



**Daiva Tamosaityte**

## The price of boredom

Life in Scandinavian countries: a bore? Too few beggars, too few violations of the law etc. Has the future of enlarged Europe to lie in the "excitement" in a sharp division of society in rich and poor? Daiva Tamosaityte questions the past and future of the enlarged European Union. A view from Lithuania.

I decided to write a non-competitive article under the heading "Changing Lithuania In Changing Europe" – not one for which bureaucrats from the EU after reading it would pat me on the shoulder, saying "Good girl!", and because of my straight shooting give a grant. No, I would write as a crank, whose strange and old-fashioned prattle to the friendly train of people passing by would look like the desperate mooing of a poor cow who didn't fit within the five percent of the limit, which has been fixed by Brussels for our animal farms, and now is rapidly disappearing into the distance.

May 1st of the year 2004 marks an historical moment, and to properly realize the meaning of the date is not yet possible, but intuition suggests that many things will change enormously. First of all, we realize that a great turning point in international foreign policy took place, and it was a tremendous success for us. The three predators – Russia, Austria, and Germany – turned into sugary lambs, the USA stretched their hand out to press ours (NATO), and with Poland we'll work together toward a union again (EU). This is a fundamental, truly overwhelming move on the chessboard, but both in life and in the political game of chess nobody always plays only with the white chess pieces. So, it is better to follow the lead of the grand-masters, i. e. to check all the possible forward moves and to foresee emergency measures in order not to be checked ourselves all of a sudden while sitting in a euro-café and drinking obligatory beer.

To foresee who and what is making the plans and has expectations from this expansion is perfectly possible, because history teaches us that the one who orders the music, is the king of the party. Soon after the ten new members joined the EU, BBC World aired an international forum in which officials of the highest ranks from the old and new countries participated. The television broadcasting was led by an expert, but it still was disappointing because of the chaotic atmosphere and the inability to delineate a subject: everybody was talking from his or her own bell-tower, and it was evident that even ministers do not know what to do with the newcomers, especially how to solve the immigration problem. The forum was remarkable solely because of the fact that it was broadcast live, that is, before anybody had time to hold back emotions and to hide himself or herself properly under the mask of political correctness. Out of the mass of contradictory "proposals", an idea slowly emerged, tacitly yet obstinately hanging in the air: the old Europe was

adopting so many foster-children, and it didn't know what to do with them. And besides, they are hungry, they snivel, they need everything and, of course, they are terribly ill mannered. The "old-residents" for the time being employed the term "kids" for describing us, and during the whole program used it like a magic word. The atmosphere and statements showed "how welcomed we are" over there; it went on and one listener lost patience (*a propos*, he was a black man from some country in Africa) and said: "Hey, you are egoists, gentlemen. You are preoccupied only with yourselves, but not with those kids. You are not inviting them into your family to take care of them, as it is supposed to be." The commentary was followed by an irritable silence – evidently, the former colony had missed its chance to keep silent. – and I felt how my lips started to twitch as if bad guys were going to rob me of a toy...

Nobody discusses the real reasons for expanding the EU (e. g., merging lobbies plus the automatic growth of their capital) and, perhaps, nobody will ever know, though there are a lot of secondary reasons for this, and these are constantly under common consideration. Of course, the ideal aims of good will are very important, but whether they will result in communal intercourse or not and what will happen with all of this, nobody knows. Up now for the last 10–15 years, many bridges were being built between Lithuania and European countries, the USA and Canada. Different groups of particular interests – cultural, political, economical and others – were brought together. The process goes on spontaneously and in a diplomatic way, and one of the most important functions of the EU is to ensure the efficiency of these relations, satisfying the interests of both sides. Nevertheless, the true intellectual, accustomed to question everything, must be worried a bit about the facade of the new, multi-flat condo. Everybody agrees that in many neighborhoods life is much safer and happier. The point is, that wanting to tear us away from a provincial space, we very often end up dragging reality into an imaginary vision. Some feel like they fall in the crossroads between East and West; others say they've always been in Europe; and some are inundated by the nostalgia of the former empire, attempting to "adopt" Ukraine and Byelorussia – for the future glory, to be sure. One of the most interesting visions, seeing Lithuania as a more northern country and adapting the Lithuanian mentality to more intimate forms of community, has been left on the sidelines of the plan made by the new architects of our society. They, perhaps, are trying to compensate for their non-existing southern passions, and uncritically adopting the opinion of some American journalist about Scandinavian countries, primarily Norway. According to her, it is unbearably boring over there. Norway lacks beggars and poverty, trafficking in women and children, violations of the law, murders and suicides, alienation and corruption, the new suzerains and oligarchs. It is boring when people are pleased with life, and when they reasonably create their national culture and well-being. Certainly boring where any self-respecting person wouldn't go to TV shows like "Ills' Market" to beg for a crust of bread; where men do not die of "free" medical service and don't need a crowd of the poor around them in order to feel prosperous, in a word, "a white". To watch our new magnates, *uspaskichs* and *trumpos*, trying under the humble conditions of Lithuania to implant the *berezovsky* or *rockefeller* type of welfare is not funny any more. It is natural that standing at such a crossroad, it is a hard task to make any precise forecasts. Maybe this is one reason why sober but too often starry-eyed intellectuals suddenly stand up for the "cabbage-in-every-pot-Presidents". They have lost their faith in the fast-yielding fruits of democracy, but do not see they've been baited. Others, the so-called more engaged, insensibly become heralds of the new ideologies (but in fact the old ones). But, I am afraid, "fast-food" culture does not lead to a "fast-democracy".

Does enjoying equal rights with the other members of the EU mean that we will become Europeans? Or maybe it means having the possibility to think freely? Are we supposed to tap this thinking? And lastly, does the prevailing policy of the old countries suit that thinking?

To become natural members of the new European family is neither possible for Lithuania nor for any other post-communist country as for example, Poland – despite Stalin's name dancing in every issue of popular magazines like "Wprost". There are at least two reasons for this: first, an almost unconsidered and critically unevaluated heritage from the period of Soviet occupation; and second, the heritage of the old-timers, the creators of the Third World, which we are going to take on uncritically.

As for the first question, it should be noticed that the former authorities not only hold to their previous ground, but even strengthened it during the period of Independence. Those who once controlled and perpetrated the former situation are not gone. They are still in power because banishments, prisons, torture, physical extermination, and the obstruction of individuality – activities which in their opinion were normal and justifiable – are not accepted in the administration of justice in the Western world today. On seeing that nobody was going to apply to them the principle "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", these cynical chameleons, some cold-blooded, some hot-headed, are now trying to rewrite history, to be at the head of all possible movements, and in addition to gather all regalia, awards, bonuses, and orders which are being handed out according to one's devotion to the present state of Lithuania. And thus they hide there past.

They create mobile formations, which consist of the same persons, and their nurslings, using so called "new" methods to consolidate domestic and foreign policy as well as economic structures, and to silence the voice of truth. Another phenomenon also continues: a personal reckoning with those who showed in the past the courage to openly protect their individual dignity and conscience. This is being done through the jobs, formation of opinion behind the scenes, and adulteration of "personal files". It is necessary to state that the moral and civic situation in the country has paradoxically become worse. The ability to change it belongs to the younger generation, which hasn't been fed the falsehood and aggression of the communist surroundings, but who are now immigrating to foreign countries because they are unwanted in their native land. This emigration is part of a consciously but "imperceptibly formed" policy. However there is nothing imperishable on earth. The very logic of development requires an appreciation of the inheritance – otherwise it would stop. The longer the falsified, and not acknowledged facts of Lithuania's recent history are hidden, the more foolish we'll look in the eyes of the West and, *a propos*, the most foolish will be those shifty, opportunistic characters, "on whose faces", to apply a paraphrase of a famous statement by Karl Marx, "history itself has written to what sort of humanity they belong." Unfortunately very few of them recognized the truth, because they realized that recognition of the truth in itself has a priceless power; and their victims, quietly and with dignity, confess their faults. If they won't, well, these former hegemonic fellows, as they've already promised, will collaborate with those who did similar jobs in the West. But the West has very good protection from such "black technologies", and except a new card of terrorism, frightening with some conspiracy, struggle of classes and hidden enemies doesn't work, or leastwise not at such a paranoiac scale as in the gulag's empire. If that kind of poise will be met with a courtesy and good grace, that would only mean, that behind a pent-up of laughter lays a good-natured effort to help to come to

reason. The most important thing is that the meekness of men is illusory, and the spiritual endurance of the tortured, trampled down, and disdained has hidden behind it a tremendous force. As one of the sacred books says, sometimes it is better to bring the apostles of falsehood and evil-doers to a stop, than to allow their own evil and lies to turn upon them later with such unimaginable power and consequences, with such a horror that its difficult to dream of. All the same, what can those words mean for those who never knew the meaning of mercy?

Considering this, I'd like to remind on a rather complex form of cultural identification: if we accept unconditionally everything that constitutes the historical heritage of the present area of the EU, – first of all, I have in mind the mentality formed by racism, religious intolerance, and colonial regimes, which though changing is not changing as quickly as one would wish – the situation becomes equivocal. Our country didn't commit crimes against most other races and cultures. And normal Lithuanians wouldn't be very happy to share the guilt accrued from an unimaginable violence against and genocide of black and red people, which took place in lands conquered and ruled by French, British, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, German and other Europeans over the last 400 years, not to forget the individual or massed tortures and massacres pursued by the Holy Inquisition in the course of 700 years (alas! the fact is inseparable from the history of Christianity, which for some still seems to be the "background of modern Europe"). Well, we need to make all of this very clear; otherwise the rest of the world will see us as part of this terrible history. And no Machiavellian politics will help if Arabs should think of "practicing" in our land. We try to forget about Chechnya. We are participating in a war in Iraq. It is a sign that we don't want to be on the side of the defeated any more. But we have to learn from our past and, moreover, we have something to say to the West, which seems to be listening. This attitude does not signify euro-skepticism or antiglobalism. On the contrary, a sensible view of things can help all parties to rightly understand the intentions on both sides. However, if the other side persists with the proverb "Love me, love my dog", we will wait for equality for a long time. In the popular and tasteless ambition of so-called "big cultures", nostalgia for a perished imperialism frequently sticks out like a sore thumb. Who knows, maybe imperialism with a human face is better than imperialism with a satanic face, the one which the whole world had to look at during the times of the flourishing empire of evil. Anyway, this position primarily shows an adherence to principle. It must depend neither on the state, nor on the largeness of the population, and, I dare to add, not upon the money distributed by the World Bank. That is why logically this position must be stated by intellectuals, – writers first of all, – and not by paper academics constructing reality according to their insane, false discourses. Thinkers must do this, those who are able to feel the pulse of time and to measure it with a universal gauge. One should not wait until politicians proclaim the truth, those who in the final analysis are too weak to change the course of history.

For about 200 years we've been "taught", that we can't rule our national state, that we are losers. Well, we have to learn now, that we *are* able, and even more, that it was wrong to believe the contrary. This is the lesson that the West is learning very unwillingly. It is not important therefore, who is going to teach us – our own reactionaries, the East or West. We must emphatically state that we exist. (In order to escape the destiny of "the last of the Mohicans", who once lived in the thousands in New York State, and who now cannot prove that they exist, because their ancestors didn't have a chance to write it down on paper. They can't enjoy their rights nor prove that James Fenimore Cooper was

a liar!) Because to exist means to prove one's existence; to adduce documents of every action, idea, or priority of life. Those who created "the great history" of Europe, and recently accepted us as equal in rights, are watching us. However, when tigers get tired of chasing gazelles and warmly invite them to come into their family, this might suggest that either they are not tigers, or we are not gazelles any more.

Who are we, then? What we are going to propose or to take over? Successful trade, the growing national income, and culture in its golden age – all of this has already existed in the past and will continue in the future. But the day may come again, when nothing of this will mean anything, because what means and predetermines our destiny is some, mostly mad, *idea*, tailored to fit each man among millions. If we could legitimately prove that we have critically evaluated our Soviet heritage and are joining now with those who followed the same process in the other camp, I would say, that we've made a step forward. But this is not enough: if we could compel those involved to regret their offences done to humanity, and by real work and legal acts to substantiate their repentance, only then would I say that an irreversible process has taken place, and that we can breath freely again.

What do our Soviet and the old European heritages have in common? Modern research affirms that the Nazis and later on the Stalinists successfully adopted methods used by the Inquisition. In all cases, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust inevitably were present (Stalin, true, wasn't in time for it). The truth is, universally condemned and undermined was only one out of three – Nazism: searched, inventoried, and rightly evaluated. Criminals were convicted; losses, if possible, recovered; and till then persons with the like inclination are being treated by harsh methods for about 50 years. It seems, that the apostles of Nazism have learned their lesson pretty well. This was possible because documents and irrefutable proof miraculously survived and were made accessible to public opinion around the world. We can't say the same about Stalinism or the Inquisition for two reasons: first, the same institutions exist, though their names and robes have changed. The West doesn't quite get this. Secondly, the mere fact that evidence for *corpus delicti* was either destroyed, or made inaccessible to the public, hidden in vaults and dungeons of the archives, shows that the previous Forces still make use of some kind of power and influence. It is perfectly evident that by trying to excuse or hide the operations of the Inquisitors, Nazis, Stalinists and their likes, we are giving a chance to their ilk to lie in ambush, waiting for the propitious moment to expand the area of their operations once again. If the framework of violence is being left open deliberately, it is as clear as day that the inheritors of this space, will continue to preserve a privilege of impunity under the cover of an allegedly innocent organizations, will once again get a chance to prove their *raison d' tre*. Is it really necessary to reap the fruits of procrastination – the next Night of Saint-Bartholomew, a witch-hunt or pogrom – in order that these monsters go scot-free from the hands of justice?

Does the peculiar principle of the continuity of evil really exist? I think that talking about such phenomena, like lampshades made of the human skin, or tortured women who were accused of "evident" fornication with invisible incubuses, – phenomena far surpassing common sense and normal behavior, – we can't escape the basic definitions by which we describe existence. After all, we are not talking about wrong manoeuvres on the battlefield or a miscalculation at a bar. It is the organized pathology of behavior, as if evil itself were the pathology of existence. From first sight, disparate institutions unite in an effort to impose their rule on a society by constant assaults and

control of every step of its citizens. They are united by hatred for the open mind and progress, by a seeking to implant jealousy and fear, by using of espionage, torture, transportation, the death penalty, interdiction, and attainder. For centuries, culpable regimes fulfilled their self-perpetuating and horrible selves by turning the lowest features of the human psyche into the very mechanisms of the lifeblood of society. It seems, Stalin achieved the "best results". He succeeded in implanting into day-to-day circulation an espionage and information system about relatives, friends, neighbors, and lovers; also jealousy and hatred for richer and better people, physical violence and moral humiliation, theft and slander, fraud and swindle, treason and harsh treatment, and all this as though it were a law unto itself. Even today, like a brain implant, this system works in the minds of certain people. It is possible to set it in motion by going to some agency to complain about something, or to vote *pro rata*, or provoke the masses, or just damage and spoil, whatever. Naïve idealists didn't do a blow-by-blow revision of Sovietism and its sprout, Stalinism, and thus handed to these isms the progressive leverage of the ruling of society, even giving them the possibility to enjoy human rights and a freedom of speech they are not worthy of, but can perfectly make use of, eagerly pursuing the lowest of interests. Lately, they are operating with a free hand. Are we not like the foolish gazelle that, while watching the fight of a bear and tiger, didn't notice that it had made its home under the nose of hyenas! According to naturalists like Waris Dirie, they are pitiless, and therefore the most dangerous of animals. They never give ground when fighting for prey.

It is more convenient to forget about them. Unfortunately, hyenas so much remind us of their whereabouts. Of course, they try to pretend they are not what they look like. But it is a common trick of evil: to convince that it doesn't exist, but what *does* exist, is good. There is no devil, no evil and evildoers, no concentration camps. We can arrive at the well-founded conclusion that the whole of European history is not a history of fighting states, classes, religions and systems, but the history of a struggle of progressive movements, great minds seeking for knowledge and perfection against the dark forces hostile to progress: a history of renaissance against regression, the chronicle of a battle of an open society with its enemies. That's why in appearance, dissimilar institutions often fall into the same category, and their common trait is limited neither by time nor by space. Nevertheless, evil can't invent anything more terrible than it already has – only the scale of its operations differs nowadays. It feeds on human darkness and ignorance, a lack of faith and effortlessness. This is why its main goal – the feature identifying it most – is an attempt to suppress liberty, free thinking, and an open society that guarantees cognition of all possible kinds, leading to knowledge. It does this because knowledge destroys the precondition of the existence of evil itself. Evil tries to put into some index the newest achievements and experiences of humanity, to organize an auto-da-fé of ideas, books, and other works.

Today we can see Europe marching forward. It has paid a very great price for this. We are paying, too. We are paying the price of boredom, of a spoiled elite that doesn't know what to do next, because artificial problems can't overcome the easiness of being. Though one could be ready for a more serious challenge. In this respect it is not enough to become rich, famous, to kill an adversary and win a wife away from her husband, leaving for one's descendants a history based on similar adventures, which some call the cultural heritage. It is also not enough to admire strange ideas, the adopting of which ends with lampshades. For example, the idler's energy to direct his search toward his soul. That is the true challenge; otherwise we wouldn't talk about the same problems, as Plato did. The idea that sages will rule the world still soars in the

air. Maybe they will, when they gather enough "critical mass".

The world is hot. I am scared to see a sore thumb, the wing of an eagle, or a good friendly wolf in sheep's clothing. So I have decided "to perforate" myself for God's sake, i. e. to declare one position among three millions. As a Lithuanian and a citizen of Lithuania, I refuse to identify with forms foreign to my native culture, – at extreme imputed on us – nor will I identify myself with the above discussed forms of falsehood and aggression and the institutions protecting them. As a person, free and not the puppet of outside forces, I choose the right to speak and think freely. I want to join the European family with clean hands and conscience. If such a position seems the attitude of a Fascist, heretic, Marxist, feminist, or nationalist, I would think, that I have chosen one of the possible "emergency" measures. Maybe it is not so bad to be a cow eating grass; until now nobody has succeeded in painting it brown, red, or blue.

July 2004

---

Published 2004-11-28  
Original in English  
Contribution by Kulturos barai  
© Kulturos barai  
© Eurozine