



## Eurozine Review

### The many, messy histories

*New Humanist* sees no humanitarian solutions to political crises; *Fronesis* asks who the People are; *Osteuropa* examines the gaffe-prone politics of European identity; *Dilema veche* says leaving Romania is the most effective form of protest; *L'Homme* revisits 19th-century arguments for the abolition of prostitution; *Arena* questions the impact of the Swedish Sex Purchase Act; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) avoids another story of western selflessness; and *Studija* welcomes a timely exhibition of Soviet-era painting.

## New Humanist 5/2010



Disillusion on the Left with "real existing politics" together with the brutal civil wars of the 1990s were the factors behind the rise in humanitarian NGOs in the last two decades. As a result, the relationship between humanitarianism and human rights has become deeply intertwined, [argues Susie Linfield](#), professor of journalism at New York University. Not only that: the liberal understanding of human rights in political terms has fused with the socialist, economic definition.

In a new book, Irene Khan, former secretary general of Amnesty International, equates (lack of) human rights with poverty. At the same time, she states that "there is nothing inherent in the character of certain rights which makes them more or less political than others". This is "obviously untrue", objects Linfield, "as free-speech advocates in China and universal health-care advocates in the US know well. [...] It is precisely this refusal of politics — and the willingness to identify oneself with politics — that elicits doubt, and even scorn, from human-rights critics."

**Should Britain ban the burqa?** Yes, says [Yasmin Alibhai-Brown](#): "The burqa is not a battle between anti-racists and racists, or liberty or oppression. It is between open and egalitarian Islam and obscurantism; human rights values and inhumane exceptionalism; integration and apartheid." [Kenan Malik](#) disagrees: "If legislators truly want to help Muslim women, they could begin, not by banning the burqa, but by challenging the policies and processes that marginalize minority communities."

**Also:** [Sally Feldman](#) explores reasons for the power and tenacity of [the myth of Pope Joan](#); and Baroness Mary Warnock (86), eminent British moral philosopher, tells [Laurie Taylor](#) why religion should keep out of politics.

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## Fronesis 34 (2010)



"Democracy is always a question of the People's right to govern itself," writes Magnus Wennerhag in the introduction to an issue of *Fronesis* entitled "The battle for the People". Yet the precise meaning of the term "the People" is far from obvious. "It may refer to the overall population, such as when the will of the people is supposedly expressed in general elections. But it may also refer to only parts of the population: in political discourse, ordinary people can be contrasted with societal elites, or Swedes distinguished from non-Swedes."

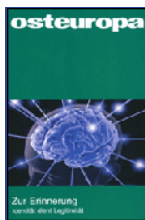
Recently, the populist radical Right in Europe has found its way into several parliaments and governments. According to the conventional view, the far-Right is antithetical to the values of liberal democracy. However, new insights show that far-Right ideology is a radicalization of mainstream values, [argues](#) Belgian political scientist [Cas Mudde](#). "Instead of being understood as a normal pathology, the contemporary populist radical Right needs to be seen as a pathological normalcy." Its ideology and its key features — nativism, authoritarianism, and populism — is a pathological variant of a way of thinking otherwise accepted in our societies, rather than a radical departure from it.

This shift of focus has profound consequences for the study of rightwing populism, says Mudde. "Provocatively stated, the real question is not why populist radical Right parties have been so successful since the 1980s, but why so few parties have fallen on fertile ground."

**Also:** Alongside a number of classical texts — such as Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès' "What is the Third Estate?" from 1789, and the early feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Seneca Falls Declaration" from 1848 — Anders Hellström examines how the Sweden Democrats (a nationalist party) have reclaimed the old Social Democratic slogan of the "People's Home" (*Folkhemmet*); Carlo Ruzza looks at the political Right in Berlusconi's Italy; Ernesto Laclau discusses Latin American populism, focusing on Hugo Chávez; and Mi Lennhag asks whether "Putinism" in Russia can be understood as a variety of populism.

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## Osteuropa 8/2010



In *Osteuropa*, [Stefan Auer](#) examines the politics of postwar European identity. Originally an instrument of Franco-German reconciliation, from the start the "people's Europe" was a technocratic vision, he writes; questions of legitimacy and popular consent only gained importance with the Single European Act in 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. This led to a concerted effort to foster European identity: hence the creation of a "Europe Day" in 1985, marking the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. "Unwittingly," comments Auer, "[Europe Day] is also a reminder of the elitist and secretive nature of the project, at least originally."

While western Europe was stepping up its "quiet revolution" from above, a bottom up revolution was taking place in central and eastern Europe. The West was taken by surprise, writes Auer: German *Ostpolitik* had favoured stability and a "politics of small steps" (the SPD failed to condemn the declaration of martial law in Poland 1981), while France's response to '89 was to insist on "deepening" the Union before "widening" it. Twenty years later, however, the EU is claiming ownership of the "people's revolutions" of '89.

Yet historical gaffes have marred such attempts: a video produced by Brussels for the twenty-year celebrations angered Poles by failing to mention Solidarity, while the new Franco-German history textbook omits the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. "The juxtaposition of uplifting narratives produced by the European Commission, with the many, messy histories of participating nations, points towards the limits of the use of history for political aims, however worthy those might be," Auer concludes.

**Political change in Slovakia:** The election of the new liberal-right government in Slovakia is a clear rebuff to nationalist politics and sends out an important signal to the whole of eastern central Europe, writes Olga Gyarfasova. What's more, for the first time in twenty years there are no former communists in the Slovak government. Hungarian-Slovak relations look to improve, too: Most/Hid, the party representing the non-nationalist Hungarian minority, has distanced itself from the politics of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán.

**Georgia:** The memory of communism is a contradictory one in Georgia, some romanticizing it as a golden age of stability, others construing it as foreign rule. [Maya Razmadze describes](#) how the history textbook has become the link between politics, pedagogy and history.

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### Dilema veche 334–340 (2010)



Amidst harsh austerity measures forced by the economic crisis, *Dilema veche* (no. 334) raises a timely question: can Romanians protest effectively? Contributors think not. For Bogdan Voicu, the reasons people do not fight back are "the lack of experience in participating in protest, education, a limited understanding of democratic mechanisms, civic culture, migration, low trust in institutions, high religiosity, and the ineffectiveness of past protests." For Florin Iaru, meanwhile, "the most effective (but also tragic) form of rebellion is leaving the country".

**Data privacy:** In October 2009, the Romanian Constitutional Court rejected outright a law implementing the European Data Retention Directive (the only country to do so [except Germany](#)). Oana Tanasache argues that a lack of public debate has made it impossible to find an improved version of the law (no. 337). Constructive dialogue between the authorities and opponents of data retention could have led to legislation that allows data storage while also safeguarding Internet users from privacy abuses, she argues.

According to Constantin Vica, it is no longer privacy that is at stake online, rather "one's capacity to control the circulation of personal information". Unlike his older and more sceptical co-contributors, Vica thinks the Internet

provides the tools for this. "We do not have to rebuild the Internet merely to give people the chance to withdraw, exclude and modify the information that represents them."

**Ceausescu:** The exhumation of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu in July revealed Romanians to be suffering from ills that would make the dictator shine, writes Adrian Cioroianu (no 337). In the light of their powerlessness to protect the truth and the freedoms of the revolution, "Ceausescu would deduce that it makes no difference that we killed him, since we were the ones who created him in the first place, and who could always recreate him — a reconstructed clone of the sum of evils inside us."

**Also:** [Martin M. Simecka](#) and [László Rajk](#) discuss still unanswered questions surrounding the involvement of their fathers' generation in post-war communism; and [Boyan Manchev](#) makes a plea for the university as "locus of the unconditionally political".

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## L'Homme 1/2010



In *L'Homme*, Petra de Vies follows the development of feminist debates on prostitution in the Netherlands since the late nineteenth century. She describes how the official "regulation" approach to prostitution was undermined — and finally overturned in 1911 — by two versions of "abolitionism". Evangelical feminists like Anne and Marianne van Hogendorp, the founders of the Women's Union around 1880, opposed the state's "sanctioning of sin" and advocated a notion of universal sisterhood, which, writes de Vies, "was essentially embodied as a bourgeois moral mother."

At the same time, libertarian socialists were redefining prostitution as "inequality". Aletta Jacobs, the first female doctor in the Netherlands and an important figure in national and international campaigns for women's suffrage, called for male abstinence and argued that a reformed family, based on love and equality, would create a society without prostitution.

The repeal of the ban on brothels in the Netherlands in 2000 reflected the critique of second-wave feminism that in the struggle against regulation the prostitute had not been consulted. The notion of agency, advocated since the 1980s by progressive feminists, social workers and prostitutes' associations, is rooted in the socio-economic improvements of the era, suggests de Vies: the welfare state removed connotations of prostitution as "last resort".

Today's regulatory approach, meanwhile, recalls nineteenth century policies that saw prostitution solely as an issue of law and order. Although the definition of prostitution as sex work "makes clear that working conditions in the sex business are sometimes as bad as they were 150 years ago", writes de Vies, "the vocabulary may also be interpreted as a sign of a general sexual liberalization, which would gloss over questions of inequality and render the gendered nature of the prostitution contract invisible."

**Forced sex labour:** Between 1942 and 1945, female prisoners from the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp were recruited for "Arbeitseinsatz im

Bordell" (labour duty in the brothel), a system intended to increase the productivity of male forced workers. Insa Eschebach examines the assumption that brothels gave male prisoners the chance to restore their masculinity and analyses sexualized representations of Nazi concentration camps in the Israeli "Stalag Literature" of the 1960s.

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### Arena 4/2010



Sweden's Sex Purchase Act was passed in 1999, making it illegal to buy sexual services, but not to sell them. Recently, Norway and Iceland adopted similar laws and several European countries are currently discussing whether to follow suit.

Last month saw the publication of a public enquiry into the effects of the Swedish law ten years on. In *Arena*, [Devrim Mavi](#) is severely disappointed. The enquiry deems the Sex Purchase Act a success and notes that street prostitution has decreased by 50 per cent. But several key questions remain unanswered: "Has the total number of prostitutes gone down? Are those who sell sex more secure now? Have Swedish sex buyers turned to other countries instead? How widespread is Internet prostitution? What is the situation for minors selling sex? What about male prostitutes? What are the legal consequences for those who voluntarily sell sex?"

Failing to address any of these questions, the enquiry says nothing about whether "criminalization" has deterred potential sex buyers and prevented organized prostitution, concludes Mavi. It adds absolutely nothing to the debate about the pros and cons of the Sex Purchase Act.

**Art:** Maria Lind, until recently director of the Graduate Program at the Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies in New York, criticizes the cautiousness of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. "The Swedish institutions talked about abroad are Index in Stockholm, Bildmuseet in Umeå and Gothenburg's Konsthall. Sometimes Magasin 3 and the Andrehn–Schiptjenko Gallery," she says in interview. In the last decade, the Moderna Museet has almost exclusively focused on household names; artists that are conventional rather than experimental. Moderna Museet "has established a canon in an old-fashioned way, rather than triggered a debate with and about art."

Lind, who came second to Daniel Birnbaum in the contest for the position as new director of Moderna Museet, suspects that the fierce debate about the works of artists Anna Odell and Lars Vilks (see Eurozine Reviews [9 June 2009](#) and [27 November 2007](#)) is nothing but "a storm in a Swedish teacup". "Debate and outrage are created all the time — when Janet Jackson flashes a nipple on MTV or Damien Hirst covers a skull in diamonds. That doesn't necessarily mean that the performance or the sculpture are artistically relevant."

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### Le Monde diplomatique (Oslo) 8/2010



Can a documentary reproduce reality authentically or can it be reasonably objective? **Truls Lie** has produced a documentary, *Kjære Haiti, hva nå?* (Dear Haiti, what now?), for Norwegian TV. He wished to show a different reality of everyday life in the Caribbean state and to document what has happened to the money raised by Norwegians to help Haitians since the earthquake.

Taking his lead from poetic filmmakers such as Godard and Resnais, Lie sees himself in a line of directors wishing to create a film to prevent forgetting. But just as with Hiroshima, these events *will* be forgotten, he writes, since we only perceive what is important to each of us individually.

Lie's documentary consists of impressions rather than a story about selfless aid from the West. "In this essay, a lot of the interpretation is left to you as the viewer. And that means also to think in images." He answers the introductory question himself: "No, a documentary is a creative processing of reality, and since it is not a copy of reality it does not reproduce it."

**Also:** Steffen Moestrup on the documentary *Armadillo* about the Danish forces in Afghanistan: "According to *Armadillo*, boys don't become men by going to war. Rather the opposite. They become even more boyish than when they left." And Morten Harper on the latest Swedish addition to the world of comics, *En hjälpare hand* (A helping hand), which in stark satire tells the story of the unemployed Zven and his entry into the weapons industry.

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## Studija 4/2010



"Art [...] is boring as a whole, it is only individual artists and some of their works that are interesting. And when those rare flashes occur they are wonderful events, regardless of where they come from. I have never been attracted by so-called high art, which is cold and intellectualized. In comparison it seems to me that an old woman selling her crocheted doilies in the street speaks more about her time and environment than a supposedly complicated work with countless references."

Baiba Baiba is a Latvian artist now living and working in New York — yes, it is both her first and her surname, "her only small project of conceptual art" as she ironically says. In interview with Elina Duce, she talks about her views on art and how her own drawings come about:

"The impulse comes from a sort of neurotic desire to doodle and scribble on anything that resembles paper. [...] I am always at a doodle's distance from a drawing." To Baiba, "art is something like an experience of consciousness, it has to be hermetic [...] and half a step outside my comfort zone. It has to be more than a pleasant occupation."

**Soviet art:** Because the initial reaction of post-communism was to ignore official and ideological art, a new exhibition of Latvian painting from 1950 to 1990 offers a rare opportunity to see art of the Soviet era for those too young to remember. But, adds Sniedze Sofija Kāle, "if the exhibition aspires to achieve

the status of being a permanent exhibition of Soviet painting [...] it would be important to textually describe the context of the Soviet regime in which the Latvian Artists' Union and its members were working."

**Also:** Inese Baranovska presents an in-depth description of the Reykjavik Arts Festival in Iceland, which has "served to promote the global popularity and recognition of Iceland".

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