MOTHERS OF EUROPE

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About the project

In the “Mothers of Europe” project, we fill in the missing half of European history. We discover and tell the biographies of outstanding women who contributed to the democratic transition, European integration and co-shaped European values.

“Mothers of Europe” is implemented by a consortium of NGOs from Hungary (Magyarorszagi Europa Tarsasag), Germany (Alliance4Europe), Greece (Inter Alia), Spain (Asociacion Consortium Local-Global Coglobal), the Czech Republic (Knihovna Vaclava Havla), and Poland (The Bronisław Geremek Foundation and The Polish Robert Schuman Foundation).

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Introduction

The Fathers of Europe – six figures who made the greatest contribution to the reunification of Europe after World War II. They managed to transform post-war resentments and a long account of wrongs into a project of reconciliation and cooperation in the name of a future without wars. Their ideas and actions laid the foundation for the European Union. For decades, the Fathers of Europe were a symbol of the success of reconciliation and integration. Six senior gentlemen in dark suitss.

We sought answers to this question in six countries: the Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Germany, Poland and Hungary. We established cooperation with partners in each of these countries, with each organization identifying three women whose contributions, legacies, and biographies were considered particularly important to the history of their country and Europe.

While this sample does not fully reflect the diversity of the European Union, it does show the perspective of both large countries and smaller ones. Above all, however, we shift the focus away from the center of the EU: in this list, only Germany is among the founding states, the others joined in the 1980s (Greece and Spain) and then in 2004 (the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary). These were the times of authoritarianism, democratization and then European integration, the beginning of the end of patriarchy.

The history of 20th century Europe is clearly visible in the biographies of these women.They first fought authoritarianisms – Nazism in Germany, Fascism in Spain and Greece, and Communism in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary.

They were involved in opposition activities (such as Czech Olga Havlová, Polish Anna Walentynowicz), defended oppositionists in courts (such as Czech Dagmar Burešová, Hungarian Anna Kéthly, Spanish Paca Sauquillo and Dulcinea Bellido and Greek Agni Roussopoulou) or acted on behalf of the most excluded (such as Ottilia Solt).

Another great challenge was the political transformation and democratization of countries. Polish Danuta Hübner, as well as Dagmar Burešová and Dulcinea Bellido, among others, took part in it.

Some of them have co-shaped European integration – including Danuta Hübner, Spaniard Carmen Díez De Rivera, Greek Melina Merkouri, and Anna Kéthly.

A special role was played by German women whose lives were shaped by German Nazism. Ursula Hirschmann, Hannah Arendt, and Nelly Sachs – German women of Jewish descent who survived World War II and whose lives and work were to ensure that the horrors of war would never be repeated again. They co-created the intellectual, political, and cultural foundation for the values, and ideas on which human rights, liberal values, and European integration were based.

Among the figures we described were also women who used their loud voices to fight for the causes most important to them. Journalists defending freedom of speech (such as Lída Rakušanová), women of culture – the world of film (such as Polish director Agnieszka Holland, Hungarian actress Dorka Gryllus, actress, and politician Melina Merkouri) and literature (such as Hannah Arendt, and poet Nelly Sachs), and activists who focused on human rights, social injustice, women's rights and minority rights, including those of non-heteronormative people (such as Betty Vakalidou and Agni Roussopoulou).

Most of the female protagonists we describe lived in times of male domination. The same achievements required much more effort from them than from men. Politics was dominated by men - that's why most of our heroines entered politics through the "back door" – through trade unions, defense of human rights, support for men, activism, through the world of culture and science.

Some of our heroines (such as Olga Havlová and Anna Walentynowicz) filled the space left by men, and expanded it. Others, such as Betty Vakalidou, Agni Roussopoulou, Dorka Gryllus, Ottilia Solt, Dulcinea Bellido and Agnieszka Holland, fought inequality, broke and changed unjust cultural norms. They violated taboos, opened the debate to social change and gave a voice to discriminated and excluded groups, fought for their rights.

None of the women we have described can be pigeonholed, each was active in many spheres. This may attest as much to their activity as to the times in which they lived – for patriarchy forces women to combine multiple roles.

The Mothers of Europe were multitasking because they had to – they carried the same burden that affected half of the continent's population. To become political leaders, they first had to change societies and break cultural norms.

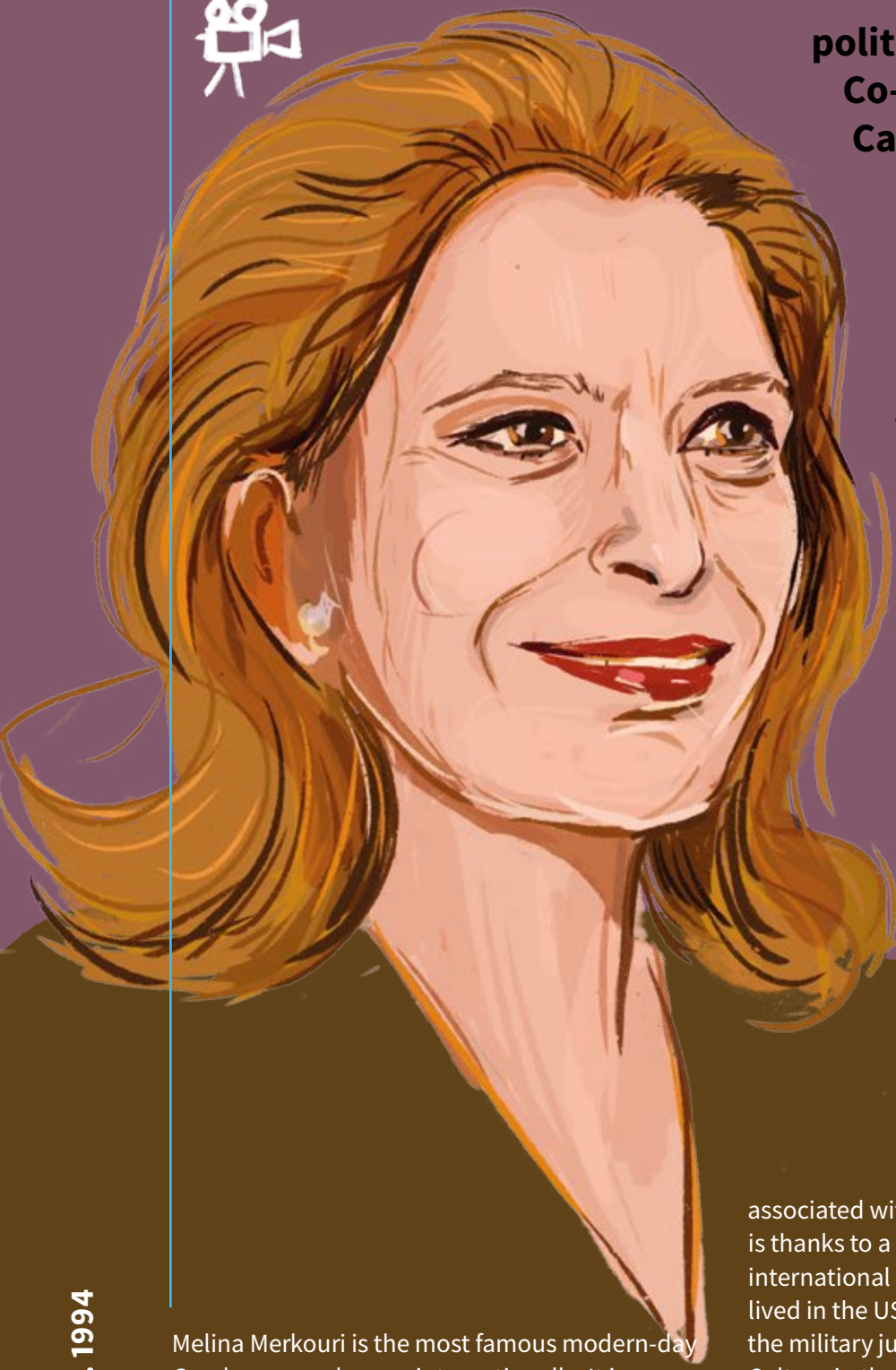
The social and cultural changes that were initiated or accelerated by them became the foundation for political changes introduced primarily by men.

Men could only become fathers of the European political project thanks to women who became mothers of European societies. This political project was a gigantic success in the 20th century, not so much due to the involvement of men, but rather despite the exclusion of women. In order for this success not to go to waste in the 21st century, it is necessary to learn lessons and accelerate changes that incorporate diverse voices and perspectives into the public debate and political community.

Michał Sęk

Melina Mercouri

Actress, oppositionist, politician, Minister of Culture. Co-founder of the European Capital of Culture initiative



> I was born Greek and I will die Greek. Pattakos was born a fascist and will die a fascist (about the leader of the military junta and Minister of the Interior General Stylianos Pattakos)

b. 1920 | d. 1994

Melina Merkouri is the most famous modern-day Greek woman, known internationally. It is difficult to assess celebrity on quantitative term. However, there is an irrefutable empirical criterion, however you are, in Europe, but also in other parts of the world, the name “Melina” is associated with Greece in the 20th century. This is thanks to a combination of several factors: her international career as an actress, the years she lived in the US and Europe, her struggle against the military junta, her tenure as the Minister of Culture in the 1980s, her fiery temper. And there is a red thread that unites all of the above: Melina, her personality, action and life, that managed to embody the demand for women emancipation with great success.

Greece

Melina Merkouri lived during a turbulent period in Greek history, full of socio-political changes. She lived through the major events of the 20th century: the Nazi occupation, the civil war and the dictatorship of the "black colonels" in 1967. At a time when Greece was facing political instability, traditional social roles were changing and the influence of political families like her own played a key role.

During the Nazi occupation (1941–1944), Melina had enjoyed the privileges of a wealthy background, which she later felt ashamed of. During the military junta, she became a symbol of the struggle against dictatorship, publicising the situation in Greece internationally, losing her citizenship and becoming a target of repression. After the fall of the junta, she returned to the country and became involved in politics as a member of the socialist PASOK party. As Minister of Culture, she promoted Greek heritage and fought for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, becoming an icon of the struggle for democracy and culture during Greece's transition.

Melina Merkouri was born in Athens in 1920. Her given name was Amalia-Maria, but she was called by her pet name, Melina, to such extent that there is no need to mention her last name. She came from a family of politicians. Her grandfather, Spyros Merkouris, who served as the mayor of Athens for about twenty years, greatly influenced young Melina. Her father, Stamatis, was a Member of Parliament for several terms, while he also served as the Minister of Public Order and Public Works. Her mother Irini Lappa came from a wealthy family. Melina was closely connected with her younger brother Spyros, her companion throughout her life, both on a personal and professional level.

From a young age, Melina had an aptitude for acting as opposed to school education, which she found suffocating. She made her "debut" in acting at the age of ten in Spetses when she gave an improvised performance for which she was "rewarded" with a slap from her mother. During her teenage years, she fell madly in love with the much older famous actor of the time, George Pappas, for whom, coming into conflict with her family, she attempted suicide.

As a teenager, while on vacation in Spetses, she met and fell in love with the wealthy landowner Panos Harokopos, whom she secretly married, sending her family a telegram "Marriage consummated." Her main motivation for this marriage was the complete freedom of movement that Harokopos had guaranteed her, a promise that he kept throughout their married life.

Despite serious family objections, her passion for acting led her to apply for the Drama School of the National Theatre. She passed the exams with flying colours and studied with Dimitris Rodiris as a teacher. She was at this point when the Nazi Occupation happened. Despite the bleak circumstances, she herself, married to a wealthy husband, did not face particular difficulties and tried to help friends and colleagues. However, she was not proud of this period, as she later confessed, she was romantically involved with the war profiteering businessman Phidias Giadikiaroglou.

After having completed her studies in 1944, she began her acting career starring in Eugene O'Neill's play "Mourning Becomes Elektra," staged by the Katerina's troupe. Her first big success, however, came with "A Street Car Named Desire" of Tennessee Williams, directed by Karolos Koon.

Melina's moving to Paris opened her artistic and intellectual horizons. She appeared on the Parisian stages with a "boulevard repertoire" and, at the same time, frequented the cafes where she mingled with intellectuals and artists.

A pivotal moment in her life and career was her playing the leading role – the first one in cinema – in Michalis Kakogianni's film "Stella," where she played the homonymous character. The iconic film represented Greece at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956, and although Merkouri was not awarded – as it was expected – she received rave reviews. Her appearance in Cannes was a catalyst not only for her artistic journey but also for her personal life. There she met the man with whom she shared the rest of her life, the persecuted by the McCarthy committee, American Jewish director, Jules Dassen. In the

following years, Melina became Dassen's muse and starred in many of the films he directed. Among them, "Christ Recrucified" (from the homonymous novel by Nikos Kazantzakis), "Phaedra" and "Never on Sunday" for which Melina won the prize for best actress in Cannes in 1960. With the films of Dassen but also through other collaborations with distinguished directors such as Vittorio de Sica, Norman Jewison, Karl Froman. Melina built an international film career that numbered 19 films.

In the same period, her theatrical career continued successfully, on both the Greek and Parisian stages. The highlight was the theatrical performance in Tennessee Williams's play "The sweet bird of youth" that stagged in 1960, directed by Karolos Koun and produced by the "Art Theater" (Theatro Technis) with Yannis Fertis as co-star.

In 1967, Melina moved to New York and starred on Broadway in the play "Ilya Darling." She was there when the military coup of the colonels occurred. She began the anti-dictatorial struggle almost immediately. Her reputation, the networks she had in the artistic field and the platform she was given helped to highlight the Greek case. Through interviews, she urged Americans not to visit Greece. Because of this attitude, the Junta took away her citizenship. When Melina was asked about it, she answered with the famous phrase: "I was born Greek and I will die Greek. Pattakos was born a fascist and will die a fascist." From November 1967, for about three months, she was placed under protection by the FBI, as there was information that an assassination attempt against her was plotted.

During the seven-year junta, Melina became a symbol of the anti-dictatorship struggle. She participated in concerts with Mikis Theodorakis, spoke at anti-dictatorship events, gave interviews to foreign television networks and toured many European countries. The junta banned her songs in Greece and froze her assets. Attempts on her life were made, such as in Genoa in March 1969, where an explosive device was planted in the theatre where she was to speak.

On this tour, she met Andreas Papandreou, with whom she was politically associated for the rest of her life.

Two days after the fall of the junta, Melina returned to Greece and was enthusiastically welcomed by the crowd. In the post-dictatorship period, she continued her political activity through the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) of which she was a founding member.

Parallel to her political activities, she continued her career in theatre, cinema and television, where she participated in the social programme "Dialogues" on ERT. The show was cancelled due to the airing of the first two episodes about Cyprus.

In the elections of 1977, Melina was elected a Member of the Parliament in the 2nd district of Piraeus with PASOK.

In 1980, she starred, with great success, in Tennessee Williams's the "Sweet Bird of Youth," directed by Jules Dassin, while in the summer, in Epidaurus, which was filled to capacity, she played Clytemnestra in the tragedy "Oresteia" by the Karolos Koun Art Theater. Gradually, however, her engagement with politics became dominant.

When PASOK won the elections in October 1981, Melina's political career reached its peak. She was assigned the Minister of Culture, a position in which she remained throughout the party's government terms (1981–1989 and 1993–1994). Her central political goal was the promotion of the Greek cultural heritage and its global dimension. Key to this goal was her international reputation and the friendships she had developed during the years of the dictatorship, which enabled her to come into contact with leading European leaders, such as François Mitterrand. She organised many important exhibitions in foreign museums and met political figures such as Jack Lang, Olof Palme, Felipe Gonzalez, Indira Gandhi and others.

Melina's great vision, for which she fought stubbornly and became inextricably linked in public memory, was the return of the Parthenon

marbles to Greece. Knowing that, in addition to the international dimension of this claim, infrastructure works were also needed, she promoted the idea of a new Acropolis Museum and prioritised the restoration work of the Acropolis monuments. Her ideas of unifying the archaeological sites of Athens and the introduction of the free entry of Greek citizens to museums and archaeological sites served the same vision.

In the field of modern culture, Merkouri contributed decisively to the establishment of the institution of the (alternating) cultural capital of Europe: in 1985, Athens was designated the Europe's first Cultural Capital. Melina's policy did not only focus on Athens. Indicatively, she pursued the establishment of Municipal Regional Theatres in provincial towns, thus combining her sensitivity for arts with her concern for decentralisation.

In 1990, after the change of government, she was a candidate mayor for the Municipality of Athens. To her great disappointment, she failed to be elected. In 1992, she returned to the artistic stage, again, participating in the opera "Pylades" by Giorgos Kouroupos and performing Clytemnestra. Her return to ministerial office in 1993 was short-lived. She died on March 6, 1994 in the USA where she had gone for treatment. Her funeral in Athens was massively attended while mourning manifestations were organised in many places, such as the closing of Broadway theatre.

Melina Merkouri has been described as the most famous Greek woman of the 20th century. To this day, thirty years after her death, her fame remains strong, being one of the emblematic personalities of modern-time Greece, far beyond the borders of the country.

Aggeliki Christodoulou
Anastasia Kapola
Stratis Bournazos

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Agni Roussopoulou

Brilliant lawyer, passionate feminist and fighter for democracy

Lawyer, socialist, feminist. Although little known today, the eloquent and militant Agni Roussopoulou is an icon of the struggle for democracy, equality and women's rights. In 1929 she was dismissed from the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece. Her biography is a fascinating journey that allows us to follow the struggles, victories, and changes in the field of social and political rights over half a century.

Agni Roussopoulou was born at the beginning of the 20th century, Greek women were confined to domestic and family responsibilities, and experienced many exclusions and inequalities in their personal, family, educational, social and professional lives. Women were treated as inferior to men, as mere 'accessories' to them.

Agni Roussopoulou was a pioneer of Greek feminism, a lawyer and socialist who fought for women's rights and democracy. Between the wars, she was active in feminist movements demanding equal rights for women, access to the professions and education. During the Nazi occupation, she supported the resistance movement and helped political prisoners. In the post-war years, she promoted the ideas of socialism and equality and was imprisoned for her political activities. During the military junta (1967–1974), she defended political prisoners and documented the regime's repression. She remained active until the end of her life, symbolising the struggle for equality and democracy in Greece.

b. 1901 | d. 1977

Greece

Agni Roussopoulou was born in 1901 in Athens from a wealthy urban family. Completing her law studies in 1922, she applied for the Bar Practitioners' Register. The application was rejected, as there was no provision for the registration of female graduates in the Register of Trainees.

Disappointed, but also determined to immerse herself in her science, to fight for what is right and overcome social barriers, she travelled to Leipzig to continue her studies there. She specialized in labor law. She continued her studies in New York for two years.

In 1929, the first call for recruiting the first ten "speakers" in the newly established (1928) Council of State was announced. Agni applied for the call, but was rejected due to her gender. Claiming the annulment of the unjust decision, she filed an appeal before the Council of State itself. The matter was debated in the Plenary, which ruled that the decision was constitutional, as the law stipulated that the Council hired law graduates who had completed their military service, i.e. only men.

In the interwar period, a large part of her multifaceted activity was dedicated to the women's movement and to the struggles for equity and equality before the law.

Agni was a member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Rights Association that supported women's right to vote, access to all professions and public functions, equal pay, etc. Roussopoulou also expressed her positions on the women's issue in her articles in the association's journal The Struggle of Women. In her writings, she deals with divorce issues and civil law in Greece and other countries, the international feminist movement, civil rights, women's suffrage.

At the same time, she was a member of the National Council of Hellenic Women, the federation that included women's organizations, charities and feminists. Her consistent views and unshakable faith in her principles, inspired by socialist ideas, led her to resign from the National Council of Greek Women, in 1934, as it took a conservative turn.

Also, from 1924, she was actively involved with the Association of Greek Women Scientists, of which she was elected president in 1929–1930. The operation of the Association was interrupted during the dictatorship of August 4. At the same time, she was an active member of the "International Federation of Women Lawyers."

In 1934, the Ministry of Education commissioned her to write the first textbook for the newly introduced subject of "Citizenship Education." The introduction of the course gave another dimension to the concept of citizenship and its function in the context of a democratic state. Roussopoulou's book embodied the new spirit in the brightest way. The dictatorship of August 4th banned the book, which was republished in an enriched version in 1954.

During the Second World War, Agni Roussopoulou participated in various ways in the Resistance. As the vice-president of the Association of Greek Women Scientists, she morally supported prisoners and their families. At the same time, she joined the Hellenic Red Cross. She participated in the distribution of food and the care of infants, taking over the area of Piraeus and its districts. She also led the operation of the Macedonian and Thracian Committee. The Commission was established by the eminent constitutionalist, socialist politician and professor Alexandros Svolos, with the aim of defending the regions of Macedonia and Thrace from the Bulgarian occupation. Her main task was the drafting of memoranda with evidence of Bulgarian atrocities in the region.

A devotee of the ideas of socialism, Agni associated with Alexandros Svolos, as she joined the political schemes where the latter held leading positions. In the heavy atmosphere caused by generalized and unjust persecutions after the Decembriana, Agni was arrested for her political activity and kept for about a month in prison.

German-raised and politically influenced by European social democracy, she had been associated for many years with a political circle consisting, apart from Svolos, from important personalities such as: Nikos Kazantzakis, intellectual lawyer Stratis Someritis, trade

unionist Dimitris Stratis, veteran trade unionist of the Abraham Benaroya Federation, jurist Charalambos Protopappas, and others.

Agni Roussopoulou was a founding member of the Socialist Association that was formed in November 1953. In 1956, she was elected its president.

In 1955, she was elected a member of the Board of Directors of the Athens Bar Association. She was the first female member of the Board of Directors in the history of the Association. Her resignation from this, two years later, was due to a favorable provision for women lawyers, which was passed during her absence abroad. The provision referred to their early retirement, after having completed fifteen years in the practice of the profession. Roussopoulou claimed equality before the law and equal treatment of sexes and did not accept positive discrimination in favor of the female sex.

Agni Roussopoulou, during the colonels' seven year regime, developed multifaceted action, despite the limitations imposed on her by the dictatorial regime. One of her main activities was the defense of political prisoners and their families.

She also contributed to the anti-dictatorship struggle by translating texts concerning the situation in Greece, the persecutions of the Junta and the lack of freedom, which were addressed to international organizations and European governments. She also took advantage of her large political circle of international personalities (politicians, diplomats, journalists) mainly from the German Social Democracy, but also beyond.

In 1973, the Junta, seeking legitimacy, organized a rigged referendum, which abolished monarchy and declared the Greek state a "democracy" under the dictator George Papadopoulos as "president." Democratic citizens constituted the "Coordinating Committee for the Restoration of Democratic Legality." Agni Roussopoulou participated in it, along with eminent personalities, such as politicians George Mavros, Ioannis Zigdis, George Rallis and Panagis Papaligouras.

During the post-dictatorship period, even though she was of advanced age, by then, she remained active. In the parliamentary elections of 1974, she was a candidate of the "Center Union – Nees Dynames" party led by centrist politician Georgios Mavros. Fighting to the end, Agni Roussopoulou died in Athens on April 18, 1977 after a few days of illness.

Agni Roussopoulou, possessing significant social capital, had the opportunity to study in Greece and abroad, at a time when this was an elusive dream for the vast majority of Greek women, who experienced multiple exclusions, economic-, class- and gender-based. With the life choices she made, starring in the women's and socialist movement, she wanted to fight practically, with her word and action, for the removal of obstacles, so that women, especially from the lower social strata, would not be the outcasts, but equal members in society. Despite her social background and the advantages it brought her, Agni Roussopoulou experienced many barriers in her life – yet another example of how gender barriers, despite their deep class nature, are not limited to the lower classes. The action of socialist and feminist Roussopoulou, in theory and practice, combined, in a common struggle, the fight against social injustice and inequality with the fight for gender equality. And, that's why she was a pioneer.

Aggeliki Christodoulou
Anastasia Kapola
Stratis Bournazos

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Betty Vakalidou

Activist and artist. Leader of the LGBT+ movement, actress and writer. Her work for the visibility of transgender people and the fight for their rights has made her an icon of the Greek LGBT+ community

> "It has happened to me as a transgender that they did not rent me an apartment. I used the seaman's brochure from when I was working in the ships and said it was my husband's and so I tricked them into renting it to me"

"Betty" is an iconic figure in the LGBT+ community. She was one of the first to publicly display her transgender identity and, as a member of the Gay Liberation Movement of Greece, was at the forefront of the struggles for the rights of LGBT+ people. In addition to her activity in social movements, Betty has written autobiographical books and acted in theatre, and cinema, contributing significantly to the visibility of the LGBT+ community. Her biography enables us to approach democratization and rights from a different perspective than usual: not in strictly political terms, but by approaching a whole world that up until recently was in obscurity.

b. 1950

Greece

In the 1950s and 1960s, conservative values and patriarchal norms discouraged any deviation from tradition, especially in the provinces where Betty Vakalidou was born and raised. Issues of gender identity and sexuality were taboo, and as a transgender person, Betty experienced violence and ostracism that forced her to leave home and interrupt her education. During the military junta (1967–1974), she was sent to a penal institution where she tried to continue her education despite the difficult conditions. In the 1970s, in the face of repressive anti-LGBT+ laws, she became one of the first public transgender activists in Greece. Her artistic, literary and activist work also contributed to the moral liberalisation of Greece.

> **"Prostitution is alienating, it makes you not care about anything. You forget your vocabulary, the hardship of the job is reflected on you. The work has a vulgarity and this is reflected in your eyes, on your face. My antidote to prostitution was reading, cinema and theatre. I was 27 years on the streets. I felt I had to stop so I wouldn't get lost. I had taken care of my finances. I was never addicted to alcohol and drugs"**

Betty Vakalidou was born in Feres at the region of Evros in 1950. For about fifteen years, she grew up as a boy, named "Periklis Vakalidis," the last child of a large farming family of five boys. She grew up in a conservative environment of a rural village in the countryside, under the heavy, and often suffocating shadow of traditional perceptions and attitudes of the Greek society of the time. Very early, just before puberty, the child begun to discover her sexual orientation. She understood that she was attracted to people of the same sex. When her social circle started noticing this fact, her family subjected her to verbal and physical abuse and humiliation – especially her father and one of her brothers. Under these circumstances, she dropped off school and left her parental house. In July 1965, she moved first to Alexandroupolis, where she worked with one of her brothers, then to Thessaloniki and, finally, to Athens, to an unknown environment, where she did various odd jobs to survive.

After an intervention of her family, in February 1966, she was prosecuted for "vagrancy" as she was a minor and had left her parental home. The authorities decided to incarcerate her in the Juvenile Penitentiary, in Athens. She stayed there for three and a half years. Because of her good behavior she was allowed to go to school outside the Penitentiary, as she wished. Although the experience of incarceration was harsh, due to her personal desire for learning, she read many books and managed to live small moments of freedom, when she went to the cinema, with tickets given to her by an employee of the Penitentiary. During that period, and out of admiration for the then up and coming actress, Betty Arvanitis, she adopted her female name "Betty." Although she was diligent in her studies, she did not manage to get a high school diploma, after she failed her exams of the 5th high school grade, in mathematics.

She remained in the Penitentiary until she was 18. This was the time of the military junta that ruled Greece for seven years (1967–1974). Then, her manager decided that she could not remain in it, due to her age, and released her. In 1969, Betty embarked a ship and registered as a ship-worker. She travelled as a junior steward on cargo ships for two years. Finally, while on a trip to the USA, she decided to escape and settled for a while in New York. She returned to Greece in 1972. Finally settled in Athens, she initially did various odd jobs, while from 1974, she started prostituting as a transvestite at Syngrou Avenue. "In those years it was a one-way street, even now it's a one-way street, we couldn't find work," she later said in an interview.

Life was not easy. The persecutions and arrests by the police of prostituted women, the dangers

of the night and prostitution, social exclusion and prejudices, caused serious difficulties in everyday life. A typical example was renting a house. As she narrated: "It has happened to me as a transgender that they did not rent me an apartment. I used the seaman's brochure from when I was working in the ships and said it was my husband's and so I tricked them into renting it to me."

In 1977, an institutional prosecution was added to the daily hardships of transgender women: the government of Constantinos Karamanlis submitted a bill to the Parliament on "Protection from venereal diseases and regulations of related issues." It provided for the tightening of penalties including the filing of "kinaids" (as homosexuals were called at the time), prison sentences of those prostituting on the street and even their displacement in cases of relapse.

The bill was met with an unprecedented wave of reaction by homosexuals and transvestites in Greece. Within a few days, we witnessed the rapid birth of a movement. This movement found its expression mainly through the collective formed to face the persecutions, the Gay Liberation Movement of Greece. Under these conditions, on April 25, 1977, a large demonstration of homosexuals and transgender people took place at the Lusitania theatre. Betty actively participated and represented the transgender community by giving one of the keynote speeches. The demonstration was extremely massive and caused a sensation. Its success, combined with the marches and protests that followed, forced the government to back down. The bill, however, with some partial changes, came to the Parliament for a vote, and was passed by the Ralli Government in 1981. However, it was short-lived as the next PASOK government repealed it very quickly.

With the momentum created by aforementioned events, Betty published her self-titled autobiography, which challenged the social mores of the time and at the same time was a great publishing success. The book was considered "obscene," the author and the publisher were prosecuted and convicted. Upon these events, Betty took center stage. Then, she met Jean Genet who was in Athens and took part in this fight. At the same time, director Dimitris Stavrakas, inspired by the book, made the short film "Betty" in 1979, in which she starred. The film was awarded by the Critics' Union at the Drama and Thessaloniki Festivals.

In 1984, Betty decided and underwent sex reassignment surgery in Casablanca. She distanced herself from social struggles and activism and at the same time began to participate in theatrical performances. However, in order to secure a living, she continued prostituting in brothels, until 2000, when she finally left the profession. In a TV interview many years later, she stated that: "Prostitution is alienating, it makes you not care about anything. You forget your vocabulary, the hardship of the job is reflected on you. The work has a vulgarity and this is reflected in your eyes, on your face. My antidote to prostitution was reading, cinema and theatre. I was 27 years on the streets. I felt I had to stop so I wouldn't get lost. I had taken care of my finances. I was never addicted to alcohol and drugs."

In the 2000s, she went on in her film and theatre career as well as her writing work with great success. In 2009, she participated in Panos Koutras's award-winning film "Strella," while her participation in Vassilis Bispikis's theatrical performance "The Red Lights," in 2021 was notable. In recent years, she has been systematically involved in the theatre, participating almost every year in theatrical performances. Moreover, she has republished enriched versions of her two books. In 2004, she republished her autobiography with additional material and was one of the persons of the year of the European Year of Equal Opportunities (2007).

Aggeliki Christodoulou
Anastasia Kapola
Stratis Bournazos

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Dagmar Burešová

The first lady of Czech justice, defence lawyer of workers and dissidents, fighter for rights and justice in communist courts, court system reformer

> "Cowardice should be a criminal offence"

She came from a family of lawyers and herself become one, body and soul. While still a student she displayed a sense of justice and courage, hiding a classmate on the run. She dedicated herself to civil and labor law, defending workers and dissidents. When she was nearly 40 years old, she represented Libuše Palachová, whose son Jan burned himself to death in 1969 in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia and who became the target of Communists lies. She faced persecution for this and similar cases.

During the Velvet Revolution, she accepted an offer from Václav Havel to become a member of the new, still federal, government. Despite the opposition of many MPs, she sought to rebuild the judiciary. She drafted key democratic norms, such as freedom of speech and assembly, the privatization of the legal profession and legislation on out-of-court rehabilitation. As the speaker of the Czech National Council, she negotiated the split of Czechoslovakia. After leaving politics, she returned to law.

b. 1929 | d. 2018

Czechia

Elegantly dressed and with a slim figure, bold lipstick and infectious smile. This is how the "first lady of Czech justice" Dagmar Burešová always looked. She grew up in the educated and socially minded "bourgeois" family of lawyer Josef Kubišta. Dagmar was a keen scout, volleyball player and skier. She was a teen during WWII and at the time of the communist coup. None of her family, who venerated the European values of Masaryk's Czechoslovakia, joined the Communist Party. Kubišta initially tried to talk his daughter out of studying law, suspecting the new regime would use the law as it pleased. He failed.

The following story has long remained unknown. One day, 19-year-old Dagmar received a phone call from Jan Tumlíř, a classmate whose family were highly politically suspect. He was on the run from prison, following a failed emigration attempt, and needed to hide. She didn't hesitate. She brought him food, did his laundry, took care of him along with another friend, Petr Kopta, and raised money for a smuggler to get Jan across the border into Germany. This was a time when the Communists were handing out long jail terms, and even death sentences, in rigged trials. Fortunately, all turned out well.

That same year, Dagmar married medical student Radim Bureš. After her studies, she worked at a Prague law firm, specializing in civil and labor law, and later in workplace injury compensation. She mainly represented workers and initially won almost all her cases. Thanks to her, it also became easier for victims to prove their cases. A year after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, however, she took on an impossible case. She was approached by Libuše Palachová, whose son, student Jan Palach, had recently burned himself to death. Palach's sacrifice represented a problem to the regime, which strove to question it in every possible way. Vilém Nový, a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, advanced the false theory that Palach had been put up to it by certain people, who had assured him that "cold fire" would do him no harm. Dagmar instantly decided to defend the honor of both of them in court. For the Bureš family this led to a series of State Security (Czech: Státní bezpečnost, StB) police interrogations, wiretapping, the confiscation of Dagmar's passport for seven years and their younger daughter being barred from grammar school. But she never had any regrets. She also represented journalists Ivan Medek and Karel Kyncl, writers Milan Kundera and Jiří Lederer, sculptor Karel Nepraš and dozens of dissidents thrown out of their jobs for signing Charter 77. She said "cowardice should be a criminal offence."

The StB secret police kept a file on her with the codename "Lady." They couldn't have come up with a better nomen omen.

"She was always ready to get into conflict with any authority when right was on her side," said her later superior in the government, PM Petr Pithart.

During the Velvet Revolution, Dagmar was given two hours by Václav Havel to weigh up accepting the post of the justice minister. She decided quickly. Despite strong pushback, she replaced the leadership of nine regional courts and, with the help of other committed individuals, drafted several key laws: on freedom of speech and assembly, rehabilitation, and compensation for unjust persecution, imprisonment and robbery by the state.

> **"Fear is natural. Only a fool is never afraid, because he doesn't have enough imagination to imagine all the things that could happen. But fear must be overcome. In overcoming it, courage is born. In the end, he who does not wish to overcome it is not brave, only cowardly"**

She pushed through the privatization of legal representation and provided Milada Horáková's daughter with letters she had written prior to her execution. After the first free elections, she became the speaker of then parliament –

the Czech National Council. She and Pithart negotiated for hundreds of hours with Slovak leaders, who were pushing for secession. "The two of us did not want the state to be divided," Pithart later recalled. The partition of Czechoslovakia would eventually happen, although calmly and peacefully, and Burešová undoubtedly played a major part in this.

Though she spent a mere year and a half in high politics, she laid the foundations for a free and independent Czech judiciary, without which we could not be part of the European community.

She was also on the board of the Czech-German Fund for the Future and the Masaryk Democratic Movement. She is a recipient of the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk for outstanding services to democracy and human rights, and in memoriam also received the Slovak Order of the White Double Cross, second category.

The StB file "Lady" was shredded. To this day we do not know who informed on this courageous woman.

Lucie Vopálenská

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Olga Havlová

First Lady of the Czech Republic, wife Václav Havel, founder of the Committee of Good Will – the Olga Havlová Foundation. Charter 77 signatory, co-founder of Original Video Journal and Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted

> The state can help a person, but it will never take them by the hand

b. 1933 | d. 1996

Born Olga Šplíchalová, she came from a working-class background. At home, she helped take care of her brother and her sister's five children. She completed an apprenticeship at a Baťa factory, where she later worked. In the 1950s she held various jobs. From a young age, she was interested in literature and theatre, which led her into contact with Václav Havel, three years younger than her. The more practically-minded Olga became a support for the hesitant and doubt-filled intellectual and his first reader and critic. Together they faced persecution and Václav's repeated imprisonment.

Czechia

She was a proud and exceptionally strong personality. She played an important role in the lives of the unjustly prosecuted and, after the Velvet Revolution, in the lives of many others via the Committee of Good Will, one of the first charitable organizations in free Czechoslovakia, which she founded. Her activities won praise both at home and abroad.

Internationally-acclaimed playwright Václav Havel was banned in Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 1970s and later repeatedly jailed. Olga Havlová not only inspired philosophical reflections from his cell (*Letters to Olga*); she continued to engage in opposition activities, bringing common sense, imagination and a refusal to compromise to the dissident scene. She also aided the unjustly prosecuted.

Repression ended in autumn 1989 – and at the end of the year Olga became Czechoslovakia's First Lady.

> **"Whoever I speak to, rich or poor, I always take them the same way. Either they're a good or bad person, either clever or stupid, but I don't pay attention to social differences"**

Olga Havlová's story is rather Cinderella-like: the daughter of a poor worker and a horse butcher, who soon abandoned the family, eventually becoming the country's First Lady. By the age of 10, she was already taking care of her younger brother and her sister's five children. At the same time she would visit cinemas, theatres and libraries. She apprenticed at a Baťa factory, where she lost four fingers on her left hand at 16.

In the 1950s she changed jobs and attended acting classes. At Café Slavia she met Václav Havel, three years younger than her. The gentle, intellectual young man from a "bourgeois" family was drawn to the well-read, charming and commanding woman. "There was a strange mix of insolence and a kind of street pride in her," says Daňa Horáková, Olga's philosopher friend.

Although possessing only a basic education, she held her own among Václav's friends, mostly artists and intellectuals. After three years, he asked Olga in a letter whether she would like to go steady with him; eight years later they married. In the 1960s, Olga worked as an usher at the Theatre on the Balustrade, where Václav established himself as a successful playwright. During the political liberalization of 1968, he advocated for political pluralism and condemned censorship. The Soviet occupation changed everything. Havel's plays were banned, Olga could not find work and both faced repression. They spent most of the 1970s at their cottage at Hrádeček in North Bohemia.

The Havels were active in Charter 77 and later the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted. Václav became the regime's public enemy number one and from the late 1970s was repeatedly jailed. Olga was not idle while they were apart. Despite police harassment, she hosted the families of other Charter signatories at Hrádeček and threw birthday parties. Family was essential to her, even though she was not granted the chance to have children. She continued to publish the samizdat series Dispatch Editions. With friends, she founded the prankisterish association Hrobka (Tomb). In the late 1980s, she co-founded the magazine O divadle (On Theatre) and Originální Videojournal (Original Video Journal), a samizdat video magazine in which she raised environmental issues. When Olga had enough of everything, she would go to the forest to pick mushrooms or just for a walk with the dogs. She loved nature, cared deeply about the environment, and sorted waste. "She came across as a direct, rational and decisive woman who could stand on her own two feet. But I had several moments with her when she had a tear in her eye. There was a sensitivity that she was hiding," Bishop Václav Malý said of Olga.

November 1989 turned the Havels' lives upside down again. Václav was the leading figure in the Velvet Revolution. Olga struggled to accept that she would become First Lady but in the end assumed the role with grace. "The worst thing for

her was the godforsaken formalities… but no-one could tel," Havel's spokesman Ladislav Špaček once said. She used her new position to found the Committee of Goodwill – the Olga Havlová Foundation, one of the first charities in free Czechoslovakia, to help those with disabilities and other disadvantages.

> **Mum was an ordinary worker, but on Sunday she donned a hat and we went to the theatre. She taught me to like theatre**

Unshowy and sincere, Olga found falseness and pathos hard to take. "For example, when I made all manner of important statements, and strutted like a peacock over my own importance, she was the very one who was first to mock me and hold me to account. She was the one who kept me in check and with regard to whom I – let's say – did not go beyond a certain point," Václav Havel recalled. Olga was his indispensable partner, his anchor. The relationship was so firm even infidelities did not break it. "Even though things were often really wild with him, she always stood by him," says Anna Freimanová, a family friend and colleague.

While Olga refused to talk about her own illness, a month before her death she was still commenting on the law on foundations. "The state can help a person, but it will never take them by the hand," she said, referring to her own experience. She took many by the hand, without pathos or grand gestures.

When, unexpectedly to the public, she died, tens of thousands turned out to thank her. Art historian Věra Jirousová sent her off with moving words: "Your earthly task is over, dear and brave Frodo, just as you wished. The ring has disappeared from the world; let's hope that it is safe at the bottom of Mount Doom…"

In memoriam, Olga was awarded the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk for outstanding services to democracy and human rights. She was named 1991 Woman of the Year in Norway and received an award in the Netherlands for her work for children.

Lucie Vopálenská

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Lída Rakušanová

Leading Czech journalist, commentator. Radio Free Europe journalist, important figure in Czech-German relations, promoter of European integration, involved in regional journalism

> After the revolution, people thought that everything was all right now, that all we had to do was look forward to a brighter tomorrow. But few realized that we would have to build that tomorrow, and that everything we did or didn't do would be up to us alone

b. 26 May 1947

The most famous Czech exile commentator and leading Czech journalist has received numerous awards. Her voice became a symbol of free broadcasting to totalitarian Czechoslovakia. Following the Soviet occupation, she and her partner and later husband Josef decided to emigrate. From Munich, Lída reported, remaining lucid and fearless, on the airwaves of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). This meant a lot to listeners behind the Iron Curtain. Since the 1990s, she has lived between Prague and Bavaria, publishing independently in Czech and German-language media. She offers analysis and unvarnished commentary, among other things warning of the dangers of populism and nationalism and refuting various untruths about the EU. She has long promoted Czech-German understanding and reconciliation. She is a member of the ethics committee that evaluates participants in the resistance and opposition to communism. She co-founded the Department of Regional Journalism at Brno's Masaryk University.

Czechia

Although the Communists tried to jam them, to totalitarian Czechoslovakia RFE/RL's broadcasts were essential, being a source of information that the establishment withheld or misrepresented. After the fall of communism, the Czech-German relations were a sensitive subject, marked by the war and the expulsion of three million Sudeten Germans. A number of Czech politicians, including two presidents, stirred up negative emotions on the issue. We see similar populism and nationalism in Europe today.

> **Free speech must always be fought for. I am sometimes astonished at how quickly things that were once common can be forgotten, how quickly authoritarian order can return. We see this not only in our country, but also around us. A functioning civil society is the basis of democracy**

Lída Rakušanová has been honored many times for her work as a journalist and for promoting democratic values such as truth, freedom, and justice. She does not recall her early childhood in České Budějovice happily; her biological father disowned her. However, her mother met a different man and he adopted her. Ludmila Horská liked to read and got straight A's at school. After graduating from high school, she did Czech Studies and History at the Charles University. The life of Prague students in the second half of the 1960s was marked by joyful May celebrations, but also by protests against the Communist Party. "The majority of students in Prague, and you can take this as read, wanted nothing less than full-blooded democracy along the lines of the First Republic. Ideologically, most of us were miles away from our peers in Western Europe, protesting the Vietnam War and admiring the Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara."

In the summer of 1968, Lída met the love of her life, photographer Josef Rakušan. Although they were warned abroad that the Prague Spring would not be tolerated in Moscow, she did not anticipate the troop invasion. When the politicians caved in and MPs backed a treaty on the temporary stay of 75,000 Soviet soldiers on the Czechoslovak territory, they decided to emigrate.

In Germany, their first jobs were at a lighting factory. Since the 1970s, Munich has been their home. Lída graduated in German and Slavic Studies and became a translator. Josef was a successful photographer. Both were involved in exile activities and, from the mid-1970s, Lída worked for Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL). As a staff member, she covered both foreign and domestic issues. She followed politics with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe and wrote about the EU and NATO.

Lída made an indelible mark on the memory of listeners with her (by contrast with domestic radio) highly intelligible reports, which she prepared from exile "to interest people at home." The need to tell the truth, come what may, was audible in her voice. Lída helped listeners to survive normalization. This was marked with high risk. In 1981, she left the newsroom just hours before a terrorist attack injured three of her colleagues. She and her husband were stripped of their Czechoslovak citizenship and followed by intelligence agents both in Munich and at their cottage in Rinchnach; it was very near the once impenetrable Iron Curtain, which Lída helped tear down with her broadcasts.

During the Velvet Revolution she came to Prague at the invitation of Václav Havel. She witnessed great joy and euphoria and appeared on TV. However, the very next day she prophetically remarked that society still had a lot ahead of it. "Even then, I told myself I didn't want to see the hangover," she told a newspaper a quarter of a century later.

Since the 1990s, she has shuttled between Prague and Bavaria. When RFE/RL's Czech service was closed down she went freelance. She still comments for Czech Radio's Plus station. For Czech Television she has produced a series

of critical documentaries on the transformation of the Czech society. Under the name Ludmila Rakusan she writes for German-language periodicals (Berlin's "Der Tagesspiegel", "Rheinischer Merkur", "Passauer Neue Presse", Switzerland's "Finanz und Wirthschaft", and others). She was also involved with the regional newspaper publisher Vltava-Labe-Press.

> **Fortunately, a number of people here have come to understand that collective guilt--based expulsions – as a result of which almost three million Sudeten Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war – were wrong. To admit this is to free oneself from the burden of the past, to gain self-confidence. We ought to do that first and foremost for ourselves, not for the Sudeten Germans**

She co-founded the Department of Regional Journalism at Brno's Masaryk University. She continuously monitors and still comments on the sensitive Czech-German relations, even at the cost of misunderstanding and malevolent responses. She has repeatedly drawn attention to the negative effects of President Edvard Beneš's post-war decrees based on collective guilt. Those edicts affected not only expellees and their descendants; they also hurt Czech citizens of German origin who were allowed to stay after the war. Lída personifies the quest for understanding between Sudeten Germans and Czechs.

Similarly, she is still actively focused on European integration. She refutes myths, prejudices and lies, whether about migration, the Green Deal or the war in Ukraine. She writes freely and confidently in her own distinctive style, regardless of the possible risks.

Thanks to her high moral credit, she is also a member of the ethics committee that evaluates participants in the resistance and opposition to communism.

Lucie Vopálenská

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Dulcinea Bellido Carvajal

She was a seamstress, an antifascist activist, a neighborhood activist, and the founder of the Women's Democratic Movement (Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres)

b. 1936 | d. 2001

Dulcinea Bellido joined the Communist Party at a very young age, where she met her husband and began a difficult life in and out of jail for defending freedom and democracy in Spain. In 1959, when her husband was imprisoned, Dulcinea took the lead in organizing, along with other women, groups of female prisoners' relatives who demanded better prison conditions and, above all, amnesty for political prisoners. Additionally, she had the foresight to unite the neighborhood movement, feminism, and anti-Francoism as key elements in the achievement of democratic rights.

In 1965, she founded the Women's Democratic Movement, the seed of class feminism with a commitment to ideological plurality as a democratic condition, fostering participation among Catholic women and socially concerned independents. It grew to have 5,000 members during the dictatorship.

Spain

Bellido became politically active during the period known as the Second Francoism, between 1959 and 1975, a time marked by Francoist Spain's focus on development policies. Labor conflicts, especially after the Asturias Miners' Strike of 1962, increased police repression. The Court of Public Order was established as a special body to prosecute political dissent. It embodied the repressive nature of the regime, initiating thousands of cases for activities such as illicit association, illegal assembly, and demonstrations, among others. The Franco regime showed absolute rejection of the right to strike, protest, and free trade union association.

> **Women must participate in all political development of the country, just like men. We need public daycare centers so that we can join the workforce without worrying about where to leave our children. Collective services would help us with domestic tasks and give us more time to read, learn, and cultivate ourselves**

Dulcinea Bellido was born into a peasant family in Valencia del Ventoso, a small town in the province of Badajoz, where she experienced a life marked by economic and social hardship, along with the repression, violence and death of the era. "They were so intent on killing that they even killed sparrows," she recounted to her son Daniel.

Dulcinea began working in a household at the age of 8, where she suffered abuse, mistreatment, and hunger, until she and her family migrated to Madrid in 1948, where she started working as a seamstress. There weren't many opportunities for women like her, coming from the humblest families in the country. This harsh life sparked in Bellido the need to commit to changing things, with the conviction that injustices, lack of freedom and rights, or hunger were not inevitable. Probably for this reason, she joined the Communist Party of Spain at 17.

Her political activity, like that of many others, led to her arrest and imprisonment. Bellido entered prison for the first time in 1956, and from that moment, her life took a path of even greater commitment. When her husband was arrested for a second time for his communist activism, it sparked the beginning of a women's movement that demanded better prison conditions and amnesty for political prisoners. To this end, Dulcinea, along with other women, organized an entire clandestine network to support Spanish political prisoners and their families, which included visiting as many ecclesiastical, military, and civil institutions as they could access. These encounters, and sharing the hardships they faced as women in a country where they were second-class citizens, gradually incorporated a genuine feminist perspective into the fight for democratic rights.

As a result of this collaboration, the 1962 call to action emerged: a mobilization in Madrid's central Puerta del Sol to denounce the torture endured by Asturian women, wives, and relatives of miners during the event known as "La Huelgona" (The Great Strike). This mobilization gained international attention as an example of the repression of basic rights such as the right to strike or the right to assembly and association. 80 people were arrested out of the 400 participants. Nothing stopped these women seeking justice and freedom, and they continued working, expanding their networks to contact young intellectuals, some of whom later played a very recognized role. They met to learn and study feminist thought coming from Europe, such as that of Simone de Beauvoir.

By 1965, Bellido, along with Merche Comabella, María Dolors Calvet, and Rosalía Sender, founded the Women's Democratic Movement, a true seedbed of Spanish class feminism, which grew to include 5,000 women during Franco's dictatorship.

Bellido and her colleagues were deeply committed to political plurality: they sought to engage women from diverse political, religious, and organizational backgrounds. This included housewife associations and Catholic women organized around various religious groups, who provided a haven in their neighborhoods for discussions on solidarity and human rights. They also connected with the burgeoning neighborhood movement, which had such a strong impact on the national political scene.

> **"The undersigned women, who remain committed to fighting for fully legitimate demands, believe that at this critical moment, it is essential to prioritize a framework of coexistence for all Spaniards, above any group interests – even if that group represents half of the population. This framework is the Constitution"**

Without a doubt, Bellido demonstrated enormous clarity in integrating labor, neighborhood, and feminist struggles into a project of democratizing the country through the achievement of fundamental rights. She was not afraid to seek the necessary international support to end repression and the lack of freedoms in Spain. She traveled to the Vatican in 1970 and participated in the World Congress of Women in Berlin in 1975. She also helped organize and participated in the First Women's Liberation Conference in Madrid from December 6 to 8 of that same year. On May 28, 1977, she took part in a historic rally in the now-demolished Vista Alegre bullring in Madrid, where she and other Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres leaders advocated before 20,000 people for measures necessary for the advancement of women's and society's rights, such as the decriminalization of abortion, divorce law, and the decriminalization of homosexuality.

She died in January 2001 in Madrid, in undeserved oblivion.

Eva García Sempere

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Carmen
Díez de Rivera y de Icaza

Aristocrat, a political scientist and a member of the European Parliament in the first elections representing the moderate centrist party, the Democratic and Social Centre

> I get the impression that in Spain, progress in environmental policy has been made solely and exclusively thanks to EU policies

Carmen Díez was appointed the Chief of Staff to the Spanish government's presidency in July 1976. Her time in the government was guided by values such as the necessity of political plurality to achieve democracy, gender equality, and universal legal guarantees. From there, she played a decisive role in advancing a reform agenda that was already a demand in Spanish society, such as the abolition of the Court of Public Order, a special judicial body for the repression of political crimes, and the political and trade union freedoms embodied most notably in the legalization of the Communist Party of Spain, a symbol of political openness in the country.

Her political career later shifted to the European stage. She was elected to the European Parliament in 1987, where she spent the last chapters of her political life fighting for sustainable development and the right to a healthy environment. She advocated for the European Environment Agency with full authority, opposing oil companies, tobacco firms, and even governments.

b. 1942 | d. 1999

Spain

Carmen Díez de Rivera was the first woman to serve as the Chief of Staff to the Spanish government. Moreover, she took up the post at the age of 34, which caused a stir in the traditionally conservative political environment. In the political and social context of Spain in 1976, she was a young woman at the heart of the political process during the Spanish Transition, personally involved in pushing for democratic advances against reactionary elements resistant to political openness and fundamental human rights.

Carmen was born into an aristocratic family, giving her access to influential individuals and environments where she could project her strong political and social concerns. She was able to study abroad and receive an education far above the average, speaking four languages as per wishes of her mother, who came from a family of diplomats.

Her family did not tell her that she was an illegitimate daughter. She only found out when it became clear that she could not marry her fiancé because he was her half-brother. The affair left a deep mark on her and led to a turbulent period in her life, including the three years (1964–1967) she spent in the Ivory Coast with Volunteers for Progress, a French cooperation organization. Her travels abroad became a constant throughout her life.

She studied philosophy, literature and political science at Oxford and the Sorbonne. There she met philosophers and writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Michelle Vian, and began to explore feminism.

Her choice of study did not meet with the approval of her family, who refused to pay her tuition fees. This did not discourage Díez de Rivera, who took a job at the prestigious journal Revista de Occidente to pay for her academic expenses This experience had a lasting impact on her, as she had always shown a deep curiosity and desire for freedom, and she found these at the magazine. The work and the people she met there cemented her commitment to European values, which were already taking root from her travels and would later be reflected in her work across various institutions.

Her personal friendship with King Juan Carlos I allowed her to approach Adolfo Suárez, then the director of Spanish Radio and Television (RTVE), and she began working with him as the Head of International Relations.

> **Adolfo Suárez was not initially convinced of the need to legalize the Communist Party of Spain as the ultimate test of Spain's future democratization. [I persuaded him] after months of stubborn persistence, a firmness shared by other high officials of the nation**

After Franco's death in late 1975, King Juan Carlos I assumed full powers to lead the country through the necessary political reforms that society was demanding. Adolfo Suárez was appointed the prime minister with the task of moving toward the rule of law, and in this process, he again relied on Carmen Díez, this time as his Chief of Staff in January 1976, and from July of that same year, as the Director of the Government's Presidential Office, making her the first Spanish woman to hold this responsibility.

Her commitment to freedom, full equality, legal guarantees, and democratic progress was evident in her key role in abolishing the Court of Public Order, a repressive entity responsible for some of the darkest chapters of late Francoism, as well as in advancing political and trade union pluralism in Spain. Her prominence came with consequences: she became the target of severe attacks from the country's most reactionary elements, who launched a vicious campaign of lies and defamation. Accusations ranged from being the lover of high-profile figures to public allegations of spying for East Germany, leading Díez de Rivera to resign on May 13, 1977.

During this time, and until she was elected in the European elections on June 10, 1987, Carmen returned to the Spanish public television, continued traveling, learning, and remaining involved in both national and European politics. It was in the European Parliament where she expressed her strongest commitment to the great values of the 21st-century European project. She put critical issues at the forefront of the political debate, such as ending with the use of fossil fuels and fighting the tobacco industry to protect public health, driven by firm social and environmental convictions.

Her steadfast defense of democratic values like co-decision in political processes, her passionate commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development, and her active work on consumer rights – an area still developing at the time – made her a key figure in the democratic construction of both Spain and Europe.

On November 29, 1999, a day after her death from cancer, President of the European Parliament Nicole Fontaine called for a minute of silence at the opening of the session, paying tribute to her passionate commitment to all noble causes. Representatives from all political groups joined in this homage.

Eva García Sempere

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Francisca

Sauquillo Pérez del Arco

Lawyer, activist, defender of democratic freedoms, Member of the European Parliament, and founder of the Movement for Peace, Disarmament, and Freedom (Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad)

> United people, without hatred and without violence, are stronger, more resilient, and better. We must continue working for fairer societies, only from the culture of peace

Francisca „Paquita" Sauquillo Pérez del Arco began her professional career as a lawyer in 1966 and has worked in various areas within criminal law, including the National Court, the Supreme Court, and the Constitutional Court. In 1970, she founded the renowned "Despacho de Lista," one of Madrid's first labor law firms, where she defended the causes of numerous unionists and other struggles related to the defense of fundamental rights and freedoms. Meanwhile, she launched Spain's first neighborhood association alongside her brother.

After years of fighting against repression and for union and social freedoms, in the democratic period, Sauquillo took up the battle for civil rights, defending the Divorce Law and assisting over 3,000 people affected by the Toxic Oil Syndrome, a mass poisoning in Spain that affected more than 20,000 people, killing 3,300 in the spring of 1981. This ruling was key in establishing jurisprudence on crimes against public health. She was also a Member of the European Parliament representing the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party for two terms.

b. 31 July 1943

Spain

Paquita Sauquillo became the lawyer for some of the most famous cases of the final period of the Franco regime, such as the Proceso 1001, where the entire leadership of the trade union Comisiones Obreras, the main labor opposition to Franco's dictatorship, was sentenced to prison, and the regime's last executions. In this highly repressive atmosphere, Sauquillo was detained and found herself in prison with one of her clients. She also suffered threats from members of Falange, a fascist party aligned with the regime, when visiting impoverished neighborhoods.

In this context of violence and lack of freedoms, the murder of her brother in January 1977 by fascists during the Atocha Lawyers Massacre, a brutal attack by far-right terrorists in which five labor lawyers were killed, deeply marked Sauquillo's unwavering commitment to defending democracy.

> **"Because we will only move forward as societies if the reconstruction after the COVID-19 emergency is based on social justice, respect for human rights, cooperation, and dialogue, even in the face of differences"**

Paquita Sauquillo was born in Madrid, the daughter of a military man and a retired opera singer. Her life could have taken a very different path. Her critical spirit opened her eyes to situations that others might have overlooked. She recalls that classism in her school and her father's stories about the construction of the Valle de los Caídos, a monumental complex built in honor of the fascist military uprising, built under terrible conditions by republican prisoners, were key factors in shaping her rebellious character, along with her mother's advocacy for her to study in a context where it was not easy for women to do so.

She went to law school, where she met other women who would soon become references in the fight for democracy and women's rights. In this period, Sauquillo was deeply committed to grassroots Christian movements, to the point that, at the beginning of her legal career, she visited and assisted workers in very poor neighborhoods alongside the famous "Red Priest," Father Llanos, a highly recognized figure for his struggle for decent living conditions in underprivileged communities. Because of this, she was threatened by Falangist gunmen.

Sauquillo had a frenetic activity. On the one hand, she promoted the foundation of Spain's first neighborhood associations, in the areas of Palomeras Bajas and Entrevías in Madrid, convinced of the importance of community organization for the improvement of living conditions in impoverished neighborhoods and access to basic services as the foundation of democracy. On the other hand, she became increasingly involved in the defense of civil and union rights from her labor law firm "Despacho de Lista," representing workers from industries such as Pegaso or Marconi, but also students and politicians facing the feared Francoist Court of Public Order.

She handled extremely well-known cases such as the Proceso 1001 and the last executions of the Franco regime. However, without a doubt, what marked not only Paquita but an entire generation in this country was the "Atocha Massacre." On January 24, 1977, five labor lawyers were killed by fascist gunmen. Among them was her brother, Francisco Javier Sauquillo. This event marked the beginning of a not-so-peaceful Transition, during which the role of people like Sauquillo and others, defending democracy and committing themselves to peace and freedom, was crucial.

She later had an active political life: she ran and won a seat in the first elections to the regional Madrid Assembly in 1983, serving in the next two terms. She was also a Senator, both by autonomous designation and direct election, participating as a speaker in the Organic Law of the Judiciary. She was elected to the European Parliament for the Socialist Party from 1994 to 2004.

Without a doubt, there are two milestones for which she also deserves to be remembered: her work on the Divorce Law, which led to her first book on the subject of claims, and her involvement in the first major public health crisis: the toxic oil syndrome. Sauquillo assisted over 3,000 people, playing a key role in a ruling that established precedent.

Lastly, we must not forget the spaces where Paquita carried out enormous work in the field of civil society: a co-founder and the president of the Movement for Peace, Disarmament, and Freedom, the president of the Spanish Consumers Council, and the vice president of the Spanish Volunteer Platform. In all these roles, she developed her immeasurable fight for a peaceful society, based on equality, where human rights are at the core of socio-political action.

The Movement for Peace, Disarmament, and Freedom was born out of the pacifist movement, driven by, among others, and particularly by Francisca Sauquillo, who founded the association and gave it a character intimately linked to the European pacifist movement. Mobilization, citizen participation, and networking with other European organizations remain the association's hallmarks, alongside the fight against oppression and poverty.

Eva García Sempere

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Hannah Arendt

Historian, philosopher, political theorist, publicist on democracy and authoritarianism

> Evil comes from a failure to think. It defies thought for as soon as thought tries to engage itself with evil and examine the premises and principles from which it originates, it is frustrated because it finds nothing there. That is the banality of evil

b. 1906 | d. 1975

Hannah Arendt, born in Germany, was a leading thinker of the 20th century whose work had a lasting impact on European thought. Fleeing Nazi persecution, she initially lived in France before emigrating to the USA through Portugal. These experiences influenced her profound analyses of totalitarianism and human rights. In works such as “The Origins of Totalitarianism” and “The Life of the Mind,” Arendt examined the complexity of power, authority and public space and offered critical insights into the shortcomings of the nation-state model. Her report on the Eichmann trial coined the term “banality of evil” and challenged conventional notions of moral responsibility. Arendt argued for a federal, post-national Europe based on shared democratic values and pluralism and significantly influenced debates on European integration and governance. Her legacy remains a cornerstone in discussions about democracy, totalitarianism and the human condition in Europe and beyond.

Germany

Hannah Arendt's work is the product of a period of profound upheaval in Europe, characterized by the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, the devastation of the Second World War and the challenges of reconstruction. The collapse of the European nation-state system, characterized by extreme nationalism, genocide and mass expulsions, had a decisive influence on her thinking. This context of crisis and the subsequent quest for new political forms shaped Arendt's critique of sovereignty, her examination of human rights and her plea for a post-national, democratic Europe.

> **The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust that if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism**

Hannah Arendt's life was marked by a profound commitment to freedom, justice, and human dignity, values she championed throughout her philosophical work and public life. Born into a Jewish family in Germany, Arendt was deeply affected by the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe, particularly the horrors of Nazism. Her early academic work in philosophy under the guidance of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers was interrupted by the rise of Hitler, forcing her to flee Germany in 1933. This experience of exile, first to France and later to the United States, profoundly shaped her understanding of statelessness and the precarious nature of human rights in the modern world.

Throughout her life, Arendt confronted the forces of totalitarianism, nationalism, and the erosion of public freedom. Her work "The Origins of Totalitarianism" offers a rigorous analysis of how totalitarian regimes destroy the very foundations of political freedom and human dignity. Arendt argued that these regimes thrive on the destruction of plurality and the suppression of individual thought, leading to the dehumanization of entire populations. She identified the roots of totalitarianism in both Nazism and Stalinism, showing how both ideologies sought to obliterate the individual in service of a totalizing ideology.

One of the most significant transformative events in her life was her involvement in the intellectual resistance against totalitarianism during and after World War II. In exile, Arendt became a leading voice advocating for a new political order in Europe, one that would transcend the limitations of the nation-state model. She saw European integration as a potential realization of a post-national political community, grounded in the principles of democratic pluralism and shared human rights. For Arendt, the horrors of the 20th century made it clear that the old system of sovereign nation-states, which had failed to protect its citizens and often turned against them, needed to be replaced with a new form of political organization that could safeguard human dignity and political freedom.

Arendt's work on totalitarianism, authority, and the nature of political action made a lasting impact on European political thought. Her analysis of the dangers of authoritarianism and the fragility of democratic institutions remains relevant today, particularly in the context of rising nationalist movements across Europe. Arendt's insistence on the importance of public discourse and civic engagement as the bedrock of a free society challenged political passivity and encouraged active participation in the democratic process. She believed that true freedom could only be achieved through active engagement in the public sphere, where individuals could come together to discuss, deliberate, and take collective action.

Her legacy is one of intellectual courage and a relentless pursuit of truth in the face of overwhelming odds. Arendt's contributions to political theory, particularly her concept of the

"banality of evil," have influenced generations of scholars and activists who continue to grapple with the moral and political challenges of the modern world. The "banality of evil," a concept she introduced in her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, shocked many by suggesting that great evil can be committed by ordinary people who simply conform to orders without critical reflection. This insight continues to provoke discussions about moral responsibility and the dangers of blind obedience.

Arendt made history not only through her writings but also through her active engagement with the pressing issues of her time, leaving a profound impact on the European intellectual landscape. Her participation in the debates surrounding the formation of a united Europe, her critique of totalitarianism, and her advocacy for a post-national political community have cemented her as a pivotal figure in European history. She envisioned a Europe that could move beyond the destructive forces of nationalism to embrace a new political identity based on shared values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Arendt's influence extends beyond her critique of totalitarianism. Her reflections on the nature of power, authority, and the public realm have deeply shaped contemporary political thought. She argued that power is generated not through domination but through collective action and public agreement, a view that challenges traditional notions of sovereignty and governance. Arendt's vision of post-war Europe, aimed to protect political freedom by dispersing power across multiple levels of governance, preventing any single entity from monopolizing authority.

Arendt's ideas continue to resonate today as Europe faces new challenges. The rise of populism and authoritarianism across the continent echoes the dangers Arendt warned against – the allure of simple solutions to complex problems, the erosion of public discourse, and the abandonment of shared truths. In this context, her call for a renewed commitment to civic engagement and public responsibility is more relevant than ever. Arendt believed that democracy could only survive if citizens actively participate in public life and hold their leaders accountable.

Her legacy is a testament to the enduring power of ideas in shaping the course of history and the future of Europe. Arendt's work challenges us to think deeply about the conditions necessary for freedom and justice in the modern world and to recognize the fragility of these achievements. She reminds us that the struggle for human dignity and political freedom is ongoing and that it requires constant vigilance and active participation from all members of society.

In sum, Hannah Arendt's life and work represent a profound contribution to the defense of European values in the face of unprecedented challenges. Her advocacy for a post-national Europe, her critique of totalitarianism, and her unwavering commitment to democratic pluralism continue to inspire and guide those who seek to build a more just and free world. Her ideas have not only shaped the intellectual landscape of Europe but have also provided a moral and political framework for understanding and resisting the forces that threaten democracy and human rights today.

Benjamin Zeeb

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Ursula Hirschmann

Jewish German intellectual and political activist, political refugee, anti-fascist. European federalist and feminist

> We, *déracinés*, the uprooted of Europe, who have changed borders more often than our shoes, as Brecht writes, this kingdom of the uprooted, we too have nothing more to lose than our chains in a united Europe, that is why we are federalists

Ursula Hirschmann was a crucial yet under--recognized figure in shaping European federalism. Her resistance against fascism began in Berlin, and after marrying anti-fascist Eugenio Colorni, she moved to Italy, where she played an active role in underground political movements. On the island of Ventotene, she participated in discussions that led to the Ventotene Manifesto, a founding document for a federal Europe. Hirschmann clandestinely smuggled the manifesto to the mainland and helped distribute it among anti-fascist circles.

After Colornis's death, she married European federalist Altiero Spinelli. Instrumental in shaping post-war European ideals, she later co-founded the European Federalist Movement in Milan and established "Femmes pour l'Europe," advocating gender equality and social reform in Europe. Hirschmann's life, spanning Berlin, Ventotene, and Brussels, reflected her dedication to unity, social justice, and European cooperation, leaving a lasting impact on the European integration movement.

b. 1913 | d. 1991

Germany

Ursula Hirschmann lived during a time of profound upheaval, marked by the rise of fascism and the devastation of World War II. Born into a Jewish family in Berlin, she fled Nazi persecution and joined anti-fascist resistance efforts in Italy. The Ventotene Manifesto, co-authored by both her husbands, emerged from the political repression of the era, envisioning a united, democratic Europe. Hirschmann's work within the European Federalist Movement and her advocacy for women's rights shaped postwar Europe's democratic ideals.

> **We must think and plan a united Europe as if every day it were possible to create it immediately, rejecting the weariness of those who always put it off until tomorrow. If it really is possible, we can begin to make it a reality today**

Ursula Hirschmann's path to becoming a decisive figure in the history of Europe was marked by her unwavering commitment to freedom, democracy and equality. Born into a Jewish family in Berlin, she grew up at a time when Europe was on the brink in one of its darkest chapters. She made an early commitment to political resistance against fascism and joined the social democratic youth movement to counter the growing threat of nationalism and totalitarianism.

After fleeing the Nazi Germany, Hirschmann made her way to Italy, where she became an important participant in the anti-fascist resistance alongside her first husband, philosopher Eugenio Colorni. During this time, she made contact with a circle of intellectuals in exile on the island of Ventotene, including Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi. This collaboration led to one of the most important contributions to post-war Europe: the Ventotene Manifesto. The manifesto called for a radical departure from the nationalist policies that had plunged Europe into chaos, arguing instead for a federal Europe united in its commitment to peace, human rights and social justice.

Although she was often overshadowed by the men involved in drafting the manifesto, Hirschmann's contribution was crucial. She acted as a bridge between the political prisoners on Ventotene and the wider resistance movement on the Italian mainland. Thanks to her pragmatic approach and exceptional organizational skills, she managed to smuggle the manifesto, written secretly on cigarette paper, off the island and ensure its dissemination among key figures in the resistance. By disseminating the manifesto in anti-fascist circles, Hirschmann played a central role in promoting the vision of a united Europe that transcended borders, nationalities and ideologies.

Hirschmann not only fought against fascism, but also against the systemic inequalities and injustices that plagued Europe at the time. She believed in the power of solidarity and was committed to overcoming divides – whether between nations or between women and men. Her personal experiences as a stateless woman, constantly uprooted by war and political unrest, made her particularly sensitive to the plight of those who had no voice in shaping their destiny. This empathy continued in her later work when she founded „Femmes pour l'Europe" in Brussels, a movement that campaigned for women to have an equal say in shaping the future of Europe. This work continued her lifelong commitment to gender equality and made it clear that a truly united Europe must include equal rights for all citizens.

Despite her achievements, Hirschmann faced considerable personal and political challenges. She had to cope with the tragic loss of her first husband Eugenio Colorni, who was murdered by the Fascists in Rome, and struggled to reconcile her commitment to her six children with her tireless political engagement. The political landscape of the post-war Europe was also a source of deep frustration for her. While she had helped plant the seeds of European unity, the immediate aftermath of the war saw the

division of Europe into opposing blocs during the Cold War, a reality that seemed to betray the ideals she had fought for.

Nevertheless, Hirschmann's influence on Europe was undeniable. She was instrumental in the founding of the European Federalist Movement, and her contributions helped shape the vision of a peaceful, democratic Europe that eventually became the European Union. The values of democracy, unity and justice that she espoused are now enshrined in the founding principles of the EU.

> **"I am not Italian, even if I have Italian children, I am not German, even if Germany was once my home. I'm not even Jewish, even if it was pure coincidence that I wasn't captured and burned in one of those ovens in one of the extermination camps"**

Her legacy is one of great courage and tenacity in the face of adversity. By actively participating in the fight against fascism and promoting a vision of Europe based on cooperation and solidarity, Hirschmann helped to lay the foundations for a more peaceful and just continent. Her life's work, in particular her commitment to women's rights within the European project, has ensured that future generations will inherit a Europe committed to the ideals of equality and inclusion.

In essence, Ursula Hirschmann's story is one of transformation – from a young woman resisting fascism in Berlin to a central figure in the creation of modern Europe. She went down in history not only as a witness to these transformative events, but also as their active shaper. Her work continues to resonate today as Europe struggles with its own challenges, reminding us of the enduring power of freedom, unity and justice.

Benjamin Zeeb

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Nelly Sachs

Poet, playwright, translator, voice of Holocaust remembrance, advocate for peace and reconciliation, Nobel Laureate in Literature, chronicler of Jewish suffering, her work explores ideas that are foundations for a European Union that includes Germany

> "World, they have taken the small children like butterflies and thrown them, beating their wings, into the fire"

Nelly Sachs, a Jewish poet and a Nobel laureate, transformed the horrors of the Holocaust into lyrical masterpieces that expressed the deep pain and resilience of the Jewish people. Born in Berlin, Sachs narrowly escaped Nazi persecution, fleeing to Sweden in 1940 with her mother. Her work, marked by themes of exile, persecution, and spiritual transcendence, gave voice to the collective suffering of the Jewish people. Sachs' poetry, including works like "In den Wohnungen des Todes" and "Fahrt ins Staublose," melded mystical elements with the brutality of history, creating a bridge between trauma and healing. In 1965, she became the first woman to receive the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, and a year later, she won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Her deep commitment to reconciliation and the memory of those lost during the Holocaust has left an indelible mark on European literature and continues to resonate globally.

b. 1891 | d. 1970

Germany

Nelly Sachs lived through the rise of Nazism and the horrors of the Holocaust, which deeply impacted her work and life. As a Jewish woman, she fled Germany in 1940 to escape persecution, finding refuge in Sweden. Her poetry, written in the aftermath of World War II, reflects the trauma of exile, the Shoah, and the loss of millions. In a post-war world grappling with guilt and reconciliation, Sachs's work offered both a voice for the victims and a call for healing and peace across Europe.

> **"And all of us, what should we do with the word that was given to us but to grasp it by its roots and let it sweep the globe, so that it may give its secret, unifying power to a conquest – the only conquest in the world that does not bring tears but smiles: the conquest of peace"**

Nelly Sachs's life was a testament to the transformative power of human dignity, freedom, and peace, values deeply rooted in European thought. Born into a Jewish family in Berlin, she witnessed the rise of fascism and the devastation it brought to her community as well as millions of others across Europe. Her early years were marked by personal struggles – her unfulfilled desire to become a dancer, hopeless love, and the growing shadow of anti-Semitism. These experiences shaped the universal themes of love, loss, and transcendence that would later define her literary work.

As Hitler's regime tightened its grip, Sachs and her mother narrowly escaped the horrors of the Holocaust, fleeing to Sweden in 1940 thanks to the intervention of Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf. The trauma of exile and the murder of friends and family permeated her poetry, turning her into one of the most eloquent voices of the Jewish experience during the Shoah. Her poetry became a vehicle for truth, remembrance, and reconciliation. Unlike many who might have been consumed by bitterness, Sachs tackled the complex relationship between victims and perpetrators, exploring concepts of guilt and forgiveness.

Her work, especially after arriving in Sweden, expanded beyond personal grief. It grappled with larger existential questions about humanity's capacity for evil and the need for solidarity among nations and peoples. She viewed Europe's postwar recovery not only as physical but also moral, a time to reaffirm shared values of justice and respect for human life. Her poetry addressed the inhumanity of the Holocaust, but also the potential for redemption and unity through collective memory and shared grief. In a continent torn apart by war, Sachs believed that peace could only be achieved through an honest confrontation with the past.

Despite the personal challenges Sachs faced – health issues, depression, and post-traumatic stress – she remained committed to using her literary voice to promote these values. Her tireless commitment was recognized in 1966 when she became one of the few women to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, solidifying her role not only in literary history but in the broader European effort to build a future based on coexistence and peace. Sachs's poetry, which mourned the loss of Jewish culture while also celebrating resilience, was seen as a critical part of Europe's cultural recovery.

Sachs's work has been a bridge between the past and the future. She actively participated in reshaping Europe's conscience, challenging the world not to forget the atrocities of the Holocaust. Her poetry, infused with hope despite the suffering it chronicled, became a testament to the idea that art and culture are essential tools for both individual and societal healing.

By focusing on remembrance and reconciliation, Sachs helped inspire the idea of a Europe united, not just politically, but spiritually and morally. She believed in a Europe where human rights were protected and where the memory of the past served as a guide for creating a more compassionate future. In this sense, her poetry

transcended national boundaries, echoing the postwar vision of European unity founded on shared values of democracy and tolerance.

Sachs's legacy extends far beyond her poems. She has been a symbol of resilience, standing as a testament to the ability of the human spirit to overcome unimaginable horrors. Through her works, she continually reminds Europeans of the dangers of totalitarianism, and the importance of maintaining freedom and dignity for all individuals. Sachs's work highlighted the ways in which art can serve as both a witness and a healer, emphasizing the role of culture in building lasting peace.

> **Many encounters with individual German people have become unforgettable to me and have shown me, like on a star chart, the emergence of a new sign from which hope and peace can develop again**

The transformative event in Sachs's life was not only her escape from the Nazi Germany but her dedication to ensuring that the atrocities of the Holocaust would never be forgotten. She did not just survive; she bore witness, and through her poetry, she demanded that Europe remember its darkest hours to build a better future. In a time when survivors were often silent, Sachs gave voice to the millions who could not speak for themselves. Her commitment to truth in the face of horror helped shape Europe's collective memory and helped the continent along a path of reconciliation.

Her poetry is her legacy, but so too is her moral vision that insists on human rights, compassion, and the necessity of confronting the past. Nelly Sachs was not just a poet of mourning; she was a poet of hope, demonstrating that from the ashes of destruction, Europe could rebuild itself on the principles of justice and dignity.

Benjamin Zeeb

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Danuta Maria Hübner

Professor of economics, politician, Minister of European Affairs, negotiator, EU Commissioner, MEP

> **Women's politics looks different from men's. Women's politics is rational, participatory, inclusive. A focus on something that can be called social welfare, and in simplest terms, a holistic approach to politics**

b. 8 April 1948

Danuta Hübner worked in four successive Polish governments during the period of democracy-building and complex political, economic and social transformation. She prepared Poland for the membership in the European Union (EU). She was responsible for this process as the chief negotiator of Poland's membership in the OECD (1995–1996), the creator and the head of the Office of the Committee for European Integration, first in the rank of the Secretary of State and later as the Minister of European Affairs. She was the first Polish Commissioner in the EU, first for international trade, then for regional policy. For 15 years, she represented Poland in the structures of the European Parliament. She chaired the Committee on Regional Development, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and the Delegation for Relations with the United States. She was the only Polish MP formally involved in the process of the UK's exit from the EU (Brexit) and post-Brexit regulations and relations.

She co-founded the Women's Congress Association and has been a minister in the shadow cabinet of the National Congress of Women since 2011.

Poland

Poland, after the revolution initiated by the "Solidarity" ("Solidarność") movement and the overthrow of the communist rule in 1989, began a process of rapid systemic, political, economic and social changes. Parallel to the transformation, the country was preparing to join the EU, which already had a fifty-year history of rising from the rubble, the drama of World War II and the long period of the "Cold War." Poland's application for the EU membership was submitted in Athens on April 8, 1994. On April 16, 2003, the Accession Treaty was signed on behalf of Poland by Prime Minister Leszek Miller, Foreign Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz and Minister for European Affairs Danuta Hübner. On May 1, 2004, together with 9 other Central and Southern European countries – Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta – Poland joined the EU.

"The women who prepared us to enter the EU were very numerous. They brought what women always bring: the opportunity to work together. And the EU is all about working together, about cooperation. (…) The EU is created for the citizens, and increasingly also by the citizens. And among them, half are women"

After graduating from high school at the 10th High School in Warsaw, she graduated with top marks in economics from the Faculty of Foreign Trade at the Central School of Planning and Statistics (now the Warsaw School of Economics – SGH). At the age of 25, she earned her doctorate in Western economics, six years later her habilitation in international economic relations and in 1992, at the age of 44, she received the title of professor of economic sciences from the hands of Lech Wałęsa.

She experienced 1989 and the fall of communism in Poland "from a distance" in the US, as a Fulbright scholar and newlywed wife and mother of two daughters, Ewa and Karolina. Upon her return, as a prominent expert in international affairs and Western economics, she very quickly joined politics. In 1994, she became an advisor to the deputy prime minister for social affairs, and later the deputy minister of industry and trade. In 1996, she co-organized the newly established Office of the Committee for European Integration and a year later became the head of the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland. In 1998, she became the deputy executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe and then the executive secretary (with the rank of the UN deputy secretary-general). In 2001, accession work accelerated and Danuta Hübner headed the key agendas negotiating Poland's entry into the EU and the largest EU enlargement to date. After the accession referendum and Poland's entry into the EU, she was successfully recommended as a Polish commissioner in Brussels in 2004.

A role model. She was the only woman from Poland holding key, prominent and responsible positions in the process of negotiating enlargement and Poland's entry into the EU. She became the first Polish EU commissioner (for trade and for regional policy).

She was and is a politician who thinks in the long term, strategically and globally – free from party self-interest and current power struggles. Her trademark was professionalism and a desire to build compromises and her priority was Poland's presence in the most important discussions on the future of the EU.

She was an effective and acclaimed negotiator who proved herself both in the EU's fifth and largest enlargement, which resulted in the entry of ten Central and Southern European countries into the EU after the fall of communism – and in the UK's exit from the EU. She has participated in and chaired many events building and deepening transatlantic cooperation.

She believed that in a geopolitically and technologically diverse and polarized world, the key to preserving peace and preventing and dealing with conflicts is respect for the differences and interests of all communities in which people live their daily lives, dialogue, common values and laws, and the most valuable currency is

cooperation, solidarity and mutual trust. She has been a courageous promoter of structural reforms to sustain the EU cohesion, security and resilience.

She had a vision of a "Citizen's Europe," in which the EU is created "for" and "by" citizens. In which the role of ordinary people in shaping the present and future of the world is cared for and strengthened. She focused on face-to-face meetings and dialogue with all actors in society, and cooperated and supported numerous civil society organizations and pro-citizen think tanks (including formally, as a member of program councils or governing bodies). She actively participated in the Conference on the Future of Europe, a EU initiative to involve citizens in shaping its future by including them in decision-making processes (2021–2022).

She placed special emphasis on relations with European regions and local communities. As the Commissioner in charge of regional policy, she visited more than 220 regions and was often the first European Commission representative there in the history of European integration.

She has dealt with some key legal, structural, economic and financial issues that bind the EU together but often hardly make headlines. In the Committee on International Trade (INTA), the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, she was often the only representative of Poland, always prepared substantively for discussions, respected, listened to and widely quoted and commented on.

At the same time, she has committed her experience and resources to meta-level issues. In times of the pandemic, war, migration and energy crises, inflation, and increased anti-democratic movements, she has openly spoken out against populism, anti-democratic movements, anachronistic policies based on authoritarian and violent practices, and discrimination against women and minorities. All this despite the brutal criticism coming from the right-wing authorities at home.

She believed in the value of unity and solidarity and in the global, transnational public good: peace, climate, public health, security, equal rights.

> **"The Union is a way out of the perpetual conflict over everything. It is a breath of fresh air. (…) The Union has changed in response to external challenges, but also in response to citizens' expectations. The Union has been changed by enlargements. Each new member state brought something different"**

Crucial to her were women's rights seen as an integral part of human rights and the foundation of democracy. She believed in, dreamed of and actively supported women's rights, agency and leadership. She saw women as equal actors on the public stage, and emphasized the immense value of women's involvement in politics, at all levels. She publicly supported, welcomed and highlighted the benefits of every pro-equality initiative, law change and appointment of women to decision-making positions in the EU. She recognized and moderated equality initiatives and projects, and believed in women as architects of the future and creators of "green leadership." She has been aware that the EU is a powerful legislative tool that can be used for the rights of women and minorities.

From 2011 to the present, she has served as the Prime Minister of the Shadow Cabinet of the Women's Congress Association, which is a cross-party initiative and social movement that activates women in Poland politically and socially. The association works for real gender equality (equal rights, opportunities and possibilities), recognition of dignity, autonomy and freedom, building women's solidarity through the exchange of experiences, mutual assistance and working to remember the history of their predecessors.

She did not give up her activities and scientific development. She has exemplarily combined both competencies. Academically, she appreciated the power of knowledge, solid data and also speaking, writing and sharing her reflections with a wider audience. Prof. Danuta Hübner's organized bibliography includes hundreds of scientific papers, research reports and articles. Throughout her activity in the EU structures, she published her speeches. More than 1,000 texts were produced in the period of 2009–2024. The 14 volumes into which they are collected total nearly 4,000 pages. She is the only person from Poland who has been invited to contribute materials from her activities for Europe to the Historical Archive of the European University in Florence.

Honorary doctorates were awarded to her by: University of Sussex, University de Valenciennes in France, University Degli Studi in Camerino in Italy, University of National and World Economy in Sofia and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

For her work on behalf of a common Europe, she has received many international awards. Among them are: The Order of the Legion of Honor of the French Republic (2014), the Emperor Maximilian Award of the Republic of Austria (2011), as well as the earlier award of the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of Portugal in 1997 and the only Polish award – given for leading the negotiations and the process of Poland's entry into the OECD – the Knight's Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland, awarded by the President of the Republic of Poland (1996).

Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska

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Anna Walentynowicz

Welder and overhead crane worker at the Gdańsk Shipyard, dissident, anti-communist activist, leader of workers' protests, political prisoner, member of Free Trade Unions, co-founder of "Solidarity" movement

> "I was a nobody, and now I am a worker, doing an important thing"

b. 1929 | d. 2010

Born into an indigent peasant family in Volhynia (in today's Ukraine) as Anna Lubczyk, she was orphaned by her mother at an early age, completed only four grades of elementary school and from childhood – in exchange for food and shelter – worked hard physically for another family. She lost contact with her own family in the turmoil of war and was long convinced that none of her relatives had survived. Tired of working without pay and being mistreated, not long after moving to Gdańsk she decided to change her surrounding and start working first in a bakery, then in a margarine factory, finally taking a welding course and getting an extremely difficult and dangerous – but well-paid – job at the Gdańsk Shipyard, where she would spend the next 30 years, becoming a living legend of the place and the city.

Poland

At the age of twenty-three, she had an unplanned pregnancy, which she decided to carry to term against the wish of the child's father, opting for single motherhood, which was not easy in those days. Only a dozen years later did she marry, to a good work colleague, Kazimierz Walentynowicz, whose name she and her son Janusz would henceforth bear. When she contracted cancer at the age of 36 and was demoted, despite many years of diligent work, she rebelled against the injustice and wrote complaints and appeals for so long until she won better working conditions. When the memorable December 1970 workers' protests, in response to a drastic increase in food prices, were bloodily suppressed, she joined the protesters and from then on remained in opposition to the ruling regime until its end, becoming one of the loudest, most stubborn and most steadfast dissidents.

> **"The shipyard workers wanted me to head the strike, but I said I couldn't, because the rank of the cause would fall if there was a woman at the head"**

"A peasant child who prayed all night to be admitted to the shipyard. And then an ardent Union of Polish Youth activist, a superproductive worker whose portrait hung in front of the gate. A natural social activist, with a deep conviction that people must be fought for, that one has to be with people. Fighting alone. During the 1970 strike, she cooked food for the workers. Always eager to provide that simplest help, to sweep up, to wash the stairs," another opposition leader Jacek Kuroń wrote about her.

Throughout her years of opposition activity, she was systematically under surveillance (reportedly by nearly 100 agents) and imprisoned several times. However, she was famous for her steadfastness and being exceptional in making life miserable for the services. When she was fired just before her retirement on the orders of the communist authorities, a strike broke out in the shipyard, demanding, among other things, Walentynowicz's return to work, but also freedom of speech, freedom to form trade unions and decent living conditions. The communist authorities succumbed to pressure and promised to meet the shipyard workers' demands, with the strike leader Lech Wałęsa deciding to end the protests. This was opposed by women – led by Anna Walentynowicz and Alina Pienkowska (a nurse at the shipyard clinic). It was the women who turned back the workers who had already begun to leave the shipyard. The strike continued, and by the end of August as many as seven hundred workplaces across the country and some seven hundred thousand workers had joined. The August protests resulted in the so-called "Solidarity carnival" – a period of relative civil liberties and the transformation of the trade union into the largest mass organization in the history of Poland. At the height of its popularity, "Solidarity" had ten million male and female members.

The "Carnival" was brutally interrupted by the introduction of martial law, and Anna Walentynowicz, along with other oppositionists, was interned, that is – imprisoned preemptively, without a court sentence. In 1983, she was sentenced to a year and a half in prison, suspended for co-organizing a strike in the shipyard. A few months later, she was tried again for participating in an attempt to erect a plaque commemorating miners killed during protests at the Wujek mine. This time she was jailed for several months.

For workers and the anti-communist opposition, "Ms. Ania," "that little woman in the sweater," was an icon, a symbol of steadfastness and courage, and a true – albeit inconspicuous – leader. They came to her for advice, asked her to intervene, and her small apartment in Gdańsk became an important meeting place for dissidents. When the strike broke out, she herself refused to take the lead: "The shipyard workers wanted me to head the strike, but I said I couldn't, because the rank of the cause would fall if there was a woman at the head," she said years later on the Polish Radio. Reluctant to compromise and negotiate with the oppressive authorities, she came into

conflict with Lech Wałęsa and removed herself (or rather: was removed) from the leadership of "Solidarity".

As usual, she bluntly criticized the successive moves of the union's leadership, including a decision to join the Round Table, i.e. negotiations with the communist authorities that ended in a compromise and partially free parliamentary elections. After 1989, she remained in opposition, this time to the post-Solidarity ruling elite, remaining on the margins of politics. She lived to receive recognition and due honors only at the end of her life.

She died tragically along with 95 representatives of the Polish state in the crash of the presidential plane near Smoleńsk in 2010. In 2020, the US weekly "Time" named her one of the 100 women who defined the twentieth century. She remains an icon and a symbol of uncompromising and steadfast resistance in the struggle for dignity, justice and democracy, and a symbol of the inextricably intertwined fates of Poland and Ukraine.

Anna Kowalczyk

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Agnieszka Irena Holland

Director (film and theater), screenwriter, actress, translator, producer, commentator of socio-political life in Poland, personality of film world

> I am who I am, I don't pretend to be someone else and I say more or less what I think. I think it pays off in the long run, it generates respect

b. 28 November 1948

She is the daughter of Henryk Holland and Irena Rybczyńska. She has a younger sister, Magdalena Łazarkiewicz, who is also a film director and a screenwriter. She graduated from the Stefan Batory High School in Warsaw, and then studied from 1966 to 1971 at the Film and Television Department of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. She witnessed the Prague Spring of 1968 while in Czechoslovakia. She made her films in France, Germany, the United States, the Czech Republic and Poland. She earned three Oscar nominations (two nominations for non-English language picture for films: "Angry Harvest" and "In Darkness" and one for Best Adapted Screenplay for the picture "Europe, Europe") and many other awards, also non film-related. She has cooperated with Krzysztof Zanussi, Krzysztof Kieślowski and Andrzej Wajda, among others. She belongs to a group of artists linked to the cinema of moral anxiety. She herself admits to being inspired by the Czechoslovakian New Wave. She is a member of the Polish Film Academy, the European Film Academy and the American Film Academy.

Poland

She comes from an intelligentsia family – her parents were journalists. Her father had a Jewish background, her mother was Catholic. Both were members of the communist Polish United Workers' Party. As a child she survived the suicide of her father Henryk Holland. She married Slovak director Laco Adamik, with whom she has a daughter, Kasia Adamik, also a director. In 2012, Adamik came out and revealed that she is a lesbian. She is an outspoken supporter of the LGBT+ community, and her mother is equally open about it.

> **When we choose comfort – both in political and livelihood spheres – before the values for which Europe has fought for years, we will end up as Churchill said: we will have neither comfort nor values**

The life path of Holland as an artist is typical of her generation: communist censorship, ostracism, inability to make her own productions, emigration. After the fall of communism in Poland and Eastern Europe, she continued her projects, in which, as before, she asked questions about fundamental issues and problems, such as anti-Semitism, the impact of totalitarian systems on human life, the human condition in the face of extreme experiences (war, emigration, exile), the limits of freedom and the risk of subjugation, the attitude to animals and nature. Also of interest to the director were the biographies of prominent figures and their personal entanglements and talents. The subject of Holland's films is also her critical view of the Catholic Church – questions about God, transcendence, identity are frequent in her films.

It is difficult to point to a single universal value for which she fought. Perhaps, as an artist, it would be freedom? And due to the fact that she came from Eastern Europe, from Poland, this freedom also had political colors? After all, because of her background, she had to face a whole range of restrictions (e.g., censorship, lack of contact with the free world, being in prison). She spoke out, and continues to do so, against everything that threatens freedom. Also against restrictions on freedom of speech and creative freedom.

She has achieved international fame and notoriety, although this was never her main goal as a director. Nor has she ever had the ambition to lecture or spout "revealed truths," as she herself once put it. What she had and still has to say, she has conveyed through the language of film. And exactly the fact that she has managed to maintain her freedom can be called her success.

It is precisely thanks to this that her films, often in the convention of fairy tales, fables, archetypes, have an impact on the audience. The world seen through the eyes of Holland unmasks schemes, limitations and cultural stereotypes, „scrapes away the layers of complacency," shows the smallness, but also the greatness (often temporary) of man, asks about the meaning of art and the act of creation. Her films cause inconvenience and are not comfortable for the average person. They do not give ready and simple answers to the questions posed by the artist.

As a Pole with a difficult background (but also character, as she herself admits) she has changed the thinking of many Polish women and men. First of all, because she touches on sensitive topics in Polish culture and mentality, such as anti-Semitism, "paper" Catholicism, lack of sensitivity to the suffering of animals and people, especially those with different skin color. The works of Holland provoke discussion, and each of her films is the beginning of a change.

In addition to her artistic work, she has also made history as a fighter for women's rights and the LGBT+ community, as well as an opponent of racism, anti-Semitism, social exclusion.

She is a specialist in the depiction of revolutionary motifs, which she has become through her artistic choices and life experiences.

Her legacy is very extensive. It includes not only 40 directed films and series, but also 23 written screenplays and several acting roles. Holland is also known as a director of theater and television productions. In addition, she has translated Czech literature into Polish, the most famous is her translation of M. Kundera's novel "The Unbearable Lightness of Being."

> **It seems to me that Poles are in dire need of psychotherapy, both collective and individual, for the reason that neither our school, nor our culture, nor the Church, is founded on introspection, and confession alone is not always enough. Despite this Catholicism of ours, I see too little of people accounting for themselves**

She participated in important events for Europe and Poland. As a student at the Czech Academy of Performing Arts, she took part in student strikes during the Prague Spring. She was arrested by the Czechoslovak security service on suspicion of contacts with an groups that smuggled illegal publications (the so called "Tatra mountaineers'" case). She spent several weeks in prison.

In 1981, after the martial law was declared in Poland, she decided to remain in France.

She is a supporter of Poland's presence in the European Union.

She became "Gazeta Wyborcza's" (one of the leading Polish newspapers) Person of the Year in 2023 "in recognition of her artistic achievements and civic courage."

Edyta Głowacka-Sobiech

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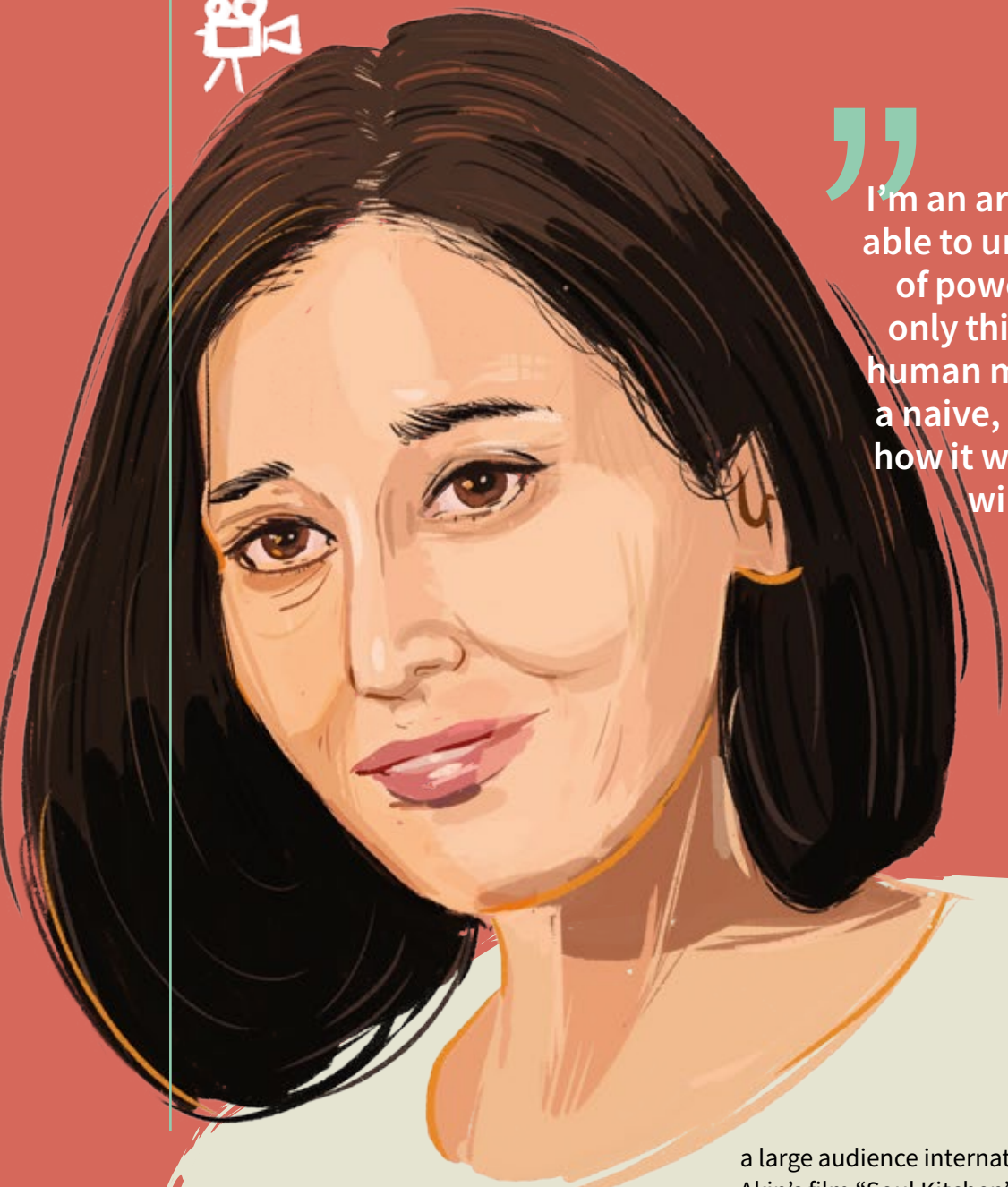
Dorka Gryllus

Actress, director, singer



> I'm an artist, I need help to be able to understand the system of power and money. I can only think about important human matters and believe in a naive, specific truth. That's how it was, and I think that it will stay that way

Being the daughter of a director and a musician, she studied acting and became a member of the ensemble at the Csiky Gergely Theater where she worked with influential Hungarian directors. She participated in various film and television productions in Hungary first, then moved to Berlin where she learned German from scratch. As a freelance, she has acted in many Hungarian, British and German films and has been awarded at international festivals. She became known to a large audience internationally through Fatih Akin's film "Soul Kitchen" and Sam Garbaski's "Irina Palm." Dorka Gryllus was also the lead singer of the Berlin band RotFront.

After the birth of her first son, she moved back to Budapest but is still working in international film productions. She prefers to work in artistic collaborations that look beyond the classical repertoire and renew the language of theatre. In her directorial debut, she contributed to a play which unconventionally talks about human sexuality.

b. 26 January 1972

Hungary

She was born in the Kádár-era as the daughter of a director and a musician. By the time her career started in the 1990s, Hungary experienced a peaceful political and social transition to a parliamentary democracy.

Dorka found her second home in Germany around the time when Hungary became an EU member (2004), but then, after giving birth to her first son, moved back to Hungary. This was a time when serious criticisms have been raised against the government concerning its policies affecting rule of law, media, civil society, artistic freedom, and human rights. She became active and more visible in the Hungarian public again.

> **"Men wrote the plays, shot the movies, and there is a portrayal of women but women themselves were forgotten to be asked, how they thought it was. In the movies, men wanted to see that there were young women alongside the older men. Those men get old and women don't"**

Her teenager dream was to become a Lutheran priestess, as her role model at the church in Deák tér, Budapest. She studied theology for one semester, but still ended up preparing to become an actress. These two professions have something in common, she explained in an interview. They are both about conveying a message. "It is not by chance that actresses are called Thalia's priestesses."

She became a member of the prestigious ensemble at the Csiky Gergely Theater, Kaposvár, where she worked with influential Hungarian directors.

She also participated in various film and television projects, Hungarian and foreign, and after a while found it difficult to combine these with work in Kaposvár. When she quit the ensemble there, she received no job offers from other Hungarian theatres. So, she began to work as a freelance, and then moved to Berlin where she learned German from scratch.

Shortly, she became a sought-after actress Europe-wide who can play in three languages. She has been awarded at international festivals. She became known to a large audience internationally through Sam Garbaski's film "Irina Palm" (2007), and Fatih Akin's "Soul Kitchen" (2009). She liked to collaborate with directors who are experimenting and working for a socially reflective, open, diverse and democratic theatre. She was also the lead singer of the Berlin band Rot-Front. However, she never lost her connection to the Hungarian theatre scene. She worked with smaller, independent ensembles such as the Trojka Theatre Company or Gólem, a Budapest-based Jewish theatre company.

Dorka found her second home in Germany around the time when Hungary became an EU member (2004), but then, after giving birth to her first son, moved back to Hungary. This was a time when serious criticisms have been raised against the government concerning its policies affecting rule of law, media, civil society, artistic freedom, and human rights. She became active and more visible in the Hungarian public again.

As she says in interviews, living and working abroad formed not just her personality but also her worldview. She started to express her opinion on social matters more distinctly. In 2011, thousands of people demonstrated in Budapest against Hungary's controversial new media law. Gryllus was the one who read out a list of the demonstrators' demands, which included a constitutional revision of the law, and other guarantees regarding the confidentiality of journalists' sources.

In 2017, she was among the numerous Hungarian intellectuals who stood out for Central European University and academic freedom, when the regime introduced regulations to make CEU's operation impossible in the country. Similarly, she publicly showed solidarity with the students of her alma mater, the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest, who fought against government efforts to restructure the institution on an ideological basis.

She is still working in international film productions. She prefers to work in artistic collaborations that look beyond the classical repertoire and renew the language of theatre.

In her recent public statements, Gryllus seizes every opportunity to talk about ageism and its negative impacts on women in film industry and wider society. She openly criticizes how actresses above 40 are given fewer roles and opportunities. This also relates to the problem of representation of older age groups in films and artistic storytelling in general. Female narratives are not equally represented in the entertainment industry, older characters, especially women often appear one-dimensional and stereotypical on film and TV, and are much more commonly portrayed as passive, pitiable people often irrelevant to the lead story.

> **"Sex is more like a scale… Of course, we can say that this wall is green, even if it is white in fact. You can lie about human sexuality being bipolar, but for what sake?"**

Gryllus often urges that artistic projects tell more female-centred stories. She is proud of having portrayed strong and independent women. She believes that breaking away from the caretaker, and suppressed image to more empowered, capable and complex women portrayals would have a huge impact on gender equality. Playing the woman in the play "Glasswall" about domestic violence is one example of her recent contributions to this more nuanced, less superficial characterization of women.

Dorka calls for multifaceted and realistic representations, and this demand and her reflection on the richness of human experience drives not just her work as an actress but lately also as a director. In her debut play, "SX_MCHN" of last year, she raises questions such as whether we are aware of our sexuality, or whether we are just following the expectations that society, our social environment, or our gender place on us. This unconventional topic is a particularly courageous choice in a society where the legislation is seriously restrictive regarding adoption for same-sex couples or the legal recognition of gender change, and where the government is actively creating a narrative in which gender and LGBT+ "ideology" is considered to threaten "normality."

Dorka openly talks in public about her faith and religious life. When interviewed she is also honest in some aspects of her private life, such as the challenge of finding a balance between career and motherhood, managing an equal relationship with her husband, or the experience of having a child at a relatively old age. Her dedication to authentic and open self-expression in every situation provides a great inspiration for women.

Dorka Gryllus is also the ambassador for the Autistic Art Foundation, and has been helping people with autism to lead a life with dignity.

Fanni Bársony

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Anna Kéthly

Hungarian social democratic politician, Hungary's second female Member of the Parliament and in October 1956, she entered the coalition government as the president of the re-established Social Democratic Party

> One would not request a stamped document for a lifebelt from a drowning person

As an internationally well-known leader of the social democrats, she fought for democracy and freedom in Hungary and in exile for more than half a century. In the interwar period her parliamentary speeches as a female member of the opposition gave voice to the working class people, especially women. Her political views meant hope for those citizens in the country who wanted to avoid a communist takeover after the second world war. During the 1956 revolution, as a member of the democratic coalition government, she expressed in a determined way the vision of a democratic Hungary. Her views about a United States of Europe were acknowledged by the European institutions during her long years as an emigrant. Her personal courage made her a legend and her fame became an inspiration during the fight against communism and for the success of the regime-change in the year of miracles – 1989–1990 – at her home country and in Central Europe.

b. 1889 | d. 1976

Hungary

Anna Kéthly was born in 1889 as the second child of a modest working-class family of nine children, grew up in the countryside, and did not get much education.

After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 she travelled to the West as a Minister of State of the revolutionary Imre Nagy government, and could never return to her homeland after the intervention of the Soviet troops on November 4 and the brutal repression by the new communist regime. She died in Belgium in 1976, aged 87.

> **For us, a small country confined to narrow borders, it is a very risky thing to oppose the European currents of ideas, especially as we strive – although there are those who do not share this goal – to fight for an honest, just peace revision without bloodletting – and I emphasize this – without bloodletting**

"You can't stop on the slope," wrote Anna Kéthly sarcastically in the Parisian émigré Irodalmi Újság in the mid-seventies about György Marosán's autobiographical book, to which the Communist demagog gave the catchy title: "One must go along the road." At one time, both were involved in politics in the social democratic movement. But while Kéthly remained devoted to her democratic views until the end of her life, Marosán became the leading figure in the bloody suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and war of independence.

Anna Kéthly became a Social Democrat after being active in the trade union movement: whilst welcoming the democratic revolution of 1918, she did not accept the atrocities of the short proletarian dictatorship of 1919, the Hungarian "commune." Amidst the limited freedom of the consolidating national-conservative Horthy era, she ran for the parliamentary elections in 1922 and became Hungary's second female Member of the Parliament. She knew that she could not convince the representatives of the government: "our speeches speak to history," she declared.

She soon gained popularity with her eloquence. Fighting for equal rights of women living as second-class citizens, she mocked the fact that they were not allowed to vote until becoming thirty years old: "apparently on the basis that women grow up and reach maturity at a later age than men." Kéthly called the abortion ban the "shameful paragraph." She regularly raised her voice for the elevation of the destitute and the poor, for the improvement of the housing situation of workers, and for the expansion of state health care programs. On the issue of heavy territorial losses after the First World War, she took a restrained view against the confrontational irredentist illusion and anti-Westernism of the "No, no, never" slogan: "for us, a small country confined to narrow borders, it is a very risky thing to oppose the European currents of ideas, especially as we strive – although there are those who do not share this goal – to fight for an honest, just peace revision without bloodletting – and I emphasize this – without bloodletting," she summarized her position in 1922. Opposing the extreme right-wing tendencies that were gaining strength in the 1930s, she resolutely argued against the disenfranchising anti-Jewish laws in the parliament. Her personal courage was characterized by her saying: "Whoever is afraid, should go working as a confectionery demoiselle!" She kept her mandate until 1944. After the Nazi Germany invaded the country on 19 March, she had to hide until the liberation of Budapest.

By that time, her international relations had gradually expanded: the leaders of the European social democratic parties, including the British Labour Party, considered her one of the most important politicians of the Hungarian democratic left. In 1945, together with them she hoped that the communist takeover in Hungary could be avoided. Within her own party she firmly opposed the compromisers and collaborators, but also those who became lenient towards the supporters of the "aristocratic"

regime of the interwar period. In vain. By 1947–1948, as she later described in her emigration, in the occupied country the Muscovites "destroyed the forces of democracy one after another." After the establishment of the Stalinist dictatorship, she could not avoid her fate: she spent four years in prison – without a sentence. After her release, the weakening communist system tried to win her confidence, but Kéthly did not give up on her ideals of multi-party democracy. After the outbreak of the revolution in October 1956, she entered the coalition government as the president of the re-established Social Democratic Party. In Vienna, she made contact with her like-minded foreign friends, participated in the meeting of the Socialist International when the news of the Soviet "proletarian internationalist fraternal assistance" arrived.

First, Anna Kéthly made efforts in New York, at the United Nations, to garner international support for the Hungarian people and their crushed revolution. The "Hungarian cause" (with the exception of the spiteful governments of the communist world) was surrounded by general sympathy and solidarity. Nevertheless, amid the conditions of the Cold War, the state minister who had become an émigré was not allowed to speak in the assembly. She expressed her disappointment as follows: "one would not request a stamped document for a lifebelt from a drowning person." She returned to Europe and continued to work as one of the most respected leaders of the diverse, endlessly quarrelling Hungarian emigrant organisations.

She considered the creation of a United States of Europe to be a progressive idea. Although she previously refused all awards, in 1957 she accepted the European Peace Prize of the Council of Europe: the gold medal shows a map of Europe surrounded by stars. Anna Kéthly received the medal at the celebratory meeting of the organisation's assembly. She was wearing a black dress, her face was covered with a veil. Representatives of 16 European countries stood up and applauded in her honour. Towards the end of her life, at the age of 83, she flew to Israel, where she planted a tree in the Yad Vashem memorial park. She visited the country at the invitation of Prime Minister Golda Meir, who, in recognition of her courage during the era of the persecution of Jews, welcomed at her home the other grand lady of the social democratic movement.

She never let go of the demands of '56 – never accepted compromise to the right nor to the left. At the end of the fifties, she was once again considered a public enemy in her country. "Anna Kéthly and some of her collaborators did everything they could to faithfully follow the instructions of their role models and mentors […], their direct bosses, the Hungarian politicians of Horthy's time, and help keep the Hungarian bourgeoisie in the saddle," wrote the main newspaper of the Hungarian state-party denouncing her as a right-wing social democrat. The aging politician, exiled for eternity, unwaveringly stood by the democratic ideals of the revolution even during the period of international real-political changes and detente. She could not witness the collapse of the communist systems in East Central Europe, the triumph of European ideas, Hungary's accession to the European Union, the restoration of her reputation and honour. Her ashes were brought home after the regime-change in 1989–1990 and buried next to the martyrs of the 1956 revolution. Today, statues and squares preserve her memory in the country, and a feature film was made about her life.

István Hegedűs

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Ottilia Solt

Sociologist, member of the democratic opposition, founder of the Foundation for Supporting the Poor, editor of the Beszélő samizdat, member of the Hungarian Parliament

> **"With courage, patience, lengthy little work, we, this small people, here a little east of the centre of Europe, can fight for ourselves to live in the kind of system that the majority wants"**

She was a sociologist who, with her immense field-work experience, social sensitivity, and deep sense of solidarity, focused her research mainly on the poor, the Roma, the homeless, and other deprived social strata.

Solt established the first major civil organization dealing with the poverty, the Foundation for Supporting the Poor in 1979, in opposition to the Communist system. She became an organiser, an "institution" of civic activity herself. She was an editor and published regularly in Beszélő, the samizdat journal of the democratic opposition and despite constant surveillance by the police and searches at her home she helped to set up the Network of Free Initiatives. Establishing a "second publicity" was tantamount to a courageous act of defiance for freedom of speech as the authors disregarded censorship and taboos.

After the regime change, she was a Member of Parliament of Alliance of Free Democrats, the anti-Communist liberal party that grew out of the democratic opposition. Following various personal tragedies and a car accident, she died in 1997.

b. 1944 | d. 1997

Hungary

Ottilia Solt was born in 1944. She grew up in the Communist Hungary which heralded the dawn of a new, egalitarian, just world, but in reality was neither based on equality nor justice.

Solt's academic career was blocked, and she lost her job due to her views and activity.

Despite being unemployed and short of money she was still a person who could always give to those more in need than her.

> **"[System] in which rich and poor, big and small, traditionalist and innovative, right and left, can constantly wrestle and agree with each other. Where monopoly of power, police violence does not stifle interests and opinions. Where no way of life and no thought is persecuted, even if the majority does not like it"**

"Her apartment on Komjádi street, (…) functioned as a kind of plebeian salon, where you could find a Western journalist interested in the domestic opposition, the conservative Catholic '56-er, a nonconformist avant-garde visual artist, a sociologist looking for professional advice, a misunderstood Shakespeare expert, an editor of a university samizdat, a radical environmentalist, a proletarian woman who moved from Tripolis to Újpalota, a Roma poet and a Roma support worker commuting from Boldva or Szatmárcseke to Budapest," such was the lifestyle of Ottilia Solt in the 1980s according to sociologist colleague and close friend Gábor Havas. Being unemployed, she channelled her energy to various democratic opposition activities.

As early as 1971 Solt participated in the national Gypsy survey conducted by István Kemény and she uncovered the high school dropout ratio among Gypsy children, also highlighting that segregated schools offered much worse education than the regular ones.

She described the lives of uneducated, unskilled families, and the dreadful housing conditions of the slums, the existence of which was anathema to an official ideology that propagated the rule of the working class. In the newly formed sociology group of the Budapest Pedagogical Institute, she studied workers' child-rearing practices and the relationship between socialization and school performance, the hierarchy within the Budapest working class.

Solt was keen on using the right terminology. Language, she believed, was abused by the elite, euphemisms placated "existing socialism" in a favourable light. Poverty was denied, and discrimination against the minority Roma was unmentionable. Solt showed the abject structural defects of the system, such as the lack of equality and social justice. The poor should be named poor, as it was to be understandable to the public, she claimed. Those who are poor are the have-nots, while others "have" something. The former are coerced by need, while the latter enjoy freedom and individual security. Economic deprivation was closely related to the lack of human dignity, freedom to choose, the equality of choices.

In 1979, the Budapest Pedagogical Institute dismissed her for publishing her study on the poor in a samizdat publication and for signing the Charter 77 in solidarity with Czech dissenters, a clear show of European solidarity and a stand for human liberty. She found a primary school job afterwards, but was soon expelled from that too.

In 1979, SZETA (Szegényeket Támogató Alap), the Foundation for Supporting the Poor, was established. SZETA was not only her brainchild and creation, but she became an institution herself. SZETA helped those in need, those who were excluded from state care. SZETA's members collected money and clothes, distributed donations directly to families whom the founders met during their sociological fieldwork.

Members of SZETA took part in opposition events to make independent cultural actors visible and to collect money. A kick-off concert, with famous pianist Zoltán Kocsis, was cancelled at the last minute by the authorities and thus donations were lost. Following that, the

organisers went “underground” to evade the prying eye of state officials.

The Hungarian democratic opposition was in constant contact with like-minded Europeans, for instance with the Polish “Solidarność” (“Solidarity”). The close and often risky cooperation included the smuggling of banned literature or organising a 2-week holiday in Hungary for more than twenty disadvantaged Polish children – financed and executed by members of the democratic opposition, among them Solt herself.

In Beszélő, the samizdat journal of the democratic opposition, she published her SZETA experiences and became an editor. Establishing a “second publicity” was tantamount to a courageous act of defiance for freedom of speech. The authors disregarded censorship and taboos.

> **“… we can all feel how depressing it is for a large middle class to sink back into the drabness of daily penny worries and constant, forced resignation – the real drama is the bottom million! (…) What will become of this one million?”**

Around the time of the system change in 1989, Solt’s ideological home was the fiercely anti-communist Alliance of Free Democrats, a liberal party with roots in the democratic opposition. She became a member of parliament, but did not consider herself a political animal. She tried to use her position for the representation of the downtrodden. Service, rather than power or privilege, was her motivation and personal ambition.

After the demise of Communism, her stubborn dedication to the underprivileged could hardly be reconciled with the harsh economic realities of economic transformation into a market economy which often left the poor even poorer. She was revered, but her views became peripheral, just like the objects of her research. Her legacy, the essence of the “Solt platform” was summarized by historian-journalist Sándor Révész as “advocating for a long-term social policy that eradicates the structural causes of poverty, and has an exceptional sensitivity to human rights violations, to illegal actions of law enforcement agencies, and the persecution of refugees and the homeless.”

Since 2022, which marked the 25th anniversary of her death, a small square in Budapest has borne the name of this great Hungarian woman.

Monika Pál

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