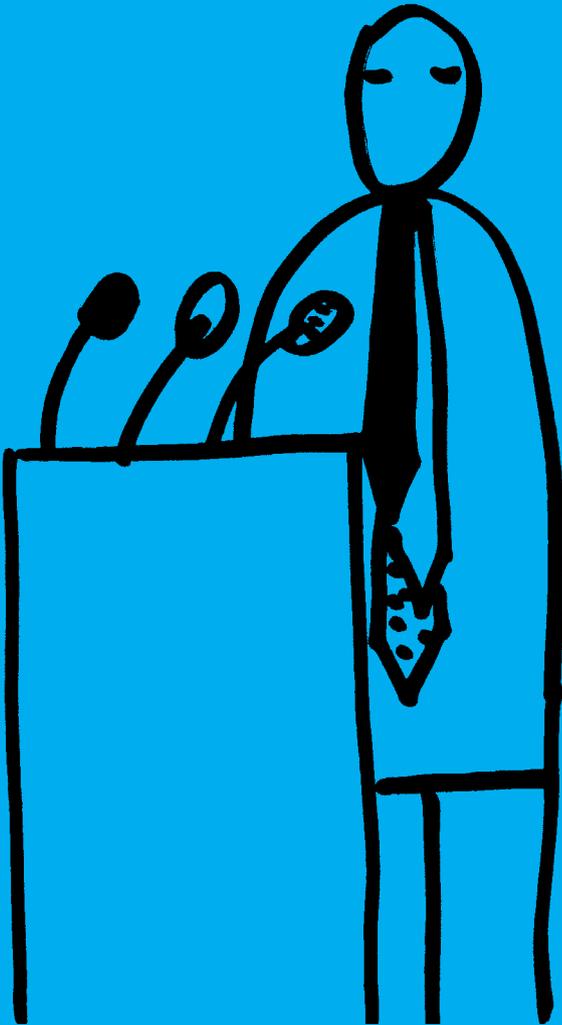


aces

Academy of Central
European Schools



thoughts for aces

Authors share their
views and visions

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foreword

by Boris Marte
ERSTE Foundation

“So what does your foundation do, like, really do?”

A common question from people that are unfamiliar with the work of ER-STE Foundation, and a good one, too. Where to start? Maybe with an easy-sounding, nice to explain project, with aces. “School exchange. We support school exchange in Central and South Eastern Europe. Together with two partner organisations we set up the biggest international network of schools in this part of Europe. Students work together on projects, have fun and learn about intercultural - or even trans-cultural as some put it - experiences, teachers are being offered methods and tools that they can use in their classrooms, and representatives of Ministries of Education from all fifteen participating countries exchange - and meet again with students and teachers. A project like aces is for many students the first chance to understand what it means to be in a foreign country.” What sounds simple, and what still is a prime example for a quickly explained project, is a complex and deep-reaching idea put into practise.

The organisational structure is outstanding and needs to be mentioned: aces would not be possible without the great cooperation of many people from at least three institutions. We have established it together with Interkulturelles Zentrum from Vienna - and it became more international and stronger through the help of VČELÍ DOM from Bratislava. And it would certainly not be the same without the high amount of external input - be it workshop trainers and facilitators at the kick-off and academy meetings, the aces council, the ministry representatives, artists and educational experts at the big events or authors from all fifteen “aces countries” contributing their thoughts and ideas. But all this super-structure would be little, had it not been for the teachers and students bringing in their ideas, work, interests and enthusiasm.

This little book is for all of those who would like to see their aces horizons even more expanded. A big thank you to all authors and contributors of this book providing us with more food for thought. Some of the texts clearly say: The world is not perfect, and aces reflects this. All the fun within the project might help to cover misunderstandings and still existing problems, but its purpose is not to ignore them. It gives a safe framework for overcoming differences and conflicts by giving examples for excellent cooperation. Let us not take sympathy, understanding and interest for granted, but rather let us continue to meet, exchange and discuss.

foreword

by Christine Gamper
Interkulturelles Zentrum

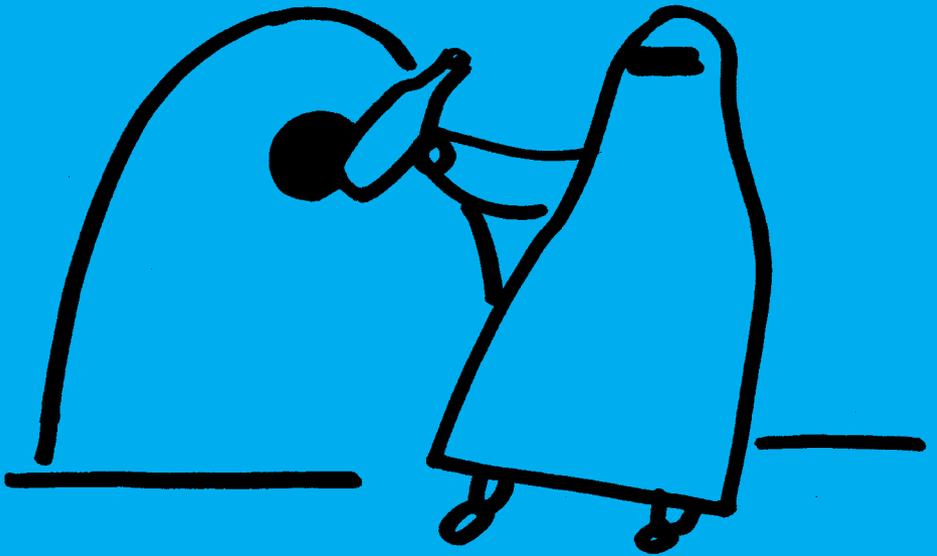
At the beginning there's always a thought ...

aces – Academy of Central European Schools was a project idea based on the following three beliefs: firstly, that education can be a key factor in the process of European integration as it promotes the development of “European citizenship”, secondly, that schools can play a decisive role in cross-border communication processes and the development of common values, and lastly, that international cooperation of schools contributes to the strengthening of the region. Thus, supported by the Ministries of Education of the first eight partner countries, we founded this school network in 2006 offering concrete opportunities for students, teachers and schools to actively take part in intercultural exchange and to become a vital part of a shared vision of Europe. At present the network comprises fifteen Central and South Eastern European countries with a growing number of aces member schools.

Active participation is a key element of aces. By granting international school partnership projects selected in an annual competition, aces encourages more and more students and teachers to meet and work together with peers from other countries. Apart from the single school projects, the aces network conferences – the Kick-Off Meeting and the Academy - serve as additional platforms for further exchange, mutual learning and educational innovation, bringing together delegations from all project schools as well as other stakeholders. The aces events take place in different aces countries, thus travelling there also bares the chance to experience another place and to make new encounters.

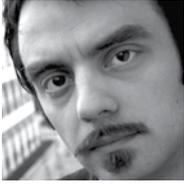
To enrich and stimulate the discussions of the participants, aces regularly invites prominent figures from the partner countries to share their thoughts and visions on topics such as European values, citizenship and active participation, intercultural dialogue, conflict resolution and media literacy. This booklet gathers the manifold views of these writers, artists, scientists and activists reflecting also the conditions of and the experiences made in the region. Many thanks to all the authors for contributing and for being our educators in their own special way.

We wish you an inspiring reading experience!



Recycle, 2005
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

European Identities, Values and Visions



Goran Rebić

The skies above Europe

*There are no borders. Not for thought,
not for feelings. Fear draws the borders.*
Ingmar Bergman

As the son of immigrants, I have learnt to overcome borders from childhood, I got used to living amongst many cultures, and reacted very severely to the word “foreigner”. When asked where I liked it better, there was no answer, as even then I felt European. That was at a time when, in every country still, the national flag was raised and a hymn was fervently sung at midnight, at the end of broadcasting on TV. Out of yearning for a supranational affiliation, I passionately watched TV shows like “Games without Frontiers” in which teams from different European countries competed against each other in imaginative sporting challenges, and the yearly Eurovision Song Contest. As dubious as the quality of the music was, as negligible its cultural authenticity, as incomparably high the associated ideal was for me. Of course, I also shared in the national pride of my new home country, as it was once called: Austria: twelve points, Autriche: douze points ...

The really major European experience in my youth though, long before Austria became a member of the EU, was the school exchange between my school and a French secondary school in Orléans. I stayed in a French host family for a month, separated from my parents and friends, and every morning I went to school with their son. In this direct manner, I was able to learn a lot from the life and culture in France, and this encounter undoubtedly significantly marked my “Éducation interculturelle”.

(Flashback) 50 years ago, after the start of the launch of the E-U-R-O-P-E spaceship to the sound of Beethoven, the “Euronauts”, representatives from politics, economy and culture, on board the space capsule look down to the continent that is moving further and further away. Overcome, they initially point to their different origins. “Look at the rivers there, crossing each other, that’s where I was born. The big mountain there, my town lies at its foot.” In the end, they are all in agreement: This new perspective will conquer all borders! While the outline of a mysterious presence becomes visible from above, they praise the future values and diversity of Europe.

(Leap in time) Today, during the ceremonious live transmission on the occasion of the 50th Birthday of the EU, its citizens are sitting in the towns

on those far-off rivers and mountains, in front of their television sets shaking their heads. European values? What's that? The utopia of a borderless Europe has become reality for us who live within those borders. But the process of cultural rapprochement has stalled. What has become of the intellectual curiosity for others? After the countdown of the media enthusiasm over the union of peoples and tolerance, a new fear of foreigners has emerged in Europe in the same way.

(Cut-away) The well-known artist duo 0100101110101101.org is posting posters of an imaginary European blockbuster entitled "United we stand" in large cities - the plot sees a united task force that saves the "old continent" at the last minute before its ruin. Could Europe be a flop?

(Dream sequence) Children of different languages and cultures land with parachutes on far-off rivers and mountains. In order to realize the dream, they scatter to go and learn about and understand the life of others in the same way as the ancestral fathers of the idea of European unification thought: "We do not unite countries, we bring people closer to each other." In the sky, the powerful spaceship E-U-R-O-P-E is slowly pulling away.

The continent of Europe is so wide,

Mein Herr.

Not only up and down, but side to side,

Mein Herr.

I couldn't ever cross it if I tried,

Mein Herr.

So I do...

What I can...

Inch by inch...

Step by step...

Mile by mile...

*Man by man.**

(Fade-out)

(* from the musical "Cabaret", Lyrics of "Mein Herr" by Fred Ebb, 1966.)

Goran Rebić

The film director and screenwriter Goran Rebić was born in 1968 in Vršac/Vojvodina in the former Yugoslavia and grew up in Vienna. After his film studies, he made *During the Many Years* (1991) and *At the Edge of the World* (1992) in which he documented Georgian independence and civil war. *Jugofilm* was his first feature film, which he made in 1996 and which recounted the bloodshed in the Balkans. In 2000, he surprised us with the documentary *The Punishment* and let the yet unheard voices of young people of Belgrade, between NATO bombing and millennium celebrations, be heard in the West. His film *Donau, Dunaj, Duna, Dunav, Dunarea* (2003) is a road movie on water. Following a voyage down the river Danube, it combines different destinies across borders. Forthcoming productions are the feature film *Illegal Gardens*, an unusual story of passion in Iran, and the screenplay *Francuski*, the tragic-comic story of a Soviet convict.

Goran Rebić has been invited to many film festivals and his prizes comprise the Austrian National Film Award, the Diagonale Award for Best Austrian Film, the “Giam-paolo Paoli” at the Festival Dei Popoli in Florence, the Audience Award in Mannheim-Heidelberg, Best Foreign Film in Ischia, Best Script in Herceg Novi, Best Film in Novi Sad, Fipresci in Vrnjacka Banja, a Honorary Mention in Karlovy Vary, Mention de Cinéma Jeune Public de Laon, the Austrian Talent Script Award, the Silver Award Hong Kong’s Critic’s Choice and the Silver Award of Bergamo International Festival.



Nikola Madzirov

The conflict of inherited interspaces

To be born in the Balkans usually means being born with a pacemaker in the heart, the purpose of which is to constantly appease the arrhythmia of the inherited East-West mental conflict. The depth of this problem is not in the sides of the world – despite their historical and civilization denotations, nor is it in the conflict – but it is rather in the act of inheriting, because hereditary diseases are the hardest to cure just as inherited property is the hardest to divide. Like everyone in this region, I was growing up in a time when the blood in my veins was running according to the laws of dialectical materialism, while my heart was beating following the 7/8 rhythm echoing from the East. On the day of my coming of age in 1991, as an act of initiation, I was granted a new state system and an independent republic. From my father I had inherited the faith in doubt, and from my communist education – the doubt in faith.

In my language, in the root of the word “education” (“obrazovanie”) the word “cheek” (“obraz”) is hidden, something quite concrete and touchable which served as an object to punish our disobedience – the usual slapping in school. However, in the Balkans, the moral phrases “to have a clean cheek” or “to preserve one’s own cheek” share a context much broader than the educational one, and translated literally they mean “to keep one’s dignity”, i.e. “to be oneself”, even when the educational system in communism said: “Be ourselves!”. The word “education” contained within itself the linguistic and the ideological conflict between personal freedom and freedom of personality in a strictly defined future wrapped in shiny tinfoil. But the packages with an indefinite expiry date are the most cancerous ones.

In my school, we used to wear single-coloured uniforms as if dressed in garments made of cloth for manufacturing state flags. Those textile walls upon our bodies were supposed to be a dark cloak to hide the conflicts that arose from the social status or the natural body growth of each individual, while in the classrooms – above the loudspeaker that announced the importance of all state holidays framed behind the dusty glass, the dictator was smiling sweetly at us; surely he was dressed in different clothes. However, the inner conflict arisen from the family myths and the bemoaning continued to live, as there were neither clothes nor colour to cover the

inherited hopes and fears. The cloning of the soul was noiselessly being accomplished not in the laboratories but in the closed classrooms.

At the bottom of my winter clothes cabinet still lies my school uniform from twenty years ago. I believe this is one of the few ideological monuments that cannot be broken nor permanently placed in a park or a factory yard. The moths are to finish their job, just as the moistness in the basements is eating away the collected works of the leaders of the former ideological and educational matrix. Remembering becomes the main motive for a conflict, and the conflict produces even stronger remembering, and here each second sentence begins with "Do you remember..." People remember their childhood, and they do not forget the war.

I would like not to remember those imposed ideological aspirations and pains which, like lead weights, were dragging behind me every time I changed my home place. My high school books have not just been eaten away by time but also by all the changed spaces of uncertainty. Now these books have only museum value but would not be useful even to a museum caretaker. I believe that my child will not inherit from me the inner conflict of the interspaces as the voice of the man stuck in a lift between two floors is nothing more than a scream for help.

Nikola Madzirov

The poet, essayist and translator Nikola Madzirov was born in a family of Balkan Wars refugees in 1973 in Strumica, Republic of Macedonia. His poetry has been translated into thirty languages and published in collections and anthologies in the US, Latin America, Europe and Asia. Nikola Madzirov is the Macedonian coordinator of the world poetry network Lyrikline.

For his poetry book *Relocated Stone* (2007) he received the Hubert Burda poetry award for authors born in Eastern Europe and the most prestigious Macedonian poetry prize, Miladinov Brothers, at Struga Poetry Evenings. For the book *Locked in the City* (1999) he was given the Studentski Zbor award for the best debut and for the collection of poems *Somewhere Nowhere* (1999) the Aco Karamanov prize. Inspired by his poetry, two short films were shot in Bulgaria and Croatia. The contemporary American jazz composer and collaborator of Björk and Lou Reed, Oliver Lake, composed music based on Madzirov's poems which was performed at the Jazz-Poetry Concert in Pittsburgh in 2008.

Nikola Madzirov has participated in many international literary festivals and events in the US, Latin America, Asia and Europe and has received several international awards and fellowships such as a KulturKontakt fellowship in Vienna, Internationales Haus der Autoren in Graz, Literatur Haus NÖ in Krems, Literarisches Tandem in Berlin, Villa Waldbertha in Munich and International Writing Program (IWP) at the University of Iowa in the US.

Welcome to aces, the world of smiles! When I first came to aces, I saw a world I had never seen before. It was a truly unique experience for me. aces feels like a family, one big family that cares about you and your needs, and gives you unlimited amounts of fun, good time and learning. It's like a magical place, like the ones we've read about as children, a place in which magic happens. aces is the factory of smiles. It is like one big corporation that uses your enthusiasm and creativity as raw materials to create happiness and knowledge. Whenever you are attending an aces event, wherever you turn around, you will see smiling, happy people, eager to learn, make new friends and, above all, have fun.

Martin Načevski, student from Macedonia and tutor at the aces Kick-Off Meeting 2011 in Sarajevo

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for being part of such a great event, where people from different walks of life unite in order to become more open-minded teachers and to enable their students to gain more colourful experiences.

Vjollca Shahini, teacher from Kosovo

In all my life I never had such an amazing experience, and I think these memories will never fade.

Cristina Lupuşor, student from Moldova



Beqë Cufaj

From the rear echelons

In early 1991, after completing my military service, I enrolled in the University of Pristina. Even though the Serbs were already resorting to violent means they had not yet expelled us from the university.

Those were the infamous years of major political changes in Yugoslavia. Pluralist Slovenia and Croatia wanted to break away from Yugoslavia, and Bosnia and Macedonia sought to join them, too. The Kosovars were trying to set up political alternatives to oppose the apartheid of the Milošević regime.

Apart from the Belgrade communists who had already turned into nationalists, the political prisoners under Tito's regime, such as Tuđman in Croatia, Izetbegović in Bosnia, and Demaçi in Kosovo, also contributed to this.

And when we talk about Kosovo, this unit of the Yugoslav Federation also had its political prisoners under Tito's regime. That kind of liberal communism was not to their liking. They stood for another model: the communism of Enver Hoxha. They wanted the unification of the Albanian-inhabited territories and the authority of Hoxha's iron fist. For many successive decades, hundreds of young Albanian men from Kosovo and other Albanian-inhabited territories in former Yugoslavia were sent to Belgrade jails for carrying the idea of Enver Hoxha's communism, along with their ideal of the unification of Albanian territories. Thus, in the early 1990s, ideological prisons started to crumble to dust, along with Yugoslavia.

Many Albanians from Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia also managed to escape from those prisons. They received a hero's welcome. As for myself, I was doing military service at that time, so I was unable to attend those reception ceremonies which might have been a warning sign to Belgrade that the Albanians had no intention of renouncing their aspirations, inspired also by a pathos with folklore tones that the West would help liberate Kosovo.

But let us turn back to my studies for, to tell you the truth, I was not interested in politics that much. There was only one thing in my head: to

complete my studies as soon as possible and flee the country. However, I was just at the beginning of my studies and a lot of work was needed for me to graduate.

There were two kinds of students at the Faculty of Literature in Pristina: A handful of them loved literature immensely and did not care about other things. The other group, which had the absolute majority, consisted of the riff-raff who had been refused admission to other faculties and had chosen to study literature to become teachers. Or they joined simply to kill time or engage in political activities against the Milošević regime.

That did not bother me much because I was neither interested in attending lectures nor socializing with my fellow-students. I hardly knew any of them. I would meet them only when we had exams.

I met him for the first time during one exam. Let us name him N. He did not attend lectures, just like me. And he stood out as being much older than the other students. He was somewhere in his thirties. Just like the other youngsters of that state who studied in parallel institutions in Pristina, N. was short. He wore a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. He had landed in the Yugoslav prisons when he was 19 and had spent 13 years of his life there. Now he wanted to finish the studies he had started 13 years ago.

Yet, he was very knowledgeable, having had the chance to work in the prison library for many years on end. He had learned many foreign languages and had read books by many writers. But he was very modest. When I talked with him about literature, I felt like forgetting my work and my love of it because N. was trying to tell me something with his paternal care, or to put it more precisely, the care of a political commissioner.

I do not know how long I carried on with him. I only know that that savage part of categorically refusing every single thing prevailed in me. Particularly that of “direct political engagement for the Albanian cause in the Balkans”. I wanted to read books and perhaps even write one myself one day. However, N. wanted not only to read books but also remain in the rear echelons of his comrades of the “Movement”. I knew by now that they respected him a lot. And as he was one of the main leaders of the “Movement” of Albanian prisoners in former Yugoslavia, this implied that they were tied together by a common “ideal” which many Albanians, or to put it more precisely, the overwhelming majority of the Albanians in the Balkans did not care about.

I could never understand, now and until I die, what had kept and still keeps N. in the "Movement". A man who had read all the books that should be read.

The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia took their course quickly. Thousands and thousands of innocent people were killed, villages and cities were destroyed, and whole regions and states were devastated. Just for the sake of appalling nationalism. I had already lost all contact with N. I had no idea, but assumed that he would have been part of military movements. I was right. After the war in Kosovo, the last one in the territory of former Yugoslavia, I saw N. quite closely again, in the rear echelons of the new politicians who had taken off their military uniforms and had done up their ties. N. was wearing a tie, too. For years on end, I watched him on TV programmes and read his name in newspapers and internet portals. Until one day, a few months ago, I saw that he had emerged from the rear echelons. He had become a minister, a minister in the central government, and was charged with the education of young people when the state of education in Kosovo was more difficult and serious than in any other country in Europe. It seemed, however, that my former colleague had not read any other book ever since he had gotten out of prison, for he speaks like the average deranged politician of the Balkans, a region still suffering from major problems of both the past and the present, and the future as well.

Beqë Cufaj

The fiction writer and essayist Beqë Cufaj was born in Kosovo in 1970. He studied Linguistics and Literature and moved to Germany in 1995, where he works as a writer and journalist, among others for the newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

During the war in his homeland, he published essays in various publications in which he commented on the events in his country with clear-sightedness and great sympathy. In 2000 these essays were collected in the anthology, *Kosova – Rückkehr in ein verwüstetes Land* [*Kosova – Return to a Devastated Country*]. In 2005 he published his first novel, *Der Glanz der Fremde* [*The Radiance of the Stranger*]. To date, Cufaj is the author of six books, poetry, essays, novels and of one theatre play. His books have been translated into German and Serbian, his essays into more than fifteen languages. Cufaj lives in Germany and in Kosovo.



György Dalos

Europe as a vision and a reality

In 1983, my friend and colleague György Konrád dared to draw a map of the changes he longed for. In “Antipolitics”, he wrote: “I don’t only consider Budapest, Bratislava, Prague, Krakow, Warsaw and Berlin as European. And if I were to add St. Petersburg and even Moscow to Europe, why then should I stop at Vladivostok? They are all part of Eurasia. There are no national boundaries between them. One can think on a Eurasian scale. That is a perspective that is better suited to the second millennium than the perspective of small Western Europe. I would like to think of myself as a son of a utopian Europe whose arms reach the calm ocean of both San Francisco and Vladivostok and which preserves peace in the rest of the world.”

On Hungary’s honeymoon with the new democracy, Europe was a key concept. Mentions of the continent in the media reached such an extent that it brought author Peter Esterházy to the idea: Whoever even mentions the word “Europe” should automatically be made to pay the treasury one Forint (which would not have resulted in any real recovery in view of the mountain of debts and the start of a recession). Expectations were well-meant, but naïve. By taking on European standards in politics and ethics, resounding economic and social advancement was expected – democracy with all its benefits but without the downsides of the capitalist economic system. Obviously, the development process was much more difficult. The knocking on the EU’s door alone went on for fifteen years.

Now we’ve made it, Hungary is already marking its fourth year in the new European calendar. The fall of communism or, as we call it, the change of systems, required enormous efforts from the country of ten million, the market economy did not turn out to be automatically people-friendly at all, to put it mildly, and the previously state-subsidized culture increasingly turned into a welfare case. But what exceeded the powers of imagination of the eighties the most was the fact that the collapse of one of the two mighty military blocks could not by any means bring the world closer to peace and that, within our narrow geographical environment itself, everything but a harmonious continental democracy emerged. In retrospect, we say with a shake of the head: How could we imagine such a rosy future at all in view of our difficult and complicated past?

An excuse may be that most phenomena could not be anticipated at all at the end of the Soviet era. Firstly, nobody thought of the crazy rhythm of changes, secondly, even many economists underestimated the difficulties in the transition to a market economy and thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, nobody expected the national revival to the extent it has reached today. Some countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania won the rule of law in their former geographical span, while completely new states appeared on the map in the nineties: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Bosnia, Germany (as a unified country), Estonia, Georgia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic and Ukraine. The changes to the map affected a territory with a population of almost five hundred million people.

On the one hand, the creation of these modern nation states was the most natural thing after so many decades or even centuries of heteronomy. Educated Marxists would grudgingly have described this process as “objectively progressive”, as they did about the creation of the Reich in its time. On the other hand, the decline of the great empire meant enormous disintegration, which, particularly in the cases where the right to self-determination was denied to most people or minorities, occasionally bore apocalyptic traits. While border and customs officials across the EU are slowly being condemned to unemployment, around 40 new inter-state borders have come into being since 1989, at the time of the Euro triumph, more than 20 new national currencies, from the Estonian Kroon to the Slovakian Koruna, have been introduced, and while NATO, not least for financial reasons, is pursuing the reorganization and standardization of the continent’s defence systems, new national armies are being created in Eastern Europe. The fact that some Moldavian or Ukrainian banknotes were printed in Paris in the early nineties only highlights the absurdity of the whole process and further illustrates the gulf between East and West.

The countries which belonged to the former political or ideological scope of influence of the Soviet Union were more or less isolated from the free world. Unlike most authoritarian states of the West, like Portugal, Spain, Greece or Turkey, the dictatorships of the East made sure that their people missed out on the decades of post-war Europe and, with them, the modernization of political life. More than fifteen years separate these countries from the “real existing socialism”, but they still live today and yesterday at least in parallel, whereby we sometimes understand the entire national history that has been swept under the carpet amongst the latest levels

of time. Hackneyed ideas of the grey prehistoric times, the middle ages, the early modern era, the animosities sparked by centuries of foreign rule, myths, illusions and fears mark all current events from Baku to Warsaw which would be unimaginable west of the Leitha river.

Last December, 46 Polish officials from three conservative governing parties proposed a motion in Sejm whereby Jesus Christ should be selected as King of the Rzeczpospolita (Republic of Poland). This proposal that seems so absurd and which was rejected both by a parliamentary majority and by the clergy, stems from a 17th Century tradition. At that time, Mary was chosen as the ruler of the country by a symbolic marriage with King Kazimierz in order to protect Poland in the war with protestant Sweden. There was certainly no majority behind the patrons' delusion, but religious and symbolic politicizing is no stranger to the otherwise highly modern Polish society in the 21st Century. The scandal over the secret service involvement of Cardinal Stanislaw Wielgus not least shows how conflicting this modernity seems. The case of the spiritual leader is portrayed both as a strictly protected church secret and as a grandiose media scandal.

In the autumn of the same year, unrest broke out in Hungary. The cause lay in the growing social expenses of the reform programme of the liberal socialist government. But the immediate trigger was a speech made by Premier Ferenc Gyurcsány in which he admitted to misinformation during the election campaign in front of internal circles. Since the somewhat radical conflict coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the national uprising of 1956, some of those involved imagined themselves as direct successors to the "freedom fighters" and preferred historical locations for their rallies at that time. Other than the traditional tricolour flags with the so-called Árpád stripes, some demonstrators carried a medieval symbol which was later used by the far right in the pre-war period. Irrespective of the embarrassing connotations of the latter symbol, it would surely be less probable in Germany that protests against the restrictive policies would have taken place under the banner of Frederick Barbarossa.

But the more recent past also puts its unmistakable stamp on the political culture of "reform countries". In Hungary, in the Czech Republic and not least in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic), a statistically quantifiable mass nostalgia for the "golden" seventies and eighties appears as a reflex, above all, of the middle and older generation to a present time in the atmosphere of which they could no longer feel at home. In the dismal

successor states of the former USSR, existential insecurity is expressed in the direct shift to communist parties which have benefited from this by winning several elections. In all the significance of social plights which drive people into the arms of the former rulers, we must point out the psychological background and gaps in this phenomenon. Tens of millions of people are living in a historical vacuum and long for a stable value hierarchy.

We see the sometimes violent domestic policy struggle of the East, like in Serbia, Ukraine or Georgia, as the typical “aftermath of socialism”. This is vehemently fought out away from the institutional framework and witnessed as a revolution by the citizens involved. In most places, they correct the sometimes imperfect election results, but in the best of cases lead to a new division of sinecures amongst the different power elites which again still smell of the old machinery, irrespective of their ideological bias.

This mainly means that all twenty-two states which gradually came into being out of the former East Block in 1989/91 and which are currently on the most different levels of integration, are by no means idealized European partners, even if they fulfil the official EU acceptance criteria. They will remain captive to the logic of their historicity and will only be able to overcome it of their own accord. On the question of democratizing and humanizing the domestic conditions of these countries, of directing the governing groups to respect human rights, it is the greatest possible mistake to refuse or accelerate club membership as a means of applying pressure. We cannot imprison a country in the community of freedom-loving peoples, as it were.

At the same time, this different nature of the new members and more so of applicants should have us doubting. The precursor of the EU, the European Community founded in 1957, came about at the height of the Cold War when the continent wanted to assert itself within the scope of the Atlantic Alliance. Two years after the creation of the Warsaw Pact and one year following the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, the end of the block confrontation was hardly foreseeable. When the European Parliament began its work in 1979, nobody expected that free elections could ever take place beyond the Iron Curtain. Even the highly praised *détente* did not really bring the Eastern Block countries closer to their Western neighbours, and the only firm and indissoluble bond between dictatorships and democracies was their growing debt.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire presented a challenge to the EU, a task it could not be equal to in its existing structures to date. Whether we want to or not, the integration of each individual new member is changing the character of the community of states, and a potential doubling of the European territory and population, a logical step based on its principles, would have burst open its original structure. Paradoxically, the acceptance of Turkey would cause fewer technical problems than the integration of geographically and culturally closer candidates such as Albania or Georgia. In any case, a massive expansion would complicate the control over the whole system and it would even now be advisable to think about decentralized solutions while maintaining the value community.

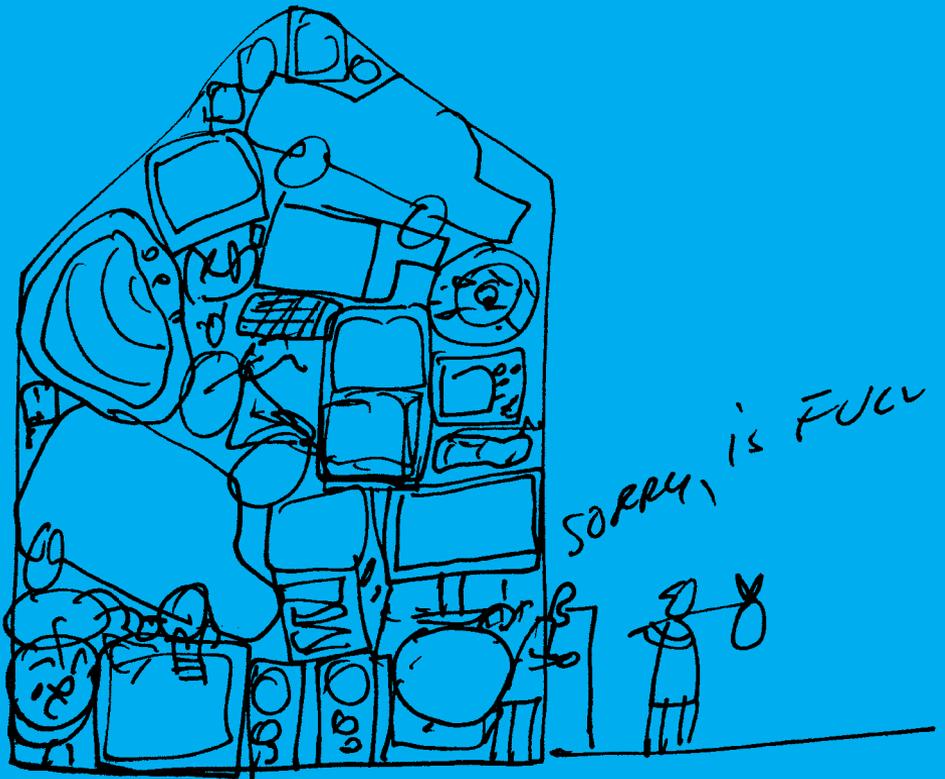
Finally, please allow me to make a personal comment. Even if our aesthetic optimistic vision of the eighties has been disproved by actual developments, I don't believe that the private futurology that was developed on the kitchen tables of dissidents was a mere intellectual pastime. On the contrary: At that time, we produced ideas with everyday intensity without caring whether they would ever be approved for promulgation. Today, however, our society enjoys the most liberal freedoms of speech in its history and it seems to have, and I say this with some melancholy, little desire, daring and imagination to think about its own future.

György Dalos

György Dalos was born in 1943 in Budapest, Hungary. From 1962-1967 he studied at Moscow University. In 1968, he was sentenced for "subversive activities" and forbidden to work. Consequently, he worked as a translator from German and Russian. In the seventies he was involved in the Hungarian Democratic Opposition. Dalos received a scholarship for the Berlin Artist Programme from 1984-1985 and was employed in the Eastern Europe Research Institute of the University of Bremen. From 1987-1995 he worked as a freelance journalist in Vienna. He was Board Member in the Heinrich Böll Foundation from 1992-1996, Leader of the Hungarian Institute of Culture in Berlin from 1995-1999 and literary curator for Hungary at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1999.

He has been awarded the Adelbert-von Chamisso-Prize 1995, the Gryphius Special Prize 1999, the Golden Badge awarded by the President of the Hungarian Republic 2000, the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary 2006 as well as the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding 2010

His most important books are: *The Circumcision* (1990), *Proletarier aller Länder, entschuldigt mich!* (Ende des Ostblockwitzes) [*Proletariats of all countries, I apologize*] (End of the East Block joke)] (1993), *The Guest from the Future* (1996), *Der Gottsucher* [*Godseeker*] (1999), *Ungarn in der Nussschale. Geschichte meines Landes* [*Hungary in a nutshell. History of my country*] (2004), *Die Balaton Brigade* (2006), *1956: Aufstand in Ungarn* [*1956: Uprising in Hungary*] (2006) and *Jugendstil* [*Art Nouveau*] (2007).



Immigrant, 2005
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

“School Europe”



Werner Wintersteiner

A school called Europe – Learning to live together with those who are different

L'Europe occidentale, foyer de la domination la plus importante qui ait jamais existé dans le monde, est aussi le seul foyer des idées émancipatrices qui vont saper cette domination.

Edgar Morin

Systematic learning requires special institutions, even schools. But in turn, schools require contact with the outside world in order to make living learning possible. Because through all learning in individual subjects, we must not forget that the point of learning, that is learning with a capital L, is not specialized knowledge, but education, i.e. the ability to integrate knowledge from individual disciplines into a world view and therefore develop into a person who can make an active contribution to the tasks of society.

The most important lesson we learn today is to live together peacefully, but with inevitable conflicts, in a globalized world. Only a democratically organized and politically conscious world community will be in a position to solve the challenges of our time – a humane life for all of the earth's inhabitants, the conquering of environmental threats and the preservation of peace.

For this purpose, Europe is both the ends and the means, both the problem and the solution: Learning for Europe means learning to live together in a united, but by no means unified, continent. But how can we learn for Europe? Only as an encounter with the never-ending diversity in Europe. This diversity results from the long and rich history of the continent which – we mustn't forget – is both a history of racism and colonialism and a history of enlightenment and emancipation. For the future, learning means learning from both these strands of history.

That's why the Academy of Central European Schools (aces) is so important: aces is a Central European project, but a project with no centre, created for transversal exchange. aces is more trans-cultural than intercultural, which means that individual cultures are not seen as self-contained and completely different units but as different and dynamic mixtures which yearn for new exchange and new mixtures. And it could even turn out that immigrants sitting in more and more European classrooms are an important connecting joint between European youth who don't have to use a foreign language in order to communicate with others. aces is a project of political education, but not on a national level. It is rather about inventing "European

citizenship”, which is currently showing the first signs of existence politically, for example in the right to vote in municipal elections for EU citizens.

Finally, it is significant that relations between teachers and pupils have also been revolutionized by projects such as aces: Pupils receive new tasks and significantly more responsibility. They must organize their learning themselves, muster all their linguistic and communicative abilities in order to communicate with young people from other countries, and they must, to a certain extent, teach themselves. They don't need teachers so much to tell them what they should do but more to show them how they should do what they want to do and help them actually do it and evaluate it. That means that teachers also have new tasks and probably more responsibility. But that is the other side of it, that learning in projects such as this is more relevant to life than normal schooling, and therefore also more personally important. “School Europe” can therefore become a factor in the renewal of school.

Werner Wintersteiner

Werner Wintersteiner is university professor of the didactics of German and peace educator. He is the founder and director of the Center for Peace Research and Peace Education as well as the current director of the Austrian Educational Competence Center at the Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt, Austria. Furthermore he is lecturer at the European Peace University, Stadtschlaining, Austria, member of the Council of the Peace Education Commission of IPRA (International Peace Research Association) and member of the Advisory Board of the Global Campaign for Peace Education.

Werner Wintersteiner is co-editor of the periodical information zur deutschdidaktik, the Culture of Peace Yearbook, the peace-educational periodical Friedenserziehung konkret as well as member of the scientific board of the periodical Wissenschaft & Frieden.

His books include Pädagogik des Anderen. Bausteine für eine Friedenspädagogik in der Postmoderne (1999) and Hätten wir das Wort, wir bräuchten die Waffen nicht. Erziehung für eine Kultur des Friedens (2001). He is also co-editor of Education towards Intercultural Understanding. The European Youth Academy Handbook (2002).

aces is not an organization, it's a family at its finest, with fellows from all over Europe. It's about building bridges between apparently distant and different countries. I have found out that people from other countries are just like me. Today, aces is something our lyceum breathes with, a brand new beginning for our school community. The aces spirit has settled firmly in my heart and in the heart of each of its participants.

Cristina Guțu, student from Moldova

This experience has changed my life forever. The moments and memories I have lived there have made an impact on my life, and I will never forget them. I would like to share them with my fellow students and I would like to inspire them to make a decision to change their lives, to change their future.

Ivan Rossa, video team member from Croatia

The world changes when people change. If all aces participants have had some life changing moment or one that has opened their eyes for a problem or a solution to it, that means that the world has been changed a little bit for the better. This experience, for most of us I think, means that we have grown as people because of some difficulty we faced while trying to realize our projects, some strength we showed or achieved while facing real life.

Yordanka Dimova, student from Bulgaria



Michal Hvorecky

Hard times boost creativity

come from a family of teachers. Both my grandmother and my mother taught deaf children and those with impaired hearing, while my grandfather and father lectured in universities and wrote textbooks. Other relatives have taught German, music, biology and other subjects and specialized fields. In fact, I also teach, albeit a sporadic and very specific subject – writing because I believe that there is room for improvement also in this art form.

The older I get, the more I realize just how strongly pedagogues influenced me – having had my share of excellent and feeble ones alike. It was mostly those who quickly had to “retrain” after the Velvet Revolution who failed to cope with what it was they were supposed to be teaching. One professor at grammar school, for example, was lecturing on books that she clearly wasn’t even acquainted with – best of all I recall how she spoke about the conclusion of Kafka’s novel *The Trial* which, in reality, was never finished... Then there was another teacher that would read a lot and who knew exactly how to get her audience enthused about the work in question.

In recent years, I have been invited regularly to speak at secondary schools which I enjoy doing even though it is mostly unpaid. I see it, possibly naively, as my obligation – for most students I represent the only contact they have with contemporary literature throughout the four years they spend at high school. Almost everywhere the curriculum ends at 1945, with the other sixty-five rich literary years since then being left to the good will of the Slovak language teachers and the willingness of their pupils. I try to indoctrinate the students with the passion for reading contemporary novels and short stories, and the talented ones I encourage for creative writing.

Teachers’ Day on March 28 is now hardly commemorated by anyone here at all, and if it is, then it is reduced to pathetic statements by some deputy prime minister about “the knowledge, sacrifice and patience of the architects of human individuality”. It’s just as well that Slovak teachers are so self-sacrificing and have endless patience, or they would have gone on strike long ago. Teachers in most neighboring countries earn considerably more. Slovak teachers earn a third less than the average wage, which

means roughly 170 Euro less than the rest of the population, and even less than crane operators or metal workers. Even though their salaries were finally increased a little last year [Ed. in 2009], inflation took its chunk out of the total amount in the end. Salaries in state administration grew even in the face of the economic crisis ... When it comes to remuneration in Slovakia, priority is always given to soldiers and the police with the justification that they are our security forces. It is as if teachers represented no “force” at all. The lack of appreciation of tutors has gone on too long. In 2010, the starting salary of a university-educated teacher is 497 Euro. With this prospect, pedagogy graduates head anywhere but to the education system.

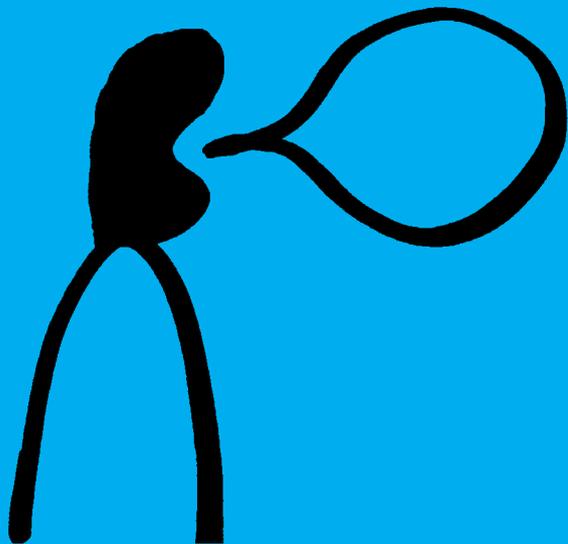
Even though the cost of living in Slovakia is on a par with that in Austria and Germany, for instance, hundreds of people in similar professions to mine, with a university education and work experience, have to make ends meet here with this income of 400 or 500 Euro a month – the likes of artists, thespians, poets, librarians, critics or literary translators. What’s more, creative people have to pay two percent more in taxes than the rest of the population, as they have to pay compulsory fees also to post-communist art funds. This is why I admire all the more the many artists and teachers who put so much creative energy into their work, in the face of such unfavourable conditions. Hard times are often inspirational times for creativity. I have spent several years abroad, had a few books published there and improved my command of at least two foreign languages. Many people in Germany have told me just to stay there, and I admit that I gave it some consideration. The fact is, though, I am at home in Bratislava and that is where I want to stay, even though there are no bursaries in Slovakia for creativity, or literature houses, or the kind of interest in culture so commonplace in more advanced countries. That’s why I am so glad the schools in my country are active participators in the aces project, which encourages pedagogic endeavours and inspires the pupils. The teachers do deserve proper recognition and acclaim for their achievements.

Even after thirty-five years of practise my mother is still teaching with passion. With shock in her voice she recently told me how the Ministry had called her school: The pupils were being compelled to go and welcome the Russian president at the Slavín War Memorial, a symbol of true socialism in the capital city on the Danube. I had to do the same as a child, every time the Soviet leaders visited Bratislava. Well, now even this is starting to be revived. In my country, we keep on learning till the end of our days.

Michal Hvorecky

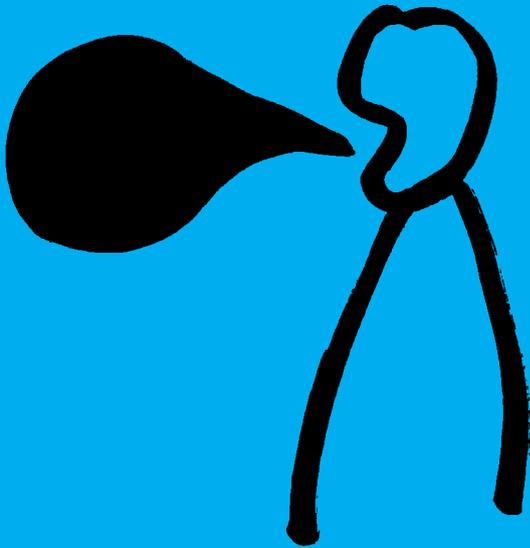
The fiction writer Michal Hvorecky was born in 1976 in Bratislava, Slovakia. He got his Master's Degree at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Hvorecky is the author of six books of fiction and one theatre play. His books – amongst them *Plyš*, *Eskorta* and *Dunaj v Americe* – have been translated into German, Polish, Italian, Bulgarian and Czech. His plays have been performed in Germany and Austria.

In 2004, he was fellow of the Writing Programme at the University of Iowa and in 2009 he won the International Journalism Award in Berlin.



Dialogue 2, 2008
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

Intercultural Dialogue





Desa Muck

Europe - Forever young

I am a writer, so I won't try to be a philosopher or give you wise advice, I will only tell you a story. Neither am I young anymore, not for a long time now, so I am full of memories like an old fur cap is full of dust. These memories filled me up and smothered me with nostalgia bringing me to the verge of tears all the time or making me smile like an annoying fool when I was attending the Academy of Central European Schools' competition in Vienna last year as a member of the jury. I am a little embarrassed to admit that I actually cried an old man's tears when I was looking at the projects of the young people. They were so creative, innovative, they radiated dedication to the subjects and freedom of the spirit demonstrating the great amount of work they put in the projects. But I was most touched by how group work connected the young people. Regardless of what nationality, culture or habits identified them, they became friends and some even fell in love.

In my days of following their socializing and youthful eagerness, I was thinking a lot of my youth. I lived in the period when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia. At those times our youth travelled around a lot. Since I did not have this opportunity, I quite envied them. Those were the times of hippies; crowds of young people were hitchhiking like nomads all over Europe with the main destination mainly being Afghanistan and India. Not many of them came here, to Ljubljana. Maybe this is why we considered them as some kind of stars. With them they brought a glimpse of a richer world where you could get everything that was not possible in our country at that time. We were not poor or hungry, but there were plenty of restrictions on imports from the western countries. We observed them sitting with their huge rucksacks in front of Figovec, a place in the centre of the city, where young people used to gather. They had long hair, and the air around them quivered with freedom. They smelled of adventures and I painfully wished to be one of them.

Whenever it was possible, we made contacts with them, invited them to our homes and listened to wonderful stories from their journeys. We asked them about everything, as though we ourselves just intended to set out on the road and imagined this would really happen. We bragged about

them in front of our friends and felt incredibly important to have met them. Those young travellers were the biggest trophies of our youth.

So, the greatest miracle for me was when I finally earned my own money and could afford some modest journeys. I absorbed every moment, every view with all my heart, so that I could live on my little inner treasure for a long time when I was back home. This is why I took pleasure in watching this relaxed celebration of youth and friendship, and this beauty of naturalness with which they socialised in Vienna. Despite the fact that the projects they carefully prepared were all incredibly interesting – you will not believe it, but I remember each of them – and I was amazed at their inventiveness and freshness, it was their friendship that most astonished me. And their partnership as well. And not even the competition could break the bonds they made.

I am grateful they let me be part of their youth.

Desa Muck

Desa Muck was born in Ljubljana in 1955 and is one of Slovenia's most versatile authors for children and young people. Her novels, textbooks and radio plays have received many awards and have been widely translated. Many of her books belong to the set texts for the children's reading competition "Bralna znacka"

Before Desa Muck made writing her main profession, she worked as a technical illustrator, a carer for mentally handicapped children, an actress and a presenter, and she published 150 "dime novels". She attracted a great deal of attention with the parallel publication of her two books for young people, *Pod milim nebom* and the good-humoured textbook *Blazno resno o seksu* (1999).

Since 1985, she has also been working in television and radio, has adapted Roald Dahl's *Mathilda* for the theatre. In 2000 she was the leading actress in the TV series *Bolnišnica na Robu*. The author lives in Mokronog with her three daughters.

Students have more connections, see the world from a different perspective, become open-minded, learn the skills and benefits of networking, understand how the world works around them. Parents appreciate the positive change in their children and their high motivation. Schools are better off when the stakeholders have positive attitudes towards alternative forms of educational activities.

A teacher who participated in an online survey on aces in 2010

You are really doing an extremely good thing, bringing all these people together and enabling them to encounter various different cultures, nations, and points of view and thus to pull down stereotypes, to become tolerant and to feel equal and equally important.

Milena Forštner, teacher and jury member from Slovenia

I have become more open-minded. Now I am able to find a solution more easily. I made a lot of friends around Europe and I found out that it does not matter where you are from. It is important to feel free to talk and tell your points of view. I was in different situations. I have realized that the world is not as "pink" as I thought it was. A lot of children who took part in the project this year discovered the joy of giving and the fact that only we can change the future of many people. Volunteering makes you a better person and this world needs this kind of people!

Catalina Maria Vlad, student from Romania and speaker at the aces Ceremony 2012



Fatos Kongoli

Where are
you from?

The event I want to tell you about happened about half a century ago, when I was a teenager in the sixth or seventh grade. I lived in a quarter of the Albanian capital where there was a football stadium and a nearby building that was unlike the others: It only housed foreign diplomats and their families. In front of the building was a field enclosed by a fence.

The field beyond the fence was usually deserted, except in the summer months during beach season, when it was lively. You could see many children playing there – boys and girls arriving for a holiday from various countries with their diplomat parents. We never mixed with them, nor did they mix with us. Sometimes they would play football on their side of the fence and we would play football on our side. One afternoon, our ball went over the fence. Fortunately, there were no foreign kids there so we drew lots to see who would go to the other side and get the ball. It turned out that I was the one to go.

I entered the foreign zone through a hole in the fence and, while I was trying to get the ball, a boy emerged from the building. We stood face to face and he smiled, and I smiled. He asked me if I understood at least some English and I confirmed that I did – yes, I understood some English. It was the first time that I had the chance to speak to a foreign boy of my age and use my knowledge of English from school, and I was delighted when a question just popped out of my mouth: “Where are you from?” He told me that he was Bulgarian and he told me his name – Georgi. To be polite, I also told him my name. Finally, as I was walking away, he suddenly made a proposal that took me a while to understand: to organise a football match between the kids from the foreigners’ building and the kids from our neighbourhood. I found myself in an awkward position as I was not sure whether my friends would accept it, but I did not want to lose face and I promised that I would talk to them and inform him soon about the date of the match.

I returned to the other side of the fence and told my friends about the proposal. At first, they were all thrilled and full of competitive spirit – until Fredi, one of the boys who played for the school team, said: “I cannot

promise anything now as I need to speak to my dad. If he lets me play with the foreign boys, then it's fine, but if he doesn't, I won't." Those words came like a cold shower and our initial euphoria faded. However, I was not aware of the problems I was creating for my father in my naïve attempt to organize this match with the foreign boys.

That evening, someone knocked on the door of our flat. I heard a quiet conversation and then my father's voice calling for me. Two police officers stood at the door. "What have you done?", my father asked, and I stood there feeling confused and shrugged my shoulders. He ordered me to get dressed and we accompanied the two police officers to the police station. They left us in a hall for a long time before taking us to a room where two people dressed in civilian clothes were waiting for us. In the meantime, my father tortured me with questions about what I had done and each time I would answer "nothing". It never occurred to me that this incident could in any way be related to my meeting with Georgi on the other side of the fence.

I cannot tell you how long we were in that room with those two people in civilian clothes. They were trying to find out what I had been talking about with the foreign boy, who else was there, whether I had met that boy or any of the other boys before and how I knew that he was Bulgarian - and they just looked at each other when I told them that I asked him in English: "Where are you from?". "Aha", one of them said. "Where are you from? ... Where are you from? ..." And then the gloomier of the two ordered me to leave the room, while my father remained behind.

When he finally emerged from the room, my father was pale. I never found out what they had told him. "If you want them to send me to jail, you go and practise your English with that Bulgarian boy, do you understand?", he told me as we went back home. His expression shocked me. "I understand", I answered quietly, although I certainly did not understand anything. I wanted to ask him what I had done, but I kept my mouth shut. I had to just listen to him and do what I was told - and never again meet with the boys from the foreigners' building; otherwise he would be suffering the consequences.

Fatos Kongoli

Fatos Kongoli was born in the central Albanian town of Elbasan in 1944 and grew up in Tirana. He studied Mathematics in Tirana and China and, after having graduated in 1967, worked as a mathematics teacher for two years. Subsequently, he wrote for the cultural magazine *Drita* and worked as an editor for the publishing house Naim Frashëri.

Fatos Kongoli is deemed to be a co-founder of the Albanian democracy movement but eventually gave up his political activities in favour of a career as a writer and translator. Since 1972, he regularly publishes novels in which he addresses the dead hand of communism, its surveillance machinery as well as the political and social upheavals which have followed since. Along with Ismail Kadare, Kongoli is the author read most in contemporary Albania and is deemed to be the most important chronicler of the transition from communism to democracy. An English translation of his novel *The Loser* was published in 2007.

Kongoli has received numerous distinctions for his work. He has been awarded the Albanian National Award for Literature several times (including for the best novel of the year and for his complete works). His novel *The Dream of Damokles* was awarded the Balkanika prize in 2003.



Zlata Filipović

Recognize

Peace is so precious. We don't know it, until we lose it. It is like health – we never fully appreciate how lucky we are to be healthy until a simple cold or a sore throat reminds us how good it was before we had it. I am a firm believer in never losing sight of the value and preciousness of peace, and doing our very best in preserving and maintaining it, doing our very best to avoid ever losing it – and if it ever arises, doing everything in our power to prevent conflict or resolve it as soon as possible. The longer the conflict lasts, the deeper it goes, and the more difficult it is to get out of it, to get back to peace.

I thought that wars happen to other people, much like we think disease and poverty happen to others. I thought it happens to people with names and lives different to my own. I distanced them as “different” because terrible things don't happen to me, to my family, to my city, my country. But in the 1990s Bosnia it all unfortunately happened to us. Uncalled for, innocent for its sudden and brutal arrival in my life, I learned the preciousness of peace, its fragility and the cruelty of war. And how being “me” was no immunity against experiencing conflict.

I am also a firm believer in the fact that the only way to truly fight war and conflict is through the heart and the stomach, through empathy and compassion. It is so illogical to resort to such a high scale of violence to resolve disputes and disagreement that it seems insufficient to just rationally argue against it. The only way to see “the other” and its point of view is to recognize oneself in the other. All of us around the world have very simple desires – to be safe, to prosper, to learn, to have friends and grow, to be surrounded by our families, to listen to music, eat well, have holidays, new shoes, cool T-shirts.

The trick is that all of us – whatever colour, nationality, ethnic or social group – have these same desires. The only way to resolve conflict is to get back to the basics – that we are all essentially the same, and that we all, essentially, want the same, very simple things.

It is only by being able to fully identify and empathize with “the other”, realizing that by denying the “other” the same desires and rights that we have feels the same as it would feel to be denied them ourselves – that we

can hope for more lasting solutions to preventing conflict and sustaining and maintaining our precious peace – in our homes, schools, communities, towns, countries, region.

I was inspired and delighted to see the work done at this year's aces Academy. To see young, creative, involved and enterprising people engage and work with each other. I quietly walked around them, listening to the languages and accents they had, like a little spy I plunged into their conversations and discoveries they made about each other through their collaborations. What stood out in my mind is hearing them all 'recognize' each other. While some media, politicians and historians high above would label them "different", perhaps even historically and politically at odds with each other, they themselves were astounded by how similar they were. Music, sports, friendships, love, family – they make sense to us all. That recognition – that the "other" does not exist, that the "other" is the same as ourselves, that the "other" is me – happened. The most valuable lesson had been learned, and then, on top of it, they came up with creative and inspiring solutions to collaborative and educational projects that dealt with environment (another precious thing we all share), minority and disability rights (another recognition of the "other") and many other relevant issues.

What a pleasure it had been to be surrounded by all that good will and energy, by all that potential. The fun, the kindness and generosity they expressed towards each other, the thirst for knowledge and desire to share are all elements that will not only help all the individuals grow into the best persons they can be – they will also have a collective effect on the development and growth of their schools, teachers, families, communities and countries. Motivated, hopeful, engaged and empowered, they are taking ownership of their own future and, with it, a more hopeful future for us all. I can only hope that each school in Central and Eastern Europe will have the privilege and luck in being involved in one of the future aces projects. By meeting and working together, the imagined boundaries between different people will be broken, and that hugely important *Recognition* will take place. And it is the key to a more hopeful future for us all – a healthy, peaceful and prosperous one.

Zlata Filipović

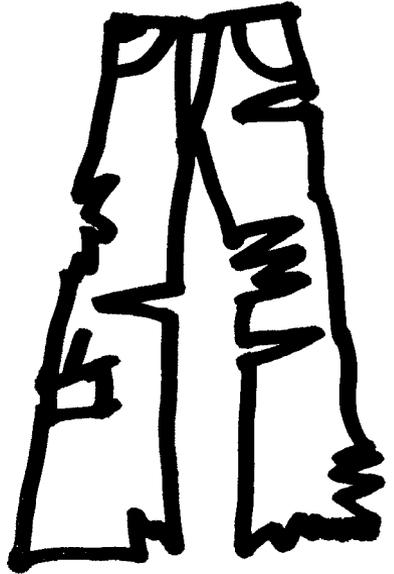
Zlata Filipović became renowned internationally when her teenage diary, published in 1993 and chronicling life in war-torn Sarajevo, was an instant bestseller. Published in editions by Viking and Puffin Books, it has since been translated into thirty-six languages. She holds a BA in Human Sciences from Oxford University (2001) and MPhil in International Peace Studies from Trinity College Dublin (2003). She has spoken extensively at schools and universities around the world about her experiences and has worked on many occasions with different organizations such as the Anne Frank House, UN and UNICEF, also being a three-time member of UNESCO Jury for Children's and Young People's Literature Prize for Tolerance.

Her written work includes contributions to several books and newspapers, including a foreword for *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1997) and the English translation of *Milosevic: The People's Tyrant* (2004), for which she has also written a foreword. More recently, she has written a contribution to the Prentice Hall Literature, The Penguin Edition: Grade 6 (2007) and has co-edited *Stolen Voices: Young People's War Diaries from WWI to Iraq* (2007) which has come out in eleven other countries. She held internship positions at the UN Children and Armed Conflict Division in New York and International Crisis Group Offices in Paris. She sits on the executive committee of Amnesty International Ireland and currently works for a documentary film production company in Ireland.

50 €

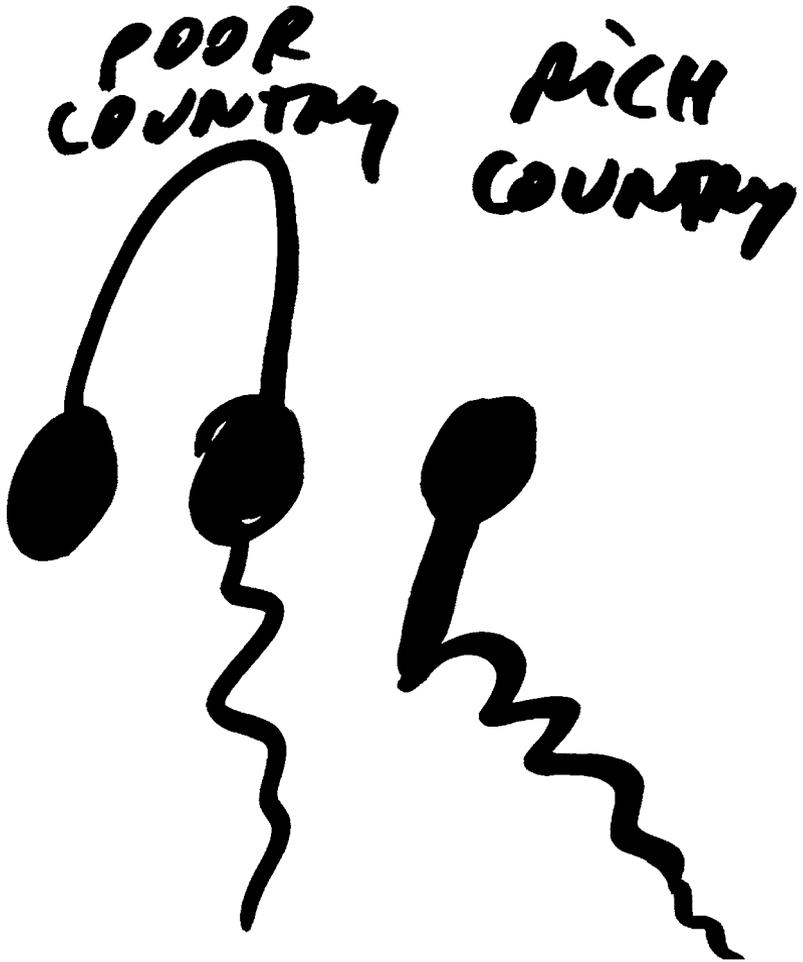


150 €



Jeans, 2003
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

Drawings on Intercultural Dialogue



Dialogue 4, 2005
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

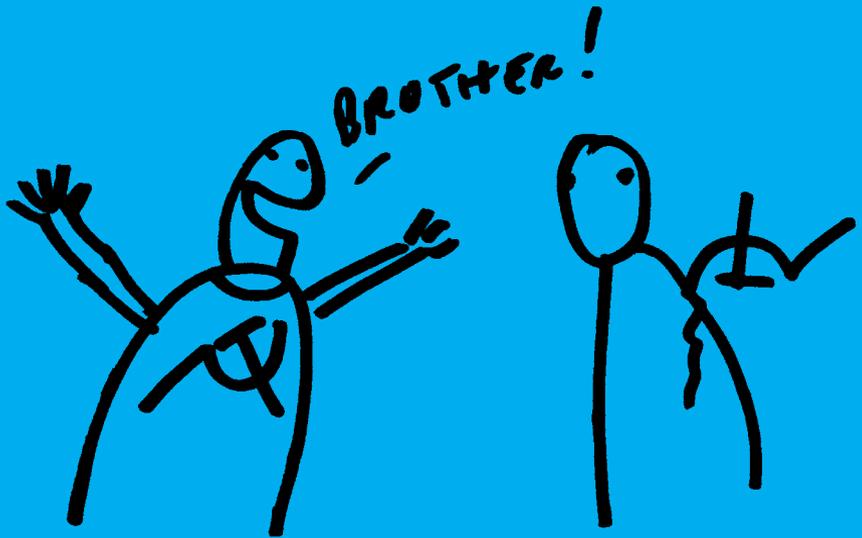


Dan Sorin Perjovschi

Dan Sorin Perjovschi was born in 1961 in Sibiu, Romania. He is a visual artist mixing drawing, cartoon and graffiti in artistic pieces drawn directly on the walls of the museums and contemporary spaces all over the world. His drawings comment on current political, social or cultural issues. He has played an active role in the development of the civil society in Romania through his editorial activity with Revista 22 cultural magazine in Bucharest and has stimulated exchange between the Romanian and international contemporary artistic scenes. He is currently living and working in Bucharest, Romania.

Dan Perjovschi had exhibitions in the United States of America, Portugal, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Switzerland, Sweden, Great Britain etc. Recent books of the artist are Postmodern Ex-Communist (2007), Non-Stop 1991-2006 (2006), Kunstraum – My World (2006), Naked Drawings (2005), I Draw – I Happy (2004).

For his work the artist has received several awards – amongst them the George Macinuas Prize 2004, the Henkel CEE Prize for Contemporary Drawing, Vienna 2002, and the “Gheorghe Ursu” Human Rights Foundation Award, Budapest 1999.



East Meets West, 2007
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

Active Citizenship



Vedrana Spajić-Vrkaš

Learning to be a participatory citizen – Why does it matter at all?

By the end of the 1990s, I was preparing research on how primary school pupils understand rights, democracy and citizenship. I drafted a questionnaire and, in order to check it, I asked a group of 4th graders who attended an elementary school in my neighbourhood to help me review the content. They accepted with great enthusiasm. In the next few days, we engaged in a fruitful discussion on the content of the questionnaire. It was a kind of mutual training through which we did not only come up with a valid research instrument but learned a lot from each other as well. A week later one of them came to me visibly enraged.

“Democracy sucks! Participation sucks!”, he said with tears in his eyes. “Is that so? Why? What happened?”

In a shaken voice he told me that, a day after we had finished our “work”, the pupils decided to “make their teacher practice democracy in their classroom”. The idea was to simulate the elections for the top governing positions in the country, and, in order to “make pressure on the teacher”, they agreed to enter their class next morning with protests, such as: “Democracy in school!”, “We want elections!”, “It’s our right to vote!”, “Our voice counts!”, and so on. The teacher (whom I had told about their assistance earlier) and their classmates accepted the idea and so the whole class “did democracy that day”.

“Well, that’s a great success! You should be proud of yourself!”, I interrupted him.

“There is nothing to be proud of! What you said is all wrong! Democracy is not fair!”

As I had no idea what went wrong I began to feel miserable myself. I tried to recall our discussion to find the clue but nothing helped me explain his reaction.

“Could you tell me the whole story? It might help to explore it together?”

“Well”, he went on, “we proposed to have ‘big’ elections: the president, prime minister, minister ‘for defence’, and minister ‘for police’, and the teacher added some other posts, too. The candidates were nominated and three of us were on the list. Then the teacher came up with the names of her favourites.”

“So who was the winner in the end?”, I asked.

“Guess who! The teacher’s favourites, of course!”

“You got no position?”

“No, the teacher said we would be the citizens only!”

“What’s wrong with the role of the citizen?”

“You are kidding me, right?”

“No, I am not. Don’t you remember our discussion: The power of the citizens comes from their rights; the power of the president and the ministers depends on how well they fulfill their duties towards the citizens.”

“Then why do the candidates make such a fuss to be elected? Isn’t it that the president and the ministers get rich after the elections while the citizens remain poor?”

“Well...”, I tried to explain but he ignored me. “Didn’t you tell us that voting is an important right of the citizen, that it is through it that citizens exercise their power? Why didn’t you tell us that once the citizens enjoy that right, they actually lose their power? It happened to us in our class the other day, didn’t it? What could I do as a citizen? Nothing! The whole day we were there to obey their orders! When we protested, they said we behaved undemocratically! And our teacher agreed! She said that democratic citizens were those with good manners! If that’s so why is participation so important? Are you sure you got it right?”

After more than a decade these questions are still glowing in my head and I still have doubts whether I “got it right”. I have conducted several studies in the same field with thousands of elementary and secondary school students and university graduates. A vast majority of my respondents is positive about democracy but only a few trust democratic institutions and political leaders. Many believe they understand how democracy works despite the fact that, as they declare, they do not learn much about it in schools, are little informed about political events and are lacking critically appropriate knowledge and skills. A great number also confirms that they are aware of the importance of their own active participation in the decision-making processes, but only few say they know how to engage in a dialogue, pro-

duce the arguments and defend their interests without fear, anger or withdrawal. Many readily answer that they are aware of their own responsibility for democratic development, but only a small number confirm their engagement in the activities that benefit their communities, either individually or as members of some local civil organization.

Democracy cannot survive and cannot be strengthened without the empowered citizen. To be empowered means to be informed, knowledgeable, active and responsible. Neither of these is possible without learning that prepares us for critical questioning of ourselves and the world around us, that makes us open for dialogue and sharing, and that makes us ready for active participation in transforming those ideas and practises that work against democratic society and its citizens. No one could and will do it for us. The supreme duty that we have as citizens is to engage in what we know is a better world for all. I do believe aces – Academy of Central European Schools has the power to help us all get it and do it right.

Vedrana Spajić-Vrkaš

Vedrana Spajić-Vrkaš is full professor (tenure) of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb as well as the founder and presently director of the Research and Training Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship of the same faculty. She holds courses in Educational Anthropology, Interculturalism and Education, Culture and Identity, Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship, European Education and Critical Theories of Education. She has held lectures and courses internationally and also contributed to the CIVITAS BiH & the Council of Europe teacher certification programme “Education for Democracy and Human Rights”. Ms Spajić-Vrkaš has also coordinated or participated in a number of research projects on a national and international level in her working fields. She is the co-author of the Croatian National Human Rights Education Programme, the European Peace Education Programme (EURED), the Council of Europe's publications in Education for Democratic Citizenship, the UNESCO and the Council of Europe's joint Tool on Quality Assurance in Education for Democratic Citizenship, and the author of some hundred academic papers and books.

Since 1997 her work has been closely related to the Council of Europe and UNESCO. As a regional expert in human rights, peace and democratic citizenship education she has participated in conferences and seminars in various countries.

She has received several awards for her work, including the Fulbright Grant for Teaching and Research for the University of California at Berkeley, the National Award “Ivan Filipović” for promoting educational theory and practice in Croatia and the European Circle of the European Movement - Croatia for “an extraordinary contribution to promoting European values in Croatia and the Croatian country in the world in the field of human rights”.



Hedvig Morvai-Horvat

Citizens for change

Don't mourn - organize!

Howard Zinn

 On December 19, 2009, the borders with “Europe” opened wide to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. A non-visa regime for the citizens of these countries to travel to the signatory states of the Schengen agreement had arrived.

Eight years earlier, the citizens of South-East Europe – gathered in a network of non-governmental organizations and local governances, connecting through cross-border initiatives and concrete cooperation projects in different areas – defined a campaign for abolishing visas. The young organized around youth activities, local administration officials involved in programmes for exchanging experiences, teachers and students in cooperation with schools in the region, artists in joint creation processes, journalists and students had all formulated a request for abolishing visas between the South-East European countries and the countries of the European Union. Petitions were signed, conferences were organized, expert meetings, seminars, counselling, art performances and analyses were carried out, reports and a book with stories from a queue for visas were published... The citizens of the region defined the problem in the context of their dissatisfaction caused by negative experiences, formulated requests, and actively participated in a regional campaign that lasted for years. A major political and security issue, the system of the visa regime became a subject of citizens’ activism.

Spring 1998. The Noise Spring Party in Novi Sad. A musical event organized by the Student Union during which a polystyrene wall was blown apart followed by the beating of 20 drums, dictating a rhythm for chanting requests to destroy the walls built around Serbia, both from within and from the outside. This marked the beginning of the idea to found a music festival by the students’ movement as part of the fight for change. As a students’ initiative, the EXIT festival originated in the year 2000. Today, it is the biggest music festival in South-East Europe and it was, in fact, started as a public call to resistance and a big “Get out to vote” campaign that gathered thousands of young people from Serbia, calling on them to vote in the forthcoming elections and to topple down the regime of Slobodan Milošević.

The changes came a few months later, on October 5, in a democratic people's revolution. Citizens' activism, people gathered in collectives around common interests with the aim of achieving positive social changes, using democratic means and led by a vision of humane relations, peace and liberty are common denominators in these two examples of major changes.

Civil initiative was a catalyst; however, it was never enough by itself for success in the liberalization of the visa regime. It served to raise awareness about the problem, for public advocacy and lobbying and, most importantly, to exert pressure on the authorities to deal with this problem with high priority. Apart from this efficient partnership of civil society and the authorities, this campaign had another crucial element, and that is regional inter-connection and cooperation of various social actors. The force of a joint message, the request to provide freedom of movement for the citizens in the region, was extraordinarily strong and focused. Surmounting the various obstacles – the state borders, the cultural differences, the historical misunderstandings and the post-war heritage – these common goals linked people, and it was confirmed that the time had come to create new platforms of cooperation based on common interests and using new communication strategies.

The young Hungarian art theorist Peter Fuchs said: “Star Wars means the same in all languages.”, referring to generation linkage that is perceived even more significantly in a digital era in which the young create a new common identity as members of the same generation exposed to similar influences of the globalized world. In this way, discovering compatibility and common experience, the young people of today interconnect much more easily and find a basis for interaction and cooperation.

In the course of its ten-year existence, the EXIT festival has developed, in a way, using an “open source” model, providing a vital platform for the participation of the young generations of the Balkans, promoting social accountability and activity. Preserving its strong social dimension, the festival represents a framework for artists, cultural workers, civil organizations and visitors in which, aside from their primary roles, everyone can also engage in other activities and different topics. The key words are choice and flexibility. In the same way as virtual systems such as “MySpace” and “Facebook” whose success is proportional to the flexibility of their interfaces and where everyone's virtual world is created in line with their personal wishes and needs, only models for activating young people that provide a freedom of choice and enable creativity are successful in demanding investment and effort.

There are enough examples which demonstrate the significance of active citizenship. The new challenges of the global world do not tolerate irresponsibility and apathy. The best way to overcome apathy is imagination. New, fresh, innovative, imaginative. We aspire to these adjectives in various areas of life, so let them be the characteristics of an approach to change our societies. Young people should make their contribution to face new challenges readily, in an open and modern way. Young people have an active role today, not tomorrow, in the creation of their future. And, the whole of society is responsible for providing them with a chance and to support them in this endeavour.

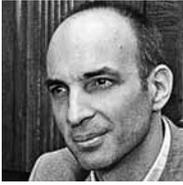
Hedvig Morvai-Horvat

Hedvig Morvai-Horvat is the executive director of the European Fund for the Balkans, an initiative of a number of European foundations including the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the ERSTE Foundation. The Fund is designed to help European foundations to become more actively involved in the Western Balkans and to prepare the countries of the region for their future in the EU.

Prior to this, she was director of the Citizens' Pact for South Eastern Europe, a regional initiative focused on cross border and regional cooperation of local communities and NGOs in SEE. She began her civil activism in 1997 as a founder and vice president of the Hungarian Student Association of Vojvodina. She was associated to various Serbian non-governmental organizations such as the Student Union of Serbia and the Novi Sad based Center for Multiculturalism, she coordinated the Carpathian Information Exchange Network AGORA, later the Novi Sad office of Partnership for Democratic Changes and was engaged in the EXIT Festival team.

She studied law in Novi Sad and Belgrade and followed numerous courses and alternative education programmes. She is an alumna of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence in the scope of the CoE Network of Schools for Political Studies.

Ms Morvai-Horvat is advisory board member of the Reconstruction Women's Fund, of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and member of the Epos Network. In 2006 she was awarded the Winning Freedom ("Osvajanje slobode") Award by the Belgrade-based Maja Maršičević-Tasić Foundation.



Filip Kovacević

Making the world a better place

Centuries ago, in the ancient Greece, a stranger asked the well-known philosopher Anaxagoras whether he kept in touch with his native city. He looked at the person for a moment and then slowly pointed his finger to the skies. "I care very much about what is going on up there" was his response. The stranger left puzzled. He did not understand what the great philosopher wanted to say. He could not understand how it could be the case that someone's native city was up there, in the skies. Later Anaxagoras explained to his students: "You see, I feel that this whole wide world, this whole universe full of wonders and surprises, is my native land. All that exists on this blue planet of ours is my true homeland. This is why I pointed to the skies. The skies unite us all into one community, no matter where we come from, what language we speak, what gods we worship, if any. We are all one, and that is how we should live."

In many ways I feel like Anaxagoras. I was born in this particular geographical area, but it could well have been any other. It was all a matter of accident, of certain decisions my parents made. Should I then make this accident into the primary feature of my identity? I think not. It would not be logical to build so much on such flimsy grounds. It would be like building a castle in the sand or a house of cards. The tide comes or the wind blows, and it is all gone. Is it not more logical to feel all humanity as one community, to believe that the true homeland is not any particular country which can be found on the map but all the countries and all the peoples?

I require only one condition to make me feel at home wherever I go. This condition is the spirit of inquiry and questioning, of courageous exploration and discovery. Where the critical spirit reigns, there I feel at home. This is so because the presence of the critical attitude with an eye to constant improvement makes any place into the place that cherishes the greatest universal values: equality, solidarity, tolerance, justice, beauty, and truth.

This should not be taken to mean that I look down on my place of birth as unworthy of passionate attachment and devotion. Quite the contrary. I am committed to making it better every day by being an active citizen, open-minded teacher, newspaper columnist, and political analyst. But I take care

not to privilege this emotion over the emotions I felt when the good people all over the world in the countries where I lived or visited for an extended period of time for instance in the USA, Russia, Brazil, France, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Belarus, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania – opened their homes to me and accepted me as a friend. I think that it is only from the standpoint of this kind of a cosmopolitan orientation that one can be truly committed to one's birthplace. I believe it is only the citizen du monde (the citizen of the world) who loves his or her native country with a love that is free of that curse of the weak-spirited and the aggressive – nationalism. Yes, nationalism is a great social and political scourge in Europe and beyond, and we need – the humanity needs – all caring teachers and scholars to begin to work together and develop their proposals for the setting up of a political system where hatred, prejudice, and bigotry will be eliminated from human existence. What needs to be accomplished is nothing less than a paradigm shift, a revolution of the mind which can set us all free to become what we are, because, in the final analysis, we are all we can be, we are our possibilities. And the possibilities of Eros, the life force that combines elements into bigger wholes, are, in my opinion, stronger than those of Thanatos, the destructive force of violence. Life with its joys, happiness and cheer must be helped to triumph over death with its brutality, desolation and misery.

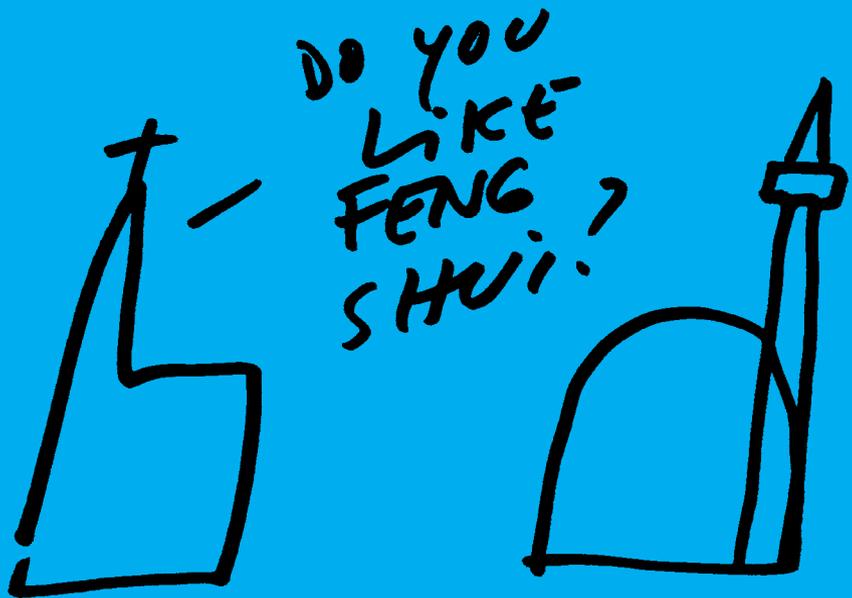
In order to do my part in that great scheme for a better life of all, I have chosen to become a teacher and a public intellectual. I took my cue from Socrates. His task, as Plato describes it in *The Apology*, was to “question, cross-examine and test everyone ... and if I [Socrates] think he does not possess virtue but only says so, I will show that he sets very little value on things most worthy, and sets more value on meaner things.” This virtue that Socrates talks about is what we would today call “excellence”. Excellence means doing the best one can, considering one's interests, care, and abilities in order to help others get to know universal things, things that bind us all together as human beings, as fellow citizens on this small, miraculous planet. I therefore consider it my task to assist whoever comes my way to attain that excellence, that state when the potential which the individual carries within himself or herself like a hidden seed blossoms and is realized to its fullest extent. This is no easy task, but I welcome its pleasures and its pains, its hopes and its disappointments, its successes and its failures. And I recommend to all others to pursue excellence in their own lives as well.

This is the only way we will make this world a better place for all.

Filip Kovacević

Filip Kovacević has been teaching political psychology and psychoanalytic theory at the University of Montenegro since 2005. He received his PhD in the US where he lived for more than a decade and later taught for two years at St. Petersburg State University in Russia. He has lectured on psychoanalytic social theory and contemporary philosophy in several European countries. He is an activist public intellectual, a columnist of the Montenegrin daily newspaper Vijesti and the independent weekly Monitor and a political analyst for the print and electronic media in Montenegro and beyond.

Filip Kovacević is the author of *Liberating Oedipus? Psychoanalysis as Critical Theory* (2007), *No Pasaran: Zbirka tekstova* (2010), *Lakan u Podgorici: Ciklus predavanja* (2010), *Markuze u Podgorici: Ciklus predavanja* (2012) and a number of articles published in international academic journals.



Feng-shui, 2005
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

Community Spirit



Iva Procházková

Hedda's morning

The cockadoodledo of the alarm clock. The daily astonishment that THAT was a dream, and THIS is reality. A reality that has surrounded Hedda for 17 years now. A reality called life.

She doesn't get up yet. She glances around a bit, retaking possession of her life so that after the five or six hours of sleep she can deal with it all again. The walls of her room are plastered with posters, photos of movie stars and rock musicians stick out of the mirror frame, on the desk an open textbook and a laptop with a school assignment on Human Relations that she struggled with until way past midnight. It had been difficult because she didn't know exactly what to write. She finally managed about two pages. Now she has to print it out and hand it in to Kaplan, otherwise she'll get an "F".

The buzzer sounds again, this time it's an angrier tone. Hedda asks herself whether she should wait another three minutes for the final stage when the alarm crows hysterically or perhaps just get up. She flings her legs out of the bed. At least she'll have time for everything. Yesterday she slept till the last ring, and the whole morning ended up as hectic and exhausting as a high hurdle race.

The apartment's empty, silent. Parents have already left for work. Hedda's in the kitchen and opens the refrigerator. A blast of orange juice right there on your palate and tongue: That's what waking up is all about! Unfortunately, there isn't much – two sips and the bottle's empty. When she grows up, she resolves, her fridge will always be full of orange juice. But I might not have enough time to drink it. I'll have to work and make money like all the rest of them. That's what life is probably like. Or is there something else to it?

In the bathroom brushing her teeth, she imagines herself in the role of a lawyer, a manager or maybe a consultant. She doesn't know yet which career she'll choose, whom she'll defend, whom she'll boss around or advise, but in any case she's going to be successful.

Still thinking about this as she powders her face (shiny as always) and applies her mascara. She tries not to blink. Wonders whether she would have it in her not to blink when defending a murderer, a thief or a mafia boss? At that moment it is difficult to imagine, but she guesses she'll get used to the bitter aftertaste of such encounters. She'd wash it down with orange juice. While putting on her shoes, she sees some money on the table underneath the coat rack along with a note: Buy a pizza. See you at supper. Love, Mom. Hedda sticks the bill into her pocket and picks up her freshly printed presentation on Human Relations – she'd better hand carry it so that it doesn't get all wrinkled up in her backpack, which is already stuffed. Before leaving, she looks at herself in the mirror. (Wow! No wedding gown, but in her new, white, hooded vest she does see a striking resemblance to Kate, the English "princess"), then she goes out into the hall, bangs the door shut, and scampers down the stairs.

They collected the garbage that morning, and the cans are still out on the sidewalk. She maneuvers her way around them and thinks how horribly boring it is to walk down the same street, get on the streetcar at the same stop, look at the faces of the same people going to work or to school reading the same newspapers, texting the same empty phrases (hey – what's up – not much – what about you – same same – ok - ttyl) and they all have the same dull ideas floating around in their heads. How can you get off this deadly merry-go-round?

Now just take a look at that gray-haired woman with the ugly, horn-rimmed glasses! Every morning Hedda sees her staring out of that secondfloor window and watering her geraniums. As if the world offered nothing more interesting than the brick wall across the street and those pathetic flowers that the pigeons poop on. Why doesn't she buy herself an elegant pair of glasses? Why doesn't she just fly off to the Canaries for a few days, or a weekend in Paris, or Venice, or Amsterdam, take a boat ride on the canals, visit some famous art galleries, have some ice cream in a romantic little café? Anything to make her life a bit interesting! She's leaning out the window as if there was something to see in this shabby street! Oh, great! Now, to top it all off, she's sprinkled water on Hedda ... damn it! And something's landed in her hood. She reaches up... she's got a little plastic watering can in her hand! No, this is not happening to me!

"Oh, dear! I'm terribly sorry, Miss." Hedda looks up. The gray-haired woman has a guilty look on her face, her voice quavers with regret. "I hope you aren't hurt."

No, nobody's hurt, the little plastic can's light, but her white vest is covered with nasty-looking stains that don't go well at all with her princess-Kate-look. And it isn't just water that she's splattered with, it's mud from the flower box. Hedda's angry. Why can't anything go right? You get dressed up a bit and somebody always has to ruin it for you! Just a little while ago, when she looked at herself in the mirror, she was in a good mood, now she's miserable. And all because this clumsy owl can't pay attention to what she's doing! To make things worse, she'll probably be late for school.

"Miss, would you be so kind as to bring that watering can back up to me?", the woman calls down from the window. "It's just the one flight of stairs to my flat."

If it's just a few steps, why don't you come down for the stupid watering can yourself, Hedda is about to snap back. But she doesn't want to get into an argument. Actually, she just feels sorry for herself and the predicament she's in. Her eyes are filling up with tears. She tries to hold them back, not wanting to smear her mascara. She walks up to the door thinking about what she should say to this atrocious beast. Tell her to be more careful in the future! Or just show her the damage she's done, spin around and leave. Yes, that's what she'll do - that'll make an impression!

She's reached the second floor. The door opposite her opens and there she ... sits. The gray-haired woman is in a wheelchair, and Hedda can't remember what audacious statement she had wanted to make.

"Thanks, that's very nice of you", says the gray-haired woman. "Let me take a look. Did I really drench you?"

Hedda hands her the watering can and the woman inspects the dirty stains on her vest. Her glasses are very thick and her eyes bulge out. They're full of compassion. She's obviously very sorry about what happened.

"Don't worry, we can clean that right off - it's some synthetic fabric and it won't stain at all", she says. "Come on in."

"Well, I'm late for school", Hedda objects but follows her down the dark hall into the kitchen. While the woman cleans off the worst spots with a sponge, Hedda glances around discreetly. It's a very simple kitchen, with all the pots and pans at a low level so they can be reached from her wheel-

chair. There's an empty breadbasket on the table.

"It all happened because I don't pay attention", the woman explains to Hedda. "While I'm watering the flowers, I keep an eye out for my neighbour. If I can catch her before she takes her son to kindergarten, she'll usually pick up some breakfast rolls for me, too. But sometimes she's in a rush."

"And when she's in a rush you don't have breakfast?", asks Hedda.

"Oh, yes I do. I cook myself some oatmeal", the woman says, smiling calmly at Hedda. "But that takes a little time – getting out the right pan, soaking the flakes in milk, lighting the oven, and stirring it – yes, that's the most important thing you don't want it to burn. And then not spilling the sugar, you know, I'm terribly butterfingereed."

She takes another careful look at Hedda's vest.

"It'll be all right when it dries, you'll see", she says. "You better get going, or you'll be late for school!"

But Hedda doesn't move. Suddenly she realizes that she can't just go off and leave this woman all by herself with that empty breadbasket.

"Wait a second, I'll be right back", she blurts out and rushes to the door. She takes the steps two at a time, stumbles and almost breaks her neck. But now she's outside. She doesn't run to catch the streetcar but goes back by the garbage cans to the little shop on the corner. Great, not too many customers there – the line's short. She buys a few rolls and, after a brief hesitation, takes two jelly doughnuts, too. Actually, it wouldn't really be much of a problem to stop here and pick up a few rolls every morning, Hedda thinks. She could get up after the clock's first crowing and leave the flat a few minutes earlier. That'd be enough.

When she finally gets on the streetcar it's a quarter to eight, and it's clear to her that she'll never make it to school on time. To make things even worse, she'll get an "F" from Kaplan because she forgot her report on Human Relations on the lady's kitchen table. Well, so what! There wasn't an original idea in the whole report anyway. Everything, all the thoughts and phrases, had been cut and pasted from the internet!

The streetcar is packed, and Hedda is there in her wet vest watching those very same faces that she sees every day, hearing the same trite phrases,

but she isn't bored. Flashing over and over in front of her eyes is the grateful smile of the gray-haired lady as she took the paper bag with the rolls, and Hedda can almost see her biting into the jelly doughnut, and how she'll enjoy the croissants tomorrow. She feels good. And when she glimpses her reflection in the streetcar window, she sees herself smiling.

Iva Procházková

Iva Procházková was born in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia, in 1953. She spent most of her childhood in Prague. After graduating from J. Neruda Grammar School, she could not go on to university for political reasons. She worked in various jobs, among others as a cleaner and a cook. In 1983, she emigrated to Austria with her husband, the film director Ivan Pokorný, and their children. She spent eleven years in exile first in Austria and then in Germany.

Her written work comprises plays and books, the latter mainly for children and young people, with some of them gaining substantial recognition. After returning to the Czech Republic in 1995, she began to work together with Czech publishers such as Melantrich, Albatros, Amulet, Mladá Fronta, Arscei and others. She has worked for the Czech TV and is currently devoting all of her time to writing. She now lives in Prague.



Irina Nechit

Being a volunteer in the Republic of Moldova or how we dodged the “subbotnik”

grew up under the Soviet regime, which is why the notion of “subbotnik” is familiar to me. Unavoidably, on Lenin’s birthday, on April 22, they organized in school, in the kolkhoz, in the village, in all of Moldova and in the whole Soviet Union the so-called “subbotniks”, which to me meant potholes of dust, piles of garbage, rusty pickaxes, gap-toothed rakes, blunt hoes, heavy barrows, spiky brooms and huge buckets of lime. We would get dirty from head to toes, we would hurt our hands, we would cover ourselves with bruises and scratches until we finished sweeping the school yard, cleaning the streets of the village, liming the trees and taking the garbage to the steep. All of these would have been more pleasant tasks if, since we were young, we had understood that we were working for our own well-being, as we were living in that particular village. But we were told by our teachers that we were working to honour Lenin, because he had commanded to do so.

Those more than 40 years of Communism destroyed the spirit of community in the republics of the former U.S.S.R. People would relate not one to another but directly to the state, a fact which completely distorted interpersonal relationships. During the Communist regime, citizens would set survival as their main goal, and thus, instead of helping their peers, people tried to merely survive. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we had to rediscover, from a different perspective, the sense of community, that of freedom and mutual respect. We had to learn how to help each other, to work selflessly for one another. It was only during the 1990s that I found out the fact that the activity of mutual help is also called volunteering. The movement of the volunteers in the Republic of Moldova began about 15 years ago with the foundation of the first NGOs. One of the most well-known figures in the domain of volunteering, Antonita Fonari, secretary of the National Council of NGOs, reckons that the most important achievement of herself and her colleagues was the passing of the Law of Volunteering (Law no. 121) in the Republic of Moldova by the Cabinet Council, on June 18, 2010.

Antonita Fonari, the initiator of some original and spectacular actions such as “The postmen of Chisinau”, “The zebra. Death on red”, “Non-smoking

underwear”, “Don’t drown your holidays in alcohol!”, “Let’s play with the hospitalized children”, states that the leaders of the political parties from the Alliance for European Integration, the coalition which has been governing since 2009, contributed to the passing of the law. They themselves took part in volunteering actions. For example, Marian Lupu, leader of the Democrat Party, president of the Parliament and president interim of the country, together with other members of the Parliament, enhanced the courtyard of the Center of Vocational Counselling for Young People with Disabilities. The vice-president of the Liberal Party, Corina Fusu, and the vice-president of the Parliament, Liliana Palihovici, baked pies for the children in the same institution.

“The responsibility for the environment in which you live must be cultivated within the family, from a very early age,” Antonita Fonari points out, telling us that her son and her four-year-old daughter have already participated in cleaning activities. They have gathered the rubbish from parks and they considered it entertaining. “Such activities strengthen the relationship between parents and children. My son and my daughter are very careful at home, they try to tidy up and collect their toy-cars and dolls in order to give them to children who do not have toys”, confessed Antonita Fonari.

It is time to mention one of the biggest volunteering actions in our country, organized in the spring of 2011 by the social movement “Go, Moldova!”. This movement registered a record number of participants, about 113.000 people, who cleaned the towns and the villages under the slogan “We want to live in a clean country!”. Nadejda Cebotari, a 19-year-old girl, recently graduated from the “Iulia Hasdeu” high school in Chisinau, a member of the group of initiators of the “Go, Moldova!” movement, told me that she had first heard the word “volunteer” when she was studying in the 6th grade. Ever since then, volunteering has been one of her constant concerns. Nadejda has succeeded in persuading several partners to join in the action “Go, Moldova!” which is similar to “Let’s Do It, Romania!” and other cleaning movements from 12 countries which started from the example of Estonia (“Let’s Do It, Estonia!”).

The National Day of Cleaning took place in the Republic of Moldova on April 16, and on the whole, during the period between April 16 and 23, the participants in the “Go, Moldova!” movement collected 6800 tons of garbage from the green spaces of 854 rural and urban areas. Hundreds of privately owned companies, state institutions and local public authorities

joined in this action. "Volunteering is expanding in the Republic of Moldova and it will continue to develop by undertaking European practises", Nadejda Cebotari thinks.

I have to admit, though, that the majority of the population still remains reserved when it comes to volunteering. The personal concerns of the common citizen prevail over the community activities. Concerned with earning their loaf of bread, having several jobs in order to scrape a living, people do not have the energy and wish to work for the benefit of the community. This is why in the Republic of Moldova the total number of volunteers is only twelve thousand, of which two thousand are hired by public institutions.

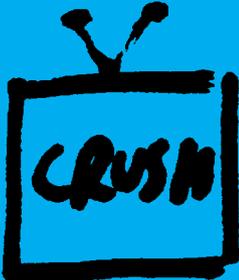
Nevertheless, there are changes occurring in the citizens' mentality. We are no longer forced to take part in the Leninist "subbotniks", but we have the freedom to choose the activities we enjoy. For instance, I planted trees in a big park in Chisinau last year together with my colleagues from the "Jurnal Trust Media", and I am glad to see that the trees grew roots and they are flourishing, forming a bowery alley on which I walk on sunny summer days.

Irina Nechit

The poet and playwright Irina Nechit was born in the Republic of Moldova in 1961. She is a member of the Moldovan Writers Union, the Romanian Writers Union and the International Association of Theatre Critics. She received the poetry award of the Moldovan Writers Union for the poetry books *The Cold Book* (1996) and *A Tired Future* (1999). Other published books include *The Claw* (poetry, 2003), *The Child from the Yellow Car* (poetry, 2010), *Godot, the Liberator* (theatre criticism, 1999; winner of the Theatre Critics Award of the Moldovan Theatrical Union), *The Monkey in the Bathroom* (plays, 2006).

The plays *The Lady-from-the Village-of the Dying-Flowers* (2006), *The Monkey in the Bathroom* (2006) and *The Corridor of Death* (2010) have been staged in Chisinau and Balti. The radio version of the play *Amethyst* was broadcast on the national public radio channel in 2011.

Irina Nechit has been participating in festivals, literary conventions and residences in Romania, France, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Italy, Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania etc. She is the coordinator of the culture section of the national newspaper *Jurnal de Chisinau* and coordinator of the contemporary drama workshop at the National Theatre in Chisinau.



HAVE A NICE DAY!

A nice day, 2001
Dan Perjovschi
Courtesy of the Artist

New Realities



Vladimir Zarev

The Internet as provocation

Human consciousness is built to make us sensitive to the unknown - it fills us with anxiety and dread, we fear it. The unknown is always aggressive, it swoops down on us, sweeping away our previous human experiences and filling us with a deep uneasiness, with uncertainty about the future. A child instinctively fears the dark because it cannot see clearly into its depths; an adult fears death because he does not know what lies beyond it. Communication is one way of overcoming uncertainty - sharing our thoughts with others seems to "open up" or uncover the world before us, making it more recognizable and predictable. There is yet another powerful motive that magnetically urges us towards communication: human otherness, our difference from all other human beings. If we stop to think about it, we can see that difference is a form of freedom - this is why the madman is fully free to the point of blamelessness, while the dead man is absolutely free. It is precisely the others' unusualness, the spiritual and mental uniqueness of those around us, their sense of difference and freedom, which attracts us. This sharing and experiencing of otherness is part of our own desire to achieve difference, thus it becomes part of our own personal freedom as well. Such sharing is one of the greatest instincts making us conscious and creative beings.

In this respect, modern man is unbelievably rich and privileged. We live in the Internet age. Besides being a gigantic storehouse of knowledge, the Internet is also a new reality. The Internet makes the world small and visible at a glance, it shortens the distances between people, via Skype or Facebook they can communicate instantaneously with one another and with knowledge itself, no matter where on earth they are located. The Internet is one of human reason's great achievements. Yet, at the same time, it is also a sword hanging over reason itself, one whose destructive potential we have not yet fully recognized but whose significance can be compared to the damage our greed has inflicted on the environment. The Internet is fast becoming the most enormous receptacle of knowledge ever created. However, the point of every true library is not just to collect and preserve knowledge but also to sift through it, to select and to reject that which stems from immorality or the basest human instincts. Secondly, since everyone can add something of their own to the Internet, the knowl-

edge it contains is not only random but also necessarily chaotic, devoid of any spirituality which could provide internal organization, since it lacks a teacher! Buddha, Aristotle and Plato, Jesus of Nazareth, Newton, Einstein, Goethe, Dostoyevsky are all great teachers. A teacher strives to give knowledge meaning, to breathe life into knowledge by tying it to faith or by attempting to expand it into an idea that reveals the laws of Being and the Universe. Thirdly, a huge portion of the knowledge on the Internet is “shallow” – it superficially informs us but does not provide emotional experience, it does not engage our deepest intellect and emotions, it does not lead to a spiritual adventure. And most importantly, as overblown as it may sound, the Internet duplicates, or worse yet, replaces the “collective unconscious” (à la Jung!) that has built up layer by layer over the centuries. In and of itself, the Internet will likely become humanity’s new “subconscious”, replacing the deepest levels of intuition, as well as the magic and freedom of being, with information. This shapeless information monster eats away at the “collective unconscious” like acid, eroding it and leaving amorphousness and chaos in its place. In this way, the Internet also encroaches on the sacred. With its soullessness it seems to desecrate the dream of the Universe, prophesying a sham, virtual world of lies; it unwittingly becomes a heresy, one which is already swarming humanity and striving not only to renounce, but to replace God! I hope I will be understood correctly. The Internet exists and is indeed one of human reason’s most significant achievements, it is beyond useful and is already crucially necessary. Yet its chaoticity must be imbued with meaning and brought under control, its aggressiveness as an ever-growing “dump” must be tamed, otherwise the Internet will gradually take over our lives and – more dangerous still – will replace them. This is a problem for the generation coming after me, for young people, for those who will have to choose between the difference (freedom!) that their unique life offers and an artificial, infinite, yet soulless and repetitive virtual world!

Vladimir Zarev

Vladimir Zarev was born in Sofia in 1947. To date, Zarev is the author of nine novels and several volumes of stories and non-fiction books. He is editor-in-chief of the magazine *Sawremennik* [Contemporary] which he preserved from closure during the 1990s. Zarev studied Bulgarian Philology at the University of Sofia and made his debut in 1972 with *Riot of Emotions*. In 1978, he set a milestone in the development of Bulgarian literature with his novel *Bitieto* [Genesis] which he eventually expanded to a trilogy.

Zarev was the first person who processed the shock of the “Wende” in two great novels – not only by employing vivid descriptions of the most important themes of the mental, social and economic transition but also the altered literary language. The first of these novels, *Rasrucha* [Decay], was published in Sofia in 2003; the second one, *Swetow* [Worlds], in 2005. *Decay* was also regarded in the German-speaking countries as THE novel of the Bulgarian - even the East European - political transition.



ERSTE Stiftung



VČELÍ DOM

ERSTE Foundation

In 2003, ERSTE Foundation evolved out of the Erste Oesterreichische Spar-Casse, the first Austrian savings bank. ERSTE Foundation is the main shareholder of Erste Group and it invests part of its dividends in the development of societies in Austria and Central and South Eastern Europe. The Foundation supports social participation and civil-society engagement; it aims to bring people together and disseminate knowledge of the recent history of a region that has been undergoing dramatic changes since 1989. As an active foundation, it develops its own projects within the framework of three programmes: Social Development, Culture and Europe. Further information: www.erstestiftung.org

Interkulturelles Zentrum

Interkulturelles Zentrum (IZ) is an independent non-profit organization based in Vienna, Austria. Since 1987 IZ has been supporting international school partnerships, cross-border cooperation in the field of education, international youth work as well as intercultural education and diversity management in Austria and abroad. Notable projects such as aces or YouthNET promote the intercultural dialogue and cooperation of countries of the European Union with countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Since 2007 IZ has been hosting the National Agency for the EU programme Youth in Action. The organization is led by a full-time management team and a honorary board of directors made up of experts. Further information: www.iz.or.at

VČELÍ DOM

VČELÍ DOM is a non-profit civic association established in 2009 in Bratislava with the aim to support and develop initiatives which help society to meet the challenges of a new and united Europe. The association plays an active role in unveiling existing resources and creating new ones that can help stimulate cultural and social life in the Slovak Republic, and in other countries, especially in Central and South Eastern Europe. The effort of VČELÍ DOM is concentrated on the development of strategies, creation of platforms, support and organization of projects for the common good in Slovakia and abroad. The strengthening of civil society and the dialogue within Europe is an important goal of the association. Further information: www.vcelidom.sk

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