

WORLD POLITICS AND THE CRISIS

(Notions and Position)

Conversation with a philosopher Kálmán Pócza

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Abstract: Reports coming from different parts of the world use the term 'crisis' or 'world-wide crisis'. The question is: is crisis a relatively new phenomenon or did it already plague ancient societies? Do we know the nature of crises? What role does morality play in the evolvement of crisis? Are new ideologies needed? What are the factors that impact the formation of awareness? Can we equate world politics and world economy? What kind of perspectives and career models do today's youngsters have? We are looking for the answers to these questions in this conversation.

Keywords: crisis, politics, morality, media, education systems, world economy

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South-East Europe: Many people say that the state- and social philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle are due to the velitation of the Athenians and Lacedaemonians. In other words, these works may not exist today without that crisis – which in those days seemed unmanageable – that necessitated the examination of forces, which kept society alive and those, which were destructive. Do we know today the positive and destructive powers of our contemporary society? Can we highlight the most important incitations?

Kálmán Pócza: The concept of crisis was already known in the ancient times, as well, so the notion itself and the feeling is not new. My observation rather concerns the fact, that most people from the ancient times on, in European history had the idea of what crisis means. Mostly, it was typical of the time between the two world wars. I, myself made researches on the history of Germany at that time. Historians say about this era, that these times were the culture or the prosperity of crisis. People used to talk about the crisis, even when it was not yet actually present in Germany. Several books were written around 2000, which tried to examine – form a cultural-historical point of view - life in Germany during the crisis. As a consequence, it turned out, that people had already had a sense of crisis not only from the end of the World War I. but also during it. In my opinion, there has always been a kind of realisation of crisis in people. If we do not count euphoric moments, and we are in Eastern Europe, these moments are only moments in themselves, and the sense of crisis lasts much longer, than the pleasure of euphoria. From this point of view, we ought to be absolutely aware of these concepts and their meanings because I believe, that every single generation has always been living in a kind of crisis. There are many, who lived their whole lives as they had constantly been in a critical situation. There is no doubt about the fact, that nowadays we are in an economic – and if we think of Europe – in a political crisis, as well but I do not think this situation to be very special.

Do we know the nature of crisis? (Its function, regularity of appearance)

As far as I am concerned, no. Some time ago, I was at a conference where the performer drew my attention to the fact, that crisis has bad aspects. There are, of course, good aspects, but at the conference it was mostly about economic crisis. The performer told us, that a really positive side of this crisis is, that it turned out, that economic science is absolutely not a science. Since the colleague was also a philosopher, he claimed with a kind of satisfaction, that today's economists do not know anything about the current crisis situation. Moreover, they neither know where it may lead. The world's leading economists also write about huge steps in the *New York Times* and in other famous newspapers but the question is; what is going to be done in reality? The problem is that most of these economists are not in a decision making position – if they were, it would be possible that their decision was different from those, which were made by the politicians.

The main point is that nobody has a clue about the future. It is not just by coincidence, that a big part of famous economists has started dealing with economic-history because this is how they can make predictions for the future. They try to analyse longer periods of history, while history itself is often accused by the fact, that it is not such a strong science like economics. The reason for this claim is that history is actually recountment and it does not work with exact numbers. So, concerning economy I have to say, that we do not know anything for sure. If we look at the other side, examining Europe, we do not know much about the political point of view because the European Union is a very unique alliance system, which is may be torn a bit, but here we can not really come up with historical examples that could show similarity. Consequently, we nor either know from a political point of view what this crisis is like in which we now live. I would again put emphasis on the fact that realization of crisis is similar to the previous time's. The process of crisis itself is probably quite different, and we are not aware of what is going to happen, like people did not it between the two world wars.

What role does morality have in the formation of crisis?

It is the third aspect, people speak about economics, political, and moral crisis, as well. We currently live in a moral crisis. I believe, plenty of generations got into an ethical crisis. This is partly due to the desire for living in a golden age, that is why we consider recent times as a moral crisis. This 'holy golden age' means an idealized world that has never actually existed but we long to go back. Where people would have had a sense of crisis like we have now. I would say that there are distressing signs but we have to be as careful with those depictions of moral crisis, as they were predictions.

People politicize, or rather speak about politics (at least about a 'version' of it, what the media broadcasts). Why can not we see philosophers on the scene of politics? What is the reason for the fact, that philosophers are shown up in the stereotype as being abstract thinkers, not like people who deal with problems of the real world?

To tell the truth, I am happy with this thought. Those few philosophers who were active at the time of the changing of the regime did their best and it is sure that in a stable democracy philosophers should take over the roles of politicians. The spiritual habitude of philosophers and politicians should have a totally different adjustment to mentality, approach, and to the world, so everything is all right this way, that we do not see any philosophers on the field of politics. This is not only true for Hungary, but I would rather say, that this situation characterizes all the other stable democracies, as well. The special case, which could have been observed in Hungary, that philosophers and writers actively participated in the process of the changing of regime, is due to the fact that there were not any different latitudes left. As a consequence we can say that active politicians could not overthrow the system. For this, those intellectuals were necessary, who also tried to consummate their own ideas at the time of communism.

Concepts

Shall we still use concepts from the nineteenth century, or ancients notions like communism, socialism, democracy or do we rather need new ideologies? Can these categories still be valid if we think about the structure of the future plans of the state?

If we approach communism and socialism from a pragmatic point of view, we need to differentiate them from the concept of democracy. However, democracy is an actual notion that defines our days. There is also a difference between ancient and modern democracy. I should note that this is representative democracy unlike direct democracy, which was present at the ancient times. We need to deal with representative democracy because I believe, communism and socialism are not able to fill the position, which could make realistic future plans for a political community. They may feature it, but can not consummate. Then again, representative democracy could surely accomplish it. In my opinion, the problem is that political communities living in democracy have high expectations of democracy itself. I suppose, that the problem is not certainly connected to the concept of democracy, but how politics and the members of the community comprehend it. What representative democracy promises to us, that we expect too much of it, is the biggest problem. People often dealt with parliamentarism – which is one of the basic institutions of representative democracy - even between the two world wars. Moreover, there were serious debates in Europe and in the United Kingdom, as well, if parliamentarism is operable or not. The problem had at that time been already the fact, that people expected too much of the parliamentarism and even of the parliament. The basic institution of an ideal representative democracy, the parliament would work in an ideal case, that representatives arguing in a rational way would find the only existing public interest and they could agree on (through making compromises) the best solution which is good for the community. Other interrelated themes are the attributes of an ideal member of a parliament, who is the one who knows about everything,

understand their profession, and knows about what he or she votes for. Moreover, the European people see the institution of the parliament surrounded with a shine of glory. This is my opinion. We have to change this. We have to recognize that members of the parliament do not know everything and that the parliament is not the field of rational debates, the parliament is not for this, this is not its primary function. Today's parliamentary institutions have completely different, yet very important functions, and this is true for the parliaments of European countries and as well as of North-American countries. Without doubt, that there are differences, thus this view could be refined, yet my underlying observation is that we have exaggerated expectations from a parliamentary institutional system. Most importantly, the expectations of the members of the political community should be slightly transformed. This does not mean reducing those expectations by all means, it is more important, however, to shed light on parliamentary roles essential for the functioning of the 21st century democracy. This is needed to make members of political communities recognize that the Parliament's main role today is other than the debate of representatives based on rational arguments.

Is it still valid to name the Hungarian social settlement as democracy? Can this form of state be considered effective? Is it more effective than if the official form of state would be for example a kingdom?

Hungary should surely be considered as a democracy. In the past years people spoke a lot about the fact – even the foreign presses – that Hungary ceased to exist as a democracy, or at least that the country was heading the good way of ending this form of state. In my opinion, in the past two years very few changes happened in Hungary on the level of institutions, at least in the way that current governing parties really wanted to achieve or what the critics of governing parties see in them. If we talk about Hungarian democracy we should strictly talk about the new basic rules of Hungary, since it defines the basic institution system of Hungarian democracy from this year. Furthermore, if we talk about the above mentioned things, I believe, that apart from one or two basic institutional changes the new law has not brought any further ones. I think, future will either repel or confirm this argument. I have to admit, that Hungarian democracy did not manage to renew from a political cultural aspect neither. This can also be evaluated as positive or negative but the main point of my opinion is that Hungary is still a democracy. Two or three institutional changes, notable personal alternations and in respect of political characters heavy modifications have been made. It can be a matter of dispute whether it did good to the country's democracy or not, but these changes should definitely be differentiated from those settled in the new basic law.

What is the situation in other countries?

One of the countries we usually refer to when we try to compare Hungary's quality and condition with other Western-European's is France. I have to note in brackets, that I have doubts about these groundless comparisons which want to highlight that in Hungary everything is wrong, but on the other hand in Western-Europe everything is all right. Moreover, in France several political scientists claim, that this is not a real democracy. Not only political characters do not name these solutions in France absolutely not democratic, but also the institutional systems. However, the main point is that differences really exist between Hungarian democracy and the political cultures of the institutional systems in Western-European countries. It is very important that we have to think twice and put these differences through strict examinations. On the whole, the Hungarian democracy is probably in a worse situation than the French, but to claim that they are as different as chalk and cheese is exaggeration.

Does communication exist between people and politics that defines their lives? How does the media; or the use of language of common people manipulated by the media, influence this communication? (Apart from the media, is there something that has a word in the formation of consciousness?)

Yes, of course. Mediums usually get secondary functions if we count political socialisations. In Hungary, the refusals connected to political parties is relatively big which was considered as a sense of crisis before. We have to say that the relation of mediums to politics is more interesting than to certain political characters. No doubt that they are rejective – it has more reasons: the heritage of communism, people turn away from politics, and there is a little disappointment in the system developed after the changing of the regime and in political characters respectively. System-changing parties have disappeared and there are just a few political characters who could remain active in the past twenty years. The antipathy against these politicians is huge. Media does not help people turn back to politics. The logic of it dictates looking for scandals, and this results in people turning away even more from politics. The responsibility of media can be concluded this way.

II. Position

Where can we find Hungary on the field of world politics? Can we think of ourselves as factors?

Of course, we are a very small country to be able to heavily influence world politics, while the happening of the past two years show that we can get into the center of attention whether we want it or not – but whether we can influence the flowing of the world with this, is a good question. The fact, that leading, popular American economists and scientists of politics deal with what happens in Hungary means, that we drew their interests on ourselves and this influences their way of thinking. However, if we can influence the course of the world with this is not sure because we are, as I have mentioned, small country. So, from this aspect it is good if we have enough self-consciousness, but at the same time we have to make a realistic picture of ourselves and about the position of Hungary in world politics.

Does state first of all, have to correspond to the system of world politics or is it better if they prefer their own interests?

Of course, the coefficient of both is what builds up this position. It has no use giving up ourselves, we need to take responsibility of the fact, that a state has special interests. I believe, from this point of view, that in the past two years the interests of Hungary are more strongly represented on the international field – whereas these representations are not always right and sometimes are being exaggerated. Apart from this, we have to say that the interests of Hungary need to be presented somewhere; but at the same time we are part of the European community, as well as world-economics and world politics. So, if we did something that does not equal the rules of the European virtue system and the norms of political communities respectively, then we would partly get acquainted to these and partly end up at the coastline. All in all, we always ought to find our way between the two. We can quarrel about the fact if we managed to find this way in the past two years or in the past twenty years – we should also examine these.

Is it necessary to copy the routinized systems of other countries (e.g. education system) instead of working out 'new' special systems that fit the features of our country?

Here, I would like to refer to what I have mentioned in the first part of the conversation, that examining the institution systems and political cultures of other countries is really interesting; I, personally occupy myself with political science, as well. We ought to handle these examples in a sophisticated way, we should know what can be made real here, in Hungary and what can not. First of all, people have to see the differences in the background, consider these very carefully and then we can take over the formulas. This means taking them over, but sometimes it is necessary. No really special Hungarian political life exists, we are part of the European culture and from this aspect there are similarities and differences, as well. However, through the interference of the two, an institution can be established abroad.

How important is it to make the federation between countries that share the same geographic, ethnographic, and cultural features stronger?(e.g. currency, TV broadcasts that have an effect on the formation of culture, etc.) To what extent can these different national characteristics gain space in tendencies like this?

I think, this question can mostly be related to Europe in this case, - nowadays, we are not concerned with the United States – the question is here the most problematic and the most exciting at the same time. So, we are looking for the answer of the question that what kind of connection can be established among people with different languages and cultures. In my opinion, there has never been in history so wide communication system that characterises the communities of states in Europe today. However, some people do not believe it, but the attunement of higher education institutions has in a huge extent contributed to the fact, that strong ties were made among the citizens of countries. We can say that today a high percentage of students of higher education in Western Europe spend at least one semester abroad, and this fact in itself deepens the cooperation, understanding and the opportunity of understanding – which is of course a great advantage. At the same time, how can we expect from a more intensive communication the formation of a common consciousness – is a bigger question. Moreover, it is a more interesting question that how can the manifestation of special national interests work. I believe, it is really important to find our special national quality or national self-consciousness even if it is a very disputable topic that from what is Hungarian really Hungarian. If we would like to take an exact example, let's examine Hungarian folk dance. If somebody knows the elements of it, then they know where these elements come from, and how they are mixed and so it is a melting-pot, whereas we do not call this as Hungarian folk dance. We could as well examine this concept, like other notions that define our identity. To my mind, some kind of national identity exists, but its borders are constantly changing; we can not deny it, it exists. However, the borders of identity can always be questioned, I mean where it ends, so that what can be called originally Hungarian or what can not.

Are we allowed to put an equal sign between world politics and world economics? When speaking about leading politicians and parties, should we think about the common people or the ideas behind, or of the interests and defining forces of finances and economics?

We can not just differentiate them but we have to make differences between world economics and its members and between world politics and the politicians of the world: it seems that this is a result of globalisation that the power of politicians is smaller, whereas the ascendancy of the serious factors of the members of world economics is growing. This raises the question that if we want to live in democracy the authority of the chosen politicians would be able to control the actions of the characters of world economy. Consequently, we do not know what the result of the fact will be, that the center of power has shifted to the members of world economics whereas our leaders have a smaller and smaller authority – what kind of new adjustment to democracy and to the characters of world economics is needed? So, this would be the phenomenon due to what we can say that it is crucial to make differences between world economics and its members and also the characters of world politics. Furthermore, we will regret the fact that the power is shifted into the hands of people who were not chosen by the community.

What effect does the settlement of multinational companies have on the economics of Hungary and as well as on foreign countries? What kind of affect does the secession of multinational companies – and with this simultaneously the decrease of GDP – and the increase in unemployment rate have on economics?

Concerning the past twenty years, we should say that we needed them, whereas we could reach better positions if we had more self-consciousness. We should have stood out for our interests. I think the past two years' happenings seem to be a bit of corrections from this point of view, but they were late. On the one hand, they had to temper with such connections- and institution systems that had been routinish, and their distraction caused many problems. We will see the result if it would do good from the reorganisation of the Hungarian political community and connections system. It is also true, that Hungary needed these multinational companies after the changing of the regime.

What kind of prospects do today's young people and less-young people have? It is like it was an expectation for the past few years to go abroad and it seems, the only opportunity was working abroad – because there are different opportunities for those, who settle down in a foreign country. What fate will our country have if the 'most important' part of people emigrate?

Of course, it would be a tragic. The question is more like whether they really travel and if yes, for how long. If we search for an article, blogs, web pages on the internet, every day there is news about how many people emigrated and why; what blogs are concerned, there are special ones which were opened to those who emigrated in order to switch their ideas about why it was necessary to go abroad. So, it is really a threatening tendency, and I am not sure if we – in the past twenty/twenty-two years – managed to create a positive picture for young people – rather not than yes. It is really hard to stay here in Hungary, this is a rather difficult decision because the fate of those who stay will definitely be harder than those who emigrate to Western-Europe and try to earn their living abroad. I think, it is understandable, but it would be hard to say it is not. Here, the question is probably about the extent, that what is the burden one can endure at home because of they can stay at home.

A similarly difficult closing question... what should a country do not to be exposed to the superiority of the financial and economic policy of the European Union (in the sense that the defining interests of the country can stay in the ownership of it)?

First of all, I would transform the question because we should not think the European Union as an exterior power that wants our goods, we were the ones who enter it, we wanted it, we are members of it and we can to some extent influence its decisions – sometimes, in some questions not adequately enough but in others we can validate our interests. So, the European Union is a community and it is another question if a nation, political community or state is able to validate its interests in a better or worse way. Here is really something to do and it would be very important that the interests of the political community of the Hungarian state to appear.

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