

# PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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## FOR EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY To the participants of the symposium “John Paul II’s Vision of Europe”

“No one can proclaim his own sovereignty or execute his rights at the cost of the sovereignty and rights of his brothers.”

John Paul II

John Paul II formulated this moral imperative fundamental for politics and social life in the contemporary world during his address to the leaders of the delegations to the summit Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, recently held in Rome. Today, as always in the time of radical change, the question of the principle of sovereignty, of particular individuals and of whole nations, together with the question of the actual grounds of human rights, cause an acute political problem.

The present transformation of Europe, and of the whole world, was first started by the events of 1989 – the year of the “autumn of the people.” The radical political changes and the collapse of the totalitarian systems in many European states restored the history of particular individuals, and of whole nations, to their correct perspective. Once again, Europe was offered a chance to regain her unity, to become one Europe with one history.

Solidarity provided the basis for the new politics. It began to spread with the awakening of conscience among the workers in Gdańsk and Szczecin, and it turned out to be so powerful that it finally brought down the Berlin wall, the symbol of the division of our continent. It was solidarity that seemed to have replaced the existing calculations: the division into the spheres of influence and the calculated balance of power. The bloodless withdrawal from the system of totalitarian rule in the states of Central and Eastern Europe, and the return of these states to democratic government, aroused a hope that European politics would restore the respect for the principle *Plus ratio quam vis*.

Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more evident that this optimistic vision also shows certain distinct flaws which are a cause for serious concern and the deepest anxiety. The successive decisions taken by European politicians seem to point to the fact that the division of Europe into spheres of influence has not yet been overcome, and that the principle *Plus vis quam ratio* still remains the criterion of this division. It is still considered that to be sovereign

means to impose one's freedom and interests, by means of power, on the freedom and interests of others.

And so, in answer to the aspirations of Poland, and of other Central and Eastern European countries, to enter the European economic, political and military structures, the suggestion is offered that Russia should become the guardian of the safety of these states in Europe. Some nations and states have thus been assumed to be economically too weak and politically not stable enough to become integrated with the part of Europe whose attributes are power and welfare.

Has it been decided, when the short period of euphoria after the year 1989 was over, that the politics of Yalta should be continued?

A symptomatic and disgraceful sign of this continuation has been one of Europe's greatest tragedies in post-war history: the fratricidal war in the Balkans. This war is a tragedy not only for the nations which are directly involved in it and fighting against one another; it is also a tragedy for the whole of Europe which, because of her passiveness, bears the blame for what has been happening in the Balkan region, right in front of our eyes.

In our country, Poland – and especially in this University – we have particular reasons for speaking of matters which are fundamental for Europe. Since it was here, in this country, that workers made the principle of interhuman solidarity the method of (morally right and at the same time efficient) political action, we will always feel obliged to recall this principle and to defend it whenever it is imperilled.

Somewhat less than three years ago, on February 2, 1991, the Institute of John Paul II at the Catholic University of Lublin initiated a debate among the representatives of different branches of science: ethics, law, medicine, psychology and theology on the one hand, and some "Solidarity" senators of the Republic of Poland on the other. The reason for holding the debate was our anxiety caused by the demands made by some "Solidarity" senators – democratically elected with the help of our votes – who strongly promoted a parliamentary act which would outlaw one category of people, namely the unborn.

Another equally important reason for our worry concerned the possible destructive consequences which the act depriving the life of some human beings of any legal protection would have for the institutions of state and law, should such an act be passed and accepted by the state. The transcript of the discussion which took place on that occasion was published in a book whose title is simultaneously a thesis: *Nienarodzony miarą demokracji* (*The Unborn as the Measure of Democracy*).

The question of legal protection of the unborn by the state turns out to be closely connected with the question of saving the state and the law from totalitarian corruption. It is impossible to deprive anyone of the legal protection of his inalienable right to live without arbitrarily claiming the power to question

this right, which is the basis of all other human rights. Does any parliamentary majority, who claim for themselves this power, differ in any respect from a dictator claiming for himself the prerogative to be above the law?

Are we not, then, in for a particular *coup d'etat* which is directed against the very essence of the institution of law and state?

Thus, we see the necessity to proclaim a "state of moral and political loss" and, at the same time, to bring an *accusation* against the ones who are responsible for it.

Let us have a closer look at the latest proclamation of the German Constitutional Tribunal in Karlsruhe which, due to its verdict concerning the act of crime on the unborn (*rechtswidrig und straffrei*), materializes the infamous *jein* principle: *ja* and *nein* simultaneously. The ruling which defies both human reason and the unequivocal character of the law is becoming more and more the leading principle in European politics. What would the one most concerned here, namely the unborn, say to this verdict if he were given a chance not only to scream silently but to speak openly on the matter which is to decide on his life or death? Would he say "Thank you," or would he rather say "I accuse!"?

The course of recent events, both in Poland and all over Europe, makes us not only deepen our concern, but also broaden its scope into other domains where violence and oppression predominate.

Is it not now time that the ones who feel most deeply worried by these problems express their common concern (*solicitudo rei socialis*) in a particular way? A chance for us to do this could be at the Lublin symposium "John Paul II's Vision of Europe," and particularly on the birthday of the Holy Father, the author of the encyclical *Solicitudo rei socialis*.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*