



Eurozine Review

The election campaign that wasn't

Blätter despairs of an election campaign devoid of content; *Varlik* hears opinions on the AKP's "Kurdish move"; *Arena* warns Sweden against the Danish trap of xenophobia; *Osteuropa* draws lessons from the Czech EU debacle; *Critique & Humanism* revisits the Batak controversy; *Passage* reads Derrida after Derrida; *Akadeemia* argues medical ethics is not just about morals; and *Mittelweg 36* says heroes are not as selfless as we like to think.

Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 9/2009



In *Blätter*, [Albrecht von Lucke](#) calls the run-up to this month's federal elections in Germany (27 September) the "election campaign that wasn't". "Whether the Christian Democrats and the Liberals are indeed able to form a coalition, or whether (in the absence of other workable constellations) it ends up in a repeat of the grand coalition, it's hardly likely there will be any real surprises. What's already certain is that fundamental and necessary changes in social and economic policy won't take place."

Has the economic crisis prompted a rethink of the free-market policies of the past decade? Not in the least, writes von Lucke: camouflaged behind the surface of "politainment", the CDU and liberal FDP are promising the same neoliberal tax cuts that were among the causes of the financial crisis in the first place. Tax cuts will require VAT increases, but the last time the CDU announced burdens in an election manifesto (2005) it cost them votes. This time around — in the spirit of Adenauer's successful election campaign slogan of 1957 "no experiments" — they are avoiding any mention of concrete policy.

"And for good reasons", says von Lucke. "If it became known what effects the tax policy of the CDU and FDP will have, they would probably lose the elections again. Because what would the consequences be for the mass public and in particular for the unemployed and socially vulnerable, whose number will increase next year as a result of the crisis? Radical cuts in tax rates lead to lower tax revenues and thus to a state that is even more indebted and hand-tied. This is something only the wealthy can afford, those able to do without social benefits entirely."

Democratic deficit: Jens G. Reich, co-founder of the Neues Forum, the grass roots movement that emerged as the voice of the 1989 revolution in the GDR, regrets the failure after reunification to take advantage of the constitutionally guaranteed right to direct democracy: "We grumble but don't do anything about the fact that democracy has become a party-political democracy, that parties are able to gain far greater power than is required to carry out their

constitutional mandate: the representation of political will."

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Varlik 9/2009



Following the launch of Turkey's first state-run Kurdish language TV station at the beginning of the year, Turkey's TV watchdog paved the way in September for private broadcasting of Kurdish television programmes. This comes amidst the AKP government's much-debated "Kurdish move", involving meetings with NGOs on both sides of the political divide in an attempt to reach a solution to the Kurdish conflict. The Republican CHP approves the move as long as it does not threaten the unitary structure of Turkey, while the Nationalist MHP is refusing to take part, calling it a separatist project.

Things are no different among the public at large: there are some who support the administration in the belief that the issue will be resolved quickly, and others who argue that the move is nothing short of treason. In its current issue, *Varlik* asks: "Is the Kurdish move necessary, or will it divide the country?"

"We must make sure that we are attempting to reach a resolution through our own initiative", says Inci Aral cautiously. "Terrorism has been receiving outside support until very recently, and we don't know why there is an attempt to resolve it hastily without building a sound structure first." Ahmet Telli doubts the efficacy of the move as it stands: "There is one piece of international law that is hardly being mentioned, and that is the right of nations to determine their own fate. If this principle is overlooked, the move will remain on paper."

Süreyyya Evren calls into doubt the dominant perception: "While the 'Kurdish move' may look like a resolution adopted by the state, in reality it is the result of the Kurds obtaining the right to represent themselves." Sükrü Erbas, on the other hand, argues that, "regardless of the overt and covert intentions, it is extremely important that the state has decided to tackle this issue. The resolution of the issue on a universally common platform will be an historical move that will relieve not only the Kurds, but the Turks and all other peoples that live in this country."

Also: Sühâ Oguzertem on Turkish literature from a "comparative" perspective; Hilal Kaya on postmodernism in Oguz Atay's *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* and Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy*; and Hülya Bulut on themes of "road" and "journey" in Thomas Mann and Nedim Gürsel.

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Arena 4/2009



In recent decades, Sweden has been spared an explicitly xenophobic political party of any significance. Until now. In the European elections in June, the Sweden Democrats (SD) achieved their best result ever. With 3.2 per cent of the vote, the SD failed to get into the European parliament; nevertheless there are indications that they will exceed the 4 per cent hurdle in next year's national elections and thus be represented in the Swedish parliament.

In *Arena*, editor-in-chief [Devrim Mavi](#) criticizes the established parties, especially those on the left, for not responding adequately to this development.

"For strategic reasons, the Left has chosen to keep quiet. At most they mumble something about the importance of sticking to a generous asylum policy and diversity. [...] Now things have to be made concrete; what's needed are politicians and pundits that dare to have visions."

Mavi gets support from the other side of the political divide. Bengt Westerberg, deputy prime minister in the centre-right government from 1991 to 1994, notes that "at core, the political programme of the Sweden Democrats defends 'Swedishness' and blames everything that is not working well in society on immigrants". In order to avoid the trap that several Danish parties have fallen into — adapting to or even taking over the xenophobic party's politics — established parties have to show that multiculturalism is "no threat to democracy and the right to self-determination".

Eco-politics: The EU is making life too easy for itself when it decides to opt for environmental measures in the South rather than tending its own garden, writes Fredrik Lundberg. "Cost efficiency is important", he says, "but must be subordinated to the aim of reducing emissions where this can be done as surely and quickly as possible. And that is here, in the rich countries."

Also: In a themed section on radicalism, Olav Fumarola Unsgaard discusses radicalism as a political position; Daniel Strand looks at the Facebook radicals and how they present leftist politics as lifestyle; and Karolina Ramqvist criticizes radical feminism's obsession with the body.

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Osteuropa 9/2009



Even before the Czech Republic took over the presidency of the EU at the beginning of 2009, its government was being written off as too insignificant, too eurosceptic and too unstable for the job, writes [Reinhold Vetter](#) in *Osteuropa*. Those fears were borne out when, halfway into the presidential term, the Czech parliament returned a vote of no confidence to the governing coalition around Mirek Topolánek's liberal conservative ODS. From that moment on, the Czech presidency was a lame duck.

The liberal economic policy of the ODS, with its slogan a "Europe without barriers" — meaning the free exchange of goods, services, capital and labour — appeared out of tune as the financial crisis deepened, observes Vetter. Topolánek's campaign for moderate state interference in markets failed to

persuade other nations from running up massive public debt to revive their economies. Only the Czech prime minister's sharp criticism of state protectionism seemed, except among the French, to find an echo.

Yet despite all this, the Czech presidency had some positive effects, says Vetter. In politics, there has been a shift to the left of centre and Czech politicians have learned how to represent their country's interests "beyond the national four walls". There is also evidence of a "Europeanization" among the Czech public: 64 per cent of Czechs think EU membership has brought benefits. Compare that to the figures for Germans, French and Italians — 56, 54 and 43 per cent respectively — and the stereotype of the eurosceptic Czech no longer corresponds to the facts.

Lastly, writes Vetter, the debacle serves as a warning for future EU presidencies, like Poland (2011): "It showed that being well prepared is only half as important as having a more or less durable domestic consensus. [...] Those responsible in Warsaw must make sure that the next parliamentary elections do not, as planned, fall during the Polish EU presidency."

Crime and punishment: Klaus Bachmann writes that in Poland, support for draconian law and order has increased since the 1960s, and many Poles would today like to see the re-introduction of the death penalty. Contrary to assumptions, this repressive tendency is unrelated to actual crime rates, but a symptom of deeper uncertainties.

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Critique & Humanism 29 (2009)



When the Bulgarian village of Batak rebelled against Ottoman rule in 1876, troops massacred thousands of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, the April Uprising of which the rebellion was part ultimately led to liberation from the "Ottoman yoke" after the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–78. When, in 2007, a German–Bulgarian exhibition attempted to explore the role of the Batak massacre in the creation of the Bulgarian national myth, its curators were accused of denying the "Bulgarian Holocaust". Despite explaining that they were not denying that the massacre took place, but exploring how romanticized painterly representations of it came to replace facts, the curators were forced to abandon the project. The nationalists won out: one of the leaders of the campaign against the exhibition, the historian Bozhidar Dimitrov, is now a cabinet minister in the new Bulgarian government — despite revelations that he worked for the communist secret police.

Writing in *Critique & Humanism*, Petya Kabakchieva argues that the 2007 controversy was a symptom of crises in three fields: the Bulgarian nation state, the media and the social sciences. In each, a substitution has occurred. Since nobody believes in the Bulgarian state, but everybody wants to be proud of their national identity, the nation is glorified. In the media, critical publicity has been replaced by the apologetics of national causes. And in the social sciences, low prestige has ushered in "the attitudes of mass consciousness". Given the ongoing crisis of state institutions, writes Kabakchieva, there is a danger that the civic identity of the nation will be replaced by a mono-ethnic one, which could in turn undermine key democratic values.

Spectres of communism: Alexander Kiossev discusses the role of Marxist professor and "incarnation of totalitarian cultural power" Todor Pavlov in the formation of the modern Bulgarian literary canon. In the early 1940s, Pavlov rehabilitated — by means of a "dialectical *Aufhebung*" — previously repudiated bourgeois authors. After WWII, as the communists gradually seized the state institutions, Pavlov managed, through a combination of organizational, "terrorist" and rhetorical means, to institutionalize a notion of the Bulgarian classics still valid today.

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Passage 61 (2009)



Very few people have been as influential in the human sciences as Jacques Derrida, who died five years ago. An intellectual superstar — with his own pop song (Scrritti Politti's "Jacques Derrida" from 1982, in which one of the lines goes "I'm in love with Jacques Derrida") and a film (*Derrida: the Movie*) — Derrida was read worldwide. Denmark was no exception, note the editors of *Passage* in their introduction to an issue dedicated to the French philosopher. However, what is truly modern at one point can later go out of fashion. While Derrida was unavoidable and, in many cases, pivotal reading at Danish universities up until the mid-1990s, many today associate his name with something long gone, an ahistorical, apolitical stance of the past.

In view of this supposed absence from the contemporary agenda, *Passage* asks if it makes sense to disregard Derrida's thinking in today's discussions about art and literature. The question is of course rhetorical, and the focus quickly changes from *if* to *how* Derrida has influenced contemporary art.

Alongside a translation of Derrida's "A certain impossible possibility of saying the event", several Danish writers and intellectuals show why theory is also relevant after theory. With the help of Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* (2003), and a detour via the paternal ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Lillian Munk Rösing poses a highly relevant question about one of the most prominent — and certainly ghost-like — artists on the contemporary Danish art scene: does Claus Beck-Nielsen exist?

In 2001, Claus Beck-Nielsen declared himself dead. He later came back to life as the anonymous director of the art factory Das Beckwerk, whose aim was to pursue the life of Claus Beck-Nielsen. Earlier this year, Das Beckwerk was involved in a court case in which one of the fictitious characters in the novel *The Sovereign* sued his author, namely Das Beckwerk, for disclosing sensitive and private information about his life...

So, does Claus Beck-Nielsen exist? Well, that is the question.

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Akadeemia 8/2009



Writing on medical ethics, Aive Pevkur points out that although western society has a *de facto* pluralist approach, universal solutions are often sought to medical dilemmas such as the right to abortion or euthanasia. "Contemporary medical ethics cannot be treated solely from the viewpoint of arguments relevant to ethics. A much wider range of factors should be taken into account, such as the development of medical technology, and cultural and religious principles."

Social attitudes develop alongside medicine and solutions to medical ethical dilemmas should take these into consideration. If options are in keeping with tradition, there is no need to change earlier value systems; but if tradition restricts the realization of primary values, traditions must be broken, concludes Pevkur.

Intellectual awakening: The first Estonian intellectuals emerged in the nineteenth century, ahead of the period of national awakening. People were desperate for education, and farmers worked hard to send their sons to universities, writes Maido Sikk. Among the first Estonian intellectual nation-builders there were a remarkable number of physicians, who in addition to their regular professions were members of the government, sat in the parliament and worked as diplomats.

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Mittelweg 36 4/2009



With recourse to Greek tragedy, hospital TV dramas and John Lennon, [Jan Philipp Reemtsma](#) argues that heroes — and hero-worship — may not be as selfless as we like to think. "We call people heroes because we admire them, because we would like to be like them. That's not to say that we long to be heroes, but that something about them, something that we believe is in them, strikes a chord in us. Which chord?"

Narcissism. "Heroes are people who live out their narcissism to an extent not normally permitted in everyday life. Nevertheless, they receive acknowledgement, admiration, love, are even glorified as superhuman. Not despite, but because of their narcissism [...]. Were that not the case, we would value the results of the act and not the act itself or the person who acted. The results are what constitutes the social good, heroes a form of acting that transcends the social."

"I sometimes feel I'm laying my body down as a bridge over the chasm that Bush and Bin Laden are trying to open", says Sarah Chayes, a peaceworker in Afghanistan (cited in [Susan Neiman's](#) new book *Moral Clarity*). "Not that I suppose my efforts are large enough to make a difference." "If the second sentence did not exist," writes Reemtsma, "the first would be the expression of pure delusion. But if the first sentence did not exist, the second would be pure resignation. In order to achieve something — and to gain our admiration — you need the realism of the second sentence combined with the narcissistic fantasy of the first."

A new Germany? A translation of Perry Anderson's *New Left Review* article, in which the British historian surveys the political, economic and social shifts

that have taken place in Europe's "still centre" since reunification. Anderson ends with an encomium for *Merkur* magazine and the editorial brilliance of Karl Heinz Bohrer:

"Although [Bohrer] would respect the goal of authority, his own higher value has always been idiosyncrasy — that is, originality, of which the strange cocktail of themes and positions he developed out of Romantic and Surrealist materials in his own texts, effervescent and potent enough by any measure, was the presiding example. Editorially, even in its late neo-liberal moods, *Merkur* always comprised contrary opinions. [...] To Bohrer's credit, conventional authority was forfeited with it."

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