**The Address of Jana Horváthová,**

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**On the Occasion of**

**The Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust**

**and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity**

**Senate of the Czech Parliament, 27th January 2020**

Right on this day, it has been 75 years since the concentration camp in Auschwitz was liberated. In my family, the memories of the war times have always resonated, and I have been confronted with those memories since my very young age. The reason for that was death of the majority of my ancestors in Auschwitz, they were the ancestors of the Holomek family, Roma people long-term settled in the territory of Moravia.

Until a certain age, I had been little detached from most of the talking about the horrifying destiny of my family members. My child’s mind could not believe what people were capable of doing. The stories of mass murders of innocent people, their children, including the babies, all seemed to me a bit “far-fetched“. The child learns step by step how the world works, about the relations among the people, about their own Self, what a human being is and how did the people split from the animal kingdom. Even if the people split from the animal kingdom, they never could split from their biological determination and vice versa-some limitations remain with humans and will forever associate humans with their origin.

**We shall all know about these limitations and bear them in our minds.** Intelligence or culture (**humanitás** in Latin) would not protect us from them. If the constellation is good, we could broaden our horizons and gain a very much needed perspective to perceive our ego and that way be able to sense whether we do not take it away from others with our feeling of joy. We have already learned from the past that high cultural level is not self-redeemable, it does not guarantee good in the world; other values are crucial as well and these other values may not have anything in common with the level of culture or education. It is that simple: ***humanness-humanity.***  This term originates in the Latin word “humanitás”. *Humanitás* stands for delicate intelligence and culture and humanity stands for humanness. The words, having the same base in Latin, they are very close, but our experience with the Holocaust was a painful demonstration of how far these closely related words in their meaning could stand when applied in the real life of humans.

Allow me to quote some lines from Karel Capek’s (Czech classic writer) book, Apocryphal Tales, and his, in my opinion, genial apocrypha Pilate’s Creed. Pontius Pilatus converses with Joseph of Arimathea, a man not so broad-minded, on nothing less important than on the truth: What is the truth? ”It would be madness to think that truth is only there for man not to know it. He knows it, yes; but who? I or you, or everyone perhaps? I believe that each of us has a share of it; the man who says yes and the man who says no. If these two united and understood each other, that would give the whole truth. Of course, yes and no cannot unite, **but people always can; there is more truth in people than in words.** **I have more understanding for people than of their truths;**“ *And later on,* Joseph of Arimathea *opposes:*

 “There is only one truth for all.“ And Pilate asks: “And which is that?“ ”The one in which I believe.“ ”There you see,“ said Pilate slowly”. ”It is only your truth, after all. You are like little children who believe that the whole world ends at their horizon and that there is nothing more beyond. (…) When you climb a very high mountain, you see that the things merge into each other and flatten out into a single plain. From a certain height truths merge into one another. Of course, man does not live and cannot live on top of a high mountain; it is enough that he sees around him his house and his fields, both of them full of truths and things; that is his true place and sphere of action. But now and then he can look at the mountains or the sky and say to himself that from there his truth and his things still exist and no part of them is stolen, but they merge with something far more open, which is no longer his property.“

**I would like to go back to the idea of the basic value, back to humanity.** We are brought up to understand this value from our very early age. For example, in fairy tales, which contain the wisdom of the ancient generations of people. Last Christmas, after a long time, I had the opportunity to watch one of the fairy tales from the Golden Fund of Czech Cinematography, “Prince Bajaja”, directed by Antonin Kachlik and filmed in 1971. There is a friend and adviser of Prince Bajaja – his devoted horse – who accompanies the prince on his way to find his happiness while fighting the evil and on that way he tells the prince a very important truth and that is: **the true happiness cannot be based on the unhappiness of others.**

These pearls of wisdom that we acquire from our early age and that we teach to our children are hard to apply in real life. Even in the times of peace and quiet, an everydayness keeps confronting us with challenges, small ones, but still challenges. We all know those fractions of seconds when we decide whether we sacrifice our comfort and help the weak one or whether we support the person who suffers an unjust treatment. We know the moments when we contemplate whether we speak out loud and say what we see, even if we know that our intervention will have no consequences.

When finding our own path to happiness or way to avoid troubles we often search (unconsciously) for protection in stronger individuals or groups whose size or large number of members could help us form the desired illusion that the given group proclaims the truth. This might be attractive, the fact that one finds the asylum where he or she feels strong with no need to exert much energy, but as the horse of Prince Bajaja says: “…**the way to hell is direct...”**; this is an old truth we need to be aware of and remind ourselves over and over again.

Allow me to quote Hannah Arendt answering the questions of Günter Gaus in a TV program called ”Zur Person“ from October 1964, broadcasted by German ZDF TV (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen): ”I have never in my life "loved" some nation or collective — not the German, French or American nation, or the working class, or whatever else might exist. The fact is that I love only my friends and am quite incapable of any other sort of love.  Second, this kind of love for the Jews would seem suspect to me, since I’m Jewish myself. Belonging to a group is a natural, given fact. Through one’s birth one belonged to one group or another. To the belonging in the first meaning, there is another type of belonging, the one that demanded “self-organising”, which could be accomplished always within relation to the world. This self-organising always means that you look away from the rest of the world. Those that organise themselves are connected together by “interests”.

The direct, personal relationship, where one can speak about love, that exists, of course, foremost in real love. It also exists in a certain sense in friendship. There a person is addressed directly. Independent of his relation to the world. People of the most divergent organizations can still be personal friends. But if you confuse these things, if you bring love to the negotiating table, to put it bluntly, I find that fatal.” I try to look at politics with eyes unclouded by politics.

*She also says:* **Humanity** is never acquired in solitude, and never by giving one’s work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who **has** **thrown his life and his person into the venture of the public realm.** We begin something; we weave our thread into a net of relations. What becomes of it we never know. We have all been taught to say: Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do. That is true for all action. Quite simply and concretely true, because one cannot know. That is what is meant by a venture. And now I would say that this venture is only possible **when there is trust in people.** A trust, which is difficult to formulate, but fundamental – **in what is human in all people**. Otherwise such a venture could not be made.“

These were the words of Hannah Arendt. I would like to add that no matter how well we feel in any community or group of people or when we benefit from these groups, we have to stay alert whether we still **defend our humanity, which ends there, where we take it away from others.** I am convinced that the majority of people is born to this world with positive ideals, but it is for the contradiction between our interests - the interests of individuals endowed with their own ego – that break us up and lead us down paths long. In such matters, and matters similar to the ones I described, we have to be cautious.

Jana Horvathova, 27 January 2020