

INFORMATION

Prof. PhDr. ALEXANDR ORT, DrSc. (SEPTEMBER 20TH 1926 – JUNE 14TH 2014) – KLATOVY NATIVE, CZECH CITIZEN, EUROPEAN¹

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On Saturday June 14th 2014 members of the Czech and European professional public learned sad news. Professor Alexandr Ort passed away at the age of 87. Death of anyone is certainly a tragedy and every human being deserves at least a silent tribute, condolences. On that Saturday we lost not “just” a great person whom many of us loved. He was a “founding father” of several scientific disciplines in Czechoslovakia and in the Czech Republic (especially political science and the science of international law), tireless proponent of the idea of European unification and peaceful Europe and an excellent scientific persona who testified to his standpoints with his own life story. Who then was Alexandr Ort?

Should we look for a place that have always been and always will be connected with his name, it would be certainly the West Bohemian town of Klatovy. Here he was born on September 20th 1925 and here he also died and is buried. But he was not born to a “typical” small town family. His father Jaromír Ort was a major in the Czechoslovak army stationed in Klatovy with the “Klatovy dragoon” regiment, a well-known cavalry unit. Major Ort’s family was imbued with the values of the Czechoslovak Republic – from an early age young Alexandr exercised in Sokol (took part in the famous X. Sokol festival, Všesokolský slet, in Prague), he had great respect for both presidents – the president Founder (formerly also a Klatovy MP) T. G. Masaryk and president Builder Edvard Beneš. A number of his professional works were dedicated to Beneš. Coincidentally, president Beneš, together with his wife Hana, was welcomed by Ort’s young sister Eva during their visit to Klatovy on May 8th 1937. This warm relationship towards the Czechoslovak state intensified after a long-term Klatovy MP for the Agrarian Party František Machník became the minister of national defence and took Jaromír Ort to Prague as his aid. Czechoslovakia became also for his son a matter of the heart – among other reasons because the ups and downs of the Czechoslovak Republic were also ups and downs of the Ort family. In his memoirs, titled *Fragments of one Czech’s Memories on the Complicated 20th Century*, Alexandr Ort writes: “The first historical event I remember was the period of the Munich Dictate.” (p. 8)

But this was not the last test of his feelings towards Czechoslovakia. In the next years Czechoslovakia fell apart and became occupied. Major Jaromír Ort was one of Czechoslovak officers who joined the resistance activities – more specifically, he joined the resistance group Nation’s Defence (Obrana národa). In October 1941 he was arrested by the gestapo

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and transported into the Mauthausen concentration camp with label “return undesirable”. Sadly, Major Jaromír Ort never returned back home. His death was one of the key moments in his son’s life. Professor Alexandr Ort remembered his father with eloquent words: “I was increasingly aware of how much the family missed father – especially me. Obviously he was a role model to me, but he treated me as a friend rather than parent. He had an understanding for some of my pranks, he used to take me hunting and horse-riding and gave me much freedom. He even allowed me to smoke, although he warned me that it was foolish... He always emphasized that he trusted me and to me that was a commitment.” (pp. 14–15).

Because of this family tragedy and tens of thousands of other victims of the Nazi regime Alexandr Ort decided for a radical action. Although his uncle Msgre. Antonín Miláček was the Dean in Klatovy and a long-term chairman of local Popular Party’s branch in Klatovy, Alexandr left after the World War II the Roman Catholic church and joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (soon after February 1948). His motivation was on one hand the disappointment from the decisions of the western powers during the Munich Agreement period and, on the other hand he hoped that Soviet Union, together with Czechoslovak communists, would be a guarantee that the terrors of war and existential threat to the Czech nation would never return. He was not the only one – in many ways these feelings were shared across the young generation that grew up during the war. We could name hundreds of leading Czech intellectual figures who lead the Prague Spring, including the publicist A. J. Liehm, journalist Jiří Pelikán, economist Věnek Šilhán, writer Ludvík Vaculík and hundreds and thousands others.

For this generation, and especially for Alexandr Ort, the left-wing ideas of socialism were not contradictory to the democratic ideals of T. G. Masaryk and the First Republic. Quite the opposite. The idea of socially just state, internationally guaranteed by the Soviet Union, was to fit in with the generally shared values of democracy and human freedom. Ort had a great respect for Masaryk’s son Jan from the war period. He often listened to the regular speeches made by “Honza” Masaryk broadcasted by the BBC. And it was Jan Masaryk who became Ort’s ideal in the domain of democratic foreign policy, based on national sovereignty, mutual respect and peace efforts. To honour Masaryk he named “his” institutional offspring at the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics the *Jan Masaryk Centre for International Studies*. It was founded in 1991 as one of the first post-November centres focusing on international relations as a research area.

After the end of World War II, Alexandr Ort started attending university. His choice set the course for his whole life, although it was not an easy sailing. He considered becoming a professional soldier to honour the memory of his father (he even considered becoming a pilot). After a brief period at the Faculty of Law at the Charles University he became a student at the new Political and Social University. From the three faculties – political, social and journalistic – he chose the first one. A wide spectrum of subjects were taught at this faculty of Political Science, as we’d call it today, including political science, history of political thought, law (public and private), warfare, contemporary history and basics of contemporary international relations. He completed his studies in 1949 but academia became his home until the end of his long life.

Because vast majority of his peers and he himself were leaning towards left-wing ideas and in the post-revolutionary situation saw a chance of creating socially and politically more

just social organization, his university career was not hindered by February 1948, albeit he certainly felt it as a student, seeing a number of faculty members leaving the country. Thanks to his excellent final examination results he was offered an assistant position at the University of Political and Economic Sciences (Vysoká škola politických a hospodářských věd) that replaced the Political and Social University and University of Economic sciences. He worked here alongside his friend and renowned “masarykologist” Jaroslav Opat. Ort himself was an assistant at the department of history and his first “boss” was a highflier historian and associate professor Josef Macek. Only after the school was reorganized he landed at the department of international workers’ movement whose head was his good friend and supporter Prof. Jiří Hájek. From this moment he started focusing on foreign policy questions, especially France’s contemporary foreign policy and its dissolving colonial system, especially in Africa. But Alexandr Ort did not live only by his academic duties and dissertation thesis “*End of Little Entente*”. In 1950 he married a charming translator from French language Jarmila, who became his life-long support – in personal and professional sense.

In spite of the political tension at home and abroad in the 1950s Prof. Hájek succeeded in leading his team through the dangers of this time period. And so his team, including Alexandr Ort, “survived” the death of Joseph Stalin, Klement Gottwald and the end of the University of Economic and Political Sciences, only to land in 1953 at another new school – Faculty of International Relations at Charles University. Paradoxically, soviet pressure to centralize the production of Soviet bloc diplomats increased after Stalin’s death and that meant the end also for this new faculty in 1955. However, it was not the end of Alexandr Ort’s professional interest in the questions of international relations. His new workplace was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the CSR.

He has never become a typical ministerial clerk. When in 1957 the Institute for International Politics and Economy was created at the ministry he did not hesitate and became an active employee there. Clearly, the life of Alexandr Ort and the history of Czech international relations are one. Even in the colourful Czech history in the 20th century we find few other such cases. Shortly after joining the institute Alexandr once again focused on France and its colonies, especially in connection with the events in Algiers and the return of general de Gaulle into the highest levels of French politics. Alexandr Ort was always fascinated by strong figures of world history and he had a weakness for the new French president and hero of antifascist resistance. To de Gaulle and France he loved so much he dedicated a number of books – let us mention at least *France today (Francúzsko dnes, Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1958)*. *The internal political developments after the World War II (Vnitropolitický vývoj po druhej svetovej válce, Prague: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1960)*, *French colonial politics after the World War II (Francouzská koloniální politika po druhé světové válce, Prague: Academia, 1968)*, and books published after November: *How to rise power – Charles de Gaulle (Jak se dostat k moci - Charles de Gaulle, Prague: Mladá fronta, 1990)* and *Charles de Gaulle – patriot and European (Charles de Gaulle – vlastenec a Evropan, Prague: Eva, 1999)*. Ort stayed in France several times – for the first time as a student before November, then regularly until 1958. This year was marked by another milestone in the development of Czech international relations science – the establishment of the journal *International Politics (Mezinárodní politika)*, the first Czech monthly journal on international issues. Alexandr Ort was one of the founders and published a number of articles in it.

The founding of the Institute for International Politics and Economy (IPE Ústav pro mezinárodní politiku a ekonomiku) and of the journal *International Politics* were just the first signs of the gradual mitigation of international tension, especially between the two superpowers and their allies. The 1960s came and with them also one of the most productive period in Alexandr Ort's life (and not just his), although the decade started with an adventure – his secret mission to Africa (Congo) for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But it was again science and university teaching that formed an axis of his activities. Besides the Africa Year the employees at the IPE were interested primarily in the German question, which was becoming more relevant as the Federal Republic of Germany formed in the 1960s. More and more relevant was becoming the question of peaceful coexistence in the world.

In 1968 Jarmila and Alexandr Ort came together to cooperate on yet another new university institute – University of 17th November, which was to educate mainly students from newly formed developing countries. And it was Alexandr Ort who as the first Czechoslovak delegate represented our country at the IPSA congress in 1964. Together with a number of his colleagues he was the godfather of Czech political science as an independent research field. The next IPSA congress in 1967 in Brussels was attended by 15 delegates from Czechoslovakia. This struggle for recognition of international relations as a scientific discipline was well-founded – according to UNESCO 1948 classification International Relations was a sub-discipline of political sciences. Acknowledging political science as a scientific discipline therefore meant that also international relations escaped the dominating Marxist-Leninist philosophy and historical science. A significant credit for this goes to Ort's habilitation work titled *European Politics of Gaullist France (Evropská politika gaullistické Francie)*. Alexandr Ort fought hard for the possibility of defending his habilitation thesis under the umbrella of international relations rather than history. And again his supporter prof. Jiří Hájek helped him. As a Minister of Education he appointed Ort on 28th April 1967 Associate Professor of international relations – the first in Czechoslovakia.

The effort to establish independent Czechoslovak scientific research in the area of international relations went hand in hand with the efforts for independent, or at least autonomous, foreign policy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. This effort was also an integral element of the entire reformation process initiated in Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 1960s, peaking in the memorable year 1968. It had a full support from the new minister of foreign affairs, prof. Jiří Hájek and the employees of IPE were not lagging behind. The institute organized dozens of conferences and meetings with scientists and politicians from the east and west. Prague welcomed big names of American political science, such as prof. Henry Kissinger and former Prague resident Karl Deutsch, Earl Warren, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of the USA and future American president Richard Nixon. The policy of loosening – détente – was triumphing.

However, all hopes were lost after the Warsaw pact invasion lead by the Soviet Union on August 21st 1968. As for thousands of others, the subsequent normalization meant for Alexandr Ort the end of a promising scientific and teaching career – at least in its official form. In September 1969 he was not permitted to travel abroad and take part in another IPSA congress in Rio de Janeiro. The IPE was dismantled and Ort was excluded from the Communist Party. He recorded his view of this desperate situation in memoirs: “I had no illusion about the possibility of finding an adequate position... I registered at the employ-

ment office and because they couldn't find a proper position for me I was given unemployment benefits for one month. When the HR on the ministry advised me to apply for the position of a park sweeper, which surprised even the paid Union representative, I took driver's exams for trucks to be able to find living as a qualified worker." (p. 181)

Fortunately, thanks to a number of friends and former students he found a different alternative – for the next long 20 years Alexandr Ort was a “translator and publicist”. He translated mostly from French and Russian and wrote for *Svobodné slovo* and *Lidová demokracie*. He authored more than 2,000 articles, although vast majority were published under a pseudonym. He continued meeting with his colleagues informally to discuss current questions in the field of international relations and development in Czechoslovakia. He never complained about the injustice in his life. He continued to work intensively, read foreign newspapers and available literature and, most of all, kept on writing and translating. That was typical for Alexandr Ort; he met all adversities (and there were quite a few) with work and activity, never grew bitter, never gave in, lived! Whether he lost job for political reason or tragically lost a beloved person. Those of us who knew him had to admire him for his toughness.

In the first half of the 1980s the situation started to look better. Besides several short sketches on Miroslav Tyrš, MUDr. Jan Jánský but also his beloved Jan Masaryk (in *Svobodné slovo* at the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth) he published in 1985 in Melantrich publishing house under pseudonym Petr Sochor a 150 page book titled *Yalta – Helsinky, path of peace (Jalta – Helsinky, trasa míru)*, in which he returned to the contemporary history of international relations and to the question of peace, which he considered crucial. Not only because his generation survived the World War II, but also because it was imperative to find a way for peaceful coexistence of two rivalling blocs and, most of all, because the idea of peaceful coexistence was so relevant in Czech history – from the peace message of king George of Poděbrady in 15th century to the big names of Czechoslovak politics, Masaryk and Beneš. Peace and peace efforts were in Ort's opinion an authentic part of the Czech political program – just like Masaryk's humanism. Both these were to form a natural foundation of Czechoslovak and later Czech foreign policy after 1989. A foundation applicable at international level, but originating from the best Czech traditions.

Another ideological focus point in Orts thought on contemporary foreign relations was the idea of European integration, which in the 1980s meant the idea of “common European house”. This was soon after his rise to power promoted by the General Secretary of the CPSU Mikhail S. Gorbachev and the idea of peace was crucial also here. As Ort said: “From “peaceful coexistence” of states with different regimes a new cooperation was to be developed in order to build Europe as a shared house”. Alexandr Ort was able to watch closely the new Soviet foreign policy, which among other things emphasized cooperation of states in the UN. By the end of 1987 he became an employee of the State Library and thus had an easy access to foreign press and other sources of information he needed for his work. And it was the idea of European Unification (re-unification) what became from this moment crucial for prof. Ort – even long before 1989. But only after the Velvet Revolution this idea could start becoming a reality. The project of integrated Europe was a project of peaceful Europe, Europe that overcame the centuries-old historical antagonism and two world conflicts. And the project of peaceful Europe was an old dream of Czech king

George of Poděbrady, so it was also a Czech concept. The magical date November 17th 1989 was coming to once again radically change the life of Alexandr Ort and with him the lives of millions of Czechoslovak citizens.

For Alexandr Ort November 89 started actually even before November, because he was invited for hosting at the Institutu d'études politiques in Paris. While teaching in France he was a guest at a number of conferences and seminars focusing on the situation in Central and Eastern Europe and here he learned about the events at Národní třída. He came to Czechoslovakia before Václav Havel was elected president. To capture, even briefly, all important events in Ort's life during the subsequent period is impossible. He and a spectrum of his friends quickly returned to important political and scientific roles. One factor played its important role – Jiří Dienstbier, Ort's student, became the new minister of foreign affairs.

Ort himself did not want to return to the ministry or to the Institute for International Relations, from which he was expelled. He was looking for the freest environment for his work and he found it at the Faculty of Law of Charles University, where he was admitted thanks to dean doc. Mucha as an Assistant Professor, later becoming the head of the Institute for International Relations and Politics. In this position he contributed significantly to the founding of George of Poděbrady Foundation for European Cooperation (Nadace Jiřího z Poděbrad pro evropskou spolupráci), where he was the director for a number of years. However, he did not get too comfortable at the Faculty of Law. Thanks to an initiative by the then rector of the University of Economics prof. Bernášek he became in 1991 a teacher at the new Faculty of International Relations at the UE, which was the transformed Faculty of Business. And in these settings he became one of the founders of the Jan Masaryk Centre of International Studies as a prestigious scientific and pedagogic centre for research on international relations. The centre was built with a very modern understanding of this field and included, besides international politics, economics, theory and history, also culture as a relevant and in many ways key element of international relations.

At the Faculty of International Relations of the Economic University Ort was, after the appropriate appointment procedure and all bureaucratic requirements, named professor for international relations on June 1st 1992. The topic of his professor lecture was not accidental – *Edvard Beneš as a European politician*. He elaborated the topic and published it a year later. Professor Ort became a good spirit of the Faculty of International Relations in the best possible sense. His lectures were interesting and attractive for students also because he would often invite politicians and diplomats. Students therefore had the unique opportunity to have a discussion with expert practitioners. In the 1990s it was not so unusual. I myself remember similar seminars by PhDr. Zdeněk Zbořil at the Faculty of Arts. Alexandr Ort also returned to publishing and while working hard on preserving the Czechoslovak Federation he published in 1992 and 1993 a number of scripts. Besides already mentioned Edvard Beneš we should mention two parts of the History of World Politics (first 1918–1945, second 1945–1975).

Once again the political climate changed. A Czechoslovak, European and a follower of Masaryk's humanism Ort was not ready to reconcile with the new course set by the Czernin Palace, represented by Minister Josef Zielenec. Ort pointed out his lack of professional competency and inability to formulate real Czech foreign policy. On the other hand, his main interests were still teaching and writing. He organized international conferences (on

Edvard Beneš and Jana Masaryk, among other topics), worked for the George of Poděbrady Foundation and new Jan Masaryk Foundation supporting international relations. He gave lectures at the University of Economics in Prague, but also at the Faculty of Law of Charles University and he also helped with lectures on international relations in Bratislava. He travelled Europe – from Moscow to Madrid, tirelessly spreading the idea of European unity and tradition of peaceful Czechoslovak politics symbolized by Beneš and both Masaryks. He passionately debated thorny topics, such as Czech-German relations, and presented to the Czech professional and lay public key European politicians from the past decades, also in the form of lectures for universities of the third age.

However, Ort's age was beginning to take its toll. In 1990 he was already 64 years old, an age of deserving pensioners. His extended service was becoming strikingly reminiscent of the active life of another "senior" – Tomáš G. Masaryk, who also at such advanced age started in 1914 anti-Austrian resistance only to become the leader of the new Czechoslovakia almost twenty years later. Alexandr Ort left the University of Economics in 2001 and moved to a town that was always central to his life – Klatovy. But before that he triumphed with his publication *Europe of the 20th Century* published in 2000, whose godfather was the Czech prime minister at the time, Miloš Zeman. Even in retirement Professor Ort often travelled from Klatovy to Prague to oversee the activities of his doctoral students, give lectures etc.

Unfortunately, his stay in Klatovy did not bring him the well-deserved peace and comfort. In September 2001, soon after Ort's 75th birthday, his beloved wife suddenly passed away and in August of the following year also his sister Eva, who was taking care of their house in Klatovy, inherited from their parents. Ort was devastated. He was alone and deserted. And the situation became even worse when he was diagnosed a serious illness – his situation was bad. Alexandr Ort lost a leg, came close to death and was asking himself if his life still had a meaning. I remember well his condition – for the first and last time I saw Professor Ort without his strong will to live. The fact that the worst did not come true and Alexandr Ort won his life struggle once more had at least two reasons. One of them was Ort's miraculous medicine – his work and enthusiasm for international relations, and the other one was the intense care of people around him provided – most of all his son Petr, who was often visiting him in Klatovy. Alexandr Ort lived 12 more years and during this time he would write, receive friends and many lady admirers, but also former students to whom he never denied advice or a good word. He was actively participating in public life of Klatovy (for example in the Úhlava society), though he always claimed to be disabled and practically powerless. We took it almost as a joke – considering that his last book *Czechs in the Middle of Europe (Češi ve středu Evropy)* was published in spring 2014, just a few weeks before his death. He worked and lived until the last days of his life. In Klatovy he also wrote a number of other books, including his memoirs *Fragments of Memory of one Czech on the Complicated 20th Century (Střípky vzpomínek jednoho Čecha na složitě 20. Století*, Pilsner: Aleš Čeněk, 2006), *Czech Foreign Policy (Česká zahraniční politika*, Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2005), *Safety of Europe and the Czech Republic (Bezpečnost Evropy a Česká republika*, head of a collective of authors; Prague: Professional Publishing, 2005), *Diplomacy (Diplomacie*, together with se Zdeněk Matějka and Jan Kavan; Pilsner: Aleš Čeněk, 2008), *Contemplations Over Czech Diplomacy (Zamyšlení nad českou diplomacií*, Pilsner: Aleš Čeněk, 2010) and many more. But this is far from exhaustive list of Ort's

activities in Klatovy. “Retired” professor was also translating a lot to offer to the Czech reader important works of the fathers of European integration. Perhaps his best-known translation works is the *Memoirs* by Jean Monnet (*Paměti*, Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2012) covering full 400 pages. And all this in spite of a number of health problems, for which he had simply no time being busy with his work and frequent visits.

I remember well my last visit. It was the end of May 2014. Professor Ort told me right at the door that he doesn’t have much time because another visit is coming from Prague. During the one hour I spent there his phone rang three times and he was attending to his work matters in Prague. After the hour passed his next visitors came and I had to take my leave. But it certainly did not feel like the last goodbye, on the contrary. Professor Ort gave me for the road a few clever and well-informed comments about the situation in Ukraine and emphasized again that the position of Czech foreign policy must be peaceful. Even George of Poděbrady knew this much! We parted agreeing to meet again to talk about his studies at the Social and Political University. Sadly, Alexandr Ort died on June 14th in early morning hours. Our debate will not be finished.

Although it is a sad moment, Alexandr Ort left this world exactly the way we knew him – optimistic, in the middle of frantic work activities, always in the middle of social (and political) life. In his *parte* we read the motto: “Who will finish my work...”. Clearly, there is no other Alexandr Ort and there never will be. But there are dozens of his friends, hundreds, maybe thousands of his students, tens of books and, most of all, millions of wonderful memories that will keep Alexandr Ort among us and therefore living. Dear Professor, it was an honour to know you and experience many pleasant and more than inspirational moments by your side. I can promise you that your work and the thoughts it carries certainly have not died on that June 14th.

Respectfully, Lukáš Valeš