



## Eurozine Review

### So what's our problem?

*Hungarian Quarterly* divines the future of the forint; *Index on Censorship* gives libel law a bad press; *Samtiden* doubts whether Norwegian police women are any freer with the hijab; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) applies the belt to Europe's cordon sanitaire; *Mittelweg 36* sees solidarity outgrow the nation; *Roots* says yes to Europe, but not at any cost; *Kulturos barai* does not dismiss the idea of a new Lithuanian Grand Duchy; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) calls the European elections a farce; *Rili* wants to keep the market out of universities; and *Fronesis* explains what 2°C means in an expertocracy.

### The Hungarian Quarterly 194 (2009)



Despite the horror–stories circulating in the world press, Hungary's budget deficit at 3 per cent of GDP and its public debt at just above 70 per cent do not fare too badly in a global comparison. "So what's our problem?", asks [Zoltán Farkas](#) in *The Hungarian Quarterly*.

Hungary's economic bubble — caused by the highest rate of welfare spending in the region, public subsidized mortgage–lending at below market rates, and soaring consumer debt, much of it in foreign currency generously lent by "parent banks" — burst in 2006. "In the three years since," writes Farkas, "the government has pared the budget deficit by 7 per cent of GDP, carrying with it a drastic decline in wages and income. As a consequence of austerity measures, economic growth slowed from 4 per cent to 1 per cent. This is when the crisis hit."

"Since October 2008, stock market investors have been leaving in droves, the government bond market has dried up, bank lending has come to a halt and foreign direct investments have run aground", laments Farkas. "There hasn't been any demand for forints — either stocks or bonds — for months." Under the guidance of the new economics minister, Gordon Bajnai, the price of the forint has been increasing gradually. "But confidence will return only if the bubble in default–prone Hungary, blown up partly by the international financial world, is burst once and for all."

**Ferenc Puskás:** Film director Tamás Almási talks about his new film *Puskás*, going into detail about the late great footballer's treatment by his native country after being shut out in 1956. "They virtually air–brushed him out of the national consciousness; they simply ignored his existence when he was at his peak. Then they very deliberately distorted news about him. [...] In the 1980s and 1990s, all those who had betrayed him and hated him began licking

his boots. They started using him in really cheap marketing for just about anything. It's a wonder he wasn't asked to do bras as well."

The full [table of contents](#) of *The Hungarian Quarterly* 194 (2009)

### Index on Censorship 2/2009



On 26 March 2009, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution condemning "defamation of religions" as a human rights violation, despite concerns that it could be used to justify curbs on free speech. The text of the resolution, proposed by Pakistan on behalf of the Islamic states, is the latest in a series of resolutions promoted by the Organization of the Islamic Conference passed since 1999.

What makes this year's resolution different, [writes](#) the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media [Miklós Haraszti](#) in *Index on Censorship*, is that it "no longer ignores Article 19, the right to free expression. That crucial human right has now received a mention, albeit in a context which misleadingly equates defamation of religions with incitement to hatred and violence against religious people, and on that basis denies it the protection of free speech."

By adopting the language of human rights so that the proposal sounds compatible with the advanced multiculturalism of liberal democracies, writes Haraszti, the resolution "cements oppressive governments' control of speech through cultural taboos and blasphemy laws, and at the same time glorifies and internationally acknowledges them in the vanguard of promoting tolerance."

**Civil libel:** While defamation legislation provides a cover for policing dissent, civil libel laws are also exercising a chill on free speech, writes *Index* editor Jo Glanville. First amendment lawyer Floyd Abram details how plaintiff-friendly UK libel laws encourage "libel tourists" to sue in the UK, knowing that their case would not stand up in a US court. And Lawrence McNamara discusses the precise nature of "reputation" — the thing that libel laws supposedly protect. He concludes that defenders of free speech should be spurred to outrage "not only when those laws are abused, but when they are structured in such a way that allows for abuse."

**20 years Tiananmen:** Wang Dan, a leading figure of the Tiananmen protests, talks to writer Xinran about the bloody crackdown and its aftermath; and the poet Liu Hongbin describes his failed attempts to return to China after being exiled in 1989.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Index on Censorship* 2/2009

### Samtiden 2/2009



"Many of us who had our political awakening in the radical '70s have problems with religious symbols in the public domain," write Tordis Borchgrevink and Grete Brochmann in *Samtiden*. "The 1970s was a decade of political radicalization, when women's lib and the critique of traditions — including confronting the oppressive religious regulations of Lutheran Norway — shaped a new generation." When the new

immigrants arrived, that very generation were the first to defend their cultural rights. But the stark contrast between the different sets of values proved problematic. "Just as we thought the patriarchy was about to be given the final push and what we considered religious irrationality was on its way out, our standards were reversed." For Borchgrevink and Brochmann this reversal was epitomized in the demand at the beginning of 2009 that Muslim women working in the police force should be able to wear the *hijab* with the uniform.

Seen in a slightly wider perspective, wonder Borchgrevink and Brochmann, does the *hijab* contribute to equality? "Which *hijab* is worn by choice, and which is not? We can't see the difference; can Muslim women? How do emancipated *hijab*-wearing Muslim women relate to the oppression of young women in their own religious society? A recurring question is this: what type of theological substance does a *hijab* signalise? Another: who dictates this content? These questions are not inconsequential since Islam is a religion that does not distinguish between religion and law. If Shari'a law indicates that women's civilian legal position is incompatible with the principle of equal rights for men and women, then the principle of freedom of religion is as much a problem as a solution."

**Multiculturalism:** Aslak Nore's impressions of an Oslo that has an ever-increasing immigrant population; Ali Esbati on the debate around integration and "hidden Islamization"; and Jens-Martin Eriksen and Frederik Stjernfelt on [culture as political ideology](#).

The full [table of contents](#) of *Samtiden* 2/2009

### Le Monde diplomatique (Berlin) 6/2009



In *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) [Charlotte Wiedemann](#) argues, that "freedom of movement and mobility in Africa is the last thing Europe wants". Although the EU cannot keep people from sticking to their West African traditions of mobility, member-states apply every possible means to achieve their aim: to prevent Africans from entering the EU.

These means are varied and well thought out, writes Wiedemann; one is the "mechanism of subtle extortion" of African states like Senegal or Benin, granting them development aid in exchange for cooperation against migratory movements. The North-African Arabian states Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya have been converted into Europe's *cordon sanitaire* and their security forces left to deal with prospective migrants to the EU: "The offshore solution of the European fight against migration is being paid for with severe human rights violations."

**No post-racist democracy:** In an analysis of South Africa after the recent parliamentary and presidential elections, [Achille Mbembe](#) concludes that the post-apartheid state could not be further from establishing an "ideal post-racist democracy": With Jacob Zuma, South Africa is led by a "lumpen radical" who, in order to maintain the ANC's moral and political monopoly, instrumentalises the misery of wide parts of the population instead of fighting poverty, the lack of education, and unemployment.

**Also:** In the foreword to a new biography, [Dietmar Dath](#) celebrates the Marxist and anti-militarist Rosa Luxemburg.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) 6/2009

### Mittelweg 36 6/2009



In a focus on "European society", [Theresa Wobbe](#) points out that it was not only in the nineteenth century that sociology was oriented towards a nationally defined notion of society, but in the second half of the twentieth as well. Georg Simmel's concept of "society as unity of the diversity of forms and degrees of sociality" — for a long time widely ignored — opens up a non-national, structural perspective on society for the first time. What is the structure of the sociality of the EU, asks Wobbe, and what are the social forms that allow for a self-stabilization of this system?

In contrast to the nation-building model of political inclusion, Wobbe argues that market-building by the European Union results in a model of inclusion that works primarily within an economic framework. The core principles of freedom of movement and non-discrimination, already established by early EU-precursors in the 1950s, aim at abolishing obstacles inherent in citizenship; they eventually lead to the freedom of establishment, the decoupling of citizenship and social welfare and, most recently, the active and passive voting right in European and local elections for non-national EU-citizens.

"From a sociological point of view, the European integration process signifies a structural change of forms of sociality, where national arrangements of solidarity and inclusion are opened up to supranational and global forms of involvement."

**Inequality regime:** Steffen Mau, on the other hand, detects a tendency to ignore transnational inequality in the EU. He identifies new groups that are part of the European inequality regime — among them European Union elites, transmigrants (very mobile labour migrants) and transfer groups. New dimensions of structuring such as the marketization and regionalization of inequality might ultimately lead to conflict.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Mittelweg 36* 6/2009

### Roots 29–30 (2009)



Throughout modern history, European powers have "alienated Macedonia from itself", writes Valentina Mironska-Hristovska in *Roots*, "in the sense of the Greek word *ana tomia* — the removal of body parts, organs and tissues." Nationalism, with its myth of the continuity of nations, began with the German and Russian empires of the nineteenth century and spread to the smaller countries of the Balkans, she notes. Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek claims to Macedonian territory hindered the formation of a "Balkan Federation" at the end of the nineteenth century that might have prevented "balkanization" and the outbreak of the First Balkan War. From that moment on, Macedonia entered into an "80-year sleep" from which the country has just emerged.

Yet, where the European forces used to divide and colonize, they are now

"posing conditions for unity, respect for human and minority rights, unification and globalization. [...] Macedonia has yet another criterion to fulfil, the one which emerges from history, from the improperly solved 'Macedonian question'." Europe

seems ready to accept Macedonia into its family, writes Mironska–Hristovska, but "under the conditions and declarations of the New Age: the complete discontinuation with tradition. [...] Accepting the ideology of the New Age means eradicating one's civilizational roots."

"Once again, we ask whether Macedonia belongs to Europe. The answer is yes: it had its own empire in the distant antique past; it accepted multicultural living ever since the beginning of the new era; it was the founder of the Slavic literacy; its artistic achievements radiated all over the world; it never wanted what did not belong to it. Yes, Macedonia has always accepted the ideas of freedom and equality, of federation and union, as opposed to nationalism and balkanization."

**Also:** In a short story by Tomislav Osmanli, a Bulgarian official implementing the *Endlösung* in Skopje has a nervous breakdown when his wife leaves him for another man; and Jerry Coyne, Steve Jones, James Randerson and John von Wyhe tell what they would like to say to Darwin around the dinner table.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Roots* 29–30 (2009)

### Kultūros barai 6/2009



*Kultūros barai* continues to publish texts resulting from the Eurozine conference "European histories", held last month in Vilnius. The [May issue](#) included the [opening address](#) by the outgoing president of the Republic of Lithuania, [Valdas Adamkus](#), while the June issue contains a full [summary](#) of the conference as well as [Martin M. Simecka's](#) call for a rethinking of the recent past. The dissident generation of the 1970s and 1980s produced a body of work unprecedented in Czech history, [writes](#) Simecka. Yet it is precisely the monumentality of this legacy that prevents the interpretation of the communist past going beyond self–diagnosis:

"I believe that the only way the past can be properly interpreted is from the uncompromising vantage point of democratic ideals of freedom. And the only ones who have the wherewithal to do this and who can do it legitimately, because they are not linked to the past, are those who belong to the younger generation."

**Imperial dreams?** The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was once the largest state in Europe. In the fifteenth century it covered the territory of present–day Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Transnistria and parts of Poland and Russia. That was then. And now is now. Or is it? Recently, Gintaras Beresnevicius, a Lithuanian historian of religion, came up with the idea of reviving the Grand Duchy. Commenting on this rather unexpected proposal, Virginijus Savukynas admits that the idea might seem utopian, but then again, so are most ideas when they are first presented:

"Did anyone even dream of an independent Lithuanian state at the beginning of the nineteenth century? Those who were interested in Lithuanian antiques were mocked by the educated 'elite' of that time. But it was exactly these supposedly marginal people who founded the modern Lithuanian nation

and state."

The idea of "reviving a colourful historical region actually looks more and more realistic", concludes Savukynas.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Kulturos barai* 6/2009

### Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 6/2009



"Imagine an election where the results are largely preordained and a number of candidates are widely recognized as unqualified. Any supposedly democratic ballot conducted in this way would be considered a farce'. Former Czech president Vaclav Havel had the UN Human Rights Council in mind, not the European parliament, when he made these scathing comments," writes Serge Halimi in the Norwegian edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*. But as the EU's powers have increased, so also has abstention from voting. The elections in each country were dominated by a focus on national issues with little or no attention paid to other countries, and there is no real continental–political unity. "Which Slovene has any insight into the Swedish election debates, and what German keeps up with Bulgarian politics?" asks Halimi. The lack of interest in what happens elsewhere has led to apathy among the voters.

**Recession results:** Mathilde Goanec has visited Kherson, an industrial city in Ukraine, as part of a series of articles in *Le Monde diplomatique* that explore the impact of the financial crisis on the average European, Asian, African, North– and South–American city. Kherson illustrates the general news image of mass redundancies, unpaid wages and dramatic drops in demand.

In interview, one of the workers at KhersonMarsh, a producer of farm machinery, describes how in the old communist cities, the factory was the heart in the social life. "At the weekends, we went swimming in the river together with our workmates, we visited the factory motel by the Black Sea, [...] we even had our own medical facilities. What are we to do if the factory disappears?"

**Also:** [Mike Davis](#) on the swine flu as proof that agricultural companies have tampered with the basic laws of nature; and Philippe Person on whether or not Clint Eastwood actually deserves all that praise.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) 6/2009

### Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées 5–6/2009



Protesters opposing planned reforms to higher education have brought French universities to a halt for much of 2009. As striking academics tell Antonella Corsani, the reforms (or "modernizations", as their proponents describe them) are in fact an ideologically–driven push to "strip universities of their intellectual independence and to make them economically and financially dependent".

The introduction of "the market" into higher education lies at the core of these reforms. But since a genuine market would not be able to operate in institutions dedicated to producing the "public good" of knowledge, an artificial market must be constructed "creating the conditions for 'rational' behaviour where they do not exist naturally". The market thus comes to mean not just corporate influence on education, but also self-interest on the part of academics.

Supposedly giving greater autonomy to universities, all the reforms will do is concentrate power among administrative elites, excluding most academics from decision-making. Much of the reform impetus comes from European institutions and is part of the Bologna process. Though being resisted from Germany to Greece, it is in France that the opposition to Bologna has been most determined.

**No man's language:** The original lingua franca was a mix of Italian, Catalan, Spanish, French and Portuguese, enabling communication among the Mediterranean communities between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to a new book by Jocelyne Dakhli. Caroline Douki finds the language to have been something more than a pidgin but without the status of a developed literary language. Sometimes the object of utopian idealism, it is reminiscent of Esperanto and other more recent attempts to create artificial languages.

**Anarchists:** Historian Benedict Anderson's book *Under Three Flags* examines the vast network of nineteenth-century anarchists who maintained contact by telegraph and shipboard travel. It is an erudite and informative work, according to Pierre Rousset, but perhaps one too enamoured of its subjects. The international anarchists were a small elite, sometimes with closer connections to their foreign companions than within their own countries. For all their fervour, long-lasting effects of the movement are hard to find.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées* 5-6/2009

### Fronesis 29-30 (2009)



Introducing an issue of *Fronesis* on "Democracy and expertocracy", [Mikael Carleheden](#) writes: "The idea of living in a society characterized by freedom and democracy undoubtedly plays a crucial role for westerners' political self-perception." Nevertheless, "the crisis of democracy" is becoming ever more topical, while politics is increasingly dependent on expert advice. But what *is* democracy and who

*are* the experts?

Summarizing the discussion of these questions contained in the issue, Carleheden stresses that "complexity is one of the most important structural conditions of the modern society. [...] Political complexity is neither about the distribution of material resources, nor the fight for recognition, but about the political role of the knowing." People are increasingly becoming differentiated into experts and laymen, Carleheden notes; the "layman's relation to an expert system rests upon 'trust' rather than knowledge". How does this influence democracy?

**2°C:** Åsa Knaggård highlights a specific example: experts in climate policy. National laws and international conventions need to be based on the long-term perspective while planning short-term action. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change claims that "a dangerous human influence on the climate system" must be avoided. But is it politicians or experts who decide what is dangerous, to whom, and when? The 2°C of maximally tolerable global warming (compared to the pre-industrial temperature) have proven to be a useful "boundary object" that enables laymen, experts and politicians to create a common denominator and basis for mutual understanding of their respective insights and concerns.

**Also:** Birgitta Niklasson and Mikael Eriksson on "the right to take wrong decisions" as a fundamental democratic right.

The full [table of contents](#) of *Fronesis* 29–30 (2009)

The Eurozine review is published with the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union and Allianz Kulturstiftung.

---

Published 2009-06-24  
Original in English  
© Eurozine