

## **Crisis in Ukraine – psychotherapeutic ways”**

### **Vienna December, 6 2014**

Three weeks passed since the international conference “Crisis in Ukraine – psychotherapeutic ways” on December, 6 2014 has taken place. It is known that the conference was organized by Sigmund Freud University, European Association of Psychotherapy and Ukrainian Umbrella Association of Psychotherapy. Members from 15 countries came the atmosphere of discussion was quite outright, sincere and somewhat tensional. The tension increases from time to time, mainly while evaluating the sense of crisis in Ukraine. Narrators from Russian Federation and Ukraine provided their view of situation in Ukraine (having the opposite ratings of crisis), and European members stressed all the time that their main interest here is to help Ukrainians in professional psychotherapeutic posttraumatic stress disorder workout. In essence, this dissonance of positions was fallen back to be overcome, and everybody stayed with their point of view. But at the same time, some understanding was achieved, although it is difficult today to name and define. In short, the position of Russian speakers was limited to a few standard points with nothing new inside: 1) Russia is not a member of the conflict; 2) Ukraine is suffering from a right-radical nationalist insurgency, the sources of which are in the Russian version of the Ukrainian history and the lack of a unified national identity of Ukrainians; 3) Russia is trying to provide possible humane assistance in solving Ukrainian crisis?!?! At the same time, it was quite difficult to understand why Russians where one of the most active conference co-organizers as they do not confess themselves being a part of the conflict.

Ukrainian position was represented in the reports that have appeared to be acutely critical to the Russian side, skeptical and critical of the Europeans whose position is hesitant and sometimes inconsistent, particularly in the assessment of the conflict. Our collective observation was also interesting: our Ukrainian position was devoid of the typical uncertainty, secondary importance and dependency on the thought of "powerful of this world" that is thoughts of Russian and European representatives. Besides that even despite the content of quite peremptorily imperial reports Russians were much more modest and restrained outside the conference than they usually are and maybe even a little guilty, but tried not to show it.

The position of the European participants was somewhat controversial, but quite favourable to our experiences and problems. The president of the EAP Yevhenius Laurinatis in the introductory report (05/12/2014) has introduced a brilliant analysis of the situation on the basis of different worldviews – Russian and European. Without any extra precautions and good arguments he showed that Russian worldview was and still is imperial in its state strategy.

The final report of Alfred Pritz was also interesting in trying to draw an analogy between the Austrian "separatism" from Germany after World War II and the current events in Ukraine. This report sounded optimistic for us because, according to professor Pritz such separatist movements are only a matter of time and may be solved through skillful public policy. That is, in Ukraine, this problem can be solved with proper consolidated position of public administration and civil society.

In general, we can assume that although this conference was small but still significant diplomatic and professional victory for us, Ukrainian psychotherapists but not in the sense of competition or struggle with other sides (this is probably partly in an intuitive and emotional level), but in terms of further consolidation of the new Ukrainian identity. That is, in fact, similar to Austria, due to prof. Alfred Pritz.

Our position is reflected through the reports added.

My short presentation will be dedicated to another topic, than previously announced. This happened due to the situation that previously the time of my presentation was estimated for 30 minutes. However my colleagues from Ukrainian Umbrella Association of Psychotherapy – that is our Association which is the co-organizer of this Conference – rightly expressed their wish to give their views on the situation as well. Besides I would like to mention that the agenda of this conference, dedicated to the military conflict in Ukraine, is asymmetrical, because the position of our Russian colleagues comprises 4 full-time presentations, one of which – by Mr. Yakov Obukhov – had been included only in the final version of the agenda. That is why I decided to share my time with my colleagues, otherwise there would be no other way to present different aspects and views on this conflict. Thus, my colleagues and I will make three presentations, 10 minutes each. That is the reason that I decided to change my primary version.

I would like to discuss the phenomenon of manipulation with mass consciousness that can be observed in Russia, in Ukraine as well as in European countries, based on psychodynamic understanding suggested by Wilfried Bion. I think that his understanding of the process of group mind and basic assumptions quite correctly describes the processes of mass psychology that have been provoked by the conflict in Ukraine.

Short version of the Bion's concept in the aspect required for our analysis.

1. Under certain circumstances groups of people, irrespective of their size, start to declare similar and even identical ideas and to create similar patterns acting as a comprehensive whole. First of all, this phenomenon can be observed in the situations provoking existentially meaningful anxiety, fear, confusion or despair.
2. The process of uniting in the comprehensive whole group or even mass consciousness is taking place mostly on unconscious level (out of awareness) due to group mind.
3. The whole range of ideas and patterns based on group mind forms the group culture, the function of which is defense from the affects of fear, anxiety and confusion.
4. According to its characteristic features the group culture is always the mythological one. The mythologies built on the basis of group mind are typical and correspond with three basic patterns – so called basic assumptions.
5. Bion acutely names these basic assumptions – fight/flight, dependency and pairing (forming of coalitions).
6. It is important to remember that in mass psychology group mind and group mythologies (that is group culture) appear when masses loose or are deprived of the feeling of reality, in other words: the mass mythological consciousness is the result of the loss of the contact with real development of dangerous or threatening situation.
7. Basic assumption of fight/flight is described as the certainty that mythological enemy acts against the group or society (N.B. mythological and not real enemy) or mythological forces which have to be destroyed. The group or society starts to form specific culture aimed to fight the danger or to flight (isolate itself) from this force. It is worth mentioning that the instrument of such fight is usually violation of established rules.
8. Basic assumption of dependency is described as the certainty or hope that there exists an outer (rarely inner) force, that one can depend on, capable to solve the problems of the group or society. This force is idealized whereas the group experiences itself as immature, weak and unprotected, demanding if possible, to solve its problems avoiding any conflicts, in peaceful way. The similarities between abovementioned positions in the military conflict in Ukraine are obvious.
9. Basic assumption of pairing is the belief of the group or society in the existence of Messiah who is capable to lead to dramatic, that is completely radical solution of the situation. And this position is obvious.
10. Finally, one of the most interesting and less discussed Bion's assumptions is his observation of intensification of mythological thinking in mass consciousness with gradual loss of the feeling of reality. It is this phenomenon that at present is responsible for the drastic distortions in mass media of all the societies involved in this conflict. In Russia it is the escalation of great and "fair"

conquests of “indigenous” lands, violating all the possible international rules. In Ukraine it is the double-dealing concerning the war that is called Anti Terrorist Operation and sharply criticized by those who actually (with emphasis on actually) participates in the war. In Europe it is the denial of the evidence of war in Ukraine, the denial of Russian military presence in Ukraine, and as the result, adhesion to the position that will allow to destroy the rules established in the contemporary society. Fortunately in Europe this position of the denial of obvious is becoming less and less popular. What can we psychotherapists do? Not much. Only to appeal with all our knowledge and skills to more complete and sensible reality testing. And I daresay in this matter we have to be united and in full agreement.

Roman Kechur

An Internal Conflict or an Act of Aggression: between the Mental and the Legal

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this high gathering on such a painful and controversial subject.

The formulation of the topics of presentations leaves open the question of where this discussion might turn: whether we will speak about psychotherapeutic aid and crisis interventions for the survivors or, perhaps, argue over the very nature of this conflict.

In the first case, we would have to discuss the content and types of therapeutic assistance and crisis support, clinical protocols and guidelines, trainings for volunteers, and material, technical and human resources. Such kind of meeting should have been as open as possible, and it should have taken place in Ukraine, where thousands of volunteers do this hard work in military and civil hospitals, in psychotherapy centers, personally and via various means of communication.

But, judging from the announced topics, we are about to hear about ‘Group trauma and pathology’, ‘Russian identity of the 21st century’, and defining Russian armed aggression with annexation of Ukrainian territories as ‘civil war’. Here we find ourselves on thin ice, because our knowledge can either help our cognition, or transform into a means of propaganda. Therefore, I have to use the limited time of my presentation to touch upon the most painful issues.

In the beginning, as I see fit, let us mention Freud, and, more specifically, a story that relates him to Philippe Halsman. Philippe Halsman (1906-1979), a friend of Salvador Dali, was the father of surrealism in photography. In the year of 1928, even before he became a famous photographer, he was convicted for 10 years for the murder of his father, a dentist Mordecai (Mark) Halsman who died falling off a cliff during a tour in the Austrian Alps. The Court of Innsbruck found Philippe guilty of murder. There was no factual proof for that. But the Halsmans were Jewish and had no Austrian citizenship, while the Nazi ideology was already influencing all spheres of life, including justice. It looked like this was the reason for Halsman’s sentence. The case became a scandal. There were public protests against the prejudice of the court. Many celebrities, including Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann, voiced their support for Philippe Halsman. The young man was released after two years, and immediately demanded to leave Austria.

During the trial, the defense of Philippe Halsman made an unexpected move. The forensic psychiatric examination that was carried out at the medical faculty of the Innsbruck University considered the Oedipus complex, found in the defendant, to be the motive for the murder. On this basis, his lawyer demanded that the defendant be released from liability for the death of his father. Sigmund Freud put forward his critique of such approach; the founder of psychoanalysis had not seen the connection between the Oedipus complex and presumed patricide, because the Oedipus complex was always there and, therefore, was not suited to decide the issues of guilt.

Thus, Freud had established the intellectual boundary in arbitrary speculative reasoning. The oedipal conflict is there, but it is regarded as a generally human psychological background, not as a direct motive for murder.

Let us go back to the crisis in Ukraine: is there a conflict between the ‘Russian world’ and the ‘European vector’? There surely is. This political and public discussion has been going on for many years. Two revolutions of 2004 and 2013 have become the quintessence of this confrontation of ideologies. Is it unique? The examples of Catalonians, Basques, Scots or Belgians come to mind. The difference of these conflicts from the Ukrainian one is in their location within the Western world,

not on its border. They are not happening next to a stagnating empire keen on expanding its borders, an empire where compromise is believed to be an expression of weakness, and any conflict is solved by annihilation of one of its parties.

And the modern Western tradition holds the conflict mainly in the form of a civilized discussion, attempting to find a source for development in the tension created by it. Possibly, this is the reason why they find the logic of the aggressor's actions hard to understand.

We have to call things their proper names. There is an ideological tension in Ukraine (as in many other countries), but this is the background, not the direct cause of killings. If we treat this conflict as a civil war, not as an armed aggression staged against the background of general public tension, then all our following conclusions will be wittingly false. Just like the intrapsychic oedipal conflict is neither reason nor excuse for a real murder of a real father, the internal outlook crisis in Ukraine does not account for the real act of aggression on Russia's part, involving real saboteurs, real tanks and all too real downed airliner.

In the case of Halsman, Freud had outlined the difference between the mental and the legal. He had understood it well. Do we?