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Candles in the Cross-Wind

We have now entered an age of irrationalism. Some call it post-truth; I call it the era of the subconscious. As humankind witnessed countless of times before, in history, the worst in human nature is now being unleashed, allowed to take control of power structures even in places most unimaginable. I am afraid we are doomed to head for a vicious confrontation.

Curtain has risen over a new period of clash of civilizations, as correctly predicted by Samuel Huntington. It was not a wishful thinking of his; rather, a prediction, a foresight. He saw it coming, because he saw the weaknesses of democracies, and the lack of benevolent and powerful leaderships. He was refuted fiercely by many who preferred wishful thinking, but no one realized how much of a realist he was. And here we are, taken hostage by elected authoritarians, who forge their forces with the existing tyrants, to place themselves as missionaries for a Kulturkampf. They are already in the epicenter of clash of civilizations. One of them is Turkish President Erdoğan, who paradoxically is a founder of a platform with the same name, a platform now defunct, in a vegetable state: he is in the epicenter of it, joining Putin and Orbán and Kaczyński and Czech and Slovak, and most recently joined by Donald Trump.

I am a pessimist, because I believe pessimists are well informed optimists, they win but only in the long term. Information is pain, and it demands that one is a realist, not a daydreamer.

We are gathered here, this weekend, in one of the remaining bastions of what comes as a fierce global battle, in Germany, whose memory makes it more alert than anywhere else about the evil gathering in the horizon like a destructive hurricane. This one will be a big battle between freedom and oppression, between malice and justice.

Needless to say, our voices will be harder to hear, in a world dominated by bigotry, lies and hatred.

Our subject for these two days is just about that. In a world where forces of democracy are on the forced retreat, the very profession of journalism sees its noble role being targeted, academia faces an immense challenge for maintaining a ground for reasoned thinking, all I see is hardship for all of us, to keep the torch for truth and demands for justice in the right place.

I have joined you in pain.

Journalism in Turkey is nearly dead; the public debate exists no longer. Most of my colleagues in jail, more than 150 of them were those, who between 2002 and 2013, were the flag carriers for breaking of the taboos in modern Turkey. Most of my colleagues who were fired arbitrarily, since Gezi Park protests until today, more than 9.000 of them, were hopeful that their country would turn into one which sets an example of reconciliation of the dark pages of its past. They had become encouraged, illusioned that they would play a historic role in tearing down the wall between the lies and the truth. But now most them realize what a disillusion it was: with a sharp u-turn, Turkey's dark forces are all back at work, resuming their positions after a brief thaw for democracy, building new alliances in Ankara. It is now back to the basics, Turkey under the current rule has returned to its malicious factory settings.

My hopes diminished exactly when the then PM Erdoğan demanded that the statue of friendship close to Turkish-Armenian border should be demolished. A flash moment. Then, when I witnessed that it was him, backed by the ultranationalist lobbies in Turkey and Azerbaijan, who sabotaged individually the protocol process between Ankara and Yerevan.

Everything since then was set at a backwards mode. It will continue to be this way. The USA is now inwards looking. The EU has been in slow motion implosion mode. And the Minor Asia, Caucasia and the Middle East is now being eclipsed by an expansionist Russia. Both Turkey and Armenia are now moving towards Russian orbit, as Turkey's southern neighborhood falls also prey to rough leaders whose codes are not more different than mafiosi.

Our challenge is multiplied under the circumstances. The codes and modes of these new type of leaders will squeeze all the ongoing, conventional processes of dialogue. More simply, what Russia, Caucasian lands, Turkey and others in the west do, is to subordinate the media, and control the official narratives, to be repeated like parrots by the media's hired guns.

From now on we should trust even less to the shackled media, and we should know that we are left to our own devices. Turkey for example lost the battle for a powerful civil society, at least strong enough to leave a legacy for the next generations to carry the torch. Our taboo breaking process, which began more or less with the efforts of Ragıp Zarakolu in late 1970's, gaining speed in early millennium with the strained human efforts of a small group of brave people; receiving an immense momentum for recognition of the past crimes of humanity with the assassination of our beloved friend Hrant Dink, has come to a halt now. Because Turkey has once more been pushed to deal with more fundamental issue of choosing or refusing a sheer dictatorship.

Under current circumstances, where the rule of law ceased to exist, where the civilian courage is bashed by brute force, where the crimes against humanity once more gain speed - as described bravely by Rakeş Dink lately - where media freedom hits rock bottom, what I see as a media professional, in terms of maintaining even the most minimum dialogue, is the social media, and digital ways of communication, because if we speak about the future, then we should focus on the world of the young, their way to speak and communicate with each other. Internet, smart phones, mobile apps and social media tools have created a global habit, and there is no power that can stop it. Yes they can slow it down, but the new generations, if they keep the flame for a world of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation over what their ancestors have done, nothing can kill their will.

Ten years ago, until we lost Hrant, we were full of hope; of progress, we had believed in a benevolent leadership. Those days are gone as disillusion took over. We are holding candles in harsh crosswinds now. But we should, more than ourselves, believe in our children, and encourage them to engage in their smart ways, to go on. They need only to be shown the right path, and I am sure, will make a difference.