

Report of the 52nd EJ International Congress

Poland (Uniejow and Łódź) – October 9-12, 2015

Poland has been the country chosen by the European Journalists Association - The Communication Network (EJ) to hold its 52nd international Congress that took place on October 9-12, 2014 in Uniejow and Lodz. It is the second time that EJ organizes events in this country; the first time was in 2008 when members coming from different countries in addition to meetings with Polish representatives of local, national and European institutions visited several realities in order to know territories where European projects were implemented and to learn attitudes of subnational compliments to promote socio-economic development in European contexts. Poland was chosen to celebrate the historical Eastern EU enlargement and to pay tribute to the country first victim of Nazism 75 years ago.

Topics of the Congress were **“Civil Society and Democracy: The Role of Media – EU Eastern Enlargement and Neighboring Countries”** and it was opened on **October 9** at the **Uniejow Castle** by the EJ president Paolo Magagnotti. He presented some of the main “hot points” around the globe from the Ukrainian crisis to the threat of ISIS, situations which represent also threats that the European Union need to face.



“Considering that we live in a highly interdependent and globalized world we need not less but more Europe, a stronger European Union with competences and power required not just for promoting well-being of European citizens but also for providing a contribution to promote and keep peace and stability worldwide”, president Magagnotti said.

The European Union, which is the most fascinating democratic project that has never been seen before in the history of humanity, he added, needs to find new ways to regain citizens’ confidence in its Institutions and in the European project as a whole. To this regard many member states need to stop blaming the European Union to cover their own mistakes and failures.

“The low turnout and the rise of Eurosceptic parties or even parties advocating a Titanic end of the European projects – he added - must be a concern for all those who have at heart the future of the Old Continent and of its peoples.”

After thanking all the local institutions which were instrumental in making the Congress possible and the colleague Katarzyna Pelka who with the colleagues Katarzyna Jagodzinska and Krzysztof Jagodzinski worked very hard in the organization of the Congress, Paolo Magagnotti ended his opening underlining the need to keep solidarity at the basis of the European integration and calling all the EJ colleagues to do all what they can to implement the European Public Space in order to gain citizens’ ownership on the European project and to win in the hearts and minds of people to it.

In the first Congress’s session, chaired by the EJ Executive Committee member Katarzyna Pelka, the Lodz region and its place and role in the European Union was presented.

The vice-marshal of the Lodzkie Region, Dorota Ryl, welcomed all participants and, underlying the importance of the historical legacy of the city, pointed out important assets of the local reality represented among others by thermal resources, touristic attractions and energy production. In fact Uniejow is the first Polish thermal city.

Creating a good infrastructure system in order to create the best conditions for attracting more tourists and foreign investments is one of their political priority. To this regard, the importance of the funding through European structural funds was underlined.

The vice-marshal underlined the strong commitment to implement at the most the natural conditions of the region for the production of renewable energy. The

regional institutions, Ryl added, invest a lot in creating the conditions for making the region a business-friendly environment for investors and to this regard the Region managed to locate 100% of its the European funds.



Quite impressive is the commitment in the region to promote research and innovation with several projects presented by Ewa Kochanska, president of the board of the Research and Innovation Center Pro-Akademia, based in Lodz, and being one of the leading research institutions in Poland.

Significant is the commitment of the center in supporting this in this society development by giving assistance in the process of education and sustainable development in the country engaging different actors: administration at local and national level, NGOs, entrepreneurs, HEIs and media, which are playing an important role in motivating in favor of innovation and setting a good practice.

In the afternoon participants were very much impressed in visiting the huge Bełchatow open coal mine, in the center of Poland, Lodz Voivodeship, which has an estimated reserves of 1,930 million tons of coal with annual coal production around 50 million tones used by the power plant nearby.

Bełchatów has the largest coal fuelled thermal power plant in Europe, the Elektrownia Bełchatów, also, one of largest fossil fuel power stations in the world.



It produces 27-28 TWh of electricity per year, 20% of the total power generated in Poland. Regarding pollution expense stated that using the most modern technologies it is reduced at the minimum.

The second day of the Congress, **October 10**, had three sessions concentrated on **“Civil Society, Multiculturalism and Democracy”**. The first session was chaired by EJ Secretary-General Corina Fornade, who introduced the presentations underlying the need of a growing debate about the citizens participation in creating a European Public Space which should create the conditions to influence policy-making processes and fill the gap between institutions and citizens.

Robert Heine, political consultant and media trainer and member of the executive committee of the EJ German section, made the presentation related to Web 2.0 and focusing on such networks and political decision-making process today including its influences on journalism.

He presented the main aspects and scenarios of the new technologies that can be to disposal of everybody using the web and highlighted the need to have a consistent updating of skills in using this new opportunities which can be very useful in a positive way in favor of a healthy society on the one hand or misused also to

influence media on the other hand. Social networks, with Facebook being the more used followed, represent a great opportunity also to put people in the conditions to positively influence policy-making processes but it requires skills, Hein added. A growing rise of “prosumers”, with the same subject being in the same time producer and consumer within the web platform, and the audience that can comment immediately and insert themselves into the story, journalists need to change their traditional mindset and adapt to the new requirements of the web.



In such a context Hein underlined for example the need for TV-journalists to interact with audience in live broadcasting, to have a colleague having simultaneously a web connection to provide immunity feedback and use or insights related to the topic on air and to this regard they recalled the experience of the German broadcaster ZDF (<http://youtube.be/Fwhz3srYwZU>). The speaker concluded highlighting the fact that journalists, for getting the most of the opportunities offered by the web, need to have with it an interactive approach.

Helmut Hetzel, Benelux correspondent in The Hague for media in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg and EJ honorary president reported about “Democracy and Multimedia Society” focusing especially on the experience of the Netherlands where more than 100 nationalities are living. Hetzel highlighted the cultural assets that a multiethnic society can represent but at the same time expressed worries about intolerance which can lead to threat peaceful leaving the European Communities.



“The Historical Eastern Enlargement: Hopes and Socio-economic Impact” was the topic of the third session. The session, chaired by the Czech vice-president Barbara Pehj, who recalled the hopes for a better future in Central and Eastern Europe generated by the Eastern enlargement, was introduced by a reflection on “Europe in memory of our history: 1914 - 1939 – 1989 – 2004” by the German EJ Vice-President Rotger H. Kindermann. Considering that this reflection recalls tragic events of the last century of which in 2014 fall important anniversaries and also refers to the 10th anniversary of the historical Eastern EU enlargement and other events that marked the beginning of freedom for millions of Europeans, Kindermann’s text is reported here in full.

“In order to present the next topic let me make some remarks:
This year is really a time for historical momentous: In numerous public functions we have already been remembering the year 1914, as the beginning of the First World War: 100 years ago. Likewise we have already been remembering 1939 as the beginning of the Second World War: 75 years ago.

We also remember the year 1989, the fall of the Iron Curtain, which took place 25 years ago. We look back to the year 2004, when Europe had been almost completed thanks to the EU membership of former Eastern bloc countries.

In his 700 pages book about the outbreak of the first catastrophe of the 20th century Christopher Clark begins by stating that: ‘The European Continent was at peace on the morning of Sunday, 28 of June 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie Chotek arrived at Sarajevo railway station. Thirty-seven days later, it was war.’”

Some generals in Vienna wanted to punish the small and rebellious neighbor-state of Serbia. The balance sheet at the end was horrible: The First World War in Europe

mobilized 65 million soldiers, brought down three empires, claimed 20 million deaths as well as 21 million wounded people.



Today there is one important question left: have we learnt ever since anything and if so, what have we learnt? The most important answer to that question: Nationalism is the greatest danger in our history, the root of all evil in politics. One must overcome nationalism as a mutual task and obligation, which unfortunately have not yet been achieved as it is shown in the recent political developments.

To what extent the beginning of the 1939 catastrophe has been linked up with the first catastrophe of 1914? This question will still be a controversial one among the historians for a long time. But there is one thing, which is certain: the German attack on Poland on September 1st, 1939, was preceded by a diplomatic dirty trick, I mean: the German-Soviet nonaggression pact between Hitler and Stalin. The historical responsibility is quite obvious: the Nazi regime systematically prepared, provoked and waged the war, in the same way as the assassination of 6 million Jews and the extermination of other minorities.

Only few days after Hitler came to power, the dictator revealed his aggressive plans to the generals of the German army. The question, we have to put today, is: Could and should the other European powers not have stopped this aggressive policy much earlier?

Historically considered, we have to learn that the policy of appeasement only deferred the catastrophe by aggravating the situation at the same time.

The scenario of those days strongly reminds us of what has been happening in Syria in the last two years. With opened eyes the world has accepted the violent escalation, even the brutal terrorism of the fighters for the „Islamic State“.

Which lessons have we drawn from 1939? Why do we still permit, that a state tries to legitimize his expansion policy? Nobody wants to make wrong comparisons, but I believe, Putin's New-Russia-policy is nothing else than a kind of garnishing and concealing imperial expansion.

But how can European Union Member States commit themselves to peace, react to military border violations done by autocrats, who ignore international law and human?

The 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall will take place in a few weeks only. The Wall was broken down from the East, motivated by the will and love of liberty and by the strong wish for the unity of the nation.

But we must not reduce those events only to the fall of the wall. The Polish people began that historical development; they prepared the breakdown of communist regimes in Eastern Europe thanks to the Solidarnosc-movement and thanks to the unforgettable pope John Paul II.

It was Hungary, which opened the Iron Curtain at first. What have we learned from the miracle, which took place 25 years ago? There is no doubt, that the wish for liberty and people's self-determination are being so deeply rooted, that they cannot be suppressed any longer.

Influenced by those roots and convictions we have meanwhile experienced the collapse of states. In a peaceful way it happened during the separation between the Czech and the Slovak Republics in 1993. Or in a violent way, as it was the case with Yugoslavia.

As a rule such developments cannot be stopped and may be democratically solved in a civic process. How to handle such a process, was just shown in the Scottish referendum. What was possible in the United Kingdom, must be valid and possible for other countries too. Such as Spain, or for the Balkan countries or the Caucasian region.

Governmental misconceptions, which took their origins on US political desks such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, will not have any good future at all. This also applies to the inhabitants of Eastern Ukraine, who were not allowed to decide by themselves on the future of their state.

Once again it is nationalism, that prevents the rational and democratic will of the people.



It was in 2004 that a vision could finally be materialized: the former states of the Eastern Bloc became members of the European Union. We all have made a mutual promise, that means, to solve problems peacefully, to help each other trustfully, to create a coordinating policy on all lines and to protect and safeguard our common traditional values.

Today, ten years later, the Polish statesman Donald Tusk has become president of the European Council. Corresponding to the European ideas the Polish people are proud of that appointment, because they consider the European Union as a genuine and trustworthy institution of power. The Polish people do not consider the European Union as a troublemaker, which might disturb decisions taken in Paris or Berlin. Having chosen Tusk for that position in Brussels, could be a stroke of luck for Europe.

We have come together here in Lodz, to hold tightly to our common experience and values and to draw our lessons. Journalists must not keep aloof from that learning process. We have to declare ourselves openly, when peace and liberty are under pressure. That is why I am really worried about the influence of so called „ Putin-sympathizers“, who are increasing especially in Germany. Among those sympathizers are not only politicians of those days but also numerous lobbyists and journalists. Of course, economic interests play an enormous role in this context. There is a great number of politicians, who are always preaching stability, while in

reality things are just drifting away. Are we confronting a turning point of Europe, as it is often said?

Are we confronting an unpleasant turning point, which leads to more quarrel and mistrust?

The decline and fall of Ukraine just now is an example of how difficult it is, to draw the right lessons from history. Journalists – accompanying that process – take a high amount of responsibility.

In the role of critical observers they must pay more attention to the principals of a free press: We must investigate much more to the soil. We must reflect on this situation, ignoring political or military preconditions, and we must have the courage for own position.

Geographically speaking, here in Lodz we are already quite near to the scene of conflict and we can only hope, that we get closer to the truth of the whole situation.”

The Polish member of the European Parliament Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, frm. First Polish minister for European Affairs and frm. First Polish Vice-President of the European Parliament, made a presentation focusing on the main challenges for the European Union today and made in-depth considerations of the weight and role within the European litigation of the countries that joined the European project after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

To this regard he underlined that talking about Eastern countries within the European Union can be misleading since all the EU countries are equally part and actors of the common goal in creating peace, stability and well-being for European citizens.



Concerning other European countries of the former communist block he emphasized the fact that they have the right to join European Union and that the negotiation process can help them to improve their attitudes in creating a functioning structure of the relevant state.

Marek Kozak, director of the center for European regional and local studies at the University of Warsaw, underlined the importance of national components in shaping a European project and in taking citizens closer to the EU institutions. We need to be aware that regions and local authorities represents core elements of democracy and that they need to have more power in the EU policymaking processes. In such context he referred to some of the basic characteristics of subnational components in Poland.

Bojan Brezigar, frm. editor in chief of the Slovenian newspaper “Primorski Dnevnik” recalled his personal experience when Slovenia enter the European Union and seeing people enthusiastic of this historical event but realizing after not a very long time that they needed to face anyway difficult problems which could be solved just by themselves.

The last session, chair by Jacques Campé, EJ Executive Committee member and frm. FIJET Secretary-General, that with “EU Eastern Neighboring Countries’ Present and Future Prospect”. He introduced the session putting attention on the Ukrainian crisis.

Tomas Grzywaczewski, Polish journalist and traveler, made a very interesting presentation of trips and their visits to different Northern countries where many differences on natural and cultural ways are marking the human landscape.

Very interesting were also the presentation made by two journalists coming from the Caucasian region. Natia Sirabidze, head of the media and public relations department of the government of Ajaria Autonomous Republic in Georgia, presented the media landscapes of the country highlighting the need to have connection with colleagues of the E U countries.

<http://www.european-journalists.eu/uploads/Media and Government in Georgia.pptx>



Tinatin Dvalishvili, manager of Caucasian Center of journalists, presented the media landscapes involving together with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and focused on the commitment by journalists of different countries to cooperate together.

<http://www.european-journalists.eu/uploads/Media Landscape in the Caucasus Region.pptx>

The EJ 53 International Congress will take place in Budapest on October 8-11, 2015.