

**Preisrede von Tony Judt
anlässlich der Verleihung des
Bruno-Kreisky-Preises für das politische Buch 2006**

**am 13. Juni 2007
im Großen Festsaal der Diplomatischen Akademie Wien**

Alle Rechte vorbehalten. © Tony Judt 2007

Information

Dr. Erich Fröschl,
Mag. Gerlinde Churavy
T 01-804 65 01-30
churavy@renner-institut.at

Thank you very much for this wonderful honour. May I say in thanking the academy, the *Renner Institut*, the chancellor Dr. Swoboda and others that they give me particular pleasure to accept the in the name of Bruno Kreisky for reasons which I hope will become evident from what I have to say in a few minutes. It is also very special pleasure to be back in Vienna. I have been here on a number of occasions at – as you kindly pointed out – the Westbahnhof and other places in 1989; as a guest of the *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in the course of the 90ies, and at various times since, and it is always a pleasure to be here. It is a very particular honour for me to receive this prize. I was a little surprised to learn that I have received the prize for a political book, since this is after all a history book. And my colleagues in the profession are very concerned about the idea that one should write objective history and not political tracts. But it is a political book, you are right.

It is a political book in three ways: It is a political book because it is impossible to narrate the history of one's own time – one's own lifetime in my case – without being engaged; and if you are engaged, you are political whether you like it or not. Secondly, it is a book with a very particular point of view, which I shall comment with a few words in about a minute. Thirdly, it is a book which I hope has some continuing small relevance to political events now and in the future.

In *Postwar* I wanted to argue a little bit against the conventional way of writing European history in the period since World War II. In first place, I wanted to break with the convention that 1945 was a sort of *Stunde Null*. Now, this is a German term and indeed for a long time was something of the German idea, but it is just as familiar in England or in France or elsewhere. The idea that somehow we began afresh in 1945, that whatever we did or was done to us before then somehow becomes pre-history, and Europe got a fresh start, got lucky – certainly Western Europe got lucky – and it is a Western European perspective, of course. There was no *Stunde Null* for Eastern Europe. I don't think that is true and in the book I tried to show why the past – the past before 1945, before 1938/39, before 1918 – weighed so heavily on the present. Secondly, I wanted to write against the idea that the history of the years since 1945 was really the history of the Cold War. This is simply not the way it seemed for many people of that time. My American wife, one of my American wives, once asked me: "So in England, did you spend the 1950ies the way we spent the 1950ies: under the desks in the schoolrooms, preparing for a nuclear attack?" I said: "No, we didn't in England. Somehow between the idea that there was no point and the idea that it probably would not happen, the concept of a nuclear attack, the Cold War as a permanent fear of real war was much less present in Western Europe than it was in the United States. And it is a very American version of post-war history to see it in the light of the Cold War.

In Eastern Europe it is different for obvious reasons. It is not so much the Cold War as Soviet occupation and the communist regimes which matter.

Thirdly – as a number of the people who kindly introduced me, said – I wanted to break with the idea that there are two European histories: the history of the Europe in the West and the history of the Europe in the East, and that before 1989 at least there are two different stories and they don't connect. And indeed, if you had gone as a teacher, which I use to do, teaching European history in England and in America and in France, before 1989, and tried to find a history of Europe, you could find many histories of Europe, but actually they were only Western Europe; and then you could find histories of Eastern Europe which were mostly about Russia. But very little about Eastern Central Europe proper and nothing almost that brought it together. Of course there are

different stories, of course they had very different experiences, but the division of Europe began after 1945, 1948 in some cases. We go back only a little bit further. Czechoslovakia before 1938 had much more in common –economically, politically – with Western Europe and was more advanced economically than Belgium, for example. It is very much a post '45, post '48, post Cold-War interpretation to see East and West as permanently profoundly divided. If we had been sitting here in 1930s and asked how to think about Europe most people would have thought Europe North-South rather than East-West, we need to remember this.

Fourthly, I wanted to break with the idea that the history of Europe is the history of the European Union. A sort of teleological story, where somehow, in 1945, a group of old men got together and realised that we could not go on like this, that we must end European division and first have a coal or steel community and then an economic community and then a community and then a union. This is not how the story went. It was not like that. And even in the places where it was like that, it wasn't like that, if you see what I mean. There was no necessity for the emergence of the European Union. There was certainly no reason to suppose so in the 1950s. When the European community came into being, it came into being for very particular interests on part of France and Germany and West Germany and the Benelux Countries. And it is not the history of Europe, it is part of that history, and I tried to recover the other parts a little bit.

Finally, I wanted in the book to recapture the problem of memory and forgetting. We all talk about it, it is the big cult subject of the last twenty years – memory studies. We don't yet have the forgetting studies, but you have the subject, if not the name. There was a lot of remembering and forgetting in post war Europe, more than after most wars, and there has been some of it again since 1989, East and West. I wanted somehow – which is not easy actually as I found – to capture in the story of Europe's development since 1945, Europe's collective reluctance to remember and willingness to forget. Let me remind you that, to take one very famous book. The book by Primo Levi, "Se questo è un uomo"; in American the title is "Survival in Auschwitz" and in England "This is a man". I don't know the German title. Levi wrote this book as soon as he returned from Auschwitz to Italy. He could not find a publisher; no one wanted to publish the book, even the resistance publishers did not want to publish it, because it was not a happy story. It was not a story of heroic resistance and anti-Fascism. It was a story of a victim and not even, so to speak, an Italian victim, but a Jewish Italian victim. It is a bad news story and the leading Italian resistance publisher – I know that – sent it to Natalia Ginsburg, herself a Jewish author in Italy and wife of a dead resistance hero. And she said: "No, we do not publish this. We do not need to hear these stories." So it was published by a little publisher in Turin in just 2000 copies. Most of them were never sold they were put in a warehouse in Florence and disappeared, washed away in the floods of the river Arno in 1966. That was the history of remembering World War II, or some kinds of remembering. It was only when the book was republished at the end of the 50ies and then in the 60ies and 70ies, that Levi, the book, the subject and the memory came back to the centre of European consciousness.

So much for the book. I started to write the book in Vienna, but I wrote most of it in America and while there were many disadvantages to living in America. There are certain advantages, if you want to look at Europe, if you live in New York.

You can see very clearly what Europe's virtues are: The capacity for trans-national cooperation and the emphasis – so normal that we take it for granted – upon trans-

national cooperation, institutions, laws, legislation, mobility and so on. Secondly, the peculiarly humane quality of Europe compared not only to the rest of the world, but to America. Practices regarding the environment, practices regarding punishment, regarding the rules of law, regarding guns, regarding prisons. Many things, which sadly one takes negatively; so to speak; for granted in America, are very different in Europe. The Europeans may not, perhaps, be quite as aware of how distinctive that is. It is not West and the rest, it is Europe and the rest. Europe is different from the United States in matters of environmental indifference or in capital punishment or in the gap between great private wealth and much public poverty.

The United States resembles what we used to call the Third World in some ways. Europe, and if you allow that Canada belongs to Europe maybe, is quite distinctive and alone. These things are much clearer, I think, if you live in America.

But other things are clear too, and they are not such good news: Europe, seen from the outside – maybe also seen from the inside – but certainly if you look at it from the outside, does appear to have lost a sense of purpose. Now, what is interesting of course is that Europe was not built with a sense of purpose, it was built institutionally. Until 1979, as you know, there were no elections to a European Parliament as such. Europe was built undemocratically and this was a very good thing, because if Europe had been built democratically in the 1950ies it would not have happened. You would not have found voters in France or Germany, certainly not in Austria or Italy or, indeed, anywhere except maybe in Luxembourg, who would have favoured in principle the kind of Europe that we have now. You would not have found them actually further East either. So it is a good thing that Europe was built undemocratically, institutionally. But we paid a price for that, because as we have switched to political construction – and it is now impossible and unacceptable to go around politics, to go around public opinion the way it was possible in 50ies and 60ies – the result is, that it is much easier for people to oppose the construction of Europe or the idea of Europe or the ambition of Europe or whatever it may be, and prevent it. And we are, it seems, at the moment in a condition not of purposelessness but of lacking direction. I think this has something to do with generational shifts. I am struck in France especially but also in Britain and in the Low Countries too, by the extent to which the new-generation politicians – and I don't mean young people, I mean people of my age, baby-boomers, people born after the Second World War, but who therefore grew up in the prosperous secure guarantees of this new, revived Europe –lack an understanding of how fragile Europe might be. To them it is simply the normal condition and therefore they don't prize it very much, they don't work for it very much and they are much more likely – whether their name is Blair or Brown or Sarkozy or whatever it may be –to exploit Europe as a target for local popularity, without counting the cost or thinking about the cost politically for Europe.

Thirdly, I think there has been a particular failure of intellectuals in Eastern Europe – certainly among many of my contemporaries in Poland, in Hungary and in what is now the Czech Republic it used to be the case that the opposite of communism was Europe, the opposite of communism was the Europe of political freedoms, the Europe of social and political rights, the Europe that they had been cut off from. This is no longer true. You don't often hear people now, and certainly you don't hear the next generation of Central and Eastern European intellectuals talking of Europe as an idea. The last place I heard that was in Bulgaria, where, “we shall get into Europe, our goal is to join Europe”, was the form, the rhetorical form, of the good guys in politics. Now they are in Europe and they no longer have a rhetoric of good politics.

The resulting vacuum is filled by other politics. Eastern European intellectuals – many of the same people – are now much more likely to find themselves, just a few years ago, enthusiastically supporting the American war in Iraq.

Now there is an interesting logic to this. The logic that says: We used to believe in non-negotiable Human Rights. We don't make political calculations. We believe in intervening on behalf of the victims of abuse of rights. That is what America is going to do or is doing in Iraq, therefore, we are with it. This is, if you like, a simple category mistake, believing that George Bush is doing what he wants to do for your reasons. But the consequences are that the focus upon Europe, the focus upon the virtues of the construction of a particular vision of Europe has disappeared from the language of what used to be intellectual politics. In Western Europe, on the other hand, I am struck by how much we have gone the other way. Many of my contemporaries in Paris have become enthusiastic pro-American, pro-interventionists on roughly the same grounds as [...] in Poland. On the other side, there are those for whom to be European is simply to be anti-American. So Europe is the "Non-America". This may be – this may have been briefly – a necessary basis for European identity but it is not sufficient. One cannot build a vision of Europe simply as whatever America is not. Europe stands for whatever America does not stand for. This is provincialism. It's just as provincial as the provincialism of the Americans themselves. Nevertheless, it's true that I did end the book by saying that the 21st century might belong to this Europe. So why? On the face of it, it's counter-intuitive. Every time I come here I go to Germany, to Italy, to France, to Austria. Everyone talks about the need for reforms. Reforms are a sort of political speak for privatisation, for the reduction of the role of the state in the economy, for more efficient systems of production, which means limiting the rights of employment and so on, reforms to undo the paralysis of the European economic model. We also hear much about the inevitable rise of China. And we hear much about the fact that Europe has no hard –power, as Americans call it. Europeans collectively have a huge military capacity, but since it doesn't come together collectively it does not exist. Europeans are not a military force in the world and so, between being inefficient and in need of reforms, lacking an army and not being China, Europe – it would appear – has a bad future. Well, we underestimate the power and the influence of Europe. If you travel to the Middle East or to Latin America, or even to South Asia, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan – you will be amazed at how many people will say that in a certain way it's the European model that they look to. Why do they look to this European model? Because Europe is the only existing model we have, where nation states have institutionalised limitations upon their power, and a capacity for collective action, collective institutions and collective decision making Europe is the only model we have which appears to balance successfully the market and the sense of collective interest, the sense of the virtues of community over the priority to the individual. You don't have to go that far: ask yourself after all, why everyone wants to join Europe. And this is in many ways a rather curious phenomenon – because, if you want to join Europe all kinds of things have to happen which are not always easy to achieve: you have the *acquis communautaire* and many other things you need to sign and learn and do and it's rather humiliating to join Europe. At the end – people want to join Europe. For many, many decades the way to become better, to improve your life, was to become American. But in order to become American you have to go to America, you have to leave Russia, you have to leave India, you have to leave wherever it is you come from. Break with your culture, learn a new language, travel to the United States, begin all over again and hope that you can eventually, or your grand children will live the American Way of Life. To become European, you don't have to do anything, because Europe comes to you. You stay in Croatia, you stay in Romania, you stay in Estonia, and Europe comes to you. You remain Estonian, you remain Serbian or whatever it

might be – Serbian not yet. But let's say, you remain Croatian and you become European – without ever having had to leave your country. And you acquire all or almost all the benefits that you thought to might have acquired by going to America, while keeping the virtues of local culture. Don't underestimate the attractions of that. Those of us who come from England, from Austria, from other West-European countries, joining Europe was a choice they were free to make or not make and they could calculate advantage and disadvantage. For most people who want to join Europe it is all advantage and in a very big way. And that's very clear to outsiders but it's not always so clear to Europeans. Remember too, that there is no longer a self-evident American model that everyone wants to copy. In my childhood, the childhood of everyone in this room, it seemed clear, even if we didn't actually say this, that just as California is the future of the United States so the US was the future of everyone else. What California had now, the rest of America would have 10 years later and the rest of the world, if it was lucky, would have 10 years after that. It's no longer true, it's no longer obvious that the American economy is more advanced or more successful than other market-based economies and it's very clear that it is a dysfunctional social model in certain crucial respects. The problem in America is not admitting that the social model does not work. It's politically finding a way to mend it – and that's different but it's no longer clear I think, in the way it was in the time when you didn't have Internet and you didn't have satellite TV – so the image of America was an image. Now people can see the reality for themselves and it's not necessarily their future. I came across an interesting opinion poll which I quoted in the book, in which a young Hungarian businessman was asked, three or 4 years ago: "How would you compare America and Europe?" – He said: "It's very simple: when you are young you go to America, but when you have responsibilities and you have grown up, then you come back to Europe." And in a sense, Europe is a grown-up version of America in some ways and it feels that way. If you had fallen asleep in America in 1960 and woken up this year, it would have been very familiar – the percentage of people who believe literally in the Bible was about the same then as it is today. The American way of Life lived around suburbs and supermarkets already existed. The cars have changed, some of the buildings have changed, but the structure of life was fundamentally emplaced then and was much as it is today.

Had you fallen asleep in Europe in 1960 and woken up 47 years later – the changes, of course, would have been astonishing. For instance it has gone from being a religious to a secular continent in two generations. The only consistently religious communities in Europe now are the Moslems, the Islamic community. And the few remaining Orthodox Christian areas.

Europe has changed. America has remained static. So Europe in some ways looks more like a place that could change and adapt to the future than America does.

The only other model, the only other competing model would be the Chinese one. And China is not a political or social model. China is, if you like, a replica under very different circumstances of the early years of industrialisation in 19th-century Britain. In terms of exploitation, in terms of the gap in wages, in terms of the importance of cheap labour and so on. China is not the future – socially. It does not have a social model. So the question whether China will replace the West as a model of life does not pose itself. It may destroy the Western economies –but that's a different question.

Let me make some concluding remarks, which are based on these thoughts. One of the reasons, why I am in this respect at least optimistic about Europe is this: We have very enthusiastically and rapidly embraced globalisation, privatisation – what the well

known NY-Times columnist Tom Friedman calls the flat world – perhaps a little too quickly. We have forgotten how Europe came into being and why it came into being. The welfare state – which we now discuss so critically – was not invented by idealists, by revolutionaries, by socialist theorists. It was invented by very conservative, mostly quite elderly gentlemen who were consciously building, if you like, a barrier against the past. It was widely believed, widely theorised – both academically and politically – that the reason the world had turned, that Europe had turned to fascism in the 1930ies was because of the economic catastrophe of the depression. The reason that communism was appealing was because of eight million unemployed, to take the German case, and so on. If you wanted to avoid a return to that, you put in place a welfare state, not necessarily called that – there are many different names – which would prevent the kinds of catastrophes that had those political consequences. That is why we have the social welfare states in various forms. “L’ Etat Providence” in France and so on, that we have inherited and that we are perhaps in too much of a hurry to say good bye to. And the reason we are in too much of a hurry to say good bye is because we assume that what is past is past. Good bye to all that. Whatever else the future looks like, it won’t look like the past. Let me have two minutes of indulgence as a historian. Imagine, we were sitting here in Vienna, not in 2007 but in 1907 – what assumptions would we make? We would make a number of assumptions. One of them would be that there had been twenty years of what was not then called globalisation, but the same idea: internationalisation of trade, the steam-ship, the telegraph, the telephone, the rapid movement of goods and money and information around the world. Seemed to make nonsense of nationalism, seemed to make nonsense of the idea of a return to economic national conflicts, seemed - in other words - to make it highly likely that the prospects for the future would be even better than in the past. When Maynard Keynes wrote “The economic consequences of the peace” in 1919, he reminds us, in the first pages, of what the world looked like to a London businessman in 1910. Everything was at his fingertips. Everything was available. The world was a single economy. War would be impossible: too expensive, too bloody, too economically disastrous. Everything had changed it seemed. Everything was for the better. And if you don’t think, that Maynard Keynes is perhaps a reliable witness because he was speaking with some nostalgia, let me make you this quotation: Such were those three decades of relative prosperity and apparent peace, when many thought that there was an infallible formula for the realisation of a centuries old dream of full and happy development of individuality in freedom and in progress, when the century spit out before the eyes of millions of men its many-sided and deceptive and endless prosperity and created a Fata Morgana of comfort, security and happiness for all and for everyone, at reasonable prices and even on credit terms. The author of those words was Ivo Andric and he wrote them in “The Bridge on the Drina”, and the place he is describing is Bosnia 1905/06.

The first age of globalisation ended in catastrophe. We know that all of the illusions of economic internationalism came to grief. We know, that it proved to be the case that even if war is disastrous, is expensive, is catastrophic, that does not mean it will not happen. We know that the illusions of the time proved to be just illusions. The outcome a few years later was unexpected and unpredicted. And anyone who stands here today, as people stood here 100 years ago, and projected and predicted endlessly stable and secure guaranteed futures is just as likely to be proved wrong as you would have been 100 years ago. Now, what’s that got to do with Bruno Kreisky and this award? There is a strong case, a stronger case today I think than there was even 10 years ago, for a European view of politics and of choices. A tragic view, if you like, because we are entering, Ladies and Gentlemen, a new era of insecurity. I don’t just mean of terrorism, that’s the least of it. We are entering a new era of insecurity in economic life. We can no longer expect that the skills that we acquired will be of any

use to us in 10 years time. For the first time, since the Second World War we have got reason to think that our children will not be as prosperous, always secure or safe as we were. In other words we are entering a period which most of the people in this room have not known, because we lived in the years after 1945 – the great age of European security, in one form or another. But it seems that the compromises that Europe has brought about – and the welfare state is after all a compromise – may become more relevant in the future, and not less. The Americans, who don't see the world this way, do not have an experience of the 20th century like ours. They did not experience occupation, they did not experience war on their territory, they did not experience the massive costs of fighting wars. Remember, within six weeks in the battle of France in April, May and June 1940, the French army lost twice as many soldiers as the Americans lost in the whole of the Vietnam War - in just six weeks. So the European experience of the 20th century is very different. A much more sober experience, a much more pessimistic one, and therefore better adapted to our likely future I suspect. I think that the European scepticism is perhaps well advised. There are great risks inherent in what you might call the American view. The only choices are between the past and the future, the old or the new, socialism or capitalism, stagnation or growth, them or us, with us or against us, good or evil. The world does not work that way and there is great danger in understanding it that way.

Let me give you the point of view of a great European, dead now 20 years, but even more relevant than that of many still alive: The French philosopher Renouir Roux, wrote in the 1970s: "Ce n' est jamais la lutte entre le bien et le mal, c'est le préférable contre le détestable." – "The struggle is never between good and evil, it's the preferable against the detestable." The detestable can take many forms and it has taken many forms past and future, but the detestable is always sure of itself, it's always dangerously self-confident, theoretically superior and morally correct.

The preferable is always a compromise, inevitably, disappointingly. It's a compromise – and Europe today is a compromise. Europe is caught, it seems to me, somewhere between the lessons of our memory, the lessons of a remembered past and the destructions of prosperity, which produces a kind of happy forgetting; between prophylactic social provisions put in place to prevent a return to bad pasts and the law of maximised individual profit; between a responsible state with all the problems that poses and the free citizen, with all the problems that he and she pose. Like all compromises it is deeply contradictory and it's deeply flawed, but of all the models – if you want to talk about models available to the world today – Europe's compromise is the one that is best equipped to face a century of insecurity with the great possibility of avoiding a surge of political extremism based upon popular fear and popular anxiety. Europe, I would say, is the 20th century's memorial book, a sort of reminder that the society and the state can go terribly wrong. Europe, in other words, is a book which may have lessons to teach us in the years to come, and it does not reflect very well on the many people in America and here in Europe – public figures and commentators alike – who want to see that book closed as quickly as possible.

There is an alternative: The alternative associated, I suppose, historically with the compromise of Social Democracy and some forms of Christian Democracy, associated in its particular Austrian form with the names of people like Karl Renner and particularly Bruno Kreisky, the reminder of the virtues and of the achievements of the European compromise. These are the reasons why we should be proud of it and not embarrassed to fight for and defend it, nor should we apologise for it. It is an honour to receive an award in the name of such people.

Thank you very much indeed.