

# HELSINKI CITIZENS ASSEMBLY

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### EDITORIAL

THE GULF WAR has been hailed as the first crisis of the post-Cold War era, even, according to US Secretary of State Baker, the "defining moment" of the post-Cold War order. The war was also a crisis for the Helsinki Citizens Assembly.

The HCA was created out of the fantasies of those who opposed the Cold War in both East and West. It was founded by people who imagined a peaceful, democratic and united Europe once the Cold War was over and who believed that the methods of the 1980's, the "non-political" activities of self-organised groups of citizens working together, the construction of an all-European society, were, if not sufficient, at least necessary to achieve this goal. The founding assembly meeting in Prague in October 1990, was at once a celebration of and a farewell to the Eastern human rights movements, and the Western peace movements. But it was also the beginning of something new.

The Gulf War has caused us to re-examine this something new. The war was immensely contradictory. On the one hand, the international reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was the first time that the world community had actually acted in solidarity to condemn an act of aggression - it was a real demonstration of the possibility of post-Cold War co-operation. On the other hand, the scale of violence, the use of (non-nuclear) weapons of mass destruction, the new enthusiasm for military means of solving conflicts shattered hopes for a new era of peace and democracy.

The war succeeded in its aims of liberating Kuwait and punishing Saddam Hussein. And yet it left an environmental disaster in Kuwait and the Gulf (comparable in scale to Chernobyl), it has decimated the population of Iraq and Kuwait (the victims of Saddam Hussein) either as a result of flight from the war zone or through death. It has had severe economic consequences for Eastern Europe and the Third World because of the rise in oil prices and interest rates, the loss of remittances, and the foregone peace dividend.

The war involved unprecedented co-operation between the superpowers and between the members of the coalition, which included Arabs and European States. And yet it has provoked deep new divisions between Arabs and Europeans, between Muslims and Christians, Jews and Palestinians, between rich and poor, North and South and even West and East.

The HCA itself was divided. The HCA is organised into national committees. Some national committees, eg in Italy and Germany, opposed the war. Others, e.g. the Czech Republic, supported the war, drawing a parallel with Munich in 1938. Yet others, e.g. France, Britain, Hungary or the Soviet Union, were divided in their opinions about the war. The problem was that the war was a no-win situation. There was no right side to be on. To be against the war (as I was) meant coming to terms with the uncomfortable fact that without the war, sanctions may not have worked and the Kuwaitis might have continued to suffer occupation, torture and execution. On the other hand, to be for the war, meant condoning the terrible slaughter of thousands of Iraqis, the disintegration of Iraq and Kuwait, the legitimisation of military methods, the economic costs, and above all, the new

political divisions. All of us took sides but most of us felt uncomfortable with our positions.

In the post-Gulf War era, the HCA has to debate and discuss the new divisions both in the world in general and among ourselves. We have to analyse how the Gulf War has defined President Bush's New World Order and what this means for our own goals in Europe.

The HCA emerged out of the old Cold War order - a permanent confrontation with far-reaching consequences for society in both East and West. During the 1980's, those engaged in the dialogue between citizens movements across the East-West divide developed a common analysis. The Cold War was viewed as a kind of collusion between power structures rather than a conflict, a way of preserving power structures by emphasizing the threat of "the other". Although the situation in East and West was not symmetrical, opposition movements in both East and West shared a common interest in opposing the idea of confrontation - the imaginary war which was played day after day in the Central European "theatre".

The Cold War came to an end because of the collapse of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe. What we underestimated was the effect of this collapse on Western society. We should have realised, on the basis of our own analysis, how profoundly the end of the Cold War would shake the "national security" community - the military-industrial complex especially in the United States, the assumptions and rhetoric of established politicians, the strategic analysis developed in think-tanks and universities, the defence-dependent regions, and so on.

Long before the Gulf War, there was talk of a new threat from the South, resulting from the proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction, the rise of fundamentalism and nationalism, of drug traffickers and terrorists, of newly regional dictators like Saddam Hussein or Gadaffi. Despite warnings from think tanks or ministries of defence, this threat did not seem somehow as real or convincing as the old Soviet threat. The Gulf War changed all that. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait succeeded in substantiating the threat from the South. Whatever the rights or wrongs of Western behaviour, the Cold War machine sprang back into action. The US put into operation a plan designed in the early 1980's to contain a thrust by the Soviet Union, involving more weapons and troops than in Europe at the height of the Cold War. Saddam Hussein was compared to Hitler making him as frightening, (and as heroic to many oppressed people in the Third World), as Stalin had been before him. The breathless victory of the coalition, the media celebration of the war, seem to suggest that military methods are appropriate once again to deal with the new threat from the South. Since Saddam Hussein and dictators like him are still in power, since the arms trade continues apace, the elements are all in place for a new North-South confrontation including real wars to supplant the old East-West confrontation.

What does the new North-South confrontation mean for Europe? The war re-established US leadership and the role of military force. In the months preceding the war, Britain and the Netherlands consistently supported the US

position while other European governments, especially Germany and France, were more hesitant, opposing a more determined diplomatic effort and asking for more time for sanctions. During the war, European countries, especially Germany, were criticised for not carrying more of the military and economic burden, for giving in to domestic pacifist tendencies. Now there is pressure for a European defence entity and Germany is being asked to revise its constitution to enable military forces to engage in military operations outside Europe. The issue is no longer whether Europe will demilitarise but whether there should be a West European or an Atlantic defence entity.

What this means is that the division of Europe is not overcome. The hopes that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) could become an effective security organisation for all of Europe have been shelved. Eastern and Central Europe will be excluded from a Western defence entity whether under a Central European or Atlantic umbrella. The Soviet Union remains a "residual" threat and Central Europe cannot be included because this would create a new front line and is (for the time being) considered too provocative. Moreover, a Western defence entity will stamp a Western character on the European Community and make it more difficult for Central Europe to join.

This military division of Europe is paralleled by an economic and political division. All the East European countries face worsening economic crises. While the war was taking place, Yugoslavia was threatened with civil war, the nations of Czechoslovakia were falling apart, the political foundations of the Soviet Union were disintegrating, the Stalinist stronghold of Albania was finally collapsing, masses were demonstrating in Leipzig against unemployment. Before the Gulf War, this was the stuff of Western headlines, calling forth public pressure for Marshall Aid plans, governmental delegations, new cultural and political links. Now the crises of Eastern Europe are relegated to the same status as the endless cycle of debt, war, coups, and violence in the Third World. Increasingly the West-East divide mirrors the North-South divide.

The new task of the HCA is to overcome these divides. Paradoxically, the HCA is strongest in those areas facing direct struggles for democracy - the Soviet Union, especially the Baltic States, Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey, Scotland. The Gulf crisis revealed the weakness of civil society in West

and Central Europe and also the United States. This was a politicians war and a media war. There seemed no role for independent thinkers and opinion-makers, at least no publicly visible role. Is there a new apathy now that democracy has been achieved in Central Europe? Have all the independent thinkers been absorbed into the power structures? And in Western Europe and the US, has the new rule by markets and opinion polls so atomized society that movements have been relegated to a sub-cultural margin? Are we entering a Brave New World Order in which wars and elections are conducted by television?

The HCA idea was born aloft by the 1989 revolutions. The revolutions seemed to prove that there was a role for human values, that truth, integrity and conscience could triumph over the technology of violence and oppression. The Gulf War seems to have shattered that idea, to have truncated the post-1989 optimistic mood. Can we keep alive some elements of the fantasies of the 1980's? Can we do something to ensure that humanity has a place in the post-Cold War order?

- Mary Kaldor

*Mary Kaldor is a founding member of END and current HCA Co-Chair*

## From Cold War Division to Europe of the Regions: A Conversation with Jaroslav Sabata

*Jaroslav Sabata is a founding member of Charter 77, a prime mover in the independent citizens East/West dialogue of the 1980's, former Co-Chair of the HCA, and currently serves as minister without portfolio in the federal government of the Czech and Slovak Republic. He was interviewed by Fred Abrahams of the Prague HCA Secretariat.*

**What are the current projects for European integration "from below", particularly given the increasingly nationalist drift of the independent citizens movements in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and even Czechoslovakia?**

These movements are generally seen as obstacles to the integration process because the states in which they develop are experiencing a process of disintegration. But it is clear now that all of Eastern Europe has to go through the process of national determination and the full development of statehood. This is clearly demonstrated by the examples of the Baltic states and Yugoslavia, where the crises are approaching a climax.

Even Czechoslovakia, where the situation is seemingly so different from the USSR or Yugoslavia, now has the same problems. In Slovakia, the necessary process of self-determination to the point where the nation feels it has achieved full equality is articulated by a number of movements, not only by Prime Minister Meciar. The problem in Slovakia cannot be reduced to Meciar alone, but involves the Christian Democratic Movement as well as the non-Meciar section of the Public Against Violence and the Chairperson of the Slovak National Council, Frantisek Miklosko.

We are in the middle of a crisis from which new state forms will result and no-one can forecast the future in any detail, here or in the Soviet Union.

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The result of this process, however, should be a Europe integrated on a higher level, including the eastern part of Europe.

**Are you optimistic about a democratic outcome to this process?**

Yes, completely. But in every case the situation must be sufficiently mature. From this point of view not all of Gorbachev's moves which are now perceived as conservative need prove counterproductive, for it is clear that in some republics of the USSR civil society is still unformed, and the development of civil society advances simultaneously with the development of the democratic state. Thus we can see the surviving old system as a shell in which a new democratic system can be born.

**Given the state of the integration process, what role can civil society play today, and has that role changed?**

The role of civil society has not changed in principle. The basic aim is to involve broad layers of society as active subjects in these changes, to transform inhabitants into citizens. National movements are movements of "inhabitants" - they represent only components of the whole and are not mature enough to represent completely autonomous individuals. This corresponds to a certain historical limitation of every movement for national emancipation - which doesn't mean that they are not historically progressive.

**The HCA represents just such a sector of civil society which is attempting to facilitate the transformation of inhabitants into citizens - how do you evaluate our work thus far?**

The HCA as such is not strictly speaking a component of civil society, it is one of the initiatives that can facilitate the change from an "immature" civil society to a "mature" one. The image of the HCA itself as a part of civil society can lead to overestimating its possibilities. The HCA is a specific initiative which was formed on the basis of cooperation between western peace movements and a section of East European "dissent".

The changes we are now experiencing resulted in a significant part of that dissent becoming a powerholding force, i.e. a force which is outside of civil society as it is usually understood. Some components of the former dissent can come into conflict with civil society. This is understandable because they are drawn into bureaucratic structures with their own inertia.

It would be mistaken, however, to identify them with those bureaucratic structures. There is a certain tension between the political representatives of this dissent genesis and those bureaucratic structures. The goal of civil initiatives from below is to release this tension productively. We have to restructure the relations between various components of western civil society and eastern society. Both partners have to be aware of this new situation and its complicated problems.

**How can the East/West dialogue be restructured to facilitate civic initiatives? What are the concrete problems and how can they be overcome?**

The problems should be solved in a way that will get us from today's Europe of national states to a future "Europe of Regions". One such region is the "Pentagonale", which is in fact a specific union of national states. But contacts are also being developed which break through the level of purely governmental contact, e.g. regional cooperation between the towns of Bohemia, Bavaria, and Saxony. The small size of this region, which includes just a few towns along the borders, is important since it underlines the importance of local and regional government. Similar initiatives exist on the borders with Poland, Austria, and elsewhere.

The borders are melting, they begin to lose their psychological importance... Europe is thus being integrated from below, which complements the bureaucratic integration from above. But the question of a Europe of regions is a complicated structural one, and the initiatives in this particular field have a very different task from both disarmament movements or the dissident initiatives whose goals was to destroy totalitarian regimes.

This doesn't mean that European peace or human rights movements have no role to play, but it is necessary to look for new forms of cooperation between the various initiatives of both the old and new variety and to try and integrate them - which is still the task of the HCA.

We still have the same goal of European integration which we had before the November revolution, but this has to be understood in a new way. This is one of the crucial misunderstandings between former dissidents and peace activists. For us the integration process is the primary aim, of course with the understanding that this process is possible only on a democratic and civic basis, while our partners frequently talk only about the role of civil society in the narrower sense... They reduce our perception of the integration process, which should be seen in its all-European context.

**What about the role of the CSCE?**

I would like to emphasise the importance of the CSCE. In the light of recent developments in eastern Europe there is a tendency to underestimate its role. The Paris "Charter For a New Europe" (November 1990) expresses the necessity of a free integrated Europe, while Czechoslovakia's "post-November" policies also move in this direction - e.g. Dienstbier's memorandum of April 1990 and Havel's speech in Strasbourg in May that year. Both stress the importance of developing the Helsinki process on a higher level through the development of a "second generation" of Helsinki. New institutions must be established, since negotiating a "second generation" means institutionalizing the CSCE.

I would also like to point to one more initiative which extends the Helsinki framework but is closely connected: the common initiative of Presidents Mitterand and Havel aiming at the practical achievement of a confederative Europe. This also raises the question: to what extent is the current state of the European security system and the CSCE an adequate basis for building a free and integrated Europe? The French are convinced that one more specific initiative is necessary, while the Czechoslovak attitude is a bit more hesitant, since it sees the integration process as a long term task. ■

