

## Jiří Dienstbier – *Dreaming about Politics*

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On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April was held another tribute to very important personality of Jiří Dienstbier, who stays remembered as a prominent member of Czech politics and society. The conference proves the emptiness in Czech foreign policy left after his death. He was a multitalented person who had his own philosophy that it is better to strive for the stars and miss them out, rather than to strive for the piles of manure and hit them.

**Karel Schwarzenberg**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, opened this conference, reminding the audience of Dienstbier's exceptionality and complex personality. He expressed gratefulness for the foundations of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy which Dienstbier established.

Current minister of Foreign Affairs of Czech Republic met Jiří Dienstbier in 1980's when he worked as a journalist who interviewed him. Since then, they've become very good friends even though- from time to time- they had arguments coming from different political opinions.

Schwarzenberg reminded everyone of sincerity and honesty Dienstbier possessed and impossibility to ever trick anyone with no intention whatsoever to make money on politics.

As a politician, Jiří Dienstbier knew before everyone else that there can be a common home in Europe, and that also there cannot be a “European house with genitors or home keepers” but rather a house where everyone would feel at home. He believed that in order to have united Europe one must have Germany united. Similarly, his attitude towards French- German relations was oriented towards the cooperation of these two countries, quite distinctive at that period of time, claiming that exactly this cooperation would be one of the foundations of united Europe.

He gave a huge contribution to the Prague Appeal which was agreed by peace activists worldwide in 1990. His approach was based on the ideas how to overcome division of Europe after wars. Some of his ideas, Schwarzenberg recalls, turned out to be illusion whereas some others turned out to be true and quite successful as a matter of fact.

As a journalist on the other hand, Dienstbier will stay in memories as excellent, who used to draw attention with his articles covering topics from different parts of world. He was involved and also described in his many texts situations in Iraq and Yugoslavia for instance. He greatly contributed to the journalism of his country.

As Schwarzenberg explains, Dienstbier was also involved in the UN matters. At the same time, he used to support openness of Czechs towards Americans, and, as Schwarzenberg remembers, even once Madeleine Albright asked Dienstbier what is the most important matter for Czechoslovakia. Then he replied the openness and the goal to have USA willingly accept students of his nationality to study in USA. According to Karel Schwarzenberg, Jiří Dienstbier used to say that Czech Republic lacks self-confidence which would navigate country towards Europe, and if Czech people want to be in Europe they should understand their sovereignty as being their identity within Europe.

Next part of the conference was dedicated to domestic policy.

First to open this part of discussion was **Petr Pithart**, one of Dienstbier’s great friends. Pithart emphasized Dienstbier’s role as a journalist and activist. His opinion of his friend as journalist is founded on the fact that he used to be in the epicenter of the events, both as an actor and as an observer- always well informed and ready to report the truth. Pithart even brings to the attention the event from August 1968, when tanks got into the country and a fire was open, while radio was overtaken by soldiers. Even then, Dienstbier was with few colleagues of his in the building. He was aware of the fact that his days at radio are outnumbered now. He showed a

great deal of respect for revolution and contra regime. His idea of being a successful journalist was founded on the belief of freedom of speech.

His reports from the period after 1968 when he got back from USA play valuable role since he was trying to explain he is coming back to the country that will isolate itself, country in which people are afraid to pick up the phone as he used to say. He got back from USA despite the offer to stay there and write for New York Times, while at the same time Petr Pithart got back from Oxford. They both were determined to come back and change the situation at home. And as his good friend recalls, this was equal to political execution. Nevertheless, Pithart claims that Dienstbier was ready enough to face the situation, well informed and with a good reputation, before all very open and generous.

**Marek Hrubec** once invited Dienstbier to talk to his students at the university. He perceives him as a multi complex person: journalist, dissident, politician and minister. He believes it is important to remember him and his approach to civic society that democracy grows out of society, which is a basis for the work of political parties. He also mentioned that Dienstbier strongly believed that the crisis and problems spread in society actually motivate thousands of people to fight for freedom.

Hrubec was only first among couple of the panelist of this conference to mention the existent link between Martin Luther King and Jiří Dienstbier.

Dienstbier believed that human rights must be respected and all principles applied. He confirmed it by the work in UN and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. According to Hrubec, he was a dissident who fought for human rights similarly to Martin Luther King. Correspondingly, he stood up against communist party and ideology rights, at the same time getting closer to social democratic party.

In same fashion, Hrubec mentioned how Dienstbier believed also in the idea that human rights must be advocated in international scene and thorough European integration, relating it not only to one single country. Likewise, another idea he supported was a global integration and in this manner, as Hrubec states, he was against America, but not Americans, and he had an idea to have global parliament established. Nowadays, we do have the European Parliament as of a similar institutional framework.

To sum up his presentation, Hrubec used Dienstbier's words: "it is better to be criticized for megalomania than for laziness". He claims that the idea Dienstbier had about unified Europe was utopia back then, but nowadays we see it as a fact, therefore some other ideas of his that seem like utopia might turn to be reality soon.

**Jiří Pehe** had a speech about the role of Jiří Dienstbier in Czech policy in 1990, confirming his complex and above all multifunctional role. Dienstbier was the first Minister of Foreign Affairs and the most important person in establishing the Ministry itself. He had strong intentions to establish and recover links with foreign countries. His role was very distinctive at both practical and symbolic levels in the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Germany.

As Pehe stated, Dienstbier took a part in projects of reuniting Europe as well as Germany, in Visegrad cooperation projects and showed a clear difference in willingness to cooperate with Western countries as well as Balkan after he left position of Minister in 1992.

Dienstbier is known for a person who had number of personalities in one: journalist; politician; dissident; books writer; and it was difficult to separate any of these. According to Pehe, Jiří believed in centristic and liberal party. He lacked success in work in political parties and domestic policies.

**Petr Havlík** concluded first panel of the conference confirming the exceptionality of Jiří's beliefs confirming that today's society needs politicians such was Jiří. Havlík reminded audience of moral relativism Dienstbier believed in as well as his statements in one of many interviews that robbery is fastest way of privatization.

In line of talking about privatization, Havlík also mentioned recently passed away Mrs Margaret Thatcher, who said in her official visit to Czech Republic in 1999, first of that type after Velvet revolution, that all forms of privatization in 90's were very fast at that time, but the key of problem is not the speed rather the fact they were not legally rooted.

In one of his last publications, Dienstbier dreams about politics where law and freedom are not in conflict; where people are not afraid to speak and think freely. His dreams were about place where one cannot buy university degree, a journalist or a politician. Where politicians do not steal from taxpayers and consumer society is replaced by solidarity.

Second panel was opened with **Pavel Barša's** memories when he first met Dienstbier. It was in 1988 when Barša discussed events with a few dissidents. They invited Dienstbier too. He

used to shock audience, due to 2 factors: he kept declaring himself as a democratic socialist and he criticized conservatism.

**Petr Drulák** then continued with a comparison between Havel and Dienstbier on human rights. No doubt, human rights issue is a fundamental for foreign affairs of Czech Republic. Nevertheless, the way of addressing human rights is legacy of both Dienstbier and Havel. The question in matter is how we make sure to protect human rights in most appropriate and best way.

Drulák claims that both Havel and Dienstbier are dreamers in a way when it comes to their visions of human rights. On one hand, according to him, there is a concept of utopia and on the other hand one of naivety. Naivety approach is based on lack of knowledge and it is not real whereas utopia is an approach based on real world but it is not correspondent to real world. Havel supported idea of naivety and Dienstbier of utopia. While Havel wrote keeping distance from dissidents, Dienstbier used to be exposed to different realities as a journalist and he didn't give up on universalism of human rights. Havel, on the other hand, believed that one can derive human rights on spiritual minimum.

Another parallel on human rights views was given through narrow and wide perception of human rights. Narrow is typical for conservative liberalism as Drulák states, whereas wide perception is typical for progressive liberalism.

Another parallel was presented through the perception of world as an international or national community. Therefore every phenomenon will differ from different perspectives.

Havel was supporter of the narrow approach and perception of world as an international society whereas Dienstbier supported wide perspective of human rights. As a matter of fact, in 2009 Dienstbier stated that there have to be human rights but they must be translated within certain culture- that is one should cultivate rights.

Panel of discussion was proceeded by **Jacques Rupnik** who spoke about the importance of Czech dissidents for Europe as a whole. He talked about Dienstbier as a person who was involved in observations as well as dialogues with West. Some of his reflections came true. All dissidents of Central and Eastern Europe had a same idea to overcome differences in Europe. Together with other dissidents, Dienstbier gave an idea which implied clear ideological division of Europe- to left and right wings advocating changes. Nevertheless it could have been looked

for solutions on both sides of Europe. As a matter of fact, Dienstbier believed in united Europe once there is united Germany. His line of reasoning was based on the idea that the real fear should be from the blocks and their conflicts not by Germany itself. In this way, with once unified Europe, there would be a less chance for conflict with USSR.

As it turns out nowadays- there is a united European public space. It is just that now there is a division between South and North and East and West.

**Otto Pick** continued with explaining the approach Dienstbier had towards the unification of Europe. He was aware of the fact that Czech Republic would have a possibility of European integration with the help of Germans only, who must be united. And it turned out to be true, as Pick said, since Germany supported Czech Republic's accession to the European Union as well as NATO. Main difference between Havel and Dienstbier in this matter was, according to Pick, that Havel's West was USA and Dienstbier's West was Europe. Dienstbier believed in justice, human and economic security which would be possible only if there were no blocks. That is why he was truly supportive for European integration as a primary way to neutralize internal disputes.

The end of the conference was presented by the speech of **Jan Pelikán**, who decided not to talk as much as he planned due to lack of time and complexity of his topic about Yugoslavia and Dienstbier's approach and thoughts on this matter. Dienstbier possessed knowledge directly from the region due to nature of his business since he was a journalist. Most of his analysis, according to Jan Pelikán, was sooner or later proved to be true. He admired his courage to stay and report from places such as SFRY, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam. In addition, Pelikán admired him for his view to change United Nations.

The conference in Czernin Palace at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic was concluded with the promotion of a Composite Book of Dienstbier's Radio Reportages in the atmosphere of admiring this former journalist and civil rights activist.