



GRUNEWALD, ONE YEAR LATER
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Like Berlin, Grunewald had in the past its own darkest dramas, but on the outside, it is a biblically beautiful area. The pace of Wiko is very much determined by the place. Despite the abundance of Porsches and hound dogs, it is a perfect setting for slow life and thoughtful conversation. And for contemplating the change of seasons. At one of the first German lessons for beginners – and I remained a beginner to the end – Eva, our teacher, cited a famous poem by Rilke. It was an important part of shared cultural knowledge in Germany, we were told. The poem was about autumn. In the effort to teach us basics of the language without sacrificing its aesthetic powers, Eva explained that the verse conveyed the feeling of negation by referring to the swinging trajectory of falling leaves. One could instantly succumb to this emotion by looking through the window at the spectacle of falling oak and maple leaves of incredible colors. In Grunewald, one could not escape watching that mag-

nificent decline every day. The autumn of 2005 was long, warm, and bright. Enough time to grasp why this season has a special appeal for poets, including German romantics. It might have had a certain use-value for Wiko Fellows too, applying the otherwise missing time-pressure and urging us to work faster. As autumn exhausted, it left plenty of leaves on the ground. The noise of leaf-cleaning machines disturbed Fellows and caused complaints.

But this was perhaps the only thing one could possibly complain about at Wiko. Only nature was permitted some degree of chaos and unpredictability. All the rest was organized perfectly. Problems were solved before they appeared. Genuine care and gentle supervision by the Wiko staff were felt everywhere. Passion and wit frequently animated Tuesday colloquia. The quality of discussions was very high. I most admired the lectures by the mathematicians. Their laconic quality and formal language presented the biggest challenge to me and, perhaps, other Fellows remote from math. By the way, Wiko may benefit if it invites more people with ideas and experience from outside academia. In that outside world, there are bright and intelligent people too. The former president of Iran Mohammad Khatami made it from academia to the top of the theocratic state – and back for a couple of hours to deliver a memorable lecture at Wiko (I wonder if the country's current president will ever follow him). It seems that the further development of Wiko may aim at creating mutually enriching link between the academic world and that of business and politics.

In a slow world, mobility is an advantage. Just a few miles away from Grunewald there was a great lively city that had to be explored before the invasion of football fans. Luckily, I brought my car and, like a dissident reversed, could escape from West to East Berlin whenever I felt nostalgic about urban life, Stalinist architecture, or archaeological treasures collected by the imperial state. The Berlinale was an impressive event. Now imagine two Fellows, an Estonian (my colleague Jaan Ross) and a Russian going to an Iranian neorealist movie in original Farsi with German subtitles ... I had friends in Mitte district, and they introduced me to an alternative East Berlin world of private cinemas, exhibitions, and an underground casino club, where I lost 25 Euro. Later, I also lost 300 Euro for negligent parking. But I have seen much of Germany from Kiel to Munich and drove through the Austrian Alps.

The project intended for my fellowship term concerned the nature of the state. Being the ultimate institution for providing protection and governance by virtue of its superior capacity to use coercion, the state can behave in economically adverse ways. To explain un-

even development, one has to explore cases and conditions where states promoted growth and modernization and, conversely, behaved in a predatory way, sending societies into decline. I have done much of the preliminary studies of state-economy relations under the conditions of early capitalism. I studied a range of comparative cases – from the USA in the Gilded Age and the 1910s to South Korean developmental dictatorship of the 1970s – to understand how different countries produce different patterns of relations between large business and states. All of that was intended to form a context for understanding the forms of governance in present-day Russia. Namely, how the strengthening Russian state defined its economic role, what tools it used, and what kind of voluntary or forced partnerships it formed with big business. The ultimate goal was to write a book on the contradictions of the post-2000 Russian state.

But intentional projects often fall short of their realization, even in ideal settings like Wiko. In November, I received an offer to write an article, introduction, and conclusion as well as to edit a book on corruption in Russia. Although the book was intended for a general audience, it was not a significant deviation from my main line of research, since corruption is one form of state-business relations. Or, one may say, the main business of any state. The book came out in the spring. The main difficulty for those working on state-business relations in Russia is that these relations are still in the process of rapid change. Every month one observes something new. At that time, there were big shifts in energy policy when Gazprom turned off the gas valve in the price dispute with Ukraine. All of that echoed in lunch conversations at Wiko, as Europe suddenly found itself vulnerable too. The state invented a simple formula: to exert political pressure, one needs to decrease gas pressure in the pipeline.

That winter was very cold and long by local standards (I wonder if the heating at Wiko uses Russian gas from West Siberia). Severe winter often causes a retarded but explosive spring. In Grunewald, spring was very powerful that year, almost instant summer. I could not help taking a swim in Halensee, where some 85 years ago, while bathing, Nabokov had his clothes stolen, having to walk almost naked through Berlin.

I wrote several chapters, including those on the USA, on South Korea, and a general conceptual piece on the nature of the state from the perspective of political sociology. That piece was my presentation at my colloquium. The idea that today states behave in essentially the same way they did in early modern times, extracting resources from respective domains unless limited by organized resistance from civil society, and that all states are predatory by nature – this somewhat pessimistic idea was presented at the Tues-

day colloquium. And I am grateful to Fellows for attentive reception and critical engagement.

Having spent most of my professional life in academia, I was thinking of moving close to “real” life – maybe policy research and consulting. And it so happened that during my fellowship term circumstances presented a new career option. In St. Petersburg, my hometown, a regional TV company was being reformed to become a new federal channel, transmitting to Russian regions and looking for ways to engage the regional audience. So they needed conceptual thinking and research. Having been invited to cooperate with the TV channel, I suggested several projects and created an independent think-tank that would deliver knowledge and creative ideas. Parallel to the Wiko project, I wrote several analytical papers on how the new TV channel could address problems of regional development and what kinds of knowledge, information, and analysis were required to draw the regional audience. It included the design of a database of Russian regions, an Index of Regional Development, and a scenario of a major analytical program. In spring and summer I had to commute between Berlin and Petersburg. So Wiko is not only an exceptional academic place, but also a liberal environment, for it can give a chance to realize one’s projects, even if they lead one away from the academic world.