

On historical openness towards visitors and permanent love in Moravian territory

Welcoming speech of Prof. Jan Zaloudik, Director of the Masaryk Memorial Cancer Institute at the Gala Dinner at the Spilberk Castle during the OECl Oncology Days 2017 in Brno

Ladies and gentlemen, dear members of the OECl, dear guests,

Thank you all for attending this evening session. Thank you also for your courage to visit Brno, the geographical centre of Europe, far to east for some of you, **in the middle of nowhere** for others.

This Spilberk Castle, where you presently are, does not resemble the Versailles, because it served during the ages only as a military fort. There was some feeling in Brno that a fort for protection was needed, because we have been living in the middle of Europe, **between the powers and superpowers**. Now this fort serves as the storage of the marvellous Moravian wines. These days this fort, as others in Moravia, can protect nothing more than wine.

I will not be speaking about cancer this evening, a boring theme, which is so familiar to all of you on daily basis. It may be more interesting to acquaint you with the place where you are, where you have actually appeared. You may think, of course, that you are in the Czech land, when you are, in fact, in **Moravia** – a mysterious territory, so central and significant that many Europeans are not even aware of its existence. Believe me, there is nothing nationalistic about this statement. Although we, Moravians, are very proud of our traditions, I am going to convince you that Moravians, despite their poor recognition by the rest of the world, have developed an extremely open behavior, sincere love towards their visitors and skills to learn whatever whenever and from whomever. History itself has given Moravians plenty of opportunities to become open and very friendly towards visitors from all geografic directions, because we could learn from many of them at least something .

Let me take you on a **short historical trip**. Do not be afraid, it will last no longer than a few minutes, but you will be surprised how many events happened around this city, hidden in the middle of nowhere.

Thirty kilometers south from Brno was a big fort and a settlement of ancient **Romans** on the northern *limbus romanus*, intended to protect the Roman Empire against the northern barbarians. I guess, we appreciated that military fort as a business opportunity and we surely loved Romans, because they brought to this region grapes (*Vitis vinifera*). Romans showed us how to produce and drink wine, which is certainly a useful knowledge and one of the few positive achievements of civilization. You can see, even from here, there on the horizon on that southern side, the Hills of Palava, full of vineyards. From Romans, who civilized us, we learnt and remembered how to produce and drink wine.

Originally, this was a Celtic land as documented, amongst other discoveries, by the great archeological findings twenty kilometers north from Brno, at the Bull Rock Cave in the Moravian Karst region. We, Moravians, however, claim a Slavic origin somewhere in the east. As a matter of fact, Slavic visitors expelled Celtic tribes from this land and sent them to

the west. It would be wiser to leave them here and move to the west themselves, closer to the sea and to the Brussel offices. Now we love the sweet dreaming of **Celts**, Celtic music and our Celtic roots, which we, in fact, as eastern Slavic visitors, once destroyed. Nevertheless, from Celts we learnt dreaming.

Seventy kilometers east from Brno was once the center of the Great Moravian Empire, which was extended from Moravia to Slovakia, Hungary and Austria and even up to the heavens. In those glorious times we were visited by two **Byzantine** priests, Konstantin nad Methodus, who brought us hope and the message of Christianity. We, of course, loved them and learnt how to behave properly and not kill each other, at least not on a regular basis. Being thus educated from southeast, we later brought the good news of Christianity to west to our beloved and barbarian Czechs, and helped them to civilize as we gladly do till now, particularly with taxes, government, statistics as well as oncology.

Later, the **Mongols** invaded Europe. After some hard times we, Moravians, bravely stopped them eighty kilometers northeast from Brno, near the city of Olomouc. Moravian troops, lead by knight Jaromir, pushed them away and they never returned. (Hopefully, they will one day, but only with some investments). We are certainly proud of this victory and of being the saviours for the whole of Europe, although some historians object and claim that this turnover was caused by a general order from their leaders to return back to their Asian homeland due to instability and fighting for power among the Mongolian rulers. We might not loved the Mongols in those times as much as it is natural to us, but we enjoyed the beauty of winning and learnt how to present success and victory in fairy tales and stories, recently shown in the media.

After several centuries Moravians sent, for the first and the last time in their history, military troops outside of their territory. Even as far as two hundred kilometers from Brno northwest to Prague in order to help our beloved Czech neighbours to defend Prague against a huge catholic **Habsburg** army. Moravians were fighting bravely until the last man died at the battlefield on the slope of the White Mountain, near Prague. In the meantime, the Czechs had been negotiating with Habsburgs about peace and the Czech subsidiarity. Loved or hated, Moravian soldiers were all killed and the Thirty Year War started to flame accross Europe. We, Moravians, however, took it as a positive experience and learnt that one should be wisely reserved before going to fight for some foreign interests or ideologies.

Later during the Thirty Year War the **Swedish** visitors came to Moravia with a powerful army. They surrounded and attacked the walls of this castle in Brno, such a pleasant place for dinning this evening. Surprisingly, they were not successful and left soon thereafter somewhere to the north. Be sure that we loved them too, because they gave us a rare opportunity to celebrate victory in that terribly complicated war, won by sitting at home. Unfortunately, some historians object again, claiming that victory was caused rather by a severe illness of the Sweedish general Thorstensson and by the low strategical significance of Brno, when villages around Brno were eaten out. Nevertheless, we learnt that we can defend ourselves more easily if we are not included in some great strategy, and we certainly continue to love Swedish people as well as the IKEA stores, which are also visible from this historical site.

Emperor **Napoleon** also came to Moravia to free all nations, including us, and to win the battle of Slavkov (Austerlitz), fifteen kilometers east from Brno, which can also be easily

seen from here. As we all know from school, he gloriously won over the Austrian and the Austrian coalition armies, because coalitions are usually weaker. In the opinion of the Moravians, however, he did not win enough, because Moravia remained under the Habsburg rule another hundred years. We loved French soldiers mentally, and physically probably too, because till now we can find some French names and phenotypes across the Moravian countryside. We also loved French visitors because they renewed our technology of wine production, which we learnt, as I already mentioned, from our previous visitors, the ancient Romans, two thousand years ago, and which became somehow outdated. Love and learning goes together, especially when it comes to wine.

To conclude my speech faster, I will only briefly mention that during the 20th century we also had **German** visitors and **Russian** guests for several, even many, years. We were trying and were trained to love them. As a positive result of that period, we had an opportunity to learn both these languages, even to deal in German in our offices, and later, to mandatorily learn Russian, starting at the elementary school level. Unfortunately, German and Russian languages are now less popular amongst Moravians and Czechs because of the global use of English, which may also change.

As the world opens more and more, we were, very recently, in May this year, delighted to welcome at our Institute a delegation from the Kingdom of **Oman**, led by Her Highness Princess Mona. Although we are not direct neighbours, we learned that we are able to share interesting ideas about organisation of health care and health care education. Frankly, we were uncertain and shy a bit, because we might appear too exotic to that very appreciative delegation, which identified us on the map of the world during their trip of Europe.

Now, after such a brief historical excursion, you may admit that instead of being in the middle of nowhere you are, actually, **in the middle of somewhere**. You may understand better the non-nationalistic, ever loving and permanently open nature of Moravians, tiny seeds on the global playground, who are reliable partners. This includes the staff of the Masaryk Memorial Cancer Institute on the Yellow Hill, just a few hundred meters from here by air.

Finally, after all the mentioned visitors, we have you, the most welcome participants of the OECl Oncology Days 2017, here. I would not, however, call you visitors. As far as I am concerned you are at home as a vital part of one family. You are not going to stay long, two, three, four days or so. You may say it is long enough for Brno and you may be right. (I am also going to travel tomorrow for my vacation to my beloved Corsica and the more attractive Mediterranean.) Be sure, however, that you are always most cordially welcome at the MMCI in Brno, either in person or as e-communicators (nowadays everybody prefers e-mailing and virtual reality, except the wine drinkers).

MMCI, as a proud founding member of the OECl since 1979, has gladly adopted the vision of the OECl family and remains ready to love you, to serve, and, of course, to learn more in order to further improve cancer care and oncology science in Europe, Czech Republic, and especially in Moravia ☺

Thank you.

*A message to take home : **Gregor Mendel**, the founder of genetics from the Augustinian Abbey in Brno, luckily did his experiments on pea plants. Had he tried to do them on the*

Moravian population, so extensively open to genes from so many directions, he could have never come to any conclusion. Consequently, we could not be showing the Mendel's museum to our visitors today. It is too hard to analyze Moravians 😊