



## Is the EU killing Europe?

An ECF-CAS roundtable on 'Narratives for Europe'  
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## 1. Narratives for Europe: From Amsterdam to Sofia

**Katherine Watson** set the context by reminding those present that ECF was founded in 1954 by a group of influential European politicians and thinkers who agreed that culture should definitely play an important role in the ideal of integrating Europe. The two intertwined concepts of ‘Europe’ and ‘culture’ are still there; are still massive and powerful concepts.

For ECF, Europe is much wider than the political boundaries of the Union; and culture is of course also broad. ECF’s mission concerns Europe’s place as a cultural actor in the world, in a most inclusive sense. More specifically, ECF’s mission is to promote and facilitate artistic expressions that can bring us to a better understanding of Europe, the space in which we are living together.

The shifting realities of Europe and the issue of how we might work together for a common future caused ECF to identify a growing problem in today’s Europe: the increasing gap between people and the concept of Europe. From our perspective, we would like to contribute to bridging this gap. But how? We translated this mission into the need for new narratives in Europe. We will not be producing these narratives, but we want to bring forward the inspiring narratives that are told every day – narratives that can empower people to connect with the experience and the concept of Europe.

Supporting this objective, we are aware that we need to work in an intercultural and crosssectoral way. In other words: we need to connect different sources of knowledge. We are not academics and we are not doing research. We connect the different perspectives. The reflections gathered at this meeting will be used for further discussions and debates.

**Odile Chenal** introduced this second seminar by stressing that, though there is a clear need for institutional narratives (the expression ‘Europe needs a story to tell’ has become part of the Brussels discourse) ECF is looking beyond such top-down narratives for the collective stories and representations of Europe at the beginning of the 21st century. Which new narratives – if any – inspire the young generations of Europeans, within and beyond the EU? Where do these emerge, and who is telling them?

The initial vision of Europe as a project for peace and wellbeing has become blurred, and even the magic of 89 does not resonate any more. Young people often do not see the need for Europe between the local and the global. Is Europe becoming a museum? A tired continent only able to produce narratives of fear and borders? Or is Europe still a bold project? Are there new narratives emerging from our cities, from the young, and less young, from the ‘culture shakers’? It is clear that the stories now current or emerging among the people of Europe are multiple, multilayered, and often conflicting. Our exploration of narratives is about identifying common



grounds and shared representations, but also dissonances, paradoxes and contradictory perspectives among European people of all backgrounds and generations.

In the first seminar in Amsterdam, it was the very concept of narratives that was questioned and debated by the participants – historians, social scientists, art critics, etc. – coming from very different disciplines. Different, sometimes conflicting historical and political perspectives on narratives were already, and unsurprisingly, present. In the next seminars, we would like to reflect further on narratives from various perspectives, starting from the perspectives of East-Central Europe.

The objective of the seminar, to identify and debate from a *cultural* perspective the narratives of East-Central Europe in relation to Europe as a whole and to the EU, suggested the following questions for discussion:

What could characterise European narratives as seen from East-Central Europe?

Can we speak of ‘regional experiences’, convergences, turning points and fault lines shaping CEE narratives on Europe/the EU?

Is there a ‘regional dimension’ to the individual (and often divergent) national perspectives on Europe?

What is the evolution of story lines about Europe and the EU in CEE over the last twenty years?

(First session.)

What are the cultural and artistic translations of these stories?

What has been / is the role of artists?

How do the new artistic voices in the region deal with Europe?

And, looking forwards, might the financial crisis stimulate new, provocative narratives related to

(Western) Europe?

(Second session.)

## 2. Shifting metaphors

*They're not washing their hands, they're stealing candies [...] Sometimes, Europe is perceived as the rich aunt while the Bulgarian parties are the naughty nephews, seeking her benevolence.*

– **Boyko Penchev**

The first part of the discussion, introduced by **Anna Wessely** and **Mila Mineva**, focused on what could possibly be understood as an ‘Eastern perspective’ on Europe and on the question of whether there are specific narratives emerging from this region.

Nowhere in Europe can the EU be described better than in the Eastern parts of the continent. Struggling with post-communism, transformation and hyper-capitalism, the Central and Eastern European peoples did – at least for about 20 years – share a belief in a collective future in the EU. Before turning to that history, the eastern perspective itself needs to be analysed first. What is ‘Eastern’ and what is the ‘perspective’?

### *There is no Eastern perspective*

‘Can we formulate this question differently?’ asked **Anna Wessely** in her introduction. ‘If there is an Eastern perspective, it could only be a perspective perceived by an outsider, someone from the North, West or South who could make explicit what is particular about the glasses through which Eastern Europeans look at Europe. They cannot see the glasses since these sit on their noses.

‘Exclusion, resentment and distrust have been recurrent aspects of the “Eastern perspective” for centuries. It is suffused by resentment and is voiced in a narrative that harps on those historical events when we felt “seduced and abandoned” by the West – ever since the revolutions of 1848. The divergence from the “Western perspective” might be illustrated by the divergence of the reactions to Gorbachev’s vision of a common European house more than two decades ago. While it sounded grand to Western ears, all Eastern Europeans felt that it would boil down to a classic *kommunalnaja kvartira* (collective Soviet flat) – with dozens of angry subletters each hating the rest. In the best case, this resentment finds expression in cynical humour and selfdeprecation that recall the famous wire Groucho Marx sent to the Friar’s Club of Beverly Hills: “Please accept my resignation. I don’t want to belong to any club that will accept people like me as a member.”

‘In answering the question if there is such a thing as an Eastern European perspective, we have to face the fact that this region does not function as a region proper. Eastern Europeans tend to be much more interested and better informed about what goes on in, say, Paris or New York than in any of their neighbour countries. Nevertheless, there still might be an Eastern European perspective immediately evident to the outside observer but not to the “natives”.

‘The point I want to make is that there are hundreds of European discourses and narratives being developed daily with the participation of masses of Europeans, but these are not region- or country-based discourses. They arise and burgeon in all kinds of networks formed not just by politicians, business people or academics, but also NGO activists, urbanists, artists, ecologists, file-sharing music fans, etc. The list is endless. Networks have so much become the dominant form of social organisation that even extreme

nationalist political groups that worship whatever they believe to belong to age-old traditions keep busily building and relying on their all-European networks. And not just on the Net.

‘Finally, to conclude with something optimistic: I think that the generation of my students, born around or after 1989, do not speak of, or speculate on, Europe. They don’t have an Eastern European perspective. They simply take Europe for granted.’

### **Europe, our last collective dream**

*‘Become a new person!’ This was a form of propaganda used in the old communist days here in Bulgaria. This is happening again. ‘Become a European!’ means: Put them in some moulds, acquire some lifestyle and create the citizens. The European narratives are about this specific power.’*

**- Ivaylo Ditchev**

In her contribution, **Mila Mineva** recalled how Bulgaria, as a representative of the former EU neighbouring countries, was hoping for EU-membership until it received that sought-after status in 2007. Soon after that moment, enthusiasm changed into disappointment and disagreement for most Bulgarians. In 2008 and 2009, Bulgaria lost the vision of a collective future.

‘A new disintegration started, this time within the European Union.’ She explains how the (Western European) concept of Europe troubles the integration process, touching on the core of the post-communist European narrative – from the ‘eastern’ perspective: from hope to disillusion.

‘From the very beginning, the Europeanisation process in Bulgaria was about things like “common European values”, “common European culture”, “common European identity”, while everyone knew that it was only about the political and institutional Europe, situated in Brussels. The EU was presented as Europe.

‘So, the process of “becoming European” is in this sense a reinventing of something that is much older and can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century or even earlier. The element of “becoming European” goes far back in Bulgarian history. Diana Mishkova, for instance, has researched the occurrence of this topic in the 19th century! Bulgaria, in the past, exploited this narrative of “being European”; and it was again used in the recent EU-integration process to show that Bulgarian identity is a European one. Here we can mention, of course, the book *Bulgarians: The first Europeans*, written by the Bulgarian nationalist historian Bozhidar Dimitrov.

'The question of lagging behind Europe was solved by these narratives of Europeanness based on two chosen arguments as to why Bulgaria was lagging behind: the communist rule (1945-1989) or the Ottoman occupation (from the 14th to the 19th century). European identity has in this sense always been part of a nationalistic identity or at least a nationalistic view on the past. Europe was our last collective dream.

'Europe now has changed. From an open entity without borders, it became, paradoxically, a very clear entity with borders, which is in fact the European Union. It was quite obvious: Europe was Brussels. There was no Europe beyond Brussels during the EU-integration process in Bulgaria. This all stopped abruptly in 2007 when Bulgaria joined the European Union. What happened in that period is that we lost the dream of our collective future. Politicians since then have eagerly tried to invent something, but to date they haven't been successful. Instead we have had short-term policies with no clear aims.

'What has happened to Europe? While Europe was the far and distant EU it was a genius entity that provided us with a normative model. Now it doesn't work as a model any more. It is no longer unquestionable; rather, it is seen as a succession of problems: Greece, which we don't want to be; or Ireland, which was always an example of how you could become successful thanks to the European Union.

'In the meantime, all kinds of 'models' are offered by Brussels, such as Latvia and Sweden. What is now happening for the first time is that, instead of learning from Europe, Bulgaria is starting to disintegrate in Europe. After fulfilling our European dream, we are dreaming of something else for Bulgaria. Who knows what that might be? The United States?'

### **Europe as the severe policeman**

*Once upon a time, I was Eastern European. Then I was promoted to Central European. Those were the times, even if not for me personally. There was a dream of Central Europe, a vision of its future, debates on what shape this future should take: everything, everything needed for a proper roundtable, though that's not entirely fair. Then a couple of months ago I became a New European, but before I knew what hit me, before I could get accustomed to it or dissociate myself from it, I became a not-hard-core European, a non-grassroots European. I felt like the man who lives in Munkács and who never leaves his native town, but is first a Hungarian then a Czechoslovak then a Soviet citizen. In this part of the world, that is how you become cosmopolitan.*

– **Peter Esterházy**, 'Reporting from the Moon, Centrelyuropdriims', *Passages, The Cultural Magazine of Pro Helvetia*, no. 36 (2004).

Responding to Mila Mineva's contribution, **Nadege Ragaru** commented on the way Mineva explained the interconnection between Europe as a norm, Europe as a dream, the concept of Europe and how this has changed in time.

'I would say that the concepts change *over time*: there were different components. What seems to me more striking is the limited level of reflexivity – particularly in EU integration studies. We move from the dichotomy “east-west” to “member states and candidates” and “non-member or member”, and we shape these concepts by means of practice, but at the same time they are extraordinarily normative. In talking about European narratives, we are bringing together these dichotomies, without analysing them.'

The shifting discourses on Europe were also mentioned by **Ivaylo Ditchev**: 'There used to be two discourses. First, Brussels and the EU, the political integration. Well, we have been talking about that. But the second one is more interesting: Europe's growing closeness through labour migration. There were the migrants working in Spain, Germany and other Western countries. Many of these Bulgarians were angry at Europe because they had to do the dirty work. When they came back, they lived in better conditions. Whether or not they really did become Europeans is a question in itself. But then there is another discourse I would like to add, which is the discourse of selfishness. After the social state was destroyed, we got neo-liberalism. The people became incapable of identifying with a shared common concept, which resulted in a crisis of solidarity: “We don't want to pay for the Greeks! We don't want to help poor gypsies in France!” These and other expressions are widely heard in today's Europe.'

'We have two interesting metaphorical narratives of Europe,' **Petya Kabakcheva** added. 'First is Europe as a judge. The second is Europe as a severe policeman. Europe has been the symbol of democracy, now it is the symbol of a punishing force.'

### **Europe as rich aunt**

In many Eastern European countries, the EU is perceived as the rich aunt. Who are the best heirs? **Boyko Penchev** concluded that Bulgarian parties can be seen as the naughty little nephew who seek her benevolence: 'If we are careful with the historical details, we can see that the culmination of the belief in Europe as Saviour (from the corruption of the Bulgarian political class) occurred in 2008-2009, when the EU institutions stopped providing subsidies after discovering violations of the rules and alleged corruption, and this became the most important theme in political debate. It was the notion of “Europe” as supreme authority – in effect, a judge – that actually took away the power from the governing coalition.'

‘The other notion of Europe as something unified, stable and lasting comes from the pool of nationalistic stereotypes. It is the problem of the possible accession of Turkey to the EU which provoked unambiguous identification with “Europe”, perceived as an historically bounded cultural and religious whole. To this whole Bulgaria belongs “by default”. The resistance to the possible admission of Turkey, exploited by the nationalist parties like *Ataka*, is, quite sadly, based on the firm belief in Europe as a single, unified entity.

‘The main narratives of Europe popular in Bulgaria nowadays are as: (1) ‘Brussels’, or the strong hand of the EU institutions, regarded as the only agency capable of turning Bulgaria into a “normal country”; (2) Europe as a fortress, besieged by the East, Islam, the barbaric, etc.

‘Of course, there is another notion of Europe – Europe as a symbol of diversity and ambiguity, but this is reserved for quite a narrow intellectual circle of artists and intellectuals.’

### *The politics of the future past*

The dichotomies of Europe, consisting of two ostensible, divided entities called ‘west’ and ‘east’, are strengthened by new perceptions of the past. And, particularly, the dark past. Coping with the past is one of the main issues of European identification – both in the ‘east’ and in the ‘west’.

‘Now we face the bad “isms” such as fascism, nationalism,’ **Petya Kabakcheva** said, ‘and we are shocked by it. We used to associate Europe with pluralism, multiculturalism, democracy, etc. They have been there always, but now we see and experience them. Europe is returning to bad heritages.’

In response, **Ivaylo Ditchev** explained how time turned Europeans into victims: ‘We see a competition in victimhood. Many nations try to imitate victims such as the Jews – for instance, Serbs and Russians. The notion of genocide is a burning centre of European *victimism*. These attempts to become the most respected victim do harm to our understanding of historical truth. Communism, for instance, was different in different countries and different times. It is not just one thing suppressing all poor Eastern Europeans.’

‘We have a shared obsession with the past,’ **Nadege Ragaru** concluded; ‘and more precisely, the evil, dark, horrendous past. And I think we need to think about that too: why we have this common need to talk about the traumas in the past and give voice to the victims and their deeply felt suffering. According to me, there is a large shift from the future to the present to the past.’

There is this linear progress that ties the three of them. If you cannot think of the future, you might dive deeper in the past. We are currently living in the politics of the “future past”. We are mostly talking about a probable future.’

### ***Tickets to Europe!***

‘The dream stops when you enter it. The desire is when you are out,’ **Nena Mocnik** said. ‘When I was in Serbia at a meeting with other young people, I was criticising the EU. They replied to me: “Yes, it’s easy for you to criticise the EU because Slovenia is already in the Union.’ I realised that the EU, in a good or bad way, is the only choice for the “outsiders” of Europe to dream of.’

**Luchezar Boyadjiev** posed the rhetorical question: ‘Would young people still be attracted to the European Union if they didn’t need a visa any more? There is this underlying vision that all people can harmoniously live together when they encounter each other. Not to be cynical, but I doubt if it’s possible.’

‘I doubt if travelling really makes people more cosmopolitan,’ **Mila Mineva** replied. ‘The students may take Europe for granted, but they are Bulgarian nationalists. They become nationalist by travelling; they want to recreate their identity. They are not interested in internationalism, they just build their Bulgarian identity. The majority of migrant-narratives are about a place where you work in a condition that takes away your dignity. Europe is a strange place where you work, and Bulgaria is your home. Europe is alien.’

The accessibility and ‘profit’ of Europe is definitely a troublesome issue, **Bas Snelders** stated. ‘I think we can distinguish between the poor and rich narratives of Europe. We – in this roundtable discussion – all feel in some way European and feel the benefit of Europe. That is because we can profit from Europe and we are directly linked to Europe. There is the difference between (a) those who can profit from Europe and (b) those who cannot profit from Europe.’

### ***A zoo or a pipeline***

‘What seem to be striking about the current wish to build shared new narratives are a few assumptions we need to think about,’ **Nadege Ragaru** said. ‘First, we should use the same tools and techniques as were used in the building of nation states. We look for common shared narratives and show them in museums, theatres, language and art. I ask the EU to be above the current nation states, but at the same time to function as a nation state! The second assumption is that there is this fascination with “beautiful diversity”. We should preserve the many differences. What we share is diversity. I see

that there is this strong wish to preserve the diversities and that they should not be mixed up. It's like a zoo, where you see all the species locked in cages. We want to keep the differences and conserve them. But the reality is that our differences always get messed up.'

'Why aren't we able to invent other tools than the 19th-century nation-state building ones?' **Odile Chenal** asked.

'It is currently shifting,' **Nadege Ragaru** responded, 'but it hasn't been discovered yet which tools to use. We are ever changing. We do not know what we are. We do not like each other. We are interactive. But this is not to be translated into something that can be workable. We can write dictionaries, encyclopaedias of terminology on the differences of identities, but what's the practical use of this? We can get out of this diversity discourse.'

'We identify with something that is unique, that is one,' **Ivaylo Ditchev** said. 'We need a centre of the cultural space. There is something to connect. We aim to become like the United States. We know more about Obama than our own presidents. In Europe it is all fragmented, we don't have a cultural concentration. The identification with territory is the easiest way – it is clear, concrete and logical. For example, the weather report is important for people to identify with a space.'

**Luchezar Boyadjiev** compared the nationalism issue in communist federal republics such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union with the unification process in Europe. 'The issue was replaced and solved by communism, as a substitute for this identity-thing. You were not seen as part of identity, but as part of a social system. That was used as the integrating factor. I think we can learn from that. As I look back on the Soviet and Yugoslav models of unification, I sometimes doubt if we were the victims of communism – at least when we were not sent to camps. We all survived communism. There are many other fascinating models of unification, apart from Yugoslavia, the USSR and the US. In a microscopic sense we can think of Singapore as well: many religions, languages and cultures but still one state. In Singapore you can be whatever you want but you have to respect your neighbour. There are so many other models of integration: why do we always gaze on European integration? Why not enforce our "Europeanness"?'

'Economy is an integrating factor, for sure,' **Petya Kabakcheva** agreed. 'Think of that! Europe is associated by the gas project (the pipeline narratives of Russia). It is a new narrative of a pipeline....'

In wrapping up the morning discussion, **Odile Chenal** posed the question: 'Is the EU maybe killing Europe? We are still intertwining the political project and the cultural space. Maybe it is a chance for Europe?'

### 3. Artistic voices

*Yesterday I went to the Bulgarian national theatre. It was a French play called Cyrano de Bergerac, done by the French Edmund Rostand. The acting style was Commedia Dell'Arte (Italian), and the set was designed in the early modern Russian formalist style – they all got together in one play. Plus I was there as a Hungarian visitor. I think that something European is happening below the surface. That is something we need to realise.*

- **Zoltan Imre**

The second part, introduced by **Zoltan Imre** and **Ivaylo Ditchev**, focused on the question of what art and artistic expression in Eastern Europe can tell us about emerging narratives. Most contributors to this roundtable discussion mentioned the overall ambiguity of Eastern European reality and how this is translated into art.

Metaphors such as ‘policeman’ and ‘rich aunt’ require imagination and creativity. **Petya Kabakcheva** observed that some ‘mystery’ is missing in the European narrative. It probably can be found in other parts of the continent – rural and urban: ‘If the symbol of Europe is “Enlightenment”, as many think, it is something rational and urban too. Then a “rural” symbol of Europe can only be “mystery” and “mystic” – which is not really represented in the European narrative yet. When we take the debate about the east and west, or centre and periphery – I think it’s also about our consciousness and ways of seeing reality.’

#### **The Ambiguity**

The 1990s in Eastern Europe were a period of ‘curing society’ of some ‘illnesses’, **Ivaylo Ditchev** explained. ‘It was not a very interesting artistic period. The “liberation” was linked with a catch-up to the West, instead of real authentic artistic explorations. Jurgen Habermas formulated the catch-up revolutions, or “corrections”. We faced this therapeutic discourse that emerged. ‘This changed after 2000, from humanitarian ideas to more economic ones. From Vaclav Havel, who is a Czech poet, to ex-bank director Vaclav Klaus. This is the development of the times. Art is being used in a more economic way – for instance, to attract tourists to Bulgaria. ‘When we have a look at the art that is created in this period, we see a problematic contrast between high and low art. It is a crisis of definition: what is the state of art anyway? The value of art is almost synonymous with the *value of the art market*. When we connect the capitalisation of the art market, we see *elitism* based on project-focused groups – subsidised by Europe or foreign art institutions.

‘There are a few conflicting notions in art. We can call them the emerging narratives of Eastern European art. They are about the imaginary spaces and explanations of reality. I can mention a few here:

- “We are in deep shit”
- Decay and decadence of transition
- Topic of difference: linked to different cultures. A clash between spaces.
- Dealing with stereotypes, travel, migration, diaspora, etc.

‘This all leads to a growing ambiguity in art: a clash of morals, stereotypes, images and the like. The ambiguity can best be seen in the way the *communist past* is coped with. In Germany there was *Goodbye Lenin!*, in which the past was pictured in a rather funny and positive way; and there was *Das Leben der Anderen*, in which that same past was dramatically shown in the worst possible way. Two totally different films about one past.’

### *New narratives made of old pieces*

In his contribution, **Zoltan Imre** concentrated partly on the role of international and national stereotypes in the theatre plays of Europe. ‘In 1995, the German director Karin Beyer staged William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Dusseldorf.

The subtitle of the production was *A European Shakespeare*. For the performance she invited twelve actors from ten different European countries, East and West alike. They all played their parts in their own native language, using the elements of their own national characteristics and theatrical culture. As a result, she staged the old theme of identity quest in the wild forest within the specific cultural, economic and political situation of the new Europe. The subtitle referred to the fact that William Shakespeare is now considered not only as a national author of England, but is regarded as a ‘national’ author in different European (literary) cultures also (e.g. Germany, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries). As a result, several questions emerge. Is there a general European canon? Who from the West are included in it? And from the East, the South, the North? Who from the West are excluded from it? And from the East, the South, the North? And on what grounds? How is it related to power? And, in Gramsci’s term, to cultural hegemony? Is there a sort of common knowledge for all Europeans? And how can we get to know it?

Beyer production also referred to the phenomenon of possibly needing to retell the so-called old stories of the past within the new circumstances of the present. As the past can neither be ‘eternally’ erased (as if it never happened) nor ‘authentically’ reconstructed (as it really happened), it is re-constructed,

re-ordered and re-told again and again in the present by various individuals and groups. So where can we locate the past? The past of Europe? Can it be traced back to ancient times? Or can we investigate it only from the 19th century onward, when the present-day nation states evolved and European politics became world politics with colonisation and, later, world wars? And can we overcome the general amnesia in Europe and in the individual nation states, especially in Eastern Europe? The retelling of Shakespeare's play also refers to other questions: Is there a single (old or new) narrative for Europe? Or rather are there different (old and new) narratives? And why do we as Europeans need them right now?

'A *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 10 languages is an interesting experiment,' **Albena Hranova** agreed. 'I can assume aesthetically what is going on on the stage, because I know Shakespeare's texture, and it is easy to imaginatively "visualise" it in a series of languages. It could be in Chinese and I would probably know what is going on. It would come as a pleasure. But the play could resemble the national stereotypes of Europe as well. For instance, who is the donkey? Who are the seven craftsmen? It might be that this syntax of different languages is an expression of the stereotypes – again.'

'This brings me back to the assumption that new narratives are always made out of old narratives. It's just pieces brought together. Let me start with two jokes I've heard, in the past as well as the present. *What are the components of the socialist paradise? Soviet peacekeeping, Serbian cold-blooded temper, Bulgarian diligence, Hungarian international language, etc.* Later, in 2004, when I was in the Netherlands I heard the same joke but in a new perspective. It was about the future paradise and hell of the European Union. The paradise would be Italian lovers, French cuisine, British traditions, German economy, etc. And the hell would be Italian industry, German lovers, British cuisine, etc. All this is a play of stereotypes. The stereotypes, however, are based on old narratives and old stereotypes. Many new narratives are reconstructed old narratives. It is almost like a palimpsest: text written over and over again.'

'We should not confuse stereotyping and the particularities and notions of laughter in regard to different layers of cultural encounters and misunderstanding,' **Nadege Ragaru** commented. In order to explore those notions of laughter she offered a suggestion: 'It would be nice to compare satirical journals from all different countries and have a small research on contemporary laughter. We can discuss our response to jokes and how we react to the concept of laughable things or fun. Stereotypes, on the other hand, are cultural processes which I think are about a lot more things than laughter – even when they're told in the artistic format of a joke.'

### *Who's speaking: Intellectuals and/or artists?*

Our debate on New Narratives is about who speaks on behalf of Europe. **Petya Kabakcheva** defined two different narrative voices:

- The universal voice. It is Europe as a universal pretention. This is interesting because artists have universal pretentions as well. They simply are working for eternity. So: Europe and artists have the same perspective, they both speak in the category of eternity and universality.
- The intellectual voice. We tend more and more to think and reflect on the past and the future. Europe starts to behave like an intellectual. It has lost its universal pretentions.

'It would be useful to leave concepts aside sometimes. So I would like to share a little personal European narrative about an advertisement I saw in a Bulgarian village. 'Service for the client. If the client wants to have contact with God, I will make the contact with God.' This is an Eastern European narrative. This is what I call magic pragmatism. If we, as Eastern Europeans, want to make something, it is possible.'

**Zoltan Imre** disagreed on the difference between artists dealing with eternity and intellectuals dealing with context. 'Artists are intellectuals as well. My special field, theatre, is not really dealing with eternity. It would be nice to do so, but unfortunately or fortunately theatre is ephemeral: the production lasts while the spectators are there. Then everybody – creators and spectators – starts to forget it. I would prefer to say that all good artists and brilliant intellectuals deal with the surrounding world, but with different tools and perspectives.'

## **4. Conclusions** - by Guido van Hengel

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrated that it is very hard to talk about 'the' Eastern or Western perspective. The many cultural differences between the nations of (former) Eastern Europe, along with the lack of solidarity between those states, show that one cannot speak of a monolithic Eastern entity. Besides, normative labels like West and East are taken for granted by many Europeans, who are not aware of their power. Most people don't realise the constant shift of normative labels in the process of mental mapping. What used to be 'East' and 'West' during the Cold War is now changing year by year in new dichotomies: EU vs Non-EU, Central vs Eastern Europe, etc. The conclusion of session 1 definitely is: There is not one Eastern perspective.

Does this finally end discussion on the subject? On the contrary. Through the dichotomies we can learn a lot more about the way how those who feel outsiders and insiders react. Especially among those who feel as outsiders, there's a more vigorous debate about Europe, as they place themselves as observers outside of the concept. The metaphors 'old lady', 'rich aunt' 'judge', etc., act as windows on the narratives of Europe: they give a fresh idea about exactly those narratives that should be told and shared.

Nevertheless, there is a severe lack of imagination in the current search for shared transnational narratives. Thinkers, politicians and writers are able to construct and reconstruct stories of the past, but a shared vision of the future is absent in society. This again results in a 'shared obsession' with the dark and traumatising past.

As an answer to this state of affairs, some suggested having a look at the unification processes of the past and what we can learn from these. Economic integration as occurred in the Soviet Union could be used again. A common interest like the European demand for Russian natural gas came up as the 'pipeline narrative'. The integration processes in the former Yugoslavia, Singapore and other culturally diverse societies, were discussed. All these models provide the imagination for a possible future – be it black or white – for Europe. An enforced Europeanness could lead to postnational spaces for new narratives.

The second session was all about the way narratives can emerge from artistic translations of reality. The ambiguity and stereotyping of transnational narratives told in cross-border spaces both create and destroy the European shared vision. We have to pose the question: Can transnational narratives really abandon any national connotation?

Finally, a 'personal' narrative can give space for real imagination. This was unfortunately totally absent in the concept-driven talk of the roundtable. However, in the end, one such narrative was shared by **Petya Kabakcheva**. Precisely the magic pragmatism of the Bulgarian shopkeeper in her anecdote is direly needed in Europe.

## 5. Annexe 1

### Towards a definition of narratives – by Bas Snelders

*'Narrative' is now a hot topic in political debates, but it has long been discussed in academic circles. In order to gain a better understanding of narratives, it may be useful to briefly review some of the major conceptions of 'narrative' as developed in, among other disciplines, literature and history.*

### References to narratives

*Over the past few decades, the highly complex notion of ‘narrativity’ and its relationship to human consciousness has received abundant scholarly attention. Whereas initially the study of narrative was largely limited to literary narrative, since the late 1980s the theory and systematic study of narrative (‘narratology’) has become truly multidisciplinary, ranging across disciplines such as literature, history, law, economics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and psychology. References to narrative, the narrative self, and narrative identity are now also frequently found in political discourse. As mentioned above, one recurring statement in recent political debates is that ‘Europe needs a new story to tell’. But what exactly is narrative?*

### Understanding of time

*Although scholars have given different answers to this question, temporality is commonly considered to be an essential element of narrativity, while narrative is generally seen as the principal way in which human beings can organise their understanding of time. The act of narrating enables humans not only to deal with time, but also to create and represent identities, and to situate themselves in the world. We will return to the use of narratives shortly, but let us first quote some typical definitions of narrative from recent scholarly literature.*

- *In the words of Gerald Prince (1982): ‘Narrative may be defined as the representation of real and fictive events and situations in a time sequence.’*
- *Brian Richardson (2000) defines narrative as a ‘representation of a causally related series of events’.*
- *Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa (1996) prefer the following formulation: ‘A narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way.’*

### Narrative: narrow and broad approaches

*Currently, there are two main academic approaches to the concept of narrative: a narrow one and a broad one. In the narrow sense, narrative is seen as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon, a speech act, defined by the presence of a narrator or teller and a verbal text. This narrow approach restricts the area of analysis to oral or written sources, and, in the case of literary studies, to such narrative genres as the novel, the epic poem, the short story, the tragedy, the comedy, and so on. In the present context, however, we are mainly interested in narrative in the broader sense, which includes both verbal and non-verbal narratives. According to the broad definition, as formulated by Manfred Jahn (2005), ‘narrative is anything that tells or presents a story, be it by text, image, performance, or a combination of these’.*



## Ample variety of semiotic media

*Narrative in the wider sense is thus not confined to literature, but is infinitely varied, including films, plays, comic strips, music videos, advertisement, television and newspaper journalism, myths, paintings, songs, diaries, chronicles, and so on. According to this broad conception, narrative can be found in all activities that involve the representation of events in time, and, as such, it is a medium-independent phenomenon: 'Narratives can therefore be constructed using an ample variety of semiotic media: written or spoken language, visual images, gestures and acting, as well as a combination of these. Any semiotic construct, that is, anything made of signs, can be said to be a text. Therefore, we can speak of many kinds of narrative texts: linguistic, theatrical, pictorial, and filmic.' It should be noted that although temporality is indeed a central element in narratives, there are differences in the variety of media in their ability to portray time.*

## 'Narratives are there, as life itself'

*One of the first scholars to advance the broad definition of narrative was Roland Barthes. In his 1966 landmark essay on narratives, Barthes already stressed the universality of narratives among human beings:*

*The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken and written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without a narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.*

## From individual to collective: Dialogic processes

*When we consider the universality of narratives, it is important to emphasise that they do not exist in isolation and do not serve as neutral interpretative tools. On the contrary, as pointed out by James Wertsch (2000), 'narratives are embedded in concrete discourse characterised by dialogic and rhetorical processes'. Narratives are part of what Wertsch has called the 'stock of stories' that makes up an essential part of the 'cultural tool kit' available in a given socio-cultural context: 'The items of this stock of stories fundamentally*

*shape how individuals and groups can talk, write, and think about the past. Seen from this perspective, narratives exist in dialogic relationships with one another. In other words, the meaning and form of one narrative may be understood in terms of being a dialogic response to another, previous one, in terms of anticipating another, subsequent narrative, and so on. The nature of the response can range from hostile retort to friendly elaboration, from a studied attempt to ignore another narrative to its celebration and so on.’ Narratives not only lay the foundation for individuals and groups to deal with the past and the present, but also allow them to shape or influence the future. This brings us to the use and purpose of narratives. What is their function?*

### *The question of identity*

*Like language and other sign systems, narratives are essentially ‘mediational means’ or ‘cultural tools’ employed by individuals or groups to carry out specific performances. In academic circles, it is commonly recognised that narrative is central to the formation and representation of identity, whether in personal memory and self-representation or in collective identity of groups such as regions, nations, religions, and gender. Indeed, it has even been argued that the key ‘use’ of narrative concerns identity. Every period creates its own narratives, building on traditions and stories of the period before, while adapting them to its own needs and circumstances. In this way, the process of identity formation and community building is one of producing new narratives to respond to old ones. Narratives commonly present themselves as objective, in order to give individuals and communities an anchor-hold in the past, but selection, adaptation and imagination always play a role in their coming into being. Any narrative involves a point of view, a particular perspective on the represented subject and series of events.*

### *Constructed narrative of Europe*

*Although not always consciously articulated, every narrative is constructed in accord with some set of purposes or interests, perhaps especially where official, state-sponsored historical narratives are concerned. As a well-known example from the European context, we may refer to Jean-Baptiste Duroselle’s widely criticised book entitled Europe: A History of Its Peoples. Published in 1990, it appeared simultaneously in eight European languages as part of a broader project that was going to be financially supported by the European Commission. Whereas official narratives often have a more or less hidden agenda, Duroselle made no secret of what he called the ‘political quest’ of his book: ‘But just suppose that [...] we seek to achieve the building of Europe. Then history matters.’ In the epilogue to his narrative, Duroselle stated that he had ‘tried to determine whether Europe could form a real community and, if so, what might be its shape and size’, adding that he made ‘no secret of [his] predilection for a Europe gradually moving towards political unity’. Particularly revealing is Duroselle’s statement that: ‘The question for us was*

*whether, in the light of history, a united Europe seemed possible at all. To answer it has been the purpose of this book. And since we found that Europe has always existed in some sense, independent of its nation states, our predilection has turned out to be validated by the past. In this sense, our quest has indeed been political.'*

### Industry of memories

*In addition to written historical narratives, narratives of history are often also organised spatially at historical sites and memorial places, especially in urban settings and places invested with a sense of collective memory. Such 'sites of memory' (lieux de mémoire) can be defined as the 'material and non-material crystallisations of memory, or memorialisations of the past, that include such places as archives, museums, monuments, commemorations and widely-recognised symbols'. Since their emergence in the early nineteenth century, museums have acted as important agents in the creation of a collective memory, and, by extension, of a communal identity. While their nineteenth-century predecessors were mainly interested in shaping national identities, new European museums and their directors, recognising the capacity of the museum as a transformer and interpreter of history, now seek to enhance the idea of a transnational and supranational Europe integrated by a shared history and common identity. Exemplary in this respect is the planned Musée de l'Europe in Brussels, where master narratives of EU history are currently being developed to further European integration.*

### Imagined communities and invented traditions

*Narratives produced by nation states or official European institutions such as the European Commission may be viewed as cultural instruments for symbolically creating 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2003) and 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm, 1990). Such national and European history narratives can be seen as witnesses to the various attempts to foster a communal identity among their readers. They collect and interpret the shared memories of a common history that binds members together and distinguishes them from others. It is within a narrative that the symbols of a community, which provide its members with a sense of belonging and security, are given their significance: namely, a discourse that serves to define the differences between an individual and other members of the group as minor, and the differences between this individual and outsiders as major. In short, narratives produce and mark boundaries between people, and, as such, are instrumental in symbolically constructing community.*

## 6. Biographies of participants

**Luchezar Boyadjiev** is an artist living and working in Sofia, Bulgaria (born 1957). His work deals with urban environments, audience construction and personal interpretation of public processes. His works were exhibited in Sofia, Thessaloniki, Dusseldorf, Vienna and Lille.

**Odile Chenal** was born in France. Graduated in Art History and History (Nancy) and Political Sciences (Paris/ Oxford). From 1975 to 1982, worked as sociologist at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. In 1982 moved to the Netherlands as Director of the Centre Culturel Français in Rotterdam and later Cultural Attaché at the French Embassy in The Hague. Since 1990 works at the European Cultural Foundation, currently in charge of Research and Development.

**Milena Deleva** is director of the Elizabeth Kostova Foundation for Creative Writing and a guest lecturer at Plovdiv University. She graduated in cultural studies from Sofia University. She is a coauthor of Cultural Policy, Politics and Change (Amsterdam: Boekmanstichting, 2005) and author of Technological Park Culture (Bucharest: Ecumest, 2005). She has also worked for the European Cultural Foundation of Amsterdam and was a coordinator of the literature program of Soros Center for the Arts in Sofia for 5 years.

**Ivaylo Ditchev** is professor of cultural anthropology at Sofia University and essayist. Among his research interests are political cultures, national and urban identities. At present he directs a research program on the relation between new media and citizenship practices. His last book is entitled *Citizens beyond places? New communications, new borders, new habitats*.

**Pavlina Doublekova** is project coordinator at the Next Page Foundation - an international NGO which aims at helping the empowerment of underprivileged groups, languages and countries by developing projects in the field of books, reading and translations. She graduated with degrees in Cultural Studies and Sociology from Sofia University and holds MA in Gender Studies from Central European University - Budapest.

**Guido van Hengel** is chairman of Platform Spartak, a Dutch NGO that functions as a scene of young and creative Europeans. He studied Balkan history in Groningen (Netherlands), Jena (Germany) and Belgrade (Serbia) and received his MA-title in 2006 for the thesis "Thinking on Tito. Coping with history in former Yugoslavia". Since then he worked as editor, publicist, interpreter and youth worker.

**Albena Hranova** is professor at the department of philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy and History at Plovdiv University. She published several books

on cultural theory, history and literature in Bulgarian, English, German, Czech, Croatian and Russian.

**Zoltán Imre** received his PhD from Queen Mary College, University of London, and is now a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Comparative Literature and Culture at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He is co-editor of the Hungarian theatre magazine *Theatron*, and dramaturge at Természetes Vészek Kollektíva (Collective of Natural Disasters; [www.artdisasters.com](http://www.artdisasters.com)).

**Petya Kabakchieva** is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" and Head of the Department. Her main teaching courses include Sociology of Power, Sociology of Ideologies, European Civilisation Process, Sociology of European Integration. She is the author of several books and many articles.

**Veronika Leiner** is Managing director at Eurozine, the European Network of Cultural Journals ([www.eurozine.com](http://www.eurozine.com)). She studied German and Spanish literature and linguistics in Salzburg, Seville and Dublin and graduated at the European Management Programme for the Arts and Media at ICCM in Salzburg. She has worked as managing director at a Community Radio Station, as campaign coordinator for the Association of Free Community Radios Austria, and as editor and press officer of the Austrian Association of Publishers and Booksellers.

**Milla Mineva** is assistant professor in the Sociology of Culture at the department of Sociology, Sofia University and managing editor of the Bulgarian edition of *Foreign Policy* magazine. Her research includes projects on socialist consumer culture, national identity and cultural patterns of European enlargement. In 2008 she is involved in the project *Microtrends*, realized by Open Society Institute, Sofia, Center for Liberal Strategies and *Capital* newspaper.

**Nena Močnik** is publicist, social scientist and theatre-maker. She has graduated from critical approaches to multiculturalism in Faculty of social sciences, Ljubljana and she continues her masters, focusing on the actualization of effective multicultural politic (called "brotherhood and unity") and its failure in former Yugoslavia.

**Boyko Penchev** was born in 1968. He is Associated professor at the Department of Bulgarian literature in Sofia University. From 1993 to 2008 he worked as editor in *Literaturen vestnik* – a Bulgarian weekly for literature and culture. He is the author of three scholarly books on the Bulgarian literary and cultural history and two books of poems.

**Nadège Ragaru** is CNRS researcher at Sciences Po (CERI, Paris) and a lecturer in political science and history at Sciences Po. An editorial board member of the journals, *Critique internationale* and *Balkanologie*, she holds a PhD in political science from Sciences Po (Paris) and was formerly *Reid Hall Fellow* at Columbia University. Her research centers on the social history of socialism and the politics of memory in Bulgaria, the negotiation of identities in Bulgaria and Macedonia, as well as on the anthropology of images.

**Marjo van Schaik** was born in the Netherlands. Graduated in European Studies and Law (both in Amsterdam). She was working in Randstad Uitzendbureau and Het Muziektheater (the operahouse) in Amsterdam. She took several governing positions in local and national bodies in the cultural field. Last year she dedicated to advising and directing cultural and social initiatives in suburbs, where diversity was key topic. Recently she started a PHD on the topic of diversity and cultural art policy.

**Bas Snelders** is an art historian at the Paul van Moorsel Centre for Christian Art and Culture in the Middle East, which is based at Leiden University. He received his PhD in 2010 for a study on the relationship between Christian and Islamic art, and the role of art in the formation of a communal identity among Syrian Orthodox Christians in the period between A.D. 451 and 1300. His present research focuses on the development of Byzantine Orthodox art under Islamic and Frankish rule.

**Anna Wessely** is sociologist and art historian at the Faculty of the Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, where she also earned her degrees. She holds several visiting professorships and Study Grants; a.o. in Berlin, Budapest, Cambridge, Berkeley, Amsterdam and Rome.

**Katherine Watson** is the Director of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) ([www.eurocult.org](http://www.eurocult.org)). ECF is an independent foundation, acting as a catalyst for change through arts and culture in Europe, via its activities, programs, grants and online platforms. She has 35 years of international experience, combining interdisciplinary art productions with advocacy, research, policy and program development for non-profit arts organisations as well as governments.