

CHARTER OF RESPONSIBILITIES 2017

In the direst straights of human history, people have often wondered what it means to **be responsible in one's own time**.

Some people, very often in solitude, have taken upon themselves the duty of caring about those who were outcast and persecuted because of unjust laws, and have shouldered the burden to defend human dignity, as it was trampled on.

The protagonists of such deeds have not only tried to stem the disasters of bad politics, but have also left traces that have then been useful to rebuild a torn world. Without the initiative of the Righteous women and men, there would not have been any defeat of Nazism and Soviet totalitarianism, nor the birth of the European community.

Such individuals have taught us that moral action, even though it often seems to yield meagre results, over time can cause a chain effect and an emulation movement. What seemed impossible and only the work of people considered by the majority of fellow human beings as visionaries, naïf and lonely, succeeds in influencing the behaviour of the other people and even to change the policies of States and governments.

Still nowadays, **those who act responsibly** and listen to the voice of their own heart, reason and conscience, can create unhoped-for effects in a complicated world that seems to go a wrong direction.

Suddenly, we realized that economic progress cannot at all be taken for granted and the period of peace and democratic achievements might stop in Europe, as well. We could find ourselves overnight compelled to face new wars, unless we stem the resurfacing of nationalism and the culture of hate.

As Shakespeare sensed in *Hamlet*, virtuous men are called to readdress the course of that “time unhinged”, in which they happen to live.

Everybody can make the difference in the face of many degenerative phenomena that, as it happened in the past, gather a lot of consent, and which many people get used to with a feeling of powerlessness and resignation.

Every human being can set on a new beginning, like the grocer from Prague who decided to remove from his shop the plasterboard of conformity; his deed was then the first step to push history toward a new direction, and his example rallied many other people.

Writer and dissident (and future President of Czechoslovakia) Vaclav Havel called this regenerative opportunity as *the power of the powerless*, that is fulfilled when people of different walks of life gather to face the challenges of the time, acknowledging that it is simply impossible to do without the others, because every human being is the bringer

of a fragility, a fallibility, a partial truth, or a difference, which though can, from time to time, be straightened out through dialogue and shared experience.

It is this extraordinary process of self-education that makes people understand how true power does not arise from the individual, but rather from the endeavor of **building together**, overcoming the belief that a new society should be created around the idea of the enemy.

Maybe, never so much as in our time, people, States, supranational organizations, unless they want to fall into the abyss, must cooperate to face the huge challenges that concern the very survival of our planet: poverty, climate change, migrations and the hotbeds of war.

The culture of closure, separation, up to the resurfacing of conflict and hate against the other, relies on the **illusion of the self-sufficiency of the individual**, as well as of one's own nation face the world, and as a matter of facts it makes us all much weaker and enemies to each other.

The **recognition of one's own fragility** is the key element of solidarity and shared humanity, up to the most difficult experience in human relations: the one of **forgiveness**.

Whoever recognizes the fragility of human beings may be the person, who is the most able to open up to the others. He or she does not care only about not harming the other people and distancing him or herself from what the dysfunctional features of society, but acts to meet the others' needs and taking up a responsibility:

they meet violence with non-violence;

they counter xenophobia with hospitality;

they reply to hatred and contempt by offering their friendship;

to those who want walls or fences, they respond by building bridges.

He or she has in facts understood that to defeat evil, **it is necessary to anticipate Good**.

This way, as it happened to many Righteous over history, who filled a void and built small islands of humanity, the person who is responsible within his or her span of control offers his or her contribution to readdress the world. Their example can become catchy and ignite a spark among the people.

Through an act of goodness, they call everybody to **act together in the name of our common humanity**.

A new start begins by challenging indifference.

Unfortunately, we have gotten used to the idea that, in the face of genocide and mass atrocities, we cannot be anything else than bystanders. Philosopher Theodor W. Adorno bitterly noted that no one lost their appetite while watching the dreadful bombings in Vietnam on TV, at supper time. Nonetheless there were many people, all over the world, who took to the streets to demonstrate, persuaded that it would be

possible to stop that war. Today, the destruction of Syria and the crimes against the humanity perpetrated by ISIS suggest that we are still far from an international policy of genocide prevention. But this is not ineluctable. Every person can become a protagonist not only at denouncing mass atrocities over the social networks and in public life, but also at reminding the political world that the commandment “thou shall not kill” should be the first ethical imperative in international relations.

Everyone of us must call Europe to play an active role in stopping genocide, making international criminal courts effective, reporting any kind of genocide denial and putting into effect practices of conciliation and pacification in the face of wars and conflicts.

Unless this void is filled, Holocaust Remembrance Days run the risk of becoming mere exercises of rhetoric and hypocrisy. Responsibility toward the victims of the past proves inadequate when we fall short of care and mercy toward those who are being humiliated in the present time. This is why it is a moral scandal that the **emergency of migrants** does not find any common response from Europe to grant an economically viable future to the countries, in which human beings endure unacceptable life standards, and that many people consider hospitality as the end of Western civilization, seeing in migrants the enemies of our wellbeing and future. It is unacceptable that the burden of such responsibility is placed on the will of each single country, while the majority remains indifferent or shuts the borders.

Then, in the face of terror violence and religious obscurantism there are no easy way outs. The fear of a phenomenon that hits people randomly and aims at creating divisions and clashes between people of different faiths and cultures can be overcome only if we create a credible pathway leading to its end.

Every individual should ask him or herself what to do to stop terroristic violence. When we clearly know which pathway we shall follow, we are no more conditioned by the blackmail of murderous fanaticism.

The first step is the understanding of the ideology that drives terrorists, because without a cultural battle on values it is impossible to take young people away from the enticement of fundamentalist fanaticism. There is no totalitarian ideology that was not first of all defeated on the field of ideas. The second step, which is absolutely indispensable, is the involvement of Muslim communities in a plural movement of moral resistance that sees together laymen and believers of all faiths.

From those who believe in Islam and any religion, a strong and clear message should emerge. When people kill in the name of God and finds a justification to carry out

savage deeds, as Ety Hillesum wrote some time before dying in Auschwitz, in facts they kill God Himself. This is why people, under the worst circumstances, are called to defend God from those who would like to turn him into a savage criminal.

A new beginning is possible when we find again the pride of being European citizens without falling into the illusion that the return to small fatherlands, local sovereignties, and protectionism, can help us face the contradictions of globalization and the limits of European construction.

It does not suffice any longer to complain about Europe's failures to do something for us, with the quarrelsome attitude of those who only list their own claims. On the contrary, everyone should start ask themselves what they can do to strengthen the European community.

Europe, with all its faults, has given us the opportunity to experience an extraordinary period of peace after the collective suicide of two world wars. The European dream of great writers such as Milan Kundera and Czesław Miłosz has been the propelling idea that made it possible to accomplish a miracle that no one could have ever imagined in the Eastern European countries before 1989: the peaceful end of the Soviet totalitarian rule and the re-composition of a torn identity. Europe enabled us to **strengthen a democratic system**, which extended freedom and citizens', women's and minority rights: it has been for years the engine of economic growth, creating a widespread wellbeing.

Getting back would not only mean repressing historical memory, but also reopening a time of clashes and rivalries, which would get us to fall again into the worst abysses of the past and would lead our continent to become irrelevant in the international context.

It is time to set into motion our best energies to accomplish a **federal project** that shall create democratic and sovereign institutions, in which European citizens can recognize their own belonging and work for an European community that may help the development of the weaker countries.

Today's world, which is torn, wild and violent, without any reference point, but with many powers that aim at a dangerous hegemony, needs the role of Europe. We Europeans may be able to offer a culture, which may lead to the **peaceful resolution of conflicts**. Because, on the one hand, we are able to think of the world with a universal and cosmopolitan outlook, but on the other hand, with our history we have laboriously created institutions, which are able to cope with plurality and diversity, social conflicts, and the relations between State and religion. From experiences that tore us apart, like the different forms of totalitarianism, we have been able to develop the antidotes to avoid the *reductio ad unum* of human society. Europe should let its voice be heard in

more influential a way to denounce anti-Semitism, homophobia and every other kind of discrimination, and promoting women's emancipation and the respect of human rights. It can do so by the example set by its institutions, but also by the means of a brave foreign policy.

This was underlined by philosopher Jan Patočka in Prague in 1977 (little before dying following a harsh questioning of the political police), when he called the European countries to a moral responsibility: “The concept of human rights does not consist in anything else than the conviction that also States and society shall abide, as a whole, by the supremacy of moral feeling”.

A new start is possible if we all are the protagonists of a revolution in our mindset that shall strongly re-propose, in the public debate and the daily human relations, the taste of seeking the truth, dialogue, listening, empathy and active mercy.

Many people believe that, in the face of the disarray in the face of an uncertain future, closure in the unsurpassable walls of one's own nation, faith, and identity is the main road to overcome anxiety and fear.

This kind of self-defence of our ego in the fact of the others is a fertile ground, on which hatred and violent clash resurface. It is through these mechanisms that the **culture of the enmity** and division between *us* and *them*, that pollutes democratic life and feeds nationalism and populism, rears its ugly head again.

We notice this in the widespread habituation to a miserable political debate where all too often the logic of anathema and contempt prevails and people have lost the taste for competence, the quest for truth and a shared assumption of responsibility. We notice this in the **social networks**, which often are the intimate reflection of our behaviors, as noted by Zygmunt Bauman; here the people, seeking ways to assert themselves, prove to be impervious to the others' ideas and search from time to time for an enemy to demonize to assert the absolute sovereignty of their own ego. We observe it in the logic of the **fences erected at the borders** to defend oneself from migrants, and that are built again every time subjects of different cultures and faiths consider cultural contamination as a danger for their identity.

We must work to rebuild in the Polis a democracy of friends who discuss politely and debate ideas the same way, putting an end to the logic of insult and personal curse, with the awareness that no one is ever the bringer of an absolute truth. Sharing one's views with the others sincerely and with intellectual honesty can make it possible for democracy to creatively work.

A different set of good manners for Politics can arise only from the **responsibility of the media and the individuals**. Too few people have the courage to denounce the

violent and quarrelsome language, to show their own disapproval when a politician expresses his views with contempt, dehumanizes people and presents his or her foes as enemies to be demolished. Those who use insult in political communication do not only pollute our society, but also generate a confrontational climate that inhibits bonds and solidarity among the people.

The force of democracy, on the contrary, consists above all in being able to choose and then building together through the sharing of responsibility.

A major contribution to this ripening can be given by a new way of dialoguing in the social networks, recognizing without any self-referential pride the others' reasons and predisposing oneself to change one's mind if needed. It is important to **watch over the truthfulness of facts** and not to allow lies to prevail. Renunciation to thought and reason make it possible to fake statements to spread over the internet clashing with earnest journalistic work and historical and scientific research, and provide the basis for pseudo-narratives of demagogues and populists, creating a dangerous virus for democracy. Social networks can provide a great opportunity to open up to the world, or become a way out, where small sects are built, each against the others.

Those who write tweets or messages from Facebook must be aware that a sick word, or a baseless accusation, can unleash hatred in a chain reaction able to destroy people. On the Web, words become immediately public, and every one of us becomes an opinion or editor of him or herself, running the risk of quickly amplifying summary judgements, simplifications and falsifications of the truth. As Kant said, we should refrain from publicly expressing the first thing that crosses our minds, because sometimes our feelings could not be completely "innocent". This is why everyone of us has a **personal responsibility over the Net** and before expressing an opinion or letting an unverified information circulate, they should reflect on the consequences of their own assertions.

The most difficult challenge is the acceptance of the other in our society.

The arrival of millions immigrants all over Europe, with religions and cultures different from ours, has created a climate of uncertainty and often our first concern is to create fences to impose our points of view.

There is only a way to win over the fear that generates monsters and causes a climate of suspicion and insecurity, where everybody become enemies: the perseverance at **searching together for our common humanity** and our capability to think and judge, always putting ourselves in the others' shoes.

As it always happened over history, a pathways of symbiosis and mimesis among different civilizations occurs, albeit not linearly, within a common experience where

people discover with curiosity the possible similarities between the cultures and the same responsibilities before the world.

Of course, integration cannot leave out of consideration the sharing of fundamental rights, nor can be realized through abstract formal agreements.

Accepting does not mean to making a step back as far as our values are concerned.

The themes of tolerance, dialogue between cultures, and diversity are to be put **in relation to our identity** and our achievements.

Modernity meant as the rights acquired by the weaker in an open society; the universal value of democracy as opportunity for everybody and freedom of thought; the separation of powers, accompanied by checks and balances provided by given social structures; the ability of providing mediation and problem-solving at the highest level between clashing interests; these factors altogether are the substance of a historical experience, which new Europe shall take charge of, unless it wants to die crushed by the burden of its own non-fulfillments, both in the political and in the social realm.

This new beginning is no impossible endeavor, because there are many people who have raised their head again to respond to indifference, not to let themselves be involved in the culture of hate, to resist terrorism, reassess the value of plurality and hospitality, peace and non-violence.

We can call them as the Righteous of our time.

It is up to us to get people to learn about them and follow their footprints, as it happened many times over history.

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