

# Nobody is controlling the collision of civilisations

Marcel Gauchet

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## Interview

France is known as the “land of philosophers”. In the country of Descartes and Montesquieu, Sartre and Pascal, Rousseau and Camus, philosophy in all its manifestations has always been a kind of religion; not simply a mind game, but the occupation of those rare and refined intellectuals, who mould not only the state of the nation’s soul, but also the image of France, and above all her self-perception. However, following the revolutionary ferment of May 1968, to be counted among the ranks of the philosophers also became a matter of commercial prestige in Paris. Once discovered by the media, the long-haired subversives of the “old certainties” became, with incredible speed, permanent denizens of radio and television and, like film stars, began to be invited to social functions and celebrity events.

Marcel Gauchet is another matter entirely. According to an acute remark in *Le Figaro*, “he is in no way one of those thinkers more often appearing on television shows than lecturing in university faculties”. Nonetheless, among those close to the spheres of philosophy, history and political theory, Gauchet, editor of the prestigious intellectual journal *Débat* and scientific director of the Higher School of Social Studies (EHESS), is regarded as an incontestable authority. “One of the most significant French thinkers of modern times” (*Libération*). “The paradoxical mind of this Norman thinker cannot fail to impress” (*Expansion*). “The entire intellectualism of French social life passes through him” (*Le Figaro Magazine*). These are just some of the comments about Gauchet’s books and his scientific work.

Marcel Gauchet was born into a family of modest means immediately after the liberation of Lower Normandy from Nazi occupation. He grew up under the powerful influence of his father, a village intellectual and fanatical supporter of General de Gaulle. This, however, in no way prevented Marcel Gauchet, a born nonconformist, from joining, in the mid-sixties, the left-wingers of the “ultra” Trotskyiste movement in the Norman city of Caen. At that time he was a school teacher and, quite by chance, a book by Raymond Aron, a militant right-wing philosopher and

publicist, fell into his hands. In an instant everything around him was reflected in a totally different light! As Gauchet himself was to write later: "I went into a bitter political hangover". He parted from his "ultra-revolutionary" friends and adopted the ideas of bourgeois social democracy. He broke from his previous environment and together with the psychiatrist Gladys Swain – a brilliant woman, who lived a short life, but had a major influence on the formation of his world view, – headed for Paris. There, after a while, he joined the circle of philosophers, historians and ethnographers that had formed around Claude Lefort, Pierre Clastres and Francois Furet. His acquaintance with the latter, a prominent researcher of the French Revolution, was to become determining for Marcel Gauchet. Knowing few people in Paris at that time, and subsisting on casual earnings, Gauchet happened to be delivering a lecture on "conspiracy theory" at one of the public gatherings, when Furet was present in the room. Immediately after the lecture, Francois Furet came up to Marcel Gauchet and offered him a prestigious contract in EHESS. This facilitated his path and led to the founding of the journal *Débat* in 1980, which became a platform for the boldest minds in present-day France, and to the writing of his many books, some of which can now be regarded as truly ground-breaking.

Herald of Europe correspondent, Kirill Privalov, met Marcel Gauchet in his office at the publishing house Gallimard, where *Débat* is edited, and asked the philosopher to share some of his thoughts about current events and the outlook for the future.

*- The 21st Century is getting into its stride. As a historical philosopher, how do you regard it?*

– The 20th Century was the century of organisation; the 21st will become the century of the individual. At present in the Western world an enormous number of people have attained, in the broadest sense of the term, a high standard of living. Whereas in 1900 only 5% of its population were living comfortably, now it is 60-70%, and in some countries even more. This levelling of wealth, or more precisely prosperity, is having extraordinary effects and is creating as many problems as it is solving. Let us say that at present we are witnessing the appearance of a great wave of liberalism, one of whose manifestations is individualism. People are becoming more and more isolated and lonely. This cannot end well.

*- Clearly we need to define what you mean by liberalism.*

– Present-day liberalism is a consequence of the elimination of the ideological conflict caused by the prolonged coexistence of communist totalitarianism and capitalist democracy. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, both societies – Western European and Eastern European – swiftly opened up, and new initiatives appeared for their development. One immediately thinks of the astonishing rate of development of the Western world in the period from 1880 to 1914. Throughout the ages, almost all European States were formed and developed in a situation of century-long conflicts between neighbouring States. Then suddenly questions of defence receded into the background of national concerns in Europe. Nowadays, maintaining enormous armies has ceased to be the main imperative for States. And this "onset of peace" has happened in the context

of a strengthening of the role of the “protector-state”, which assumes an important social role towards its citizens. The main purpose of the liberal State nowadays is the defence of the economic and social interests of its subjects. To a significant extent, precisely because of this “nanny State”, it has been possible to soften the consequences of the very severe economic and financial crises that befell the West in the closing decades of the last century.

***- So it seems that liberalism is a relatively new concept, associated with the second half of the last century?***

– Not really. Liberalism is both the triumphant illusion of the present time, and one of the most important characteristics of a whole century of organisation. During that century, liberalism became a general phenomenon, which spread throughout the West. What is more, the overthrow of the century of organisation was inherent in its very organisation. The State did not oppose the consolidation of liberalism and the greater freedom of the individual meant that it ceased to function properly. Planning proved to be a delusion and budget stagnation began. In the West, the foundations of the economy trembled, while in the East the Socialist bloc quite simply fell apart. It is not for nothing that many researchers now speak of the “paralysis of the State”.

***- And how do you explain this?***

– The nature of the State has changed. Not by occupying a smaller place in our life – quite the contrary. However, its role has changed: the “taming State” and the “warrior State” no longer exist. But people, sad to say, are attracted to strength. They have, moreover, lost all faith in politicians, as they can no longer associate them with any specific programme. What slogans are there to entice the voter? “Defence of the nation against an internal enemy?” “Upholding the principle of proletarian solidarity?” “A search for universal progress?” “Enrichment of the man in the street at any price?” No, none of this works any more. General de Gaulle, having convinced his fellow citizens that he himself personified the “eternal France”, survives only in the history books. We have turned into political spectators: we watch politicians on television who represent nothing and no one but themselves and we feel no involvement with what they are trying to feed to us.

***- Why do you suppose this is?***

– Partly it is the fault of childishness on the part of the electorate. People vote not for a politician’s convictions and his ability to be productive and constructive, but for his function, for the public position that he occupies or in which he is involved. At the same time, the politician has no guarantees that at the smallest political or economic reverse his “signed-up” electorate will not desert him at a stroke. The politician has constantly to confirm the legitimacy of his actions and in the absence of concrete achievements he needs the evidence of referendums, public opinion polls or ratings in the media.

***- So maybe the sociological soundings are in their own way evidence of the impotence of politicians?***

– Present-day Western leaders – 99% of them – are afraid of taking genuine, important decisions based on their true convictions. In order to give the appearance of meaningful activity, they skilfully exploit the Mass Media. If a solution

cannot be delayed any longer, the State will organise a referendum. Politicians take the initiative themselves less and less, and increasingly present themselves as director-producers of the collective will. In other words, “don’t put the blame on us, it was the will of the people”. “There is no problem which would not be solved on account of the absence of the possibility of its solution”, asserted Andre Kei, a famous French politician of the past and one of the founding fathers of NATO. These words could be the motto of our present-day rulers. We don’t understand what is going on around us, and this is why dissatisfaction is increasing.

***- And the political opposition takes advantage of it.***

– The concept of a “political opposition” is very relative nowadays. Those same political figures who speak of themselves as anti-liberals are, in reality, admirers of liberalism, either hiding this from the public or not realising it themselves. I would like to emphasise that I am speaking only about the Western world! The opposition say to the liberals: “The world is not turning out in the way you promised us. It is up to you to create the conditions that will allow you to fulfil your promises”. At the same time, the anti-liberals have the same view of the public as their political opponents, even though they have different ideas on how to reach their goals. The aim is the same, but the means for achieving it are different! That’s the only difference! It is this that constitutes the delicate and at times elusive difference between the “Right” and the “Left” in Western society. In essence, they are entirely in agreement with one another and live in harmony on the fundamentals of the political scene.

***- And the electorate accepts this as inevitable?***

– What other choice do they have? In the final analysis, a politician who is more cynical than the rest and panders to the desires of this prosperous but ever-demanding populace can trumpet his achievements. I do not rule out the possibility that the pendulum of Western prosperity may soon swing in the opposite direction. And that will mark the start of difficulties the nature and scale of which we cannot even foresee today. I am sure that my American colleague Francis Fukuyama was mistaken when he spoke of “the end of History”. In the 21st Century it is only just beginning!

***- You mean, more revolutions, barricades, class confrontations?***

– Not at all! The development of capitalism transforms society much more quickly, more effectively and more powerfully than revolutionary upheavals and inflammatory speeches. The Western economy offers people every opportunity both for self-advancement and for the improvement of society. The individual no longer resists the good things of life, but invests resources to obtain them. All very peaceful and friendly! People build relationships with one another according to the rules of economics – on a contractual basis. No authoritarianism. Market relationships have no need of the commanding tone often personified by politicians. Certainly not for obvious, crude dictatorship!

***- And as the famous Russian poet and singer Vladimir Vysotsky used to maintain: “there aren’t many wild men, that’s why there are no leaders”. What do you think of the modern political leaders of Europe?***

– Not very much! Only one contemporary politician, perhaps, is worthy of attention. That is the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. His serious, Protestant education from his youth has given him a strong internal core that allows him to do things he does not like at all and still remain himself. Blair is able to separate what he wants from the way matters actually turn out. I know that to many Europeans from the Continent, the leader of New Labour with his British way of behaving and his purely English sense of humour seems rather a strange person, but – believe me – This man has yet to show himself. He has a global outlook. But in general, it requires great events to produce great politicians. For about sixty years, we have been free from war on our territories. Life has been good – prosperous and uneventful. Where are great political figures going to spring from? We lack the appropriate context for them – events of the necessary scale. Great politicians are born out of tragic events. The West is paying for its present peace and prosperity with the general emptiness of the political scene.

*– At the end of 2003, the European Social Forum, organised by French opponents of globalisation, took place in Paris and its suburbs. I was most surprised when I saw your name in one of the conference programmes. I had no idea that you had antiglobalisation views!*

– I haven't! If I take part in the discussions with leaders of the opponents of globalisation – say, with the French economist Jacques Nikonoff, leader of the association ATTAC, – it is so that I can show the error of their ways. I regard their logic as fallacious. The opponents of globalisation have a totally distorted idea of the workings of present-day economics. Globalisation is basically quite simple. Above all, it's a phenomenon of infrastructure. Places where there are communications systems – computers, the Internet, mobile phones, high-speed travel – are very different from places without these means and resources. There can be no denying the obvious effect of the telecommunications and transport phenomenon. And then there are the financial aspects to be taken into account. Living standards have risen, life-span has increased and everywhere in the West people are putting money aside for their pensions. The main investors on the money markets today are not capitalists but pension investment funds (PIF). In other words, a gigantic financial opening has been created by technical means. Vast sums are traded every day on the financial markets. As a result, the main problem of globalisation is not economic and financial, but social: the problem of pensioners in the Western world. Yes, the 21st Century will become the century of the pensioner! And what of it? It is not something to fear.

*– So the opponents of globalisation are misguided in sounding the alarm about the “financial expansion of American pension funds, ruining Europe”? Is antiglobalism merely a bubble of left-wing propaganda on the economic surface of the modern world?*

– It's not as simple as that. Globalisation is a world without frontiers. Vast numbers of migrants! Life on this planet has entered a new phase, the result of migration in every sense of the word. For this reason, we must also acknowledge the appearance of globalised crime. In international economics, the leading item for revenue in trade relations between continents and countries is energy supplies, mainly oil and gas. The second is drugs. Statistics show cars, tools and components as the third item. And the fourth? The trade in “live goods”. This includes not only prostitution,

but also illegal immigration, and the traffic in human organs. An appalling finding! And here I agree with the “left-wing” antiglobalists: we have to take steps to bring this global chaos under control! But if you ask me what steps we should take I do not have an answer.

***- Maybe it is worth putting this question on the agenda of the United Nations?***

– It’s not worth stirring that organisation. It’s of little use for anything, but for the present that’s the way it suits everybody. In any case, its institution was the result of historic international compromises and it should be valued for that reason.

***- Let’s talk about the foreseeable future! Do you have faith in the European Union?***

– The rules which have governed the European Union since its creation are no longer workable. That’s an open secret! When ordinary people have run into a problem and been bruised by the encounter, what do they do? They try to calm down, sit back and reflect. But the Europeans are rushing headlong into the unknown, refusing to recognise the difficulties. And those difficulties will inevitably multiply in the future. It’s like the story of the luckless French army recruits at the start of the Second World War: «Courage! We’re retreating!» It is a terrible mistake to imagine that the problems of European expansion can be solved once and for all, as if by the wave of a magic wand. Europe is not only a politically integrated continent, but also an enormous free trade zone with inter-related economies.

***- You sound just like Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, whose draft constitution for the European Union was very recently buried at the Brussels summit!***

– It is precisely the existence of the free trade zone, which allows supporters of the European Union not to admit to the collapse of their pan-European political ambitions. Commercial contacts between Europeans give politicians the opportunity to avoid saying that their political schemes are bankrupt. And despite their ambitions no-one has any idea how to create a pan-European government that is not just a paper formula but a plan that really works. Europe is expanding but where is it heading? For the accession States the European Union has no meaning beyond the financial. The social democrats, so long entrenched in the leading European States, have raised the expectation that Europe hands out money liberally to all comers. Tell me, why should the Bulgarians and Romanians not want European money? It’s on offer – take it!

***- They’re not involved at present! It’s the Poles, the Czechs..., Eastern European Nations.***

– The inclusion of all these into the EU is a leap into the unknown. I think the Western Europeans felt this keenly when they saw the obstinacy with which the Poles, for example, with their inordinate ambitions, sabotaged the adoption of the European constitution in Brussels. The consequences of the rash expansion of Europe may be dire.

***- Such as, for example?***

– First of all, the farmers in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe will not be able to compete with the industrialised agriculture of the West, and will inevitably collapse. In the East of the continent, this will lead to the creation of a

destitute subproletariat numbering many millions. From Portugal to Russia, a horde of hungry and destitute farm labourers will start to migrate seasonally looking for work or unemployment benefit. It is not an exaggeration to foresee this apocalyptic picture!

***- There are those in France who would agree with you. But what will the role of your country be in the coming century?***

– France is not in a healthy state and doesn't feel happy with globalisation. Not only that, but the Fifth Republic is the European country which more than any other is disturbed by the way globalisation is proceeding. Present-day France is a small country, which still wants to appear as a world power. And the less notice is taken of her, the more loudly she tries to voice her protest against US policy. It is true that France has strength through her right of veto in the UN Security Council. Also, France has retained a sphere of influence in the countries of Black Africa. All this still gives us a feeling of importance. But nothing extraordinary should be expected of France this century. Our country is good for tourism: the paved walkways by the Seine, the flowering chestnut trees, the Côte d'Azur.

***- And what can be expected from Great Britain?***

– We should probably not expect much from Britain either. To me, Great Britain remains a paradox: the country that has been able to retain its apparent historic role, while at the same time remaining the next US state. For half a century the British, whose national character differs fundamentally from that of the Americans, have managed to retain their "special relationship" while at the same time not making enemies of the Yankees. I know of no precedent for this! Admittedly, at present the British, who increasingly have to take account of continental Europe, are in a period of profound disruption of their cultural traditions, and are rewriting their own history. In such a delicate undertaking, the essential thing is to stop in time.

***- Who then will set the tone in Europe? The Germans?***

– Most probably. The Germans are no longer so preoccupied with that constant self-reproach which has characterised them since 1945. The feeling of guilt of Bismarck's descendants towards humanity is passing, evaporating. People born in Germany in the last half century cannot, and indeed do not want to feel guilty for the crimes of the Nazis. In the near future, the Germans' self-image will undergo a decisive change. To me, Germany is the greatest enigma of the Europe of the future. In twenty years, that country will have undergone radical change.

***- Roughly like present-day Spain, compared with Franco's Spain?***

– Spain is Lazarus, risen from the tomb. It has made a miraculous recovery. As early as the 18th Century, the Spanish, bogged down in their colonies overseas, missed the chance of entering the new world. Then they made a mess of their entry into capitalism, into liberalism. Modern Western society took shape without Spain. Franco with his closed borders merely intensified a prolonged and very profound crisis. Fortunately, Spain is now staging a successful recovery from its ancient, centuries-old trauma, but the rehabilitation process is far from complete. The country has yet to find a voice of its own.

**- And Italy?**

- Not a country but a Commedia dell' Arte! Silvio Berlusconi is in power – an unbelievable buffoon, worthy of street theatre or strolling players. The Italians paid a heavy price for emerging into the modern world – Mussolini and Fascism, many wars – and even now have not found their “placement” at the political world's dinner table. Italy is constantly floating between an entirely civilised liberalism and unbelievable political buffoonery, between a developed economy and complete political bankruptcy. Even so, the descendants of the Romans themselves take what is happening to them lightly, and playfully. Of course, that's their nature!

***- If you are serious, you are giving an altogether likeable picture of a democratic, liberal Europe. But pressing against her from below there is Africa, and the Arab Muslim world. What will characterise this ongoing collision of civilisations?***

- Africa is a total humanitarian tragedy. Modernisation according to the Western model has become inevitable for all countries. And their culture, the strength of their cultural traditions, historical inheritance, if you like, allows them to enter into this new, inevitable dimension. Look how easily the Japanese, Chinese and Koreans entered into the new world. Or India, nowadays one of the most vigorously developing States! But in Africa, for a diversity of reasons, the conditions do not exist for the Dark Continent to penetrate the modern, global world. Those same essential conditions are also very weakly represented in the Arab Muslim world. With two notable exceptions: Turkey and Iran. And this is not by accident: these are two countries with deep cultural and historical roots. However paradoxical it may seem – history – a country's past, is the key to its modernisation!

***- And what about South Africa with its mines and skyscrapers?***

- They are the result of the brief, but significant Afrikaner cultural legacy. However it was not very profound and already it is not providing the momentum that present-day South Africa needs for its further development. I would rather not believe this, but in South Africa everything will soon turn out very badly. Matters are heading for the same tragic course of events as in neighbouring Zimbabwe and Namibia, where the white minority is becoming an outcast race. There could be huge massacres, pogroms of the white population.

***- And what will be the outcome? After all, at the same time the black population in Europe is steadily rising.***

- As a former student of mine returning home to Cameroon from Paris said to me: “The salvation of Africa lies only in its recolonisation”. But of course that is impossible. And indeed no longer necessary to the West. An amusing example: when Jacques Chirac arrived in Mali on an official visit, he intended to discuss with the President of that country a tightening of the rules governing the emigration of Malians to France. However, in Bamako, the President of Mali opened his speech by thanking Monsieur Chirac for the fact that the whole economy of the country exists with the aid of Malians working in France. My frail hopes are bound up only with the enormous cultural effect of emigration. Africans send home from Europe and America not only money, but also new ideas, another culture. Maybe in time this will have a positive effect?

*- Fortunately, the world does not yet know African terrorism. Something you cannot say about Arab Islamic terrorism. Will the Muslim fundamentalists continue their acts of terrorism?*

- I cannot say anything encouraging: they will! Taking the global view, fundamental Islam is a paper tiger. The ability of Islam to assemble powerful political and economic forces around itself is nil. However, in parallel, there exists a multitude of associated local problems. The Israel-Palestine conflict, for instance, is currently drawing in almost two billion people, who in some way or another have a connection with one of the camps. And the problems connected with the Muslim world will only become more acute. For the Islamists feel profoundly humiliated by history. Islam, the youngest monotheistic world religion, claiming to be an improvement on the other two – Judaism and Christianity – is being ruined by an untruthful feeling of its own superiority. And at the same time, the countries where Muslim rule holds sway are not developing.

*- Why is that?*

- It's a complex question, requiring a long explanation. But it is an indisputable fact. Apart from their oil revenues, the Islamic countries have no resources for development. Add to this the humiliations they have regularly suffered from the Israelis and the Americans, and the long years of colonialism, and you have collectively, an extremely strong and entrenched hatred of the West. And indeed of the whole "white" world in general. Notwithstanding this, the Islamists who so resolutely condemn the West are completely corrupted by that very same West, and secretly delight in its pleasures. For some reason, Islamic fundamentalists do not want to preach the ideas of the Koran in their own country, no, they are drawn to Europe! For immigrants from the Maghreb, migration to the West is an enormous economic success, almost their life's work. And nonetheless they never stop criticising and subverting that same environment which has hospitably accepted them. In the tangled history of world immigration, nothing like this has ever been seen before.

*- Presumably, this attitude of Muslims to other civilisations is due to the Koran itself.*

- This is exactly why Islam represents such a serious danger. A handful of fanatics are capable of creating the kind of disorder no-one could have dreamt of! In principle, there are not really that many Muslim fundamentalists in Europe. Thus, in France only 20% of immigrants from Muslim countries regularly practise their religion. But this has not lessened the Islamic threat. The point is that politically Islam is not capable of giving rise to viable regimes. Turkey doesn't count; it exists in spite of Islamic fanaticism. There was, admittedly, one exception: Iran. But the Islamists finished that off twenty years ago or more. In brief, the general Islamic mood today is despair.

*- There is then a problem in relation to Islamic immigration into Europe.*

- What is needed on our side is a wise, finely tuned and very cautious policy. However, as events show, there is no danger whatever of our seeing this from our politicians in the near future. European politicians are totally unaware of the danger of Islamism. As a result, we see terrorist acts both in the Middle East and in the West. Yes, terrorism – that is the last refuge of those who have lost hope. But politi-

cians who attempt to flirt with the Islamists and tame them are also responsible for it. The support of the Saudi regime is an absolute scandal of Western civilisation. Madness! And this despite the fact that in all the Western capitals they understand perfectly well that the mechanism of the Saudi regime is working against us. The extent of the politicians' blindness bowls me over! It's not even cynicism, but something more frightening. Western politicians have not become used to thinking about it; they don't want to because they live only for the present. Their underlying thinking is obvious: I have, after all, been elected or appointed to high office for a limited period. In a year or two I shan't be here, so why stick my neck out for no purpose?

***- Will Islamism also threaten America?***

– Why not? Nowadays, no one in the world has control over what is happening. Only the government of the USA still blissfully believes that everything can be settled by the use of force. But this is typical of the Americans. They don't know and don't want to know the world outside the USA. From the start of the 20th Century, the Americans have interfered in the affairs of other countries, on the basis, first and foremost, of moral criteria. Against the "bad", the "evil". They don't even know their own allies; that is beyond their understanding. America is utterly unprepared for living in a world where there are no clearly defined enemies. The most powerful State in the world doesn't understand the world outside its borders. Watch out!

***- But doesn't it seem to you that the critical moment in the formation of the Americans' new world view was the destruction of the World Trade Centre?***

– The explosions of 11 September marked the emergence of the US into the global world. They now find themselves at a crossroads in history. On the one hand, by all accounts a triumph: total supremacy. And at the same time, the Americans have to review their relationships with the rest of the world. For the present, they have no wish to change. But one must not underestimate the Americans. That state has one great merit – the Americans are capable of calculating any task precisely and fulfilling it in a very short time. They have an exceptional capacity for self-renewal! One can only marvel at the creativity of the Americans. They are a poorly educated nation; they do not have centuries of cultural and historical baggage like the Europeans, but they do have the ability to concentrate, to learn and memorise. Unlike the Europeans, they are not sclerotic and are devoid of complexes.

***- I can't resist bringing up Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California!***

– Schwarzi may yet surprise us all, like Ronald Reagan. These are not mere words: in America, people have unlimited possibilities. Moreover, I believe in outsiders. People who have arrived in any sphere from outside are indifferent to the prejudices and judgments of others. If a person, even an intelligent one, keeps repeating the same thing for a decade, people become used to him and stop paying attention. When a new person – even if not the most brilliant – comes in from outside, he is by definition free from prejudices and invariably brings something fresh.

***- I feel that you have moved on to Vladimir Putin, to Russia. What does the new century have in store for Russians?***

– By comparison with the West, Russia is behind in its development. It has ceased to be a "warrior-State", but has not yet become a "protector-State". However, it

seems to me that the conditions for a powerful, developed Russia are already in existence. And the question here is not one of economics, but rather the enormous cultural and historical baggage that I call “solid history”. It will save Russia! Perhaps I am repeating myself, but the paradox is that a country’s rich past becomes its key to a rich future.

***- In that case China is destined to become the richest state among the most developed modern countries.***

– You know, I have no feel for that country. The statisticians thrust figures under our noses – all these graphs, diagrams and calculations of economic growth – proving that the industrial production of the planet will soon be concentrated almost entirely in China. But a huge doubt arises in my mind. There’s something wrong here! Nowadays it’s customary to accept figures without question, but they arouse my scepticism in relation to China. Democracy is closely linked with capitalism, though by no means an inevitable consequence of it. Without everyday democracy, which China does not have at the moment, it is very difficult to solve long-term economic problems. It is nonetheless true that the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire have one enormous resource – a high work ethic. But this alone is not sufficient to create a modern, liberal economy. If I were a capitalist, I would invest in China with great caution.

***- Anyway, let's return to Russia! What lies ahead for her?***

– How this country will develop in the near future, I do not know in detail. However, in spite of the endlessly recurring war in the Caucasus, all the conditions for a successful start have already been brought together. At present, Russia is emerging from an economic and financial crisis, the responsibility for which is borne by foreigners and the past ruling elites who ran to them for aid. Suddenly, the former Russian leadership was led to believe that the Americans were controlling the functioning of their economy, which was very far from the truth. When under Yeltsin they started to transfer Chicago-style formulae into the Russian situation, utter absurdity resulted. At one time, Moscow was literally hypnotised by American programmes and the promises of their authors. Americans are in fact very bad advisors. At home, they can work wonders, but for other countries their economic formulae do not apply. The capitalism of the US, its economics and legislation, are not exportable – it’s not possible. Europe is in any case much closer to Russia in all respects.

***- And how will their relationship develop in the coming year?***

Everything for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The principle of the relationship of foreigners to Russia is in general simple, like the handle of a shovel. When the politician in power in the Kremlin has firm control of the country and is able to keep his word, let us say in the repayment of credit or the laying of an oil pipeline, then the West is pleased and rubs its hands. It is, as usual, cynical and egotistical. Such is life!