



Eurozine Review

A new way to talk politics

New Humanist predicts religion might be Romney's downfall; *Mittelweg 36* wants more justice through more Europe; *Merkur* seeks guidance in founding principles; *La Revue nouvelle* reports on a big day for democracy in Belgium; *Osteuropa* finds European standards wanting in Croatian history books; *Magyar Lettre* exposes the Belarusian blind spot in Milosz's native realm; and *The Hungarian Quarterly* talks to László Krasznahorkai about God, the world and (the end of) literature.

New Humanist 1/2012



"Religion is not the most important factor in the Republican primaries, and certainly not in the general election, but it's always there, imprinted on the words the candidates say and the actions they take." In *New Humanist*, [Abby Ohlheiser](#) explains the religious calculus in Republican politics and why the "Mormon question" might turn out to be Mitt Romney's undoing.

Two-thirds of Americans believe a presidential candidate should have strong religious beliefs and around one fifth of voters prefer those beliefs also to be their own, says Ohlheiser, citing recent polls. Those figures increase among Republican voters, above all Evangelists, a significant portion of the Republican voting base. "The fact that so many candidates are trying to overtake Romney speaks to a dissatisfaction from the Republican base. That dissatisfaction has something, but not everything, to do with religion."

Romney, a Mormon, has so far stayed clear of religious conversations — "probably a smart move," comments Ohlheiser. "The full impact of Romney's Mormon faith on his candidacy [...] has not been fully answered." According to one poll, "only four in ten Americans can correctly identify Romney's religion. Based on the available data, an increase in awareness of Romney's Mormonism among conservative voters would be harmful to his favourability rating."

Arab revolutions: Fuad Nahdi, founder of the moderate, London-based Muslim magazine *Q News*, talks to [Paul Sims](#) about the Arab Spring — what Nahdi calls "Obama's revolution", after the US president's Cairo speech in 2009. While acknowledging the validity of concerns of an Islamist backlash, Nahdi also criticizes western responses as exaggerated and hypocritical:

"If we say that it is the voice of the majority that should be heard, who are we to decide that an Islamist party that is voted into power in a legitimate way is not good for these people? In the past, much that has come from the West has been for the

oppression and exploitation of the people. Now people criticize the Muslim Brotherhood, because they don't want to do anything with the West in a relationship in which they are being exploited or their people are being abused or not treated with integrity. What will the West do now? Is it going to value its interests in the region, or is it going to value the rights of the people?"

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Mittelweg 36 6/2011



Nationalist reactions to the economic crisis show how little the EU is perceived by citizens and governments alike as "the most cosmopolitan structure there is", [argues Ulrich Beck](#) in *Mittelweg 36*. In interview with [Nikola Tietze](#) and [Ulrich Bielefeld](#), the sociologist asks how Europe can be promoted as an opportunity for more power rather than a threat to national sovereignty:

"In order to understand the relationship of Europe and its nation states, we need a new understanding of sovereignty. Because Europe does not take power away — it gives it to the nations. By internalizing the European rules of play, the member states — and only they! — gain access to new power options. They gain a voice in the European realm and far beyond, a voice that counts. They can directly influence the results of European politics. The solution to their 'internal' national problems [...] ensues from the combined power of the EU. Here it becomes clear what is obviously so hard to communicate: that Europe is the European answer to globalization, enabling it to regain political power to act internally and externally as a community of nations."

Inequalities between EU member states, invisible during win-win periods of growth, during recession trigger xenophobic and anti-European reactions in both rich and poor countries, says Beck:

"The bailout mechanism for southern European countries has assisted the development of a logic of conflict between the creditor and debtor countries. The creditor countries must introduce austerity measures at home and therefore put the debtor countries on the rack beyond the pain threshold. The debtor countries, on the other hand, see themselves subjected to the dictate of the EU, injuring the national sense of independence and pride. Both result in hatred of Europe being fostered in Europe, since Europe appears to all involved as a conglomerate of impossible demands. [...] There's a danger of a nationalism that is not so much aggressive as regressive. It emanates from the fear of losing all sense of security, be it socio-economic or the mental security inherent in the national self-image."

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La Revue nouvelle 1/2012



In November 2011 an experiment in democracy took place in Belgium billed as "the largest deliberative process ever conducted in Europe". The G1000 meeting, brainchild of [David van Reybrouck](#), aimed to "revive democracy in Belgium" by bringing together 1000 randomly selected Belgian citizens to discuss the future of the country. "Clearly the challenges that Belgium currently faces are too big to be dealt with by the normal procedures of party politics," states the G1000 [manifesto](#). "That's okay; fortunately democracy is more than merely a matter of political parties."

In *La Revue nouvelle*, G1000 participant and volunteer [Paul Th. Grosjean](#) describes proceedings on the big day:

"Three major topics had been placed on the agenda: social security, survival in a period of crisis and immigration, with a fourth topic to be chosen by the assembly as a whole. Each topic was introduced in an informative and succinct manner by two 'experts'. Then each table of ten, with the help of the facilitator/interpreter, debated the topic, identifying a number of problems, aspects or suggestions which, after half an hour, were passed to the central panel. The panel showed them on the large screen and each delegate, equipped with a little voting machine, indicated their two, three or four priorities. In this way they were able to arrive at an order of priority for the views of the assembly. At the same time, the 'GHome' and 'Goff' participants formed a kind of 'hundred and first large table' and could take part, debate and convey their views via the network."

The results of the panels are now being discussed by the "G32" — a smaller group of citizen volunteers — and will be released in April 2012 in a "Report to the Country". "In the meantime," writes Grosjean, "remember a remark by one of the facilitators during the buffet dinner at the end of the day: 'The conclusion on my table was that each of us has learnt a new way to talk politics to each other; we've changed since this morning!' Even if it amounted nothing more than that, it was worthwhile, don't you think?'"

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Merkur 1/2012



In *Merkur*, incoming editor Christian Demand refers to the journal's founding principles for guidance. In the first volume in 1947, editor Hans Paeschke published a text from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing *in lieu* of a preface. "I think only in order to teach myself," it read. "If in the end my thoughts satisfy me, then I tear up the paper; if they do not satisfy me, I let it be printed."

Merkur, in other words, set out to promote debate rather than conclusions. It has always been crucial for *Merkur*, writes Demand, that "it documents an

editorial attitude in which sureness of judgement emerges not from the security of unquestioned premises about the world, nor from the compulsion of the lead article writer to exaggerate, but from precise enquiry, from comprehensive knowledge of the subject and, not least, from the will to seriously consider objections to one's own position".

The unwilling hegemon: Having become European *hegemon* against its will, Germany must now embrace its role more actively, [argues Christoph Schönberger](#): "The inevitable leadership role affords great opportunities for forming and influencing Europe, however comes with significant burdens and responsibilities."

The article itself reflects a certain national self-confidence when the author states that "German statecraft was precisely what was needed to keep the European order stable in the turbulent twenty-first century." Yet Schönberger also has doubts about Germany's ability to rise the occasion: "The Federal Republic is not only ill-equipped mentally for the burdens of European hegemony — its institutions are also increasingly unsuited to the task. The hegemonic power needs room to move in order to organize the necessary consensus."

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Osteuropa 11/2011



Croatian history textbooks exemplify how attempts to introduce "European standards" for national self-analysis of involvement in historical crimes can conflict with narratives of victimization in post-socialist countries, writes Ljiljana Radonic in *Osteuropa*. While the school history syllabus set by the Croatian ministry of education partially conforms to recommendations formulated by the ITF (Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research), in many respects it continues to reproduce the nationalist view of the past cultivated since the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Before 1990, writes Radonic, communist textbooks had avoided any mention of wartime nationalism, terror, or inter-ethnic violence; instead, the Partisans were celebrated as a supra-ethnic army and the hollow phrase "fraternity and unity" repeated incessantly to no pedagogic benefit. After 1990, a "teleological Croato-centrism" took over: Ustashe crimes were held separate from the positive aspects of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH, the puppet state of Nazi Germany); the persecution of Serbs was justified as a response to Chetnik aggression; and the Croatian anti-fascist movement disassociated from Partisan crimes.

Today's syllabus, set in 2006 by the HDZ (the reformed party of Franjo Tudjman), while encouraging multiple perspectives and work with historical sources, nevertheless retains nationalist tendencies: the NDH is portrayed as a victim of the axis powers and its "cultural achievements" emphasized; the victims of Bleiburg massacre (carried out by the Partisans) are described as Croatian civilians (rather than Nazi collaborators); the wartime suffering of Serbian, Jewish and Roma populations is mentioned but the term genocide avoided.

Schoolbooks interpret this syllabus differently: the liberal ones problematize, for example, Croatian enthusiasm for the Nazi occupation or the manipulation of figures for victims of the Croatian concentration camp Jasenovac; the nationalist textbooks, on the other hand, portray the Nazis and the Ustashe as a bulwark against Communism and continue to demonize the Chetniks. "One can only hope", comments Radonic, "that with Croatia's EU accession, the cultivation of hate figures in school textbooks is fundamentally overcome, even if a 'shared critical attitude towards one's own very specific past' (Jan–Werner Müller) appears merely as an informal 'European standard'."

Ukraine: The EU shouldn't be surprised by the Tymoshenko verdict: its support of anything nominally reformist has been perceived as acceptance of a range of repressions, writes Mykola Riabchuk. Tough measures are now needed if another authoritarian regime is to be prevented from forming on the EU's eastern border.

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Magyar Lettre Internationale 83 (2011)



Commemorating last year's Milosz centenary, eastern European writers were invited to comment on the Polish poet's autobiography *Rodzinna Europa* ("Native realm") and to respond to the multicultural spirit it evokes. The texts, first published by HALMA (in German), are now translated into Hungarian in *Magyar Lettre*.

They include Belarusian poet Ihar Babkou's recollections of his interview with Milosz in the mid–1990s, shortly before the election of Alexander Lukashenka. At the time, Babkou resented Milosz for failing to recognize Belarus in his vision of eastern Europe and instead seeing it as part of greater Russia. Milosz's disparagement of the Belarusian national movement stemmed — so Babkou believed — from his suspicion of the "sullen" Belarusian men he had encountered in the markets of interwar Vilnius (as described in *Rodzinna Europa*):

"But for us and our time Belarus was by no means a sentimental image of a land of milk and honey. Instead it was something much more radical, even threatening. Belarus, having traversed the empire from end to end, had now re–emerged. And the men at the market, who had at last arrived in a whole world, now had to be like all other men. They had to think about their identity. Seek masks. Invent and reconstruct their traditions. Reflect and question the interior as well as the exterior. Belarus had become a project and a utopia. Perhaps also pure metaphysics. It's unfair, I said to Milosz, that you, who speak for all, didn't in your time find a place for Belarus. You divided the traditions into three: Poland, Lithuania and a bit of Ukraine/Russia. You excluded us from the common discussion. Sooner or later something like that demands its tribute.

In his reply he talked about the Polish nobility, about tradition, about the danger of nationalism, but seemed not to notice me with my question.

That summer the first presidential elections took place. I returned to Minsk and understood that waiting for me was precisely the man from the market that Milosz feared."

Also: Blanka Cinatlová, Jana Benova and [Marek Seckar](#) on the [central European city](#).

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The Hungarian Quarterly 204 (2011)



In *The Hungarian Quarterly*, novelist [László Krasznahorkai](#) talks to Ági Dömötör about God, the world and (end of) literature:

"Could it be that people will once again begin to think for themselves? By thinking, I mean original thinking, without someone holding their hand. If I read the works of thinking people, they inspire me to think, but at the same time they give me categories and don't set me free. Between them and Heraclitus's rippling stream, they interpose a book. Maybe at some point in the future, there will be nothing between them and the rippling stream. And they'll get nice and soaked."

Also: An excerpt from Krasznahorkai's novel *Satantango*, filmed by Bela Tarr in 1994 and forthcoming in English translation in 2012 (New Directions).

Folk: World music aficionado [Simon Broughton](#) pays a visit to the home of the South Slav *táncház* band Söndörgö. The *táncház* movement (traditional Hungarian dance music) developed in the 1970s as an alternative to official folk; the father of Söndörgö band leader Áron Eredics was founder member of Hungary's first professional South Slav *táncház* band. Based around the tambura, a mandolin-like instrument that is plucked and strummed, Söndörgö's "delicate, transparent" sound is very different to the elegiac music of Transylvanian *táncház*, with its reliance on bowed strings, writes Broughton.

"Söndörgö have described their repertoire as the 'Lost Music of the Balkans' and it's true. Hungary is famous for its Gypsy fiddle music, Serbia is famous for its brass bands, but here lost in the cracks between them is the delicate and distinctive sound of tambura music that's virtually unknown."

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