



Jacques Rupnik

In touch with a vanished world

It was only a few weeks ago that we met, together with Pierre Hassner (professor of international relations and the history of political thought), at Feri Fejtő's place for one of our regular discussions about the situation in central Europe, with some excursions into Romania and Serbia. In passing, our host expressed a certain weariness with the *franco-françaises* commemorations of 1968. "What we need is not another colloquium on '68 but on '48, and I mean 1848!" And the author of *Printemps des peuples*, published sixty years ago, added: "The *Vieux Continent* between nation and democracy, central Europe between Russia and Germany — that's the key moment for understanding Europe today."

He talked about history with erudition and intimacy, which he was able to convey to his students at Sciences Po (the Paris Institute of Political Studies). He was a witness of the century for whom politics was not a science. Intellectual engagement was not an excuse for ideological blindness. A new concept of Europe was brought into play in Budapest in 1956 and in Prague 1968. We had the feeling that he put us in touch with a vanished world.

As we were preparing a colloquium on 1848, the visit of a female Hungarian student writing a dissertation about Feri was announced. "Today I have to explain to her the circumstances under which Attila Jozsef wrote one of his famous poems", the master said with a mischievous look. The poem was not only among the most famous of the great Hungarian poet Attila Jozsef, Fejtő's close friend in Budapest during the 1930s, but over the years it also became one of the "classics" in François Fejtő's art of courtship.

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