name is Joe Kowalski. There are 42 Joe Kowalskis on the list, because the list, of course, does not give any identifying details, not even birth dates. You don't know if the Joe Kowalski on the list is you or not. That is a common name. And then imagine that you had a conversation with someone 30 years ago that later you said, oh shit I should not have really said that, that guy might have been an agent. So what do you do then? You go and clear your name. You ask for your file. The bottom line is, if somebody who is an opponent would be listening to me tonight he would say, well it all figures, he was at the roundtable where the deal was struck, then for 15 years he was enjoying the benefits of that deal, he is not unemployed, is he, and now that finally a brave person has released the files this guy is trying to protect his ass. And the only thing I can do is expect that some people who know my biography will refuse to believe this. The point is I have lost control of my life, it does not belong to me any more. It is out there in the imagination of other people. And frankly I never expected to get any recognition for what I did in the underground, because I got what I wanted, I got a free country. This is what I did it for. And I was rewarded exactly as I hoped. But neither did I ever expect that I will have to explain my life and justify myself. So this I consider a bad

solution. But then I think what would have happened had I been somebody whose life has been broken by the secret police, somebody being blackmailed, or threatened, or lost a job, or could not get a passport abroad to visit someone whom you would never visit again? Not everybody is like Jazek Kuron who was unable to hate the communists even when they refused to grant him one visit from prison to see his wife who was dying. They did not even allow him that. But he managed not to hate them. Well I wonder, if it happened to me. Would I not hate and would I not want and have a legitimate right to discover the bastards? And if somebody gets hurt in the process, well it is a pity but it can't be helped. At the end of the day I find myself in the ridiculous position when I can not trust my own judgement. Not a pleasant place to be in.

### **Gallmetzer**

We had a conversation earlier on this. What does it mean that 160.000 names were published now and by whom they were published, and is this a kind of political manœuvre?

### **Gebert**

The guy who released those names is a personal acquaintance who was an extremely brave student activist in the 1970's, one of the very, very best. By chance when martial law struck he was abroad. So he never became what he should have become, one of the leading figures of the opposition. When he returned to Poland in 1989 it was all over. The emigré did not have a chance. So he became a journalist, wrote more and more radical right-wing columns, and eventually released this list. We are in election year. The right-wing has made him one of its battle forces, in fact practically the only battle force. I have not heard intelligent programs about the forming health care, the tax system, no clear ideas where do we stand in relation to Brussels or Washington or Moscow for that matter. So there are two possible scenarios. One is that he has done it, the milk is spilled already. There can be two imaginable scenarios. In one the frenzy will wip enough support for the right wing, sailing to power with an absolute majority of votes. The other scenario is, which I think is slightly more plausible, that the post communist gain half a million votes. Anybody who feels threatened by opening files, and many people legitimately feel threatened, there is a lot of bastards out there, will vote communist, because the communists are the only guys who can be relied on not to open the files. In fact, he may have just prevented a right-wing victory. So these are the two possible scenarios. The third scenario which is so absurd that I would not even dare to say it in public in Warsaw but here nobody will tell is, that people become so disgusted with it all that they will actually vote for the merging political formation of the center built around the old party of Mazowiecki, Geremek, intelligent people from the former right-wing section of Solidarność, and some decent people from the post communists. I don't really believe in this. I don't think this formation has one chance in a hell of getting the 5% vote they need to get one MP into parliament. Because the common sense electorate seems to have lost hope. But I am in Vienna so I can keep dreaming.

### **Question**

The problem that I see is what had been the motives of Western governments, and particularly the United States government in supporting the Juschtschenko movement? The state department, and various other governmental agencies have stated, we did not interfere because we wanted to have a specific outcome, we just supported the specific process meaning democratic elections. If this had indeed been the case I think it would have been fine. But we can't believe it was. It seems the United States does have a strategy to support the process if it does produce the outcome they want to have. A very vivid example of that is to compare Georgia and Azerbeidjan in the fall of 2003. We had the presidential elections in Azerbeidjan in October, we had the elections in Georgia in November. There were hardly any

protests against massively falsified elections in Azerbaijan by the United States government, by the Council of Europe, by the European Union, because all these actors involved had an interest in bringing Aliyev to power. There was however an interference in Georgian affairs because the outcome was not the one that the Western governments liked to get. So we have to ask ourselves what was the real motive. Was it really the motive to bring about democracy in Ukraine? Of course it was not central, the crucial interest. Maybe as a spinoff effect, yes, quite welcome. But the real objective certainly was to wrack the Putin project of re-integrating Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine to start what he thinks of as the future integration center. That is a legitimate interest for the United States government. I am not naive. I do accept that as a legitimate interest. But we should be careful to accept the ideology that the United States involvement in Ukraine was about democratisation. It was about something different. And the only problem that I see now is, what message does it send to the other peoples of the other successor countries of the former Soviet Union. The Western institutions, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United States are losing their credibility as agents of democratisation if they apply double standards. And that is actually what they have done in the space of the former Soviet Union.

### **Gebert**

I can't disagree with anything you said but my slightly blesy answer is, so what? It is obvious that US supports democratisation when it fits its interests. And very seldom does it support democratisation when it doesn't fit its interests. So what else is new? We had Pinochet, we had the Shah. The point is that not to make an icon out of Western intervention. And I don't think the CIA was supporting me with money because they liked my looks and my democratic aspirations. They wanted to kick the Russians hard. I had no quarrel with that. I don't expect the US to be a standard bearer for democracy. It is not a bluff, or if it is, it is everybody's bluff. I didn't see the US protesting terribly against human rights violations in Tchetchnya, not out of love of Putin but out of fear of destabilising a crucial, potential ally or adversary. The US did not protest against human rights violations in Turkish Kurdistan. The US itself is involved in violating human rights in Iraq. Having said that when I go to lunch I look at the menu, and so what else is there on the menu but Western countries which occasionally also intervene in favor of democracy. The good thing would be to have Western public opinion more sensitive to this, and putting more pressure on its governments to do more of it. But are we really expecting the West to consistently support democracy everywhere and at every price? I don't think that is realistic. I don't think that societies of the Western countries would stand for it. It is a dangerous business. I agree with your analysis. But so what?

### **Question**

Do you want to say to a Uzbek human rights fighter so what? You see, some day we do intervene, some day we do not. It is a question of credibility.

### **Gebert**

We can build it. And by say supporting democracy in Ukraine we have made one small step in that direction, and very much like to see some support for democracy in Azerbaijan. Sure. I haven't encountered anybody who thinks that Russia or indeed Brussels is a standard bearer of democracy. The United States and alliances of states have a vital interest, and they act in their interests, and they much prefer the situation when acting on their interest they also have democracy to a situation where they won't. They don't. I can see a gradual, an incremental change. We tend to support democracy more often than we did in the past. But we are in bed with some pretty nasty people, starting with Putin. I don't think I would be very happy to see the United States or the EU engage all their resources into supporting a democracy movement

in Russia fighting against Putin. The global consequences could be more disastrous than the global profits. But then again, I am not sure if I would say that if I were a Russian democrat.

### **Question**

I have a provocative question which might lead us away from this very interesting discussion. When will the Polish troops pull out of Iraq?

### **Gebert**

Your question is really about who wins the elections, and then what kind of foreign policy will the new government have. I rather expect the right wing to win the elections. I don't have the slightest idea what kind of foreign policy will they have. In general the war in Iraq is deeply unpopular amongst Polish public opinion, deeply and superficially unpopular. Most Poles, if asked is it a good thing that our troops are in Iraq, will answer no. And if asked should we pull out right now, the answer would also be no. Why? Because Poland tends to treat its military alliances seriously. Our intervention in Iraq has very little to do with Iraq or Iraqi oil or Polish contracts in Iraq. This is ridiculous. It has everything to do with an attempt to build military credibility with the US. There is no credible threat to Polish independence today, and I don't see one arising in the near future. But we live in a pretty nasty neighborhood, and we believe that our independence was assured in the inter-war period, and it ended the way it ended. I am not also very sure that the Americans would be willing to die for Bialystok. And I certainly don't want to put that to test. But I am even less sure about our closer neighbors willing to do that. I do remember Mazowiecki resigning from his position as human rights rapporteur in the former Yugoslavia after Srebrenica and saying, that after Srebrenica as a Pole he feels less secure in Europe. At that point Srebrenica had better security guarantees than Poland. All we had was Partnership for Peace at that point, that was 1995, which meant that if a member of the Partnership is threatened the other members of the Partnership will consult. Srebrenica had ironclad guarantees. The UN troops in Srebrenica did actually request an air raid. Their request was rejected because it had been faxed on the wrong form. I am not making this up. They had used the wrong form to request an air intervention, and UN headquarters in Zagreb rejected their request because of the wrong form. We are in NATO, we are in the EU. A generation from now it will be obvious that Poland is part of Europe in the same sense that Austria or France is, and will be obvious for Austrians and French that therefore Poland has to be defended if a threat will arise in the way that Austria or France will be defended. There is no threat either. But no Polish government with our history can afford to take the risk of minimising a potentially credible military alliance. And this is why Polish public opinion although against the war is also against withdrawing the troops. The question is what will the right wing government do when in power. My guess is, not much. They will be elected, this is not an issue that brings people out on the streets, starting a crisis with Washington is not a good way of starting a new government. Maybe there will be a new UN empowering resolution which would give us the alibi to continue. And maybe we will think of something else creative. But I don't really see Polish troops withdrawing in the near future.

### **Gallmetzer**

I have one suspicion related to my friend Gerhard Mangott. I don't think the Americans wanted to destabilise only Putin with this operation in Ukraine, but they wanted to destabilise the European Union. Because now we have got a problem with the Ukraine. My question is, do you think that they belong to Europe? Do you think that both parts of them are European in their culture and tradition? Do you think that it is the same thing, integrating the Poles or a Soviet republic, and would that be something in quality different from all the other integrations we have had? Just one word to the Russians. I used to be a correspondent in

Moscow. Whenever we thought there might be some movement against the government or for democracy, the Russians always told us, after the experience we made with the October revolution we will never have any revolution again..

### **Gebert**

From your lips straight to God's ears. I don't want another Russian revolution either. Frankly I think the idea that what the Americans were after was destabilising the EU by promoting democracy in Ukraine somewhat preposterous. If the EU is destabilised by democracy in the Ukraine we made the wrong choice. Although obviously both state department and the White House were not unhappy about seeing the Europeans in an ice pickle. But we have not only Washington to blame for that. It takes two to tango.

### **Gallmetzer**

Excuse me, but if added it to Turkey and then ...

### **Gebert**

I am coming to the real question. Not integrating Ukraine into Europe will not be remotely easy and might prove disastrous for the European Union. I see no fundamental objection against integrating Ukraine, both parts of it, into Europe. I see a practical objection. We do not know just how much Europe can take. Europe is in the process of digesting us, and will get a heavy case of indigestion. This is not going to be easy. Rumania, Bulgaria, Croatia will be relatively minor problems compared to us, because of the weakness of those countries. Poland is strong enough to create a major problem in the EU, because an EU with Poland is not simply training relatives to behave, it is a different EU, it is a different ball game. We are a player, we are not a consumer. And we might play the game wrong. There is no way in my belief that the EU can avoid integrating Turkey because of the consequences of slamming the door in their nose at the last moment. I frankly am extremely enthusiastic about seeing a Muslim nation integrate into Europe. I think it will do not only the Muslim world but Europe itself a lot of good. But if we had not had the precedent of the promises made to Turkey, if Turkey were to apply today I would said no, we don't know how much the structure can take. And we really don't know. We will be finding out as it develops. The ideal situation would be to put Ukraine in deep freeze. You guys all go into suspended hibernation for fifteen years until we get our act together, and in fifteen years we will pick up the conversation. That will be best. Not going to happen. I think that while avoiding the trap that we laid for ourselves, you laid for yourselves, they laid for themselves, you guys are also latecomers in the EU, avoiding the trap they laid for themselves by making promises to Turkey, we should not repeat the same process with the Ukraine. But we cannot deny the Ukraine its hope of becoming a member of the EU because just like in the case of slamming the door to Turkey the consequences will be disastrous, which does not mean that the consequences of integrating Ukraine or Turkey, or Poland for that matter, are going to be a piece of cake. But it is not a case of choosing the green scenario. It is a case of avoiding the most evident disaster even if this implies that another disaster might be in the offering. This is the price of being successful. There has never been a political project so backbreakingly successful as the European Union. It should not have worked, it should not have functioned, it does. Small wonder that everybody wants in. So where should the borders of the European Union be? I don't have the slightest idea. As much as it takes without making it crumble under its own weight. Again the engineer's approach, not the scientist's, not the theoretician's. Check what works and move on and on with unavoidable mistakes. And also, just as a concluding note to that, I bring you to this a personal bias which is very strong. I have developed an ethical principle that says that somebody who has lived through 1989 does not have the moral right to be a pessimist. It is as simple as that. Until the dying days of the communist empire we never

really expected we will live to see the day. I was hoping that it all goes well, my kids one day might really live in a free country. And I was considered a reckless optimist. So if 1989 worked, and not only 1989, the last 15 years from my perspective were a stunning Polish success. We never had it so good and we call it history. If it could have worked, and just think of all the things that could and should have gone wrong and didn't, then maybe the logical approach to history is expect disaster and get a pleasant disappointment every 20 years. Maybe this approach is wrong, maybe actually we can do better. But as I said this is a very personal bias. I do not expect people who did not have the experience of 1989 share in it. But it is not only me. Look at what happened in Poland between the second and third round of the Ukraine elections. Think of the bloody civil war Poles and Ukrainians fought during world war two. About at least 150.000 dead on both sides. Think about Lwow which was and still is the most Polish city there is. Think about the half million Ukrainians deported by Poles and ethnic cleansing after the war. Think about this package and then imagine in Warsaw you had for over a month hundreds of young Poles demonstrating for democracy in the Ukraine, day after day, holding a 24 hour day vigil in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Warsaw. My son was freezing his ass off under his jacket in this tense city of Juschtschenko supporters. The first day he came there, pulled out a Polish flag. He got applauded and was distributing autographs. Two months earlier he'd get a bloody nose. This is not a small thing. This genuinely is not a small thing, this is not something you could orchestrate on either side. It was one of those very rare moments when nations have the freedom to act and act decently. Normally we feel that if we give nations freedom to act the result is a bloody mess. Occasionally people actually are decent. This is one of those occasions. And I don't think we can afford to waste it.

### **Gallmetzer**

Thank you Konstanty for your analysis, for your views, and specially for this pragmatic optimistic future vision that you have. Thank you all very much.