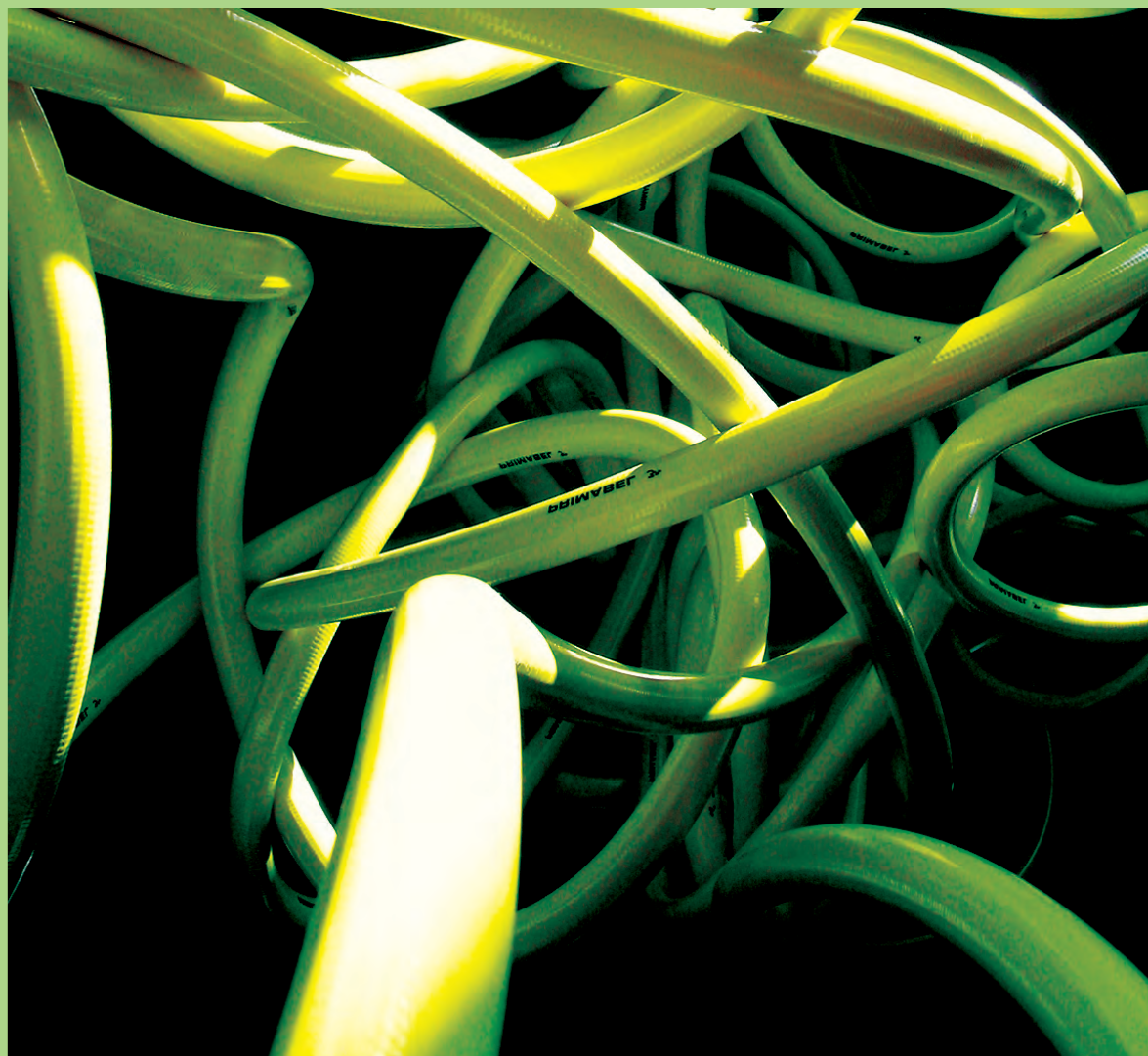




# The Heart of the Matter

This publication is the result of a process of reflection which took place in 2005 and which has since led to the setting up of a Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture. The Fund aims to support cultural projects from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo/a.



■ european cultural foundation



■ european cultural foundation

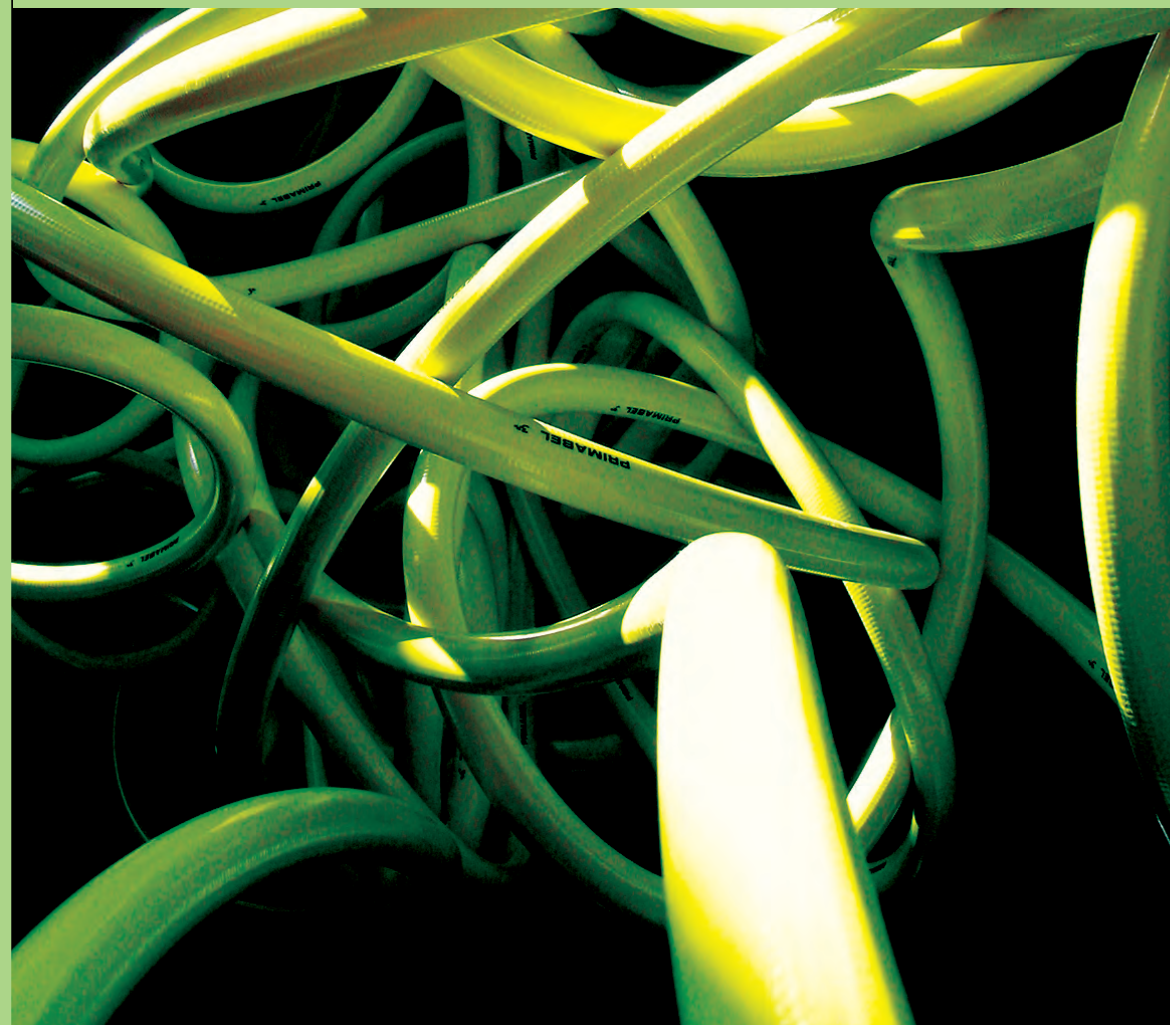
[www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org)

Mehmet Behluli  
Aida Kalender  
Šejla Kamerić  
Chris Keulemans  
Edi Muka  
Wolfgang Petritsch  
Marjetica Potrč  
Goran Sergej Pristaš  
Erzen Shkololli  
Violeta Simjanovska  
Sreten Ugričić  
Edin Zubčević

# The Heart of the Matter

The role of the arts and culture in the Balkans' European integration

The Heart of the Matter



**The Heart of**

**The role of the arts and  
culture in the Balkans'  
European integration**

**the Matter**

Editor

**Chris Keulemans**

Co-editor

**David Cameron**

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**Foreword**

# **Wolfgang Petritsch**

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When Gottfried Wagner invited me to join a 'Balkan Reflection Group' examining the role of arts and culture in the conflicts of former Yugoslavia and also exploring their potential contribution to regional and European integration – I immediately agreed.

Now, given that this may at first seem a rather academic pursuit, let me explain why I was so eager to accept the invitation.

Firstly, I am more convinced than ever that any effort to build a new Europe will fail unless serious consideration is given to the profound importance of the cultural dimension. We can help to overcome the present malaise in the European Union, airily characterised as 'enlargement fatigue', by tapping into the continent's vast wealth of artistic creativity – past and present. If this is true for the European Union, how much more urgently so must it be for those countries in the Balkans that are emerging from war, destruction and division.

Secondly, I've committed a good deal of my professional life to understanding the Balkans, and this experience tells me that, in striving for inclusiveness, we must add culture to our necessary focus on political and economic rehabilitation and reform if we are to achieve the desired results.

Hence, for this very pragmatic reason, I feel that Europe has so far failed by not seeing the clear necessity for a holistic approach. The Stability Pact for South East Europe, for example, though meant to facilitate and strengthen regional cooperation, has fallen short by its de facto exclusion of cultural issues. Clearly, this was not a good policy decision, given the destructive role that some writers, journalists and artists played, first in spreading ethnic hatred and then in assuming political positions in the Yugoslav conflict.

Likewise, the comprehensive report by the International Commission on the Balkans also fails to address the pertinence of culture. I therefore enthusiastically welcomed the ECF initiative to add a chapter on arts and culture to this excellent and timely study and to invite artists and arts managers from the region to be its authors. This I consider 'ownership' at its best.

For me, as the only diplomat among a fascinating gathering of artists, this was simultaneously an intellectual feast and an emotional experience. The overall intensity of the exchanges, the grief, sorrow and consternation that was expressed concerning the past, the unabated energy coupled with a healthy dose of scepticism about a possible common future in the new Union – this was all topped by the stunning realisation of how much common ground there was between the participants.

The 'political space' that Yugoslavia represented is a thing of the past. Yet the way this reflection group interacted made it obvious to me that something I would call a 'cultural space' – firmly anchored in the region yet truly 'European' – does indeed exist in the Balkans...and is undeniable. It is up to the European Union to swiftly overcome its self-inflicted inertia and take the Balkans on board for our long journey towards a truly whole and united Europe.

**Wolfgang Petritsch** Austrian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva

**The Balkans -  
What Really Matters**

**Gottfried  
Wagner**



The ECF has a long track record of involvement in South East Europe. For instance, it has awarded dozens of grants to cultural operators there and supported individual artists and journalists; it contributed to the second International Commission on the Balkans which led to Jacques Rupnik's 'Unfinished Peace' report; and it has run cultural capacity-building programmes within local and regional contexts.

When I took over the stewardship of the ECF in 2002 I considered this engagement with the Balkans during turbulent years to be one of its most remarkable achievements. I had been strongly involved in another field of cooperation with South East Europe in my previous position as director of KulturKontakt Austria. At KulturKontakt we had used Austria's EU presidency in 1998 to launch the so-called Graz process which triggered an astonishing level of international support for educational cooperation with and within the Balkans. I experienced how education could find its way onto the political agenda – a specific task force was established within Working Table One of the Stability Pact – but I also understood that culture apparently 'didn't matter' at a high political level. How satisfying that the ECF – in common with KulturKontakt, George Soros's OSI, Pro Helvetia, and a few foundations such as King Baudouin, etc. – was proving the opposite to be true: culture mattered.

However, I had learned my lesson. 'Marking out is not an innocent act,' remarked Maria Todorova at one of the Graz process conferences. She saw the danger in treating the Balkans as a special region seemingly disconnected from the 'rest of Europe'. In her book *Imagining the Balkans* she gave an account of the role of the European superpowers in creating a 'Balkan problem', and of the mechanisms of exclusion and ignorance prevalent in theory and political practice, which included the boom of 'Mitteleuropa' ideologists.

As a sceptical Austrian, I was extremely sensitive to idiosyncrasies and old patterns of biased perceptions. As a 'European' I was ambivalent: convinced on the one hand that only the EU could – in the long run – provide 'solutions'; and also embarrassed by the tardy and internally disputed reaction of the Union to the signs of danger in the region, to the beginning of the wars, to deadly nationalism and genocide. Moreover, the rhetoric which declared Europe a wholly peaceful continent since WWII simply ignored this part of Europe and its recent catastrophes.

In my encounters with those from the region I met more passionate campaigners for peace and reconciliation than in any other region of Europe, people whom I learned to respect dearly and adore wholeheartedly: Sonja Licht, who later became an ECF governor, Borka Pavićević from the Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Luan Shllaku from the OSI Priština, artists, educators and intellectuals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, individuals from B92 in Belgrade, incorruptible thinkers from the University of Skopje, but also Slovenian Balkan activists and politicians such as Slavko Gaber and Austrians such as Ambassador Petritsch, who later joined the ECF's Reflection Group on the Balkans and the Foundation's Advisory Council.

Deeply impressed by the tremendous potential of spirit, knowledge and humanity in a situation full of despair; an exuberance of talent, education, creativity, wit and intellect; a clearly undefeatable

opposition to simplification, populism, crime and corrupt politicians; a tireless struggle for democracy and dignity, equality and human rights – I couldn't help but invite my compatriots and friends in the EU who were not similarly privileged to get to know these people, to discover more about the richness of the region and join forces in solidarity.

Still, culture 'didn't matter'. And this despite the fact that wars were being waged in which cultural-national propaganda featured heavily, and despite the fact that it was becoming increasingly clear that change would have to happen in the minds of people in the Balkans *and in 'the rest of Europe'*. Almost incredibly – given the obvious power of perceptions, images and cultural patterns – EU politics excluded cultural programmes. It virtually amounted to a paradoxical neo-Marxism in which the power of the 'basis', of material investment, was given precedence over the power of the 'superstructure' (*Ueberbau*) – with only education, which opened its cooperation mechanisms to the region step by step, granted exemption.

Of course, post-war reconstruction and security issues were an absolute priority, and much has been achieved. Yet why do one and not the other also? Was it fear of the region's 'emotional' side? Balkan stereotypes, which reserve the 'otherness within' (Todorova) for the region, exist even in academic literature.

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This has slowly begun to change. The work of artists such as Goran Stefanovski, Šelja Kamerić and Erzen Shkololli and of scientists such as Mark Mazower, books by writers such as Dubravka Ugrešić and Bora Ćosić, films such as 'Grbavica', the translations of Guido Snel, exhibitions such as 'Blood and Honey', as well as some manifestations of popular culture: all of these are eroding ignorance or at least launching discussion.

However, this greater public awareness is late in arriving. Meanwhile, the very future of the Balkans as a legitimate component of the EU is at stake, and the tide of no-voters and opponents of further enlargement is rising.

Back in 2002, one of my very first guests at the ECF was Dragan Klaić (with whom, in open conspiracy, we have produced many important action and reflection lines), and he, the famous refugee-intellectual, cultural theorist and practitioner from Serbia, greeted me saying, 'Well, good to know that there is one more amongst the few in this country who are familiar with Miroslav Krleža.' I was stunned. One of my favourite authors had accompanied me to Amsterdam, and the Balkans was still close to my heart and my actual topographical coordinates.

The ECF used the 2004 enlargement process to brand a new line of action and reflection 'Enlargement of Minds'. This already went beyond the new EU borders, advocating the cultural inclusion of the neighbours. Despite all our efforts, the initial lobbying to include cultural components in the Balkan and neighbourhood policy failed.

In 2005 we started a second attack. This time we had the help of Chris Keulemans, a Dutch writer and activist, and Wolfgang Petritsch, the former Rambouillet negotiator, high representative in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, and ambassador in Belgrade, as well as intellectuals and artists in the region: these formed the Balkan Reflection Group whose work is highlighted in this publication. We also had the assistance (working in the background for the cause) of prominent individuals and politicians such as Doris Pack, Erhard Busek and Goran Svilanović. And we set our efforts in the context of the anniversary of Srebrenica and Dayton, the Austrian EU presidency and the start of the status negotiations of Kosovo/a. We simply tried again. *Spes contra spem*, as Thomas Aquinas might have said.

Civil society organisations play an important role at critical moments. It was four foundations which commissioned the third International Report on the Balkans, produced by a group chaired by Richard von Weizsaecker and Giuliano Amato, who lent their authority to the brilliant pen of Ivan Krastev. Their influence cannot be overestimated. The ECF decided to 'add a cultural chapter' to this report.

**There have been significant recent developments, such as the setting up of the Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture and the first promising signs of EU instruments opening up.** The EU culture programme will in principle be open as from 2007. 'Entry fees' for the EU programme(s) will be partially covered by the Instruments for Pre-Accession (IPA). A Communication on 'Civil Society Dialogue between the EU and Candidate Countries' (2005) by the European Commission contains for the first time a cultural chapter, which applies to Turkey and Croatia, with an explicit willingness to extend it to the Balkans later on. Not that we claim the glory, but the ECF has been a persistent voice and advocate. And we will continue to act: practically, through support, and as a lobbyist, through policy recommendations.

Still far from being content, I am nonetheless grateful for what I learned and for the opportunities to contribute to encounter and cooperation across those contested political borders and boundaries of minds. The Balkans begin in Vienna, said Metternich. This is biography. I am grateful to the Netherlands for enabling us to support European cultural cooperation in a noble way. This is cultural politics in an open democracy. Europe will not be successful without integrating its South East European compatriots. Culture matters.

**Gottfried Wagner** Director ECF





**Reaching the  
Heart of the Matter**

**Chris  
Keulemans**

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## **First Words**

How important, within the crippled societies of the Western Balkans, are the arts? It is this question which the following reflections seek to answer.

While Western Balkan countries are attempting to recover from war, nationalism, corruption, and economic and political crisis, a new generation of artists and arts initiatives are producing imaginative work, creating new spaces for the arts and finding new ways to collaborate – with the people around them, with their governments, and with artistic partners in the region.

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) invited ten representatives of this generation to analyse their situation and come up with recommendations for improvement. Over the course of two Reflection Groups – one held in Sarajevo in July 2005, one in Belgrade in October 2005 – they clarified which steps needed to be taken next.

At the Peace Palace in the Hague in December 2005, they presented their recommendations to a wide range of national and European politicians, policymakers and donors. The ECF and partner foundations have since begun to help make these recommendations a reality.

**A**s the moderator and reporter for this reflection process, I believe even more firmly than before that the arts really are at the heart of the matter in the Western Balkans. During the late eighties and early nineties, artists and intellectuals of an earlier generation provided the rhetoric, the symbols and the excuses which fuelled nationalism and war. Travelling throughout the Western Balkans over the past decade, I have seen how new artists are reinventing their work, their identity and their environment. I saw them huddling together in the Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade, discussing the responsibility of artists to confront their society with the question of guilt in the days when the Milošević regime seemed to have no end. In Sarajevo, I spoke to poets who saw everyday angels in the streets during the fiercest shelling. And when the nation was obsessed with finding Mladić and Karadžić after the war, I saw models showing a Carla del Ponte fashion line. In Srebrenica, I saw Tarik Samarah's huge photographs documenting the search for the remains of those who are still waiting for their final resting place. In Skopje, when Macedonia was about to split between its two peoples, I saw a mixed theatre company performing in Albanian. One autumn night in Zagreb, I saw students milling around the cultural centre of the university, switching from avant-garde theatre to weblog poetry readings accompanied by booming drum 'n' bass. In Priština, I saw a desire for belonging in a series of videos made by young artists who were calling out for Europe to recognise them in their own right. In Tirana, I witnessed the birth of an ambitious new arts centre in a city paralysed by power shifts and the cautiousness of international donors.

Coming from Western Europe, I was constantly impressed by these artists and cultural workers who regard their social responsibility as a given, who are forever changing the faces of their dilapidated but vibrant cities, who are deft at communicating with puzzled internationals and who still manage to produce innovative art. Ten of them came together for 'The Heart of the Matter'. This text is based for the most part on their stories and opinions. More often than not, they managed to bridge the gap between their different wartime experiences. Even when they were not familiar with the details of each other's work and working circumstances, the recognition of problems and ambitions was often immediate. While each of their countries is at a different phase in the struggle to achieve stability, this group quickly agreed that the steps to be taken are roughly the same for each of them, and that the future for all of these countries lies inside the European Union. The presence throughout of Wolfgang Petritsch, a diplomat with a long and influential career in the region, helped provide a



reality check. And he was a clear example of how even a seasoned politician can be convinced that the region will not make progress as long as the arts are neglected.

This text follows the agenda of the two Reflection Groups and the final event in The Hague. Not all quotes are attributed, as I believe the text reflects shared opinions among the participants. The aim is to make this a document which stays as close as possible to what the participants have said. These are their views, not mine, nor those of any other outsider.

# The arts before, during and after the wars

## Before the wars

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In the years before war destroyed Yugoslavia, there was a widening gap between the urban, cosmopolitan intellectuals/artists and official state-run cultural institutions. While many contemporary artists revelled in their growing liberty and their international contacts and post-modern disengagement from social reality (*I'm standing on the balcony*, the avant-garde popgroup, Idoli, sang, *looking down on the streets*), 'official' artists and academics latched onto the nationalist frustration growing among the political elites and the rural populations. The infamous 'Memorandum' produced by the Serb Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1986 – 'a self-pitying and self-indulgent squeamish complaint about the alleged economic and political decline of Serbia in the Yugoslav state', according to journalist Miloš Vasić – cemented the fatal relationship between nationalist artists and politicians.

Populist writers became very influential, as they had full access to the media, in contrast to dissident voices. Alternative artists who refused to take part in politics were marginalised. The alternative scene of the eighties, which had enforced the first split between art production and state support, now discovered that to be alternative was to be non-active. Disgusted with the obligatory realism in the arts under socialism, a younger generation of artists had shielded themselves from reality. This too was a strategy, but one which had no impact on a society turning increasingly nationalist while the outside world remained passive. In the entailing, fierce game of life and death they had no role to play.

■ In 1991, the Albanian writer Ismail Kadaré witnessed euphoric masses pulling down statues of communist leaders. What they didn't notice, he wrote, was the gleam in the statues' eyes: 'You think you have toppled me, but it is me who has toppled you! The cruelty I have taught you is inside yourselves.' In Yugoslavia, war broke out. Some artists fled the country, some withdrew into their libraries, some resisted the furore of nationalism, some joined the army and started killing former countrymen. In the new nation states, history was rewritten. Suddenly, each of the Balkan peoples appeared to have the most ancient and noble claims to the land.

■ In an interview with ECF's Bertan Selim, Macedonian art critic Robert Alagjovovski summarised the situation concisely: 'The critical, innovative, self-organised, NGO-based art opposed the regime and its identitarian politics. This art was nomadic, uncertain, fragmentary. It usually took place in non-institutional places that were not originally intended for cultural activities. Politically and critically indifferent art, being outside the power battle, only strengthened the position of the stronger player, the identitarian art, giving it legitimacy and moderation.'

### **Over Old Ground**

From 8 to 10 July 2005, a group of six artists, curators and critics from several Balkan countries met in Sarajevo for the first Reflection Group meeting. In the sunlit meeting room of the NGO Mozaik, overlooking the heart of the city, they discussed the role of the arts – specifically the arts, not culture in general; and within the arts, specifically 'contemporary' arts and the making of these, including literature and the performing and visual arts – before, during and after the crises in their (former) countries.

■ The group consisted of Šejla Kamerić (visual artist, Sarajevo), Edi Muka (curator of the Tirana Biennale), Marjetica Potrč (architect and visual artist, Ljubljana), Goran Sergej Pristaš (director, dramaturge and choreographer, involved with CDU, Frakcija, Clubture and Zagreb 3000), Sreten Ugrčić (writer, director of the National Library in Belgrade) and Edin Zubčević (director of the Sarajevo Jazz Festival). They were joined by Wolfgang Petritsch (Austrian ambassador to the UN, Vienna), Bertan Selim and Isabelle Schwarz of the ECF, and myself. Sreten Ugrčić is a modest man with a wry sense of humour and one of the toughest jobs in the country: in 2002, he gave up life as a philosopher and essayist to become the director of the National Library in Belgrade. One of his first initiatives was to give a press conference in the destroyed library of Sarajevo,

where he offered his apologies for the burning of its priceless collection – a war crime he had witnessed with horror.

Ugričić related a true story about the morning of the Serb offensive against Vukovar in 1991. Standing before the flag, the soldiers had to choose: join this historic venture or return home to Belgrade. One soldier moved back and forth a few times, then finally stood before the flag and shot himself.

Writers played a role on both sides of the choice between loyalty to the state and its people, and refusal to follow this course into nationalism and war. These two sides are exemplified by Dobrica Ćosić and Radomir Konstantinović. The latter's 'Filozofija Palanke', published in the seventies, predicted the provincial xenophobia which would evolve into proto-fascism. The former was infinitely more popular, gaining a wide readership with novels of moral simplicity and tribal solidarity which flirted with irrationality and existential angst.

Ćosić represents the mentality of not bearing the consequences of one's actions. This was the legacy of the Tito era in which an artificial state was created with no sense of responsibility. Built on symbols, with its trademark notions of brotherhood and unity, self-management, and its central role among the non-aligned countries, it became a highly developed people's democracy. Writers and intellectuals were natural accomplices of this addictive symbolical order, which fostered its own system of repression. Once it collapsed, many of these same writers and intellectuals switched to the even stronger drug of nationalism. This included the myth of victimhood, which is a guaranteed alibi for acting and living free of consequences.

Explaining the war with reference to the Tito era can provoke sensitivities. Edin Zubčević was ready to pounce on any mistake. In his mid-thirties, this lean young man, who now runs a jazz festival and a music label which presents explosive young acts as well as lost traditionals, spent most of the war in the trenches fighting Serb troops. Even in this sunny, civilised meeting room, anyone from Belgrade would have to run the gauntlet before gaining Zubčević's trust. To him, Yugoslavia was not simply an artificial construct. It was a very powerful state machinery, with a highly developed state infrastructure. But it did not complete two of its projects: Yugoslav nationhood and socialism. When socialism collapsed, it was replaced by nationalism. So the end of Yugoslavia meant not just the downfall of a symbolical order, but the destruction of very real cities and human lives.

Going back over the role, positive or negative, played by the arts in the build-up to the wars in the region was clearly wearying for the assembled company. They showed almost physical revulsion in referring to well-known figures who had,

they believed, profited from the rising tide of nationalism – figures such as Dobrica Ćosić, Emir Kusturica and Ljubiša Ristić. The message was clear: these stories have been told *ad nauseam*, the time has come to move on.

And yet, for many of those who have, since the war, flocked to the region on all kinds of diplomatic, aid and trade missions (including support for the independent art scene), it is important to try to grasp at least the basics of the violent shift from apparent peace to all-out nationalism and war. We have to know what came before in order to make the right decisions for the future.

Marjetica Potrč, a lively, permanently curious woman who has recently exhibited her impressions of the architectural styles of Balkan cities caught up in a flurry of self-styled reconstruction, discussed the most provocative artistic initiative of the old Yugoslavia, *Neue Slovenische Kunst* (NSK) from her hometown, Ljubljana. During the eighties, she said, NSK criticised the power structure of modernist national states by using its symbols in creating a parallel system, a state within a state, consisting of departments devoted to music, the performing arts, philosophy and design. NSK's mission was not to mobilise forces against the war but to manipulate modernist (state) projects by using national symbols. This was a final criticism of the modernist project of multicultural states within stable borders, before this concept gave way to the unstable, vibrant borders of today, where ethnic communities have taken over, individual initiative replaces state control, and private building comes before national planning.

## During the wars

The artistic sensibilities and cultural work of many in the group were sharpened during the nineties, at a time of wars, embargoes, dictatorship and economic crisis. The new nationalist discourse which fuelled the war was often self-obsessive. To many, the outside world was the enemy. In Serbia, conspiracy theories abounded about 'the fundamentalists of the worldwide Catholic multinational and the militant petro-dollar Islamic international', also known as 'Chrislam'. In besieged Sarajevo, newspapers 'uncovered' the plots of Vatican mercenaries, Komintern agents, Croatian traitors, Serbian assassins

and Masonic conspirators. In Croatia, everything had to be new and pure: the language, the street signs, the social codes. When the writer Dubravka Ugrešić saw people in the street selling cans of Pure Croatian Air, she decided 'to cleanse the country of myself' and left. In common with many artists, she was infuriated by the stupidity and banality which Danilo Kiš once said was 'unbreakable as a plastic bottle.'

Resistance came in many forms, often based on an invincible sense of humour and a stubborn denial of reality. The slogan of the Belgrade independent radio station B92 was 'Trust no one, not even us'. Under Serb occupation, Albanians in Priština set up an intricate system of living-room education. And that severely isolated city, Sarajevo, somehow became a beehive of cultural activity, with foreign guests shuttling in and out, making it Europe's informal capital of culture.

Edin Zubčević and Šejla Kamerić, a young visual artist who is taking the international art world by storm with her stylish, intensely personal reveries of remembrance and revolt, talked about life and art in wartime Sarajevo. Living under siege is a social phenomenon, and simply to stay is an act of resistance. For those living under siege in Sarajevo in an imitation of life, art was an act of survival. The motivation was not financial gain or self-promotion: making art was a revolution against the status quo. During the siege, art wasn't a goal – life was. And in the presence of death, you concentrated on what life *should be*.

In the provincial town of Sarajevo, war seemed to make international communication normal, attracting artists like Susan Sontag and Christian Boltanski. Creators and consumers alike understood that survival means progress. Sadly, this personal growth was choked by the weeds of a stagnant cultural infrastructure after the war. Many of the good things developed during the war were preserved, but war didn't fix the bad things. Even today, with poor infrastructure and politicians who wreak more havoc the more active they become, long-term thinking is impossible.

### **Constant State of Emergency**

Many of the artists who came to the fore during the nineties recall how life in Yugoslavia was lived in a constant state of emergency. Nobody could forget that the country was built in response to war. Schoolchildren were kept on the alert with the motto: 'Live as if the war will never happen; live as if it can start tomorrow.' Even so, to the generation growing up during the eighties, war came as a shock. Art then became a means of sharpening one's senses, requiring one to be present in every moment.

■ Goran Sergej Pristaš, a versatile player in Zagreb's amazingly interconnected scene of independent arts initiatives, recognised five different ways in which artists dealt with the experience of war. Only those artists who were ideologists of war, and were thus living what they wanted to see, appeared not to be affected. Many critical dissidents of the eighties left the country. Those who began making art at the beginning of the nineties had to create from zero, organising themselves well in a circuit of small NGOs and becoming agents for new cultural policymaking. Certain more experienced artists became tired and resigned, but continued to produce good work. And finally, a number of curators, dramaturges and theoreticians left the discourse of victimhood and stagnant politics behind them.

■ During the war, the collapse of the Yugoslav cultural market virtually halted all communication between the cultural organisations of the various republics. State-supported collaboration became difficult when those same states were funding the war. Anti-war artists were often forced to meet each other outside their own countries. In a recent interview with the ECF's Bertan Selim, the Macedonian art critic and curator Suzana Milevska explained the situation in this way:

There were many collaborative projects taking place which overcame all the new and artificial borders created during the conflicts. Such projects and often-private cases of mutual support were usually taking place abroad – outside of the territory of the conflict areas, as if they needed neutral terrain. Unfortunately, this merging of private and professional support, involving representatives of nations and ethnic groups which were in conflict with one another, could not prevent the hate caused by the majority. Regardless of how much we appreciate the art world and its power, we often witness its inability to cope with the irrational forces behind the societal 'desire machines'. However, art has some tools that are unavailable to the rest of society. It is the last resort and source of suppressed energies, of 'the carnivalesque' (to use Bakhtin's term), and society has yet to digest and apply these energies for its own benefit.

## After the wars

As the Bosnian war came to an end in 1995, artists both inside and outside the young states faced bewildering dilemmas. Those who had ridden to power on the nationalist wave clung to their positions in the crumbling but inextinguishable institutions – unless they were being pursued as war criminals or had committed suicide like Nikola Koljević, the Shakespearean professor who had been Karadžić's right-hand man. Those who had opposed nationalism now had to deal with its less violent but equally demanding counterpart: loyalty to the victims. And amidst the frenzy of reconstruction, one prerequisite for any work of art – the opportunity to be able to concentrate – was in short supply. For years, Bosnia didn't produce a serious novel about the war. 'Bosnia', observed the young writer, bookseller and ex-soldier Damir Uzunović in 1999, 'is now a short-story country.' In the chaos which some artists had helped create, those who had kept their senses throughout the war were now at a loss for words and images. How could one make art after Srebrenica?

As a result, those who were not directly involved tended to avert their eyes from the Kosovo crisis. But in Serbia and Macedonia, many artists found it almost impossible to keep a cool head amid the bombardments and the streams of refugees, which spilled over into Albania, a country recently ravaged by complete financial collapse.

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### The Art of Making Sense

The crucial question seems to be: Is the war really over? Is it not still going on, less overtly violent but morally and socially destructive nonetheless? Living under the artificial peace following the Dayton Accord and the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo, there is still no sense of direction, no cultural infrastructure. What artists should do now, Sreten Ugričić claims, is provide a new, post-Balkan symbolic infrastructure, to get out from underneath the old structures, patterns and models.

'All the problems in the Balkans', Ugričić wrote in an essay prepared for this Reflection Group, 'have been the problems of culture, the problems immanent to the cultural matrix of irresponsibility, incompetence, servitude, inconsistency, self-oblivion. Why is an upgrade in taste, ethics and mind required? Because low standards of mind open the space for low standards of ethics and taste; low standards of ethics open the space for low standards



of mind and taste; low standards of taste open the space for low standards of ethics and mind. How can we achieve this? Acting from within art, culture, the imaginary, from within knowledge and the value criteria that render the Balkans European and Europe Balkan. From kinship, and not from opposition... We are talking about the infrastructure of production and reproduction of sense, meaning, order and certainty of values – the infrastructure of culture. This infrastructure has various aspects. The economy of culture creates, distributes, consumes and recreates sense and meanings. The ecology of culture offers a balanced habitat of self-sustainable life and energy cycles of sense and meaning. The security of culture safeguards against peril from outside and within and maintains the stability of peace, of sense and meaning. The politics of culture make strategic decisions for the purpose of realising sense and meaning. This infrastructure consists of invisible mechanisms and strategic resources that never cease to radiate sense and values, with a force that reaches and extends over the existing solid borders, obstacles and redundant noises of bodies, territories, identities, ideologies. The production and reproduction of sense forges a vital and self-sustainable relationship between state and society, between individual and collective, between private and public, between decision and deed, between distinctiveness and equality, between morality and power, between justice and property, between inevitability and freedom.'

Artists should lead the way towards the art of making sense, Ugričić says. But while a new symbolic infrastructure might be some time in the making, its physical counterpart has been developing fast and against the odds in recent years. Alongside the remnants of the old state institutions, new initiatives popped up, providing space for the younger generation, and funded by international sponsors – with the Open Society Institute and its Soros Centres playing a central role, the value of which is hard to overestimate.

But just as artists throughout the region are discovering (or rediscovering) their potential, the attention of the international community is straying towards new trouble hotspots. Resisting such stereotypes as the pathos of patriotism, the constraint of religion, the self-pity of victimhood, the exotic labelling of the western art market, numerous artists and art spaces demonstrate their value to a fledgling society by wrestling free from group codes. Throughout the Balkans, artists are displaying the sort of intelligence which might be the most positive force emerging from these traumatised and disillusioned societies.

The arts are being caught in a complicated survival game, says the cultural observer Robert Alagjovzovski. 'Governments in the Western Balkans are now more collaborative with the Western power centres and are usually supported by the international community, but nation-state-building is still underway, and their cultural policy serves that process. With political scapegoats on trial or silenced, more or less the same political and social structure remains in place. And the cultural field was given to the identity politics as compensation for the lost political game. So ethnic-identity-based art still flourishes, nourishing frustrated sentiments, given free space to form the individual and collective unconscious. So-called multicultural art becomes a mix of two or more nationalistic arts. Moreover, with the new, politically accepted elites searching for international recognition, this identitarian art fills the cultural cooperation and presentation agenda of the ministries of culture and foreign affairs. NGO-based cultural practices receive insignificant funding, and some of their protagonists are sucked into the management of institutions or programmes. This mainly symbolic acceptance causes more damage than benefit for this kind of art: seen as 'exotic' and placed on the margins of the state, it serves as a signal to the main international funders to withdraw from the Balkans altogether, thus really marginalising critical and innovative art practices, burying them deep, deep underground.'

### **Out of Isolation**

Goran Sergej Pristaš was not about to be buried alive. He was convinced that some of the remaining international funders are going beyond the phase of Balkan stereotyping. Transparency – of laws, investment rules and state institutions – should be combined with a strong lobbying system. Artists are becoming a new kind of civil servant, taking care of infrastructure, fundraising and policymaking – all at the expense of producing art itself. To counter this new trend of artists having no time left to be artists, he proposes institutionalising certain achievements, establishing centres with adequate working space, research facilities, etc., within a dynamic regional framework.

The artists in the countries that used to be part of Yugoslavia may find themselves in a bewildering present. But there is at least a tradition of dissidence, critical discourse and counterculture which might somehow trickle through in the way they shape their present-day ambitions. In post-totalitarian, post-crisis Albania, this is hardly the case. After fifty years of total blackout, years in which you could be arrested for owning a book on Vincent van Gogh,

change came overnight. From 1991 to 1997, a new generation embracing new developments in the arts replaced the old elite. The right-wing Democratic Party, which caused the near-war of 1997, clamped down on these innovations. After the crisis, the arts helped restore a sense of normality, reflected on the crisis, and broke out of their isolation by gaining international attention – though this was stubbornly built on exoticism and stereotypes.

■ Nobody can tell this story better than Edi Muka, an artist and curator who was always in the thick of these developments and who became the most visible organiser of the new arts scene in Albania. Drawing attention to such talents as Anri Sala and Adrian Paci, who now enjoy international recognition, this small and stoic curator with his trademark stubble accomplished the impossible by turning his Tirana Biennale into a fixture on the global arts scene. As its director, he experienced how international partners often follow the logic of post-industrial capitalism, displaying interest in the brand rather than the product, thus making it very hard for an independent, innovative event like the Biennale to survive. Flexible and non-institutional, the Tirana Biennale regards the attempt to be different each time as a reason for its existence. Funders still need to recognise the crucial potential of such events in an as-yet-undefined society.

■ Muka stressed the near impossibility of living as an artist under present conditions in Albania. There is a cultural scene, but no market. Many young artists leave the country, go after the money in television or design, or become 'civil servants' in the funding world. The solution would be to concentrate not just on staging art events but on creating centres for grant giving and residence, first for local artists, then regional and world artists. These centres should receive long-term local as well as foreign funding. This concept, which Muka is in the process of realising in Tirana, resembles very closely the recommendations of Pristaš and others regarding the next step towards stabilising and expanding practice in their own cities.

■ All members of the group acknowledge that none of this will come to be without a future for their new nation states within Europe – a future in which the artistic and social value of the new arts scene is fully recognised and supported.

## **A Cold Peace**

As a prominent politician dealing with the region in various capacities, Wolfgang Petritsch is clear that the cultural dimension of EU integration is the biggest

void in the European project thus far. The EU has a material appeal, viewed by people as a means of making money: an illusion strongest among non-members. The need for a European vision which includes the cultural dimension is great.

But the war lingers on, with the region living in a cold peace. The keyword is 'Srebrenica'. Only when recognition and reconciliation have been achieved can the fate of Serb victims be properly acknowledged. Even if they play only a modest role, the arts are still more advanced than politics when it comes to dealing with such painful issues.

Civil society – including the arts – should increase pressure on governments to meet the criteria for entering the EU. Through foundations and networks, it can seek to influence the European Commission while also opening up the European project to the general public. In doing so, it would help to present the broader perspective, which can be summed up in the words 'Srebrenica: an ongoing state of war'. Finally, it is important to stress that maintaining the status quo, with its massive military presence, would be ten times more expensive than integrating the Balkan countries into the EU.

Politicians have a responsibility for supporting the cultural field in this process. Although not much extra money will be made available at EU level, a successful integration would require that culture, education and research be given priority. Freedom of movement should be increased with smart borders and smart visas. Artists should not be instrumentalised for political goals, however worthy these might be. The administration of public funding must be made more transparent and accountable. A network strategy which would include the media is also vital.

Stronger lobbying for the inclusion of a cultural dimension in the Stability Pact is needed. The message from the arts world, Petritsch emphasised, must be taken seriously within the political process.

After two days of talking about art and war, Goran Sergej Pristaš spoke for everyone when he said: 'After surviving, now we need to take place. I would like to take place, to be! This will be extremely confusing for nationalists who have never had a problem in being.'

# The value of the arts translated into cultural policy

‘**T**o counter a certain *Balkan fatigue* of the international community, multilateral organisations and NGOs,’ wrote theatre scholar Dragan Klaić in the ECF publication *Europe as a Cultural Project* (2005), ‘one needs to remember that the cultural realm generated much of the intolerance and hatred of the 1990s and thus needs to be encouraged to continue in a cooperative mode, locally, on the regional level and Europe-wide. And yet, paradoxically, culture is not even mentioned in the Stability Pact for South East Europe!’

How can politicians and EU decision-makers be convinced that arts and culture should automatically be included in European cooperation frameworks? That was the issue tackled by those who met in Belgrade for the second Reflection Group encounter in October 2005. This time the group included experts on policy in the region. Joining Wolfgang Petritsch, Goran Sergej Pristaš, Sreten Ugričić, Bertan Selim, Isabelle Schwarz and myself were Violeta Simjanovska (director of PAC Multimedia, Skopje), Erzen Shkololli (artist and curator with Exit, Priština), Mehmet Behluli (artist, professor at the arts academy and co-founder of Exit, Priština), Petra Bischof (Pro Helvetia), Paul van Paasschen (Hivos), and Aida Kalender (arts manager and journalist, Sarajevo).

## The Missing Cultural Chapter

‘If the EU does not devise a bold strategy for accession that could encompass all Balkan countries as new members within the next decade, then it will become mired instead as a neo-colonial power in places like Kosovo, Bosnia, and even Macedonia. Such an anachronism would be hard to manage and would be in contradiction with the very nature of the European Union. The real choice the EU is facing in the Balkans is: Enlargement or Empire.’

From *The Balkans in Europe's Future* by the International Commission on the Balkans (2005).

In 2005, the International Commission on the Balkans, which was made up of experienced politicians, produced a report which could well turn out to be the most influential independent statement on the Balkans in recent years. The status quo in the Western Balkans, they claim, will lead to further unrest, poverty and possibly new wars, unless the EU commits itself now to the process of welcoming these countries as new member states in 2014.

■ The report focuses mainly on political and economic issues. This prompted the ECF to initiate a reflection process that would add ‘the missing cultural chapter’, inserting sound cultural policy into this ‘bold strategy’.

■ As things stand, international support provides only incidental opportunities for arts and culture in the Western Balkans. Glaring structural flaws remain. In the words of Dragan Klaić, ‘Increasingly, artists operate in an interdisciplinary mode against the discipline-driven profile of most cultural institutions. Artists develop a nomadic existence against the static habits of institutions. The sense of *creative time* of the artists and the sense of *programming/budgeting/production time* of the institutions do not overlap!’

■ In the legendary Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade, a space which was the venue for all kinds of countercultural activities, from the first anti-war demonstrations to the days of Otpor, the student circle which proved decisive in toppling Milošević and his regime, the individuals gathered for the second Reflection Group meeting sat down and formulated a list of recommendations. These were the next steps which we believed needed to be taken in order to overcome the current stagnation of cultural policy in the Western Balkans, to assist an emerging independent cultural infrastructure, and to present the case for the necessity of European support.

■ This time around we focused on practical matters of cultural policy and support programmes – first at national, then at regional, and finally at European level. What follows is a rough outline of the recommendations which were subsequently presented in a concise document at the final debate in The Hague (see p61-63).

## Organising and supporting the arts nationally

Touring different Western Balkan countries, observing how the independent arts scenes are organised, convinces one of the need for immediate structural support. The opposite stance is being taken by several foundations, as they close down or minimise their contributions now that the emergency phase is over. At the same time, national governments remain generally unsupportive and most EU cultural programmes are still closed to Western Balkan countries or are difficult for them to access.

■ Goran Sergej Pristaš picked up where we left off by offering a *tour d'horizon* of plans for a new cultural centre and cultural foundation in Zagreb. In a deserted factory in the heart of town, the independent arts scene (now a fully recognised player on the local cultural-political stage) is about to open an interdisciplinary centre for the production, performance, research and incubation of new art. At the same time, a foundation is being set up to support new cultural initiatives and institutions in the city. This foundation will not replace the existing framework at city and government level; rather, it will concentrate on strengthening the infrastructure of the independent and interrelated arts scene, disseminating funds according to its own decision-making process (but not affecting the city's cultural budget). The challenge is to professionalise its own work while being actively involved in the reform of Croatian cultural policy in a way that doesn't require it to commit itself to any particular political party. Of the capital cities in the region, Zagreb now seems to be following in the footsteps of Ljubljana in becoming a place in which independent initiatives and state institutions can find a *modus vivendi* which permits them at least to co-exist.

■ In other countries, the situation is not nearly so encouraging. We were joined by Violeta Simjanovska, the dare-devil from Skopje who survived many attempts to close down her Performing Arts Centre, becoming one of the main players in initiating communication between the independent scene and Macedonia's cultural state institutions; by Aida Kalender, a driving force behind Sarajevo's 'Rock under Siege' who is now almost single-handedly addressing the issue of the absence of cultural policy in Bosnia; and by Mehmet Behluli and Erzen Shkololli, both from Kosova, who are creating and facilitating new art in a country that is still unable to make its own decisions let alone provide education and space for the next generation of artists. Together, they painted a rather bleak picture of the state of cultural infrastructure in their countries. Their reflections are summarised below.

In Macedonia, the synchronisation of national and international lobbying was decisive in strengthening the position of the independent arts scene. Interested politicians were invited to join cultural workers in discussing the opening up of official arts institutions, the development of a joint cultural policy and the 'education' of the media in order to convince them to pay serious attention to the arts. The implementation of all this is still very troublesome, but the advantages of joining forces are clear.

With its extreme degree of decentralisation, Bosnia and Herzegovina has no less than thirteen ministers of culture, and none at national level. Under these circumstances, gaining recognition for the scattered independent cultural scene is all but impossible. Finally documenting and evaluating the countless artistic activities that have taken place since the beginning of the war would represent a start. The economic impact of the creative industries should then be analysed, since proof that an active cultural life has a positive effect on employment, tourism and foreign investment has been crucial in strengthening cultural policy and cultural budgets in other European countries. Finally, it cannot be stressed enough just how emancipatory a role is played by serious, cutting-edge art in a society dominated by populist culture.

In Kosovo, the arts have been left behind. 'Exit' is the one place where young artists can receive an education and have the chance to exhibit somewhere other than the ossified strongholds of the older generation such as the arts academy and the national gallery. Whatever talent arises from the visual arts or music scenes – and there is certainly no lack of such talent – has to take care of itself, with the occasional and temporary support of outside funders.

On a more positive note, as Wolfgang Petritsch pointed out, traditional stereotypes which portray the Balkans as Europe's 'Other' can be mocked or even shattered by the arts. This can help to normalise relations between the Balkans and the rest of Europe. On the road to European integration, it is extremely important to grasp that the Balkans are Europe's past *and* its future.

### Complex Demands

Before becoming too optimistic about the role the arts can play in developing civil society and shattering stereotypes, it is useful to consider how complex are the demands placed upon the arts. In an interview with Bertan Selim, Macedonian art critic Suzana Milevska discussed this issue at length. Conceding that the arts can act as a moderator of significant social discussions, Milevska warns not to expect too much from the arts in this respect, as people



were often confused by the complexity of their approach. There is a hidden paradox within society's demands of the arts: on the one hand, art which projects a very clear political message is often not very good art; on the other hand, art which does not sacrifice its complexity to pragmatic agendas can be difficult to understand without a profound education, and so does not appeal to the masses. In this sense, it cannot properly fulfil its societal mission of raising awareness of the need for civil society development.

Over the past decade, Milevska argues, Western interest concentrated mostly on artists whose art reflected the urgent social, economic and political issues that emerged during and after the break-up of Yugoslavia. The war, the political and ethnic conflicts, the problems of newly accepted economic systems, the attempts by all countries to conform to EU rules, and so on: the West was profoundly interested in what was going on in ex-Yugoslavia and the rest of the Balkans. Looking at these often horrific events from artists' perspectives turned out to be very fruitful – and safe. This approach was counter-productive for a great number of artists who did not devote their efforts to these matters and insisted on working on formal artistic issues. With the foreign market demanding only art which emphasised political, social and economic issues, many such artists were simply wiped from the Balkan art scene.

Milevska highlights a very real problem facing the current independent arts scene. The fact that much of the funding comes from abroad and emphasises social relevance means that purely artistic criteria are often secondary, if they are present at all. For this reason, the Reflection Group stressed that **everything starts with content**: the production of art at the highest level is a prerequisite of the political recognition of independent culture.

That being said, recognition can be gained by documenting and evaluating the independent cultural initiatives of surprising energy and scope which have emerged ever since the beginning of the war. This would produce evidence of a civil society coming alive.

The infrastructure of the independent arts scene, with its post-war vitality, visibility and willingness to cooperate across borders should not be taken as a given, but actively strengthened.

Once the independent scene is recognised in its own right, partnerships should be created with existing state-funded public institutions, both locally and nationally. Without entering into party politics, cultural workers should find a means of engaging the traditional public institutions and also politicians of different parties in dialogue. The aim of such a dialogue would be to develop a strategically planned, open-minded cultural policy.

## Organising and supporting the arts regionally

Regional cooperation is not about recreating Yugoslavia. The connections of a former relationship exist and can be revitalised, but not out of 'Yugo-nostalgia'. It would be more realistic to state that Brussels is best approached from a regional viewpoint – regional cooperation has always been the backbone of the EU.

Ever since the break-up of Yugoslavia, countries in the region have made a point of emphasising their differences. However, a gradual change has become perceptible. Artists are becoming convinced that it is high time to define a common positive image of the Balkans. Artistic urgency leads them to cooperate regionally, but at a safe distance from the political domain. For artists, cooperation on a personal level has never stopped. Supporting their work would mean rewarding the 'non-identitarian' outlook of such individuals, and this in turn would help improve cultural life in their countries. Smart visas and less expensive travel would assist mobility, which is an essential element of regional cooperation.

Artistic cooperation can be a model form of cooperation, improving the image of the Balkans in Europe. The resulting regional networks would prove to be more flexible and effective than bilateral ones.

Sustainable networks and a common cultural market for the creative industries can be developed by working with existing partners. This should help stem the flow of artists leaving the Balkans for Europe. Cultural infrastructure development should be a criterion of EU accession, thus forcing governments to act more positively in support of the arts.

## Organising and supporting the arts at European level

The budget of the EU culture programme is absurdly, unrealistically small. It needs to be dramatically improved along the lines of the ECF/EFAH (European Forum for the Arts and Heritage) proposal of 70 cents per EU citizen per year. Not only better funding is required. The agents of EU programmes should be

approachable and responsive to artists and cultural organisations. As Isabelle Schwarz of the ECF pointed out, the existing EU/SEE frameworks in which cultural activities can be supported confront cultural partners in the Balkans with two difficulties: the precondition that they provide 5% of the requested budget, and the cost of international audits.

■ Cultural initiatives which have proven their value but cannot easily survive in the marketplace deserve funding from multilateral programmes. Such programmes could also help replace outdated national cultural policies with ones that are compatible with changes in cultural practice, and promote capacity building, cross-border cooperation and the mobility of cultural operators in the region.

■ One weakness of cultural organisations in the Western Balkans is the discontinuity of their work due to financial instability and high staff turnover (as staff members emigrate to develop and educate themselves elsewhere). This could be countered by core funding as well as mobility aid that would make temporary travel easier.

■ Bilateral support from EU countries needs to focus on partnership-building rather than promotion. While the presentation of Western arts and artists can be a valuable addition to the regional scene, the national agenda is an irrelevance to the individuals and organisations involved.

## Financial Prospects

The financial prospects for multilateral cultural cooperation are, however, gloomy. In 14 of the 25 member states, culture budgets have decreased in recent years. The adopted EU culture budget for 2007–2013 (Euro 400 m) falls far short of the figure proposed by the 70 cents campaign. For these pressing reasons, the ECF is seeking new private-public partnerships for innovative cross-border projects in the region, projects which would help define a policy for relations with those neighbours of the Union belonging to the shared European cultural space. Since foundations have a key role to play in this, the ECF has invited those foundations which sponsored the report of the International Commission on the Balkans to join with other foundations to create shared projects and establish standards of 'cultural inclusion' which go beyond mere cultural diplomacy.

■ With governments having neither money nor capacity to support the arts in the region at a time when international funders are withdrawing from it, there is the danger of a vacuum being created. To counter this, the ECF and

partners have established a new Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture. This will act to bridge the funding gap between now and such time as the Western Balkan countries enjoy full participation in EU programmes. The fund will focus on local cultural development and regional cultural cooperation.

Impressed by the diversity of the arts in the Balkans, Wolfgang Petritsch urged the EU bureaucracy to understand that arts and culture can be an alleviating factor in a region where constitutional failure has contributed to economic slowdown. The Balkans are important to the EU for compelling political, strategic and economic reasons. It is in its own interest that the dynamics of integration be continued. Balkan arts can help Brussels!

2006 promises to be a historic year in the Balkans' integration process. This offers an opportunity to 'mainstream' the arts within the political negotiations. Having as a goal the creation of a 'knowledge-based society', the EU must understand that the software of the integration process has to be redefined.

# Setting the agenda and taking the next steps

**N**obody summarised better how hard it is to bring together the worlds of arts and politics, of practitioners and donors, than Dutch foreign minister Ben Bot and Macedonian playwright Goran Stefanovski. Both were honorary guests at the Peace Palace in The Hague for the final debate of this Balkan Reflection Group process.

Minister Bot was asked about the possibilities of introducing a smart visa system so that we do not have to wait until the Western Balkan states are perfect European states before its people are allowed to cross our borders, especially since some 70% of students from the Western Balkan countries have never travelled abroad or seen a foreign capital. Ben Bot replied that we have to understand that Western Europe has a recent history of troublesome immigration, with results such as the recent riots in the suburbs of Paris. 'One can only introduce a liberal visa policy if one can be sure that the data and information one is getting from the other side is correct,' he said. 'And that those who are applying for a visa, for whatever reason, are really coming for the purpose envisaged!' Because of course, he added, in dealing with visa issues in the Balkans we don't want to get involved in such practices as the smuggling of drugs and the trafficking of women...

Stefanovski, a veteran writer now living in Canterbury, added playful insult to injury with his closing speech about Zoran (see p68), his alter ego with whom he has 'daily arguments, someone I try to tame, negotiate with, bring to his senses, wrestle with and agonise over.' Many years ago, this alter ego wrote a poem entitled 'The Heart of the Matter', which served as a patriotic poem in old Yugoslavia, then as an ode to nationalism during wartime, as the work of a writer in exile serving as the Face of Inclusion, and finally – after his return – as a song for the new Europe...

One thing that became clear during the conference in The Hague was that, despite various advocacy campaigns and initiatives at European level in recent years, the lobby for the recognition of cultural cooperation as a major force in the EU integration of the Western Balkans is not as concentrated as it should be.

■ In a very intense working atmosphere, European and national policymakers, representatives of foundations and cultural organisations, diplomats, ministry officials, artists and journalists produced a collage of differing positions. But they also managed to come up with an action list of very concrete pointers for concerted advocacy efforts. These are just a few examples:

- The EU needs now to actively engage the countries of the Western Balkans in a process of member-state-building.
- Culture should be included in the capacity-building programmes of the EU and the Stability Pact.
- A new arts and culture fund for regional cooperation should be created, with a substantial budget for supporting organic changes in the Western Balkans.
- EU technical assistance programmes such as *CARDS* should be opened up in order to enhance capacity-building in the cultural field.
- Concrete proposals should be formulated and presented to the politicians, accompanied by a serious lobbying effort. The lobby for culture should be directed towards the highest political levels. Not only the Commissioner for Education and Culture, but also the EU Commissioner for Enlargement should be approached. At local level, too, especially during their election campaigns, politicians must be urged to endorse the value of the arts to society. This can be achieved by appealing to their key priorities (e.g. youth culture) and by always synchronising efforts. Alliances with the business sector can be especially useful when defining the economic value of arts and culture to a society.

## Last Words

All in all, the conference showed that there is still a long way to go. The countries of the Western Balkans may have no future outside the EU, but they are not about to be permitted entry just yet. In this process, the innovative and independent art scenes have not been regarded as instrumental, let alone recognised as potential frontrunners for their societies. To those involved, it may be clear that they are changing the fibre of their societies from the inside. They create moments of beauty and reflection. They provide areas of concentration for the energy and imagination of a new generation that is generally cut off from the outside world. They are developing models of organisation that are more sophisticated and innovative than the stagnating institutions which still claim to rule their societies. They doggedly set up cooperation with minorities, with kindred spirits in the region, and with curious and supportive partners in the outside world.

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Still, the message that the arts can be a decisive factor in preparing the countries of the region for a stable, post-Balkan future as part of the European Union has trouble finding recognition. Yet during the closing conference of this Reflection Group process, most politicians and policy professionals made an effort to listen carefully to the artists and cultural workers present. Their message was: convince us that your work is as crucial as you maintain, that it is truly the heart of the matter, and we will think with you about strategies to strengthen the work of the individuals and institutions you represent. The list of recommendations produced by the Reflection Group (see p60) came out of the conference as a live and urgent working document.

**Chris Keulemans** Writer and journalist, Amsterdam

Commissioned by the ECF to moderate and report on 'The Heart of the Matter'



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# Contributions

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**Sreten Ugričić**

**Marjetica Potrč**

**Mehmet Behluli**

**Violeta Simjanovska**

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**Goran Sergej Pristaš**

**Aida Kalender**

**Edi Muka**

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The Bulgarian documentary 'Whose is this song?' (Adela Peeva, 2003) is a typical post-Balkans product. What the documentary proves is that even music represents an infrastructural symbolic resource of this region. The Balkanites in the film – Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians, Bulgarians – express their certainty that the melody in question belongs to them, that it originated in their region, from their people, that it could not have originated anywhere else, that it is authentic and inseparable from their identity and heritage. Finally, it

turns out that the melody is one and the same everywhere, beautiful, belonging to everybody and nobody in particular. Whose is this song? European? Balkan? Whatever is simultaneously European and Balkan we call *post-Balkan*.

The Balkans were an identity – from the inside and from the outside – and that was the essential problem. Identity versus Otherness. The Balkans paid the highest price just to prove that there is no such thing as identity. The Balkans were **ethnic**-centred and **ethnic**-based. The *post*-



**Sreten Ugričić**

# A Post-Balkan Sy

**“Let the Balkans develop on multiple levels in geographic space and historical time: what you get is Europe.**

**Conceive a culture in the Balkans, wait for two thousand and five hundred years for it to grow in all possible directions and aspects: what you get is Europe.**

**Europe is a post-Balkans phenomenon – an archetype and utopia.”**

*Balkans* is **ethic**-centred and **ethic**-based. One letter makes all the difference. The difference makes culture. The *post-Balkans* means primarily that the Balkans are not Europe’s Other.

In order to reshape and upgrade the dominant intellectual, moral and cultural standards in the Balkans and in the rest of Europe, we need a *post-Balkan symbolic infrastructure* affecting public and personal attitudes, opinions, behaviour, communication, dissemination processes, and decision-making procedures. This

transfiguration cannot originate from the sphere of politics or economics (or from any strict visa regime), but only from culture: namely, from art and knowledge, imagination and memory, qualities and principles that extend beyond the limitations and coordinates of the Balkans.

A copy of Sreten Ugričić’s complete essay, ‘A Post-Balkan Symbolic Infrastructure’, can be downloaded from the ECF website [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate/ reflection & debate).

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Director of the National Library of Serbia, Belgrade, and author of seven books (fiction, essays, theory). His prose has been included in several anthology selections of contemporary Serbian literature. Ugričić is also the editor of several magazines of literature, science and librarianship, as well as a former teaching fellow at the Faculty of Philosophy in Priština.

# mbolic Infrastructure



**Marjetica Potrč**

# The future is in the as new architectural

**Cities read like an open book.  
Architecture is, after all, the most  
immediate, most expressive and most  
enduring record of the human condition.**

During the 1990s, the Western Balkans rapidly collapsed. Today, the region is restructuring itself as a conglomeration of distinct and highly inventive societies that do not compete with each other but rather exist in parallel. Cities such as Belgrade, Priština and Tirana not only attest to the dissolution of the social state and the prevalence of derelict modernist architecture and degraded public space, they also blatantly showcase strategies that other European

cities deal with only timidly. These strategies include a new emphasis on privacy, security and locally based solutions, as well as a preference for small-scale growth. In these small countries, the desired form of coexistent habitation in cities is exemplified by urban villas and urban villages – new architectural typologies – which we might also call gated communities or closed neighbourhoods. In modernism, a residential community usually meant some 10,000 people. Today, an urban villa is a residential community of 10 to 20 families.

Basically, a restructuring of modernism is what cities in other parts of Europe have in

**“What I saw when travelling through the main cities of the Western Balkans half a year ago was indeed the future. More precisely, I saw the future of the European**

**Union in the cities there. I had already seen signs of similar strategies in the European Union, ranging from the formation of geopolitical territories**

**to the creation of much smaller territories such as residential units; only now, in the Western Balkans, they were being much more clearly articulated.”**

Artist and architect based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Marjetica Potrč has exhibited extensively throughout Europe and the Americas. She has also published a number of essays on contemporary urban architecture. She has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards, most notably the Hugo Boss Prize (2000).

# Balkans – urban villas typologies

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common with the Western Balkans. While modernism functions top-down and thinks in large-scale terms, cities and regions in the Western Balkans today celebrate, and are the product of, bottom-up initiatives, fragmentation, adaptability and an emphasis on the local.

## **The urban villa – a new architectural typology**

Urban villas are homes to small communities with similar cultural values and standards of living. The accent is placed on personal values and concerns such as privacy and security. In Cottbus, a shrinking city in the

former East Germany, architects attempted an experimental approach to the city's high proportion of vacant flats. When demolishing a residential apartment block, one third of the prefabricated components were preserved to build five urban villas of two to three stories each. Kajzerica is a neighbourhood in Novi Zagreb which has become the site for a recent bottom-up planning effort. Urban villas housing several families replace one-family houses and eradicate the public space.

A copy of Marjetica Potrč's complete essay, 'The Future is the Balkans', can be downloaded from [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate/reflection & debate).



**Mehmet Behluli**

# **The Cultural Education Searching for Alternatives**

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After 1999, the international community installed itself robustly in our country, in a humanitarian as well as a military capacity. People in the arts started to realise that it was no longer possible to have only one functioning artistic community. This period marked a new beginning, with new artistic communities and associations, new NGOs working in different fields, including arts and culture. Outsiders interested in Kosovan art arrived, mainly due to the exotic status that we were enjoying at that time. Cultural foundations began to take an interest in Kosovo's art scene. Art students gained access to more information through direct communication about contemporary means of expression and different art concepts.

**The majority of (mainly young) artists have recognised the enormous possibilities offered by an open approach to different art patterns. Incorporating this into their specific environment while insisting on working with problems that stem from their surroundings has led them to produce very unique forms of artistic expression.**

Now the international community has promoted the reform of education. The road ahead is a difficult one, for several reasons: the body of teaching staff is old, not only in terms of age but concepts and ideas also; the curricula are old – for 30 years there has been no innovation in academic programmes; the funds for education are very poor. The international community is trying to make minor, superficial adjustments



Artist and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Priština. He has had numerous exhibitions throughout the Western Balkans and the EU.

# Education System in Kosovo – Alternatives

to an outdated education system. For European integration to be effective, we need to ensure that our educational concepts as far as possible resemble those found throughout Europe. We need to have more freedom to revise the school curriculum within a common framework and in close cooperation with institutions in Europe; and we also need to find alternative methods of financing the education system and to establish common or mixed educational institutions within Europe (for example, Franco-German, German-British, or why not Kosovar-Franco art academies?). Exchange programmes are crucial. A group of students from my academy could go somewhere in the EU for a period of time, gather experiences in artistic education and then come back and share these experiences with their peers.

**Why have students from Europe not come to Kosovo? I am sure that Kosovo is a very attractive country in terms of artistic inspiration – a country with a completely different temperament, with a ‘positively irrational’ organisation of society.**

A large amount of money has been invested in Kosovo, but not much of it on culture.

The reason for this is simple: culture is not a priority. Yet investments in quality artistic, cultural and especially educational projects are direct investments in European cultural integration.

A copy of Mehmet Behluli’s complete essay, ‘The Cultural Education System in Kosovo – Searching for Alternatives’, November 2005, can be downloaded from the ECF website [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate/ reflection & debate).

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**“One overriding principle in existing teaching models is that teachers know everything and have the answers to all questions, while students don’t know anything: they have come to learn, so that ‘when**

**they complete their studies, they will know everything too!’ Somewhat half-jokingly, I often say that my main ‘mission’ in the Priština Faculty of Arts is to confuse – the students mainly (or artists who**

**happen to pass by). My strategy is quite simple: if teaching in an art school is to stand any chance of success, install *doubt* as a value above and beyond all others.”**

Cultural life in Macedonia at the beginning of the 90's was based on the programmes of the public cultural institutions, which were under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. With some rare exceptions, space for independent activities was therefore almost non-existent. As far as their organisational, human resource and strategic capacities were concerned, these cultural institutions remained in the shape they were in prior to independence: poorly managed, incompatible with and unable to communicate with the outside world, massive, expensive to maintain, with small and non-innovative production.

On the other hand, those who did not 'fit' these conditions began to act

independently, to group themselves together and to realise common goals. This was the **NEW POSSIBILITY** that became the origin of the non-governmental organisations in the cultural field. Since all forms of activity which lay outside government circles were perceived as those of the **opponents - an enemy**, the Macedonian government acted claustrophobically towards the independent activists.

Gradually, this negativity was replaced by dialogue. The division between **US** and **THEM** was replaced by unity, togetherness. We have become aware that, on various levels, we are more or less speaking of the same issues: our mutual interests, our space together, our cultural life, our public funds,

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**Violeta Simjanovska**

**The road from turning**

our future in the EU. The authorities have started to accept their primary role, which is to serve the citizens.

One of the priorities of the Macedonian government is the country's EU integration. The idea of EU membership seems to be one of the strongest bases of the country's fragile existence and democracy. Having to adjust to European standards has forced the authorities to be more and more open to the outside, and also to look inward, detecting their own weaknesses and problems.

In order to resolve difficulties and meet the new needs of Macedonia, a new Cultural Policy movement is attempting

to achieve the following priority goals: democratisation of the Ministry and institutions, decentralisation of government, decentralisation of cultural institutions and greater openness to the public, development of the cultural and arts market, education of highly professional cultural managers and the reconstruction of their operating systems. The new values which will emerge will help to create a platform for collaboration with the civil sector and establish a **partnership** with it.

A copy of Violeta Simjanovska's complete essay, 'The road from turning an enemy into a partner', November 2005, can be downloaded from the ECF website [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate/reflection & debate).

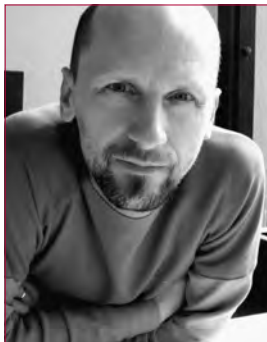
Violeta Simjanovska is currently finalising an MA programme in Cultural Management, Public Policy and Cultural Policy in the Balkans at the University of Arts in Belgrade. Since 1998, she has been Executive Director of the Skopje-based NGO, PAC MULTIMEDIA (<http://www.multimedia.org.mk>). In recent years, Violeta has been focusing on cultural policy issues in Macedonia and in the Balkans in general.

## an enemy into a partner

**“Transforming a way of life and changing society’s norms, values and spiritual patterns is a long process, but even the relatively**

**short experience since 1991 (when Macedonia became an independent country) proves that new values and**

**a new regulation of cultural activities should be fought for by all of us.”**



# Operatio

**For 10 days, 8000 m<sup>2</sup> of exterior and 5200 m<sup>2</sup> of interior abandoned space in Zagreb were occupied by culture.**

In September 2005, two of Zagreb's local organisations – [BLOK], Local Base for Refreshment of Culture and Platforma 9,81 – put together **Operation: city**.

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This ten-day event featured a variety of cultural activities held in the premises of an abandoned industrial complex and a former city slaughterhouse. The activities included theatre and dance performances, art installations, exhibitions, film screenings, music events, workshops and lectures. 26 organisations and initiatives from

Zagreb's independent cultural scene collaborated to produce a programme of some 70 events in all, attracting around 3000 people to the opening event and 15000 daily visitors. Furthermore, two international festivals, *Touch Me and Urban Festival*, took place as part of the project.

**Operation: city** helped to advocate the interests of the independent cultural and youth sectors. These sectors had been trying to find a position in relation to the City's youth action plan since the early stages of its implementation. A public debate organised by independent players grouped around the project 'Zagreb –

Born in 1967, the dramaturge, artistic director and performer, Goran Sergej Pristaš graduated from the Zagreb Academy of Drama Arts in 1993. From 1990 to 1992, he was artistic director of the SKUC theatre. Beside numerous other position held, he is also senior lecturer at the Academy of Drama Art in Zagreb as of 1994.

# n: City

Cultural Capital of Europe 3000' resulted in a declaration called 'Independent Culture and Youth in the Development of the City of Zagreb'. One of the declaration's key demands was that a location in downtown Zagreb be adapted to act as a multifunctional centre for independent culture and a macro-regional centre for youth.

**Operation: city** functioned as an interface, presenting the diversity of programmes that the future centre could offer. The project was realised in cooperation with the City of Zagreb, and had the direct support of the City's Mayor and the City's 'minister' for culture. Both politicians were impressed

by the number and quality of the art works and primarily by the size of the audiences. The project changed their perception of independent culture from an 'alternative', marginalised activity to a powerful and important social and cultural vehicle. They publicly endorsed the establishment of a future Centre for Independent Culture and Youth. Preparations for the centre are currently underway.

This text is based on the draft documents of ZCK 3000 platform. A copy of the complete essay 'The Model of the New Centre and Foundation in Zagreb, Croatia', November 2005, can be downloaded from [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate/reflection & debate).

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**“The independent cultural scene in Zagreb has already taken steps towards cooperating with public cultural institutions. It has become a partner in knowledge-sharing with local cultural centres**

**and has given visibility to those institutions which are shifting towards a hybridisation of their activities and structures. However, this dynamic cultural development has not met with an adequate**

**response, whether in terms of cultural policy, urban planning or the political decision-making which defines the development of the city.”**



**Aida Kalendar**

# **New cultural policies**

After years in which the issues of cultural policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina were simply not debated, two interesting initiatives have been launched in under a year.

Firstly, a group of young artists, cultural operators and researchers associated with Professor Jasmina Husanović of Tuzla University started a multidisciplinary project with the aim of developing various cultural policy research studies and publishing them in a book which should be ready by the end of 2006. The outlines of the

research were successfully presented in Geneva at a conference which marked the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. They contained interesting policy proposals for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second initiative focuses on raising awareness of cultural policy development among cultural operators as well as the general public. The project 'New Policies of Culture', initiated by the Sarajevo-based NGO Akcija, centres around a series of public lectures on cultural policy issues as

**“The major challenge for cultural operators in Bosnia & Herzegovina today is to initiate debate on improving the generally poor position of culture in the country and to advocate changes to the old-fashioned, centralised and non-transparent cultural system.”**

A journalist and arts manager from Sarajevo. For a number of years she has been the programme manager of the cultural NGO Akcija, which supports independent youth culture in Sarajevo and initiates cultural policy development projects. In 1998 Aida established the annual International Advanced Music Festival ‘Futura’.

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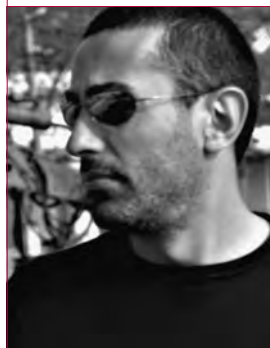
## in Bosnia & Herzegovina

well as presentations of different experiences of cultural policy development. The aim is for international experts and academics to present the basic concepts of cultural policy theory to cultural operators and to present examples of good practice from other South East European countries which have a similar ideological, socio-economic and cultural background to that of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Many SEE countries have already started a public dialogue between the government and the cultural sector on participative**

**cultural policy strategies and have gained experience in the processes involved.**

The timing of the Akcija project fits in with the publication of the first draft of the National Report on Cultural Policy, announced for 2006, and the general elections which will take place in October 2006. Both these factors highlight the challenge facing the cultural sector to get the cultural policy debate up and running. Akcija will concentrate on presenting advocacy instruments and promoting the need for cultural organisations and artists to collaborate and network.



**Edi Muka**

# Turn On

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Contours of a face fade into view on the screen. Rough, deeply cut by wrinkles on the sides and on the forehead; hair and eyebrows thick. Another face shows up: different features, but the same despair. Yet another, and another, and another.

A hand pulling an ignition wire sets a noisy engine of some kind in motion. Another hand, and yet another. More engines, more noise. The angle widens and you see the face attached to the hand holding a big lamp, lit by the noisy generator. The noise now permeates everything around us. The whole view is revealed. A group of men, lamps in their hands against the backdrop of a concrete skeleton staircase, begin to fade from view, blurred to a point where they become like flickering stars in a dark sky.

'Turn On'! What precisely is it that the artist wants to turn on? HOPE, perhaps, judging from the look on the exhausted faces. There's an iconographic stance in **Adrian Paci's** approach. There are no words, only the incomprehensible muttering of the machines. A spectacle of simplicity. Indeed, there's no need for a story: these men are the story – the icon of a helpless social condition. A very accurate and poetic depiction of a condition of existence, an entrance beyond the immediacy of 'here and now', the piece takes you on an almost spiritual journey. The social function of Adrian's art is a very elegant yet simple way of deconstructing the stereotype of 'the Other'.

A copy of Edi Muka's full essay 'The Other – Attempts to Break a Stereotype', April 2006, can be downloaded from the ECF website [www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org) (We advocate reflection & debate).



Born in Durres, Albania, Edi Muka is a co-founder and co-director of the Tirana Biennale. In 1995 he began teaching at the AFA in Tirana as assistant professor, and he is currently guest professor at the Contemporary Art Atelier. In April 1999 he was appointed Director of the International Centre of Culture in Tirana and in 2001 Curator of the National Gallery in Tirana (International Programme).

**“An increasing number of important international events are taking place in and around the Balkans, within a frame that is definitely not a Western one. Furthermore, none of the events is directly engaged in fighting stereotypes. Unaware of territorial and contextual differences which, in turn, produce different aesthetic perceptions, Western visitors unconsciously look for approaches that correspond to their own well-known patterns when witnessing these events and initiatives. When they don’t find such patterns, they apply labels such as ‘simplistic’ or ‘not necessarily good art’, thus forgetting one crucial element: these events and the art presented at them have not been organised to satisfy the Western gaze.**

**They are, rather, attempts to grapple with an overwhelming reality, stronger than any aesthetic experience; attempts to look upon oneself with one’s own eyes and to open up to scrutiny from outside; attempts to define attitudes with a language of one’s own which matches the electric drive of reality, even if it doesn’t really fit within ‘acknowledged’ aesthetic parameters; attempts to invent a strategy of survival in a desert-like cultural landscape; attempts to resist the tremendous drive and sweep of globalism, while remaining part of an international discourse. They are attempts to matter, to come to terms with stereotypes of all kinds, and offer experiences that can lead us all towards new practices arising from the encounter between art and life.”**



UČINA  
PROBNO

NJE DOVOLJNO  
KONKRETNO

KONKRETNO

UČINA  
DO KRAJA

PRIHVACEN  
JE  
ZAKLJUČAK

UČINA  
DO KRAJA

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# Recommendations

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# Conference ‘The Heart of the Matter’ on: The importance of arts and culture in the process of EU integration of the Western Balkans

1 December 2005, Peace Palace (Vredespaleis), The Hague

## **Avoid Failure**

The European Cultural Foundation, Hivos (the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries) and the members of the ECF Reflection Group on arts and culture in the Western Balkans believe that the step-by-step integration of the Western Balkans into the EU will fail if it does not recognise the role of arts and culture as part of the solution.

## **End Stigmatisation**

We believe that any convincing political perspective needs to end the stigmatisation of the Balkans, and to pave the way for an inclusive European citizenship, based on shared values, a shared political culture, and shared cultures.

## **Stimulate Dialogue**

We believe that the dialogue of civil societies – as a prerequisite for the integration of the region into the EU – can best be promoted through cultural, educational, youth and media cooperation. Through the freedom of their imaginations, artists can help to create the space for such dialogue. Cooperation, encounter, the experience of enrichment through cultural diversity will help the citizens of the EU to understand and support the integration strategy.

## **Promote Inclusion**

At this crucial moment, we urge EU policymakers to include – in a real and substantial way – cultural cooperation in the integration road map, and to provide adequate means. We seek democratic and innovative cultural policies within the countries of the Western Balkans. And we ask for support for cultural capacity-building in the region as well as for regional cooperation, assisting artists and cultural operators to work together across borders and boundaries. We urge the European institutions and the member states to add a cultural chapter and financial substance to all Western Balkans policies in the years to come. By so doing, they will be preparing for the emergence of an inclusive community of European citizens.

## Recommendations of the ECF Balkan Reflection Group on culture

The Reflection Group consisted of artists and cultural workers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo/a, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovenia. Its members clearly recognise that there are many differences and different degrees of urgency within the region. Their reflections start from a belief in the value of the production of art at the highest level and the political recognition of the cultural sector's independence.

### Country level

The **infrastructure** of the independent arts scene as a part of civil society, as well as its visibility and will to cooperate across borders, need to be actively strengthened, e.g. through creating and sustaining cultural centres for the performance, production, research and incubation of innovative, often multidisciplinary arts (**capacity-building**). The surprising energy and scope of the **independent cultural initiatives** that have been taking place ever since the beginning of the war ought to be documented.

The Reflection Group also emphasises the demand for **democratic cultural policies**.

**Partnerships** are needed between the independent scene and the existing state-funded public institutions, both locally and nationally. Without entering into party politics, cultural workers should find a way to include the traditional public institutions and politicians in a **dialogue** about developing a strategically planned, open-minded cultural policy.

Mechanisms to support the cultural industries in the region should be developed. Such a measure would recognize the economic impact of the cultural industries and their **empowering** capacity in societies exposed to market-driven populist culture. Local recognition will be strengthened by recognition within the region and within Europe. For this reason, support should be offered for **cooperation** between national and international advocacy initiatives and networks for the independent cultural scene. This support should be accompanied by **innovative art education** and **local media training** so that serious cultural criticism can be developed and reach a wider audience. At European level, recognition of and support for a strong independent cultural scene in the region could help to counterbalance the unpredictable effects of shifts in government power. Artists in two particular countries will especially profit from cooperation: those in **Kosovo**, which is often underrepresented in regional networks and where art has been strongly politicised; and in **Bosnia**, where the cultural infrastructure is especially weak due to the absence of a cultural policy.

### Regional Level

The Reflection Group advocates a genuinely **cultural understanding of regional cooperation** as opposed to artificial donor-driven gestures. Artistic cooperation has a logic and an urgency that makes it distinct from political cooperation. Artistic cooperation within the region can prove to be a model for other forms of cooperation. **Mobility** is the essence of regional cooperation. That is why smart visa should be introduced and why travel should be supported. Real cooperation and **co-production** are more interesting and have longer-lasting effects than mere co-presentations. The regional networks developed from this type of cooperation prove to be more flexible and effective than bilateral networks. **Sustainable networks** are essential for a new common cultural market in the region which would help to lower the number of artists leaving the Balkans in despair over their personal and professional circumstances. Artistic cooperation between people

and organisations in the Balkans, and the presentation of the results of this cooperation on the European scene, will help create a new, sophisticated and more vital **image of the Balkans in Europe**, in contrast to the stubborn **prejudices** that currently prevail.

### **EU Level**

**Financial incentives** for the development of 'participative' cultural policymaking and infrastructure-building as part of the EU accession process would stimulate governments to step up their support for the arts in their own countries. The Reflection Group emphasises the crucial role of the arts and culture in reinvigorating the EU integration process. They are pillars of the **knowledge-based, innovative, inclusive and democratic societies** for which the EU strives. Supporting them means improving the *software* of the process. Consequently, the Reflection Group underlines the need for fully **opening up current and future EU programmes** and for increasing the possibilities of **funding**. Such future programmes as Culture 2007 should be easily accessible and avoid being unnecessarily complicated and expensive for Balkan partners. In conclusion, the Reflection Group maintains that 2006 will prove to be a historic year for the integration process.

**Crucial negotiations** concerning most of the Balkan countries will take place then. The arts and culture should be recognised as a positive force for cooperation and the representation of a new European Balkan **identity** on the way to full integration. The Austrian EU presidency, with its commitment to the Balkans, provided an excellent platform for the launch of an innovative, sophisticated campaign to promote contemporary Balkan arts and cultural cooperation within both the region and Europe.

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### **Reflection Group Members**

**Mehmet Behluli** artist and university professor, Priština

**Aida Kalender** arts manager and journalist, Sarajevo

**Šejla Kamerić** visual artist, Sarajevo

**Edi Muka** curator, Tirana

**Wolfgang Petritsch** Austrian ambassador to UN, Geneva

**Marjetica Potrč** architect and art critic, Ljubljana

**Goran Sergej Pristaš** dramaturge and choreographer, Zagreb

**Erzen Shkololli** visual artist and curator, Priština

**Violeta Simjanovska** cultural manager, Skopje

**Sreten Ugrčić** writer and director of the national library, Belgrade

**Edin Zubčević** artistic director jazz festival, Sarajevo

### **Moderator of the ECF Balkan Reflection Group**

**Chris Keulemans** writer and journalist

**A Way Forward**

**Isabelle  
Schwarz**

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**It is vital for the Western Balkans that the prospect of EU membership should be real and credible. And as the Rome Declaration of the International Commission on the Balkans (12 April 2006) declares, 'It is in the Balkans that the EU must show that it has the power to transform weak states and divided societies.'**

**The ECF remains firmly committed to the region. In terms of the Western Balkans' European integration, the Foundation believes in putting culture at 'the heart of the matter'. A pragmatic demonstration of this is a new cultural funding line designed by the ECF to facilitate the region's full participation in EU cooperation. The ECF will continue its advocacy for the Balkans in relation to the European integration agenda and the political acknowledgement of culture in this process.**

### **Areas for Advocacy**

We are convinced that the EU's new financial Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA) should not only provide adequate means but also include cultural measures. Independent critical thinking is essential to such post-conflict societies, as are regional and cross-border cooperation and the capacity of independent cultural NGOs and cultural institutions to develop.

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Now that the Stability Pact for South East Europe is being renegotiated and restructured, there is a clear opportunity to include the 'missing chapter' - culture - in its support strands, especially with regard to 'building human capital', which will be one of the Stability Pact's priority orientations.

Artists and cultural operators wishing to engage in transnational cultural cooperation should be encouraged, and measures should be put in place to ease the visa regime. Cooperation between EU-based cultural organisations and institutions and their Western Balkan counterparts is crucial. It is encouraging to note that the European Commission communication 'The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity' (Brussels, 27.1.2006) highlighted the prospect of visa regulations being made more flexible for certain groups in society, e.g. researchers and students.

We welcome the Commission's proposal to use the IPA to cover up to 10% of the obligatory fee for participation in Community programmes by Western Balkan operators from 2007. However, the obligatory co-financing of a minimum of 25% by the country concerned as well as the required minimum contribution from all project partners (5%) present a barrier for many cultural organisations in the Balkans. Mechanisms must be developed to allow the provision of the necessary matching funds so that European cooperation can be fully inclusive.

The significance accorded to culture in the Commission's communication on pre-accession countries such as Turkey and Croatia is equally valid for the entire Balkan region. Cultural exchanges and cooperation should be an integral part of the Western Balkan strategy. These

would not only help cultural operators and artists in the region, but would also enlighten public opinion in the member states regarding the advantages of close cooperation with the Western Balkans.

### **Bridging the Gap**

In response to some of the needs identified by the Reflection Group, a **Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture** has been set up by the ECF in partnership with the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos), and the Open Society Institute (OSI).

Until such time as the region can avail fully of EU support, this new funding line should serve as a flexible tool, awarding grants to local, regional and European projects developed by independent NGOs from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo/a.

The fund is a very concrete response to the dwindling support for culture in the region. It has already attracted commitment from additional sources at national and foundation level, (The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - SDC and the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs - DCO and the King Baudouin Foundation), but EU matching would help to empower this bridging exercise. With artists and cultural professionals from the Balkans acutely interested in engaging in project collaborations (within the region and across European borders), we feel impelled to respond.

Politically, culture is still undervalued as a powerful agent of European integration. The ECF calls on the European institutions to recognise culture's profound value in this respect; it also calls on the Member States to renew their commitment (as expressed in Thessaloniki in 2003) to a European future for the Balkans.

**Isabelle Schwarz** Cultural Policy Development Manager, ECF



**The Heart  
of The Matter**

**Goran  
Stefanovski**

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**A speech commissioned by  
the European Cultural Foundation  
for the conference**

**The Heart of the Matter**

1 December 2005, The Hague

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I am a playwright. I was born in the Republic of Macedonia where I lived most of my life. For 18 years my English wife Patricia lived there with me. Then, in 1992, with the collapse of Yugoslavia, she moved back to England. I started flying to and fro, between Skopje in Macedonia and Canterbury in England.

In the early years of my living in two worlds, I was lucky enough to work on a number of European projects. Most of them were in some way connected with the issues of civil society, 'Enlargement of Minds', cultural encounters, cooperation and shared visions.

I worked with a friend, a partner, a producer, an Italian American living in Sweden, called Chris Torch. Our projects included collaboration with various Eastern European artists, but were primarily co-financed by Western European countries and aimed at Western European audiences.

This packaging caused confusion and consternation in some quarters. I witnessed a series of misunderstandings and dramatic ironies, traps and pitfalls, hits and misses. Chris Torch believed he was championing the cause of sharing cultures, crossing borders, re-mapping, making sense of the new European challenges. He believed he was a mobile cultural operator, a pioneer of European integration, citizenship and community-building.

But on the ground, I heard libels, loud and hushed, aimed against him, but which reflected against me as well. Some folks saw him as a cigar-smoking slave driver. I heard the terms 'cultural

imperialist', 'multinational trickster', 'globalisation shark'. Both sides of the fence suspected him as someone who buys cheap artistic labour in the East and sells it for profit to the West. Many people didn't care what the performances or the actual artistic articulation were like. They hated the idea on principle.

I was bewildered. Suspecting my friend, Chris, of all people? The actor from the Living Theatre, the ultimate anarchic wild bunch of the Sixties? The man who founded a theatre commune in Stockholm? I thought he was cool. But other writers didn't, they told me to be careful. Especially as he was working with me and not them.

One day there was a meeting between some Macedonian actors and Chris in Skopje. They asked how much money they would be paid for their work. He answered it would be standard European wages. One of the actors sniped, between his teeth: 'I can find that kind of money in the street.' He was lying. There was no money to be found in the streets of Macedonia. Chris said: 'I thought you wanted to make theatre and not look for money in the streets.'

This conversation has stuck with me over the years. To this day I wonder about the mindset of my actor friend, his manoeuvre, his mental calculation. He probably thought something like this: 'I know I am worth little in market terms and I am quite resigned to that fact. But now here is this guy who comes *from* the market place and is showing interest in **me**. Why? What's in it for him? Maybe I am worth something after all. What if I am priceless and don't know it? This is a conspiracy. I won't sell. I'll wait for better offers.'

One day in 1995 Chris and I went from one Macedonian theatre to another trying to garner interest for our multi-ethnic project. We were working on a remake of Euripides' *Bacchae* where the Bacchantes were all male. We wanted actors of Macedonian, Turkish and Albanian ethnic origin to dramatise the reality on the ground. We went from door to door, from the Macedonian National Theatre to the Drama Theatre to the Theatre of Turkish and Albanian Nationalities, inviting them to collaborate.

This turned out to be an explosive proposition. 'Collaborate! We've never collaborated before. We are suspicious of each other, we protect our interests, we are almost enemies. What do you mean, collaborate? We are trying hard to rid of those socialist-realist ideas and you want to sell them back to us? Are you trying to sell rope to the family of a hanged man?' Incidentally, that was the very day when there was the assassination attempt on the life of the President of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov.

It became obvious to me that one humble producer like Chris Torch can shake the very centre of a small, national, macho, patriarchal cultural mindset. That one person can become a screen for every passion and fear, desire and paranoia which happens to be flying around. Like a lightning rod, that one person attracts whatever energies and anxieties people have about the world and themselves. With best intentions of soft-core integration you can go straight to hard-core nationalist hell.

This mindset is a maze of contradictions, half real and half virtual, half genuine and half artificial. It is so convoluted that it is difficult for outsiders to understand it or probe into it. It's a mindset of bi-polar divisions, a melodramatic world of black and white. You're either my bosom friend and I love you to death or else you are my arch enemy and I am at war with you. The changes from one pole to another are swift and volatile and you never see them coming. It's slippery ground. Mercurial stuff.

Let me try to dramatise this acid mindset in a little imaginary and ironic soliloquy. I hope it might throw some light on the heart of the Heart of the Matter:

'Hello. My name is Zoran. I am a poet. Many years ago I used to live in a country called Yugoslavia. I loved my fatherland and our leader Tito. I used to say: if you cut my heart in two you'd find the Yugoslav red star there.

I worked as a kind of a journalist in a factory paper. I was an artist. I felt that my place and role in society were crucial. I felt I was a part of Europe. I wrote a long poem called "The Heart of the Matter". It was a patriotic poem which said we should all be prepared to die for our fatherland. Here's a little excerpt:

When it comes to the last battle  
I'll give my life for you, oh Fatherland!  
Knowing what I give  
and why I'm giving it.

Important men of letters have told me that it is a great poem as it makes very good use of metaphor, simile and other poetic things. It was published in numerous publications. I got a prize for it.

Now some say that it was a Yugo-nostalgic poem. That the Communist regime paid for it. What an ugly phrase: the Communist regime? Those were my people. My generals, my comrades, my teachers. You have to trust somebody. But I say, hey, that was then and this is now. We've moved on. It's progress. Let us not look back.

Things changed. The regime died. I was a poet. I couldn't publish anymore. I had to start again. Reinvent myself.

I got a job as a kind of a journalist in a front-line military bulletin. I redrafted my poem "Heart of the Matter". Only this time it was dedicated to my new fatherland, the ex-Yugoslav Republic which became a state of its own. I was an artist again, I felt my place and role were crucial again. But Europe was now my enemy. I loved my newly found old religion. I used to say: if you cut my heart in two you'd find a little cross in there.

My poem was printed in numerous publications. I got a prize for it. Now some say it was a nationalist poem. That the masters of war paid for it. What an ugly phrase: masters of war. Those

were my people. My generals, my priests, my teachers. You have to trust somebody. But I say, hey, that was then and this is now. We've moved on. It's progress. Let us not look back.

Things changed. The regime faltered. I was a poet. I couldn't publish anymore. I had to start again. Reinvent myself.

I met an English girl. She said they're hungry for Balkan writers in London. She said I had sexy Balkan style, just what they were looking for in the European publishing circles. I said my English is not very good. She said, that's what they like, they *loove* broken English, an authentic voice. I decided to try my luck. I emigrated.

I arrived at Heathrow, my heart in my mouth. I looked around. No one there. No Europe waiting. I joined a long queue, some immigration officials wanted to know my name and the purpose of my visit.

Months passed. I was waiting for a sign, a call. Nothing. I became depressed. Every day was like salt in my wounds. I planned to kill myself. A spectacular suicide, blaming it all on Europe. I spent my weekends imagining Europe coming to my funeral, swollen with grief, all sexy in black.

The English are strange. I find work in a hardware store and work like a dog – most of them live off benefits. I speak proper English – they speak with an accent. I have read Shakespeare, they haven't. I go to evening school, they don't. Now that's not right. *They* should go to evening school. "English language and culture for beginners."

One day this amateur English theatre director appears, invites me to work with him on a community project for hyperactive immigrant children. I said that's insulting, I've come here for literature, a Literary Prize, signing at a major bookshop chain, a bestseller. He said I was wrong, he started telling me about schemes, funds and initiatives. "There's a whole game out there", he said, "quick money." He told me I would be ideal as "The Face of Cultural Inclusion". That sounded like a venereal disease.

He takes me to meet this woman in an office. She sits me down. She says she wants to empower me, draw me into the public arena, give me access to the debate and the political process, make me voice my interests, get a concept of my cultural affinities. It felt like I was at the dentist's, but it gave me a brilliant idea. Why work for them when I can work for myself. It was time for a change. England sucked. I was a poet. I had to move on. Start again. Reinvent myself.

I went back home. Franchised my own NGO. I learned how to walk the walk and talk the talk and siphon funds, domestic and international! Now I know how to demand substantial investment in civil society, education and culture. I swear by the cooperation framework and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe! Do I support the campaign for 70 cents for Culture? Unreservedly! Wholeheartedly! More money for them, more money for me.

I have a new draft of my "Heart of the Matter". Only this time it's not dedicated to my motherland, it's dedicated to Europe. My place and role are crucial again. I feel I'm a part of Europe again.



Now I say: if you cut my heart in two you'd find a little European flag in there. My poem was published in an NGO magazine. I got a prize for it.

Now some say it is a neo-colonialist poem. That the neo-colonialists paid for it. What an ugly phrase: neo-colonialists. These are my people. My NATO generals, my priests of multiculturalism, my teachers of the latest trends in democracy. You have to trust somebody. Let's look to the future.

I hear that they are having a conference at The Hague in Holland one of these days. You'll never guess what it's called. "The Heart of the Matter". Coincidence or what? They're discussing stuff I know a thing or two about. I haven't been invited. It's all right, I don't mind, I hope they have a good conference.

Had they invited me I would have told them a few things. I would have told them to be careful with their mechanisms of political correctness. For years before it collapsed, Yugoslavia believed it had all the necessary tools for lasting peace, reconciliation and prosperity and brotherhood and unity. Everyone pretended they loved everyone else. And then one day a strongman came and banged his fist on the table and said: "Gentlemen, the game is over. Fuck off!" And that was all it took for the whole house of cards to slip into civil wars.

Oh well! Wars. So what? Let's think positive. Some redistribution of wealth, Smart Offshore Outsourcing, Cross-cultural conflict management. The worse it is for the common people, the better it is for us poets. I mean for our inspiration. Things change. Regimes die. New ones are born.

If things don't work again, I'll start all over again. Reinvent myself. I keep all of the versions of my poem. Whatever happens, however history turns, I'll have a suitable version to go with it. And I'll be able to say again, with a smile on my face, hey, that was then and this is now. We've moved on. It's progress. Let us not look back!

Well, that is the end of the soliloquy of my imaginary character. And here I come back to my own voice. Well. Where do I go from here and what do I say now? You might ask me to what extent I agree with my character? To what extent I *am* my character? How much is his mindset also mine? It's hard for me to really know this or talk about it, but I do know that a part of him resides within me. He is someone I have daily arguments with, someone I try to tame, negotiate with, bring to his senses, wrestle with and agonise over.

Which brings us the moral of the story: did I hear us say we were in the business of Enlargement of Minds? Well then, that is the kind of mind which needs enlarging and demands our attention.

Good luck to us all. And let's not give up without a fight!

**Goran Stefanovski** Playwright and screenwriter

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Adrian Paci, *Turn on 2004*, Still of video installation, courtesy of Peter

Kilchmann Gallery, Zürich and Francesca Kaufmann, Milan (p12/13)

Radmila Zivanovic, *Something Else* project, Stip (p40/41)

Installation by Mladen Stilinović at *Operation: City* project (p58/59)

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Jan van Goyenkade 5

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t +31 20 573 38 68

f +31 20 675 22 31

[www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org)

**the Matter**