

VORTRAG VON GEORGE SOROS »EUROPE IN CRISIS«

Right in the centre of Budapest stands a fabulous little neo-classical palais with a most interesting round-shaped entrance hall. When crossing this entrance hall, one will almost inevitably come across a colleague – a mediaevalist from Princeton for instance, who one assumed to be no longer attending conferences; or even a jurist from one's own home town, who one has not come across for an entire year, in the daily hustle and bustle of the city. And having crossed this very entrance hall – fulfilled by the beautiful wonder of these unexpected encounters – one may continue his or her way through the building towards the restaurant in the upper stories. Here, one may sit down at a table and meet unbelievably intelligent and bright students from all parts of Eastern Europe:

From Romania or Bulgaria, or less familiar and smaller states, such as Moldova, for which one might need a moment or two to precisely locate on a map. With shining eyes and glowing faces, they sit there across the table, and begin their passionate stories of their studies, and before one even knows what has happened, a fascinating conversation about everything and nothing has unravelled.

But by now you may have started to wonder why I have been elaborating on this certain institution in Budapest, when really I should be speaking about George Soros. My answer is quite straight forward and simple. This institution, evidently, is the Central European University in Budapest. And through it, I have in fact been speaking about George Soros. Indeed – were it not for George Soros and his ongoing commitment and dedication, this institution would simply not exist. It is a small but important part of his many, many charitable activities, and one important milestone in the long line of his very commitment and dedication to the opposition of the former Eastern Bloc since the 1970ies, when he was active for the Charta 77 in Prague and the Solidarność in Gdańsk.

To make myself clearer, I might have to add that the reason why I introduced George Soros by mentioning the Central European University is that Soros was born the son of a Jewish Budapest family in 1930, that he survived the German occupation of this marvellous city and that – as the names of the »Open Society Fond« and the »Open Society Institute« he initiated already imply – he based his philosophy on the ideas of the Viennese philosopher Karl Popper whose important book »The Open Society and Its Enemies« is partly founded in the

violent political conflicts in interbellum Vienna. So, in a certain manner of speaking, George Soros' new Open European Society elates from the ruins of the Habsburg Empire.

Soros' life has almost followed the great American Dream, according to which – from rags to riches – the dish-washer becomes a millionaire. Only in his case with a slight modification: a former waiter turns out to become a Wall Street billionaire. Even those amongst us who barely flick through the economy section of German and international newspapers, know George Soros at least since the early 1990ies and are well aware how Soros studied, tested and influenced the global financial markets – always under the paradigm of Popper's Critical rationalism, the paradigm of Falsification.

He gained early insight into the dangers of what he characterizes as market fundamentalism: unregulated individualism and unregulated financial markets – thinking along Popper's lines – can be understood in the same manner as unregulated Utopia – as the »Enemies of the Open Society«.

Here at the Humboldt-Universität, in the centre of the city of Berlin, we too are well aware of »Open Societies and their Enemies«, and could tell many a tale from 200 years of history. What meets the eye are of course the tales of that very 20th century dictatorships you have had to experience in the course of your life: Much as your country of birth, Hungary, the Humboldt Universität was scarred by nationalism, National Socialism and Communism. But if we think along Popper's lines, here at the Humboldt-Universität, the analysis of ill-will preventing an Open Society has to be pursued a little deeper and in more detail: Fichte, Schelling, Hegel – this ambivalent heritage of German idealism has to the same extent shaped the history of this university, as the willingness to sacrifice the values of an Open Society to boundless, unrestricted individualism or abstract collectivism and also the desistance from the sober, almost austere Anglo-Saxon way of always placing a fair compromise above the unrestricted implementation of an Utopia.

The 1920ies Berlin did, if I'm not mistaken, experience a civil war similar to the conflicts in Vienna at the same time, but unfortunately lacked an equivalent to Karl Popper, who – due to his Vienna experience – became a dedicated

advocate of the Open Society and a passionate analyst of its enemies. The more important it is to hear voices at this university, that keep alive Popper's plea for an Open Society and that provide us with deep, substantial analysis – especially in times like these, when an economic crisis leads to helplessness and perplexity even amongst experts and specialists, and to superficial, rash answers amongst laymen. That's why – amidst the celebrations of the 200 year jubilee – we consider ourselves lucky to hear the clear voice of Critical rationalism and of enlightenment, in which also the best traditions of this university are to rooted.