

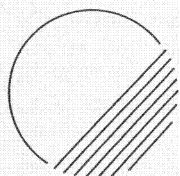
SÜDOSTEUROPA

212

Mitteilungen

02 | 2010

50. Jahrgang



SÜDOSTEUROPA-
GESELLSCHAFT

www.suedosteuropa-gesellschaft.com

Analysen / Positionen / Essays

6

Stjepan Mesić
Meilensteine einer politischen Tätigkeit

16

Gülistan Gürbey
**Wandel in der türkischen Außenpolitik unter der
AKP-Regierung? – Außenminister Davutoğlu Konzept
der „Strategischen Tiefe“**

28

Martin Renner
**Moldova at the Crossroads – Political Struggle in 2009
and EU-Perspectives**

44

Katerina Gehl
**Čalga-Kultur als bulgarische Elite-Kultur? – Zur nationalen
Bedeutsamkeit eines populären Phänomens im heutigen
Bulgarien**

58

Klaus Roth
**Of Toilets and Other Symbols – The Installation “Entropa”
and Its Reception in Bulgaria**

74

Daniel Göler
**„Werkzeug für Tirana“ – Zur Internationalisierung des
Einzelhandels in Albanien**

81 **Forum****Berichte**

- 83 Öffentliche Jahreshauptversammlung und Mitgliederversammlung der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft 2010. Berlin, 12./13. Februar 2010
- 92 Symposion des Wissenschaftlichen Beirats der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft: „Modernisierungsprozesse in Südosteuropa im Zeichen der Krise“. Berlin, 12. Februar 2010

95 **Rezensionen**

- A. Duncker: Menschenrechtsorganisationen in der Türkei B. Küçük: Die Türkei und das andere Europa – Phantasmen der Identität im Beitrittsdiskurs
- C. J. Henrich / W. Gieler (Hrsg.): Türkisches Europa – Europäische Türkei
- S. Verney / K. Ifantis (Eds.): Turkey's Road to European Union Membership
- H. Kramer / M. Reinkowski: Die Türkei und Europa R. Detrez / B. Segaert (Eds.): Europe and the Historical Legacies in the Balkans A. Lauhus (Hrsg.): Bulgarien zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen W. Gesemann / R. Ivanova-Kiefer / R. Zlatanova (Hrsg.): Bulgarien-Jahrbuch 2008 T. M. Bohn / D. Neutatz (Hrsg.): Studienhandbuch Östliches Europa – Band 2: Geschichte des Russischen Reiches und der Sowjetunion U. Krüger: Die gereizte Großmacht – Russlands Anspruch auf Weltgeltung N. Gallina: Political Elites in East Central Europe K. Káhal: Die Unterdrückung der Slowaken durch die Magyaren J. Dieringer: Das politische System der Republik Ungarn I. T. Berend: History in My Life – A Memoir of Three Eras A. Harre: Wege in die Moderne – Entwicklungsstrategien rumänischer Ökonomen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert K. Roth / U. Brunnbauer (Eds.): Region, Regional Identity and Regionalism in Southeastern Europe (Part 1)
- W. Heller / J. Becker / B. Belina / W. Lindner (Hrsg.): Ethnizität in der Globalisierung
- K. Simhandl: Der Diskurs der EU-Institutionen über die Kategorien „Zigeuner“ und „Roma“ T. Kahl / C. Lienau (Hrsg.): Christen und Muslime – Interethnische Koexistenz in südosteuropäischen Peripheriegebieten H.-C. Maner: Multikonfessionalität und neue Staatlichkeit N. Wyrwoll (Hrsg.): Orthodoxy 2009-2010

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Klaus Roth

born 1939 in Hamburg; lives in Munich.

Studied English, Geography, Slavistics and European Ethnology in Hamburg, Aberdeen, Freiburg and Bloomington. M.A. at Indiana University, Ph.D. at the University of Freiburg/Breisgau.

1982–2005 Professor for Folklore/European Ethnology at Munich University.

2005 Doctor honoris causa of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia.

2002–2008 President of the J. G. Herder-Forschungsrat; editor of the journal „Ethnologia Balkanica” and of the „Münchener Beiträge zur Interkulturellen Kommunikation”.

Contact E-Mail: k.roth@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

The article was written in 2009. A German version will be published in the fall of 2010.

Of Toilets and Other Symbols – The Installation “Entropa” and Its Reception in Bulgaria

Summary

On 12 January 2009, with the beginning of the EU presidency of the Czech government, the large installation “Entropa” by the Czech artist David Cherny was unveiled in the huge entrance hall of the building of the EU Commission in Brussels. It depicted the 27 EU member states in an ironic symbolic form in order to find out if the EU countries were capable of laughing about their prejudices.

Bulgaria was represented by “Turkish toilets” interconnected with pipes. It was the most negative sculpture and provoked a major political scandal.

The article analyses the press reports and above all the diverse and controversial reactions in several Bulgarian Internet forums to the sculpture and its meanings as well as the reactions of the government. The commentators discuss the “Turkish toilets” on three levels: as real material objects, as symbols and as political objects, and they thereby reveal deep-seated feelings and attitudes as well as frictions and controversies in the present Bulgarian society.

Of Toilets and Other Symbols – The Installation "Entropa" and Its Reception in Bulgaria

■ A Czech Artist's View of the EU Countries

On the occasion of the beginning of the EU presidency of the Czech Republic in the first half of 2009 the art installation "Entropa" was made accessible to the public on 12 January in the huge entrance hall of the EU Commission in Brussels; it was officially presented on 15 January 2009.¹ The Czech government had commissioned the famous Czech sculptor David Černý [Černý] to create the piece of art, which was ten metres high and ten metres wide, weighed eight metric tons and had cost some 375,000 euros. According to the intention of the Prague government, the artwork was to show the existing prejudices in a "Europe without borders". Its goal, as the artist who was born in 1967 explained, was to lay open the national stereotypes by means of caricature and to show, whether the Europeans were capable of "ironic self-reflection" and had a "sense of humour" concerning their prejudices.² The brochure accompanying the installation³ explained that the individual sculptures in the installation had been designed individually by artists from the 27 EU member states in order to present their respective country in a symbolic form. Each of the artists was furthermore presented with an individual homepage containing personal and artistic CVs.

The sculpture displayed in the building of the EU Commission represented the 27 EU members in the form of symbols whose meaning and message could be easily interpreted in many cases, while in several other instances a good knowledge of the country and the artist's intention was necessary. The descriptions and interpretations below are taken from several press reports and websites which, however, in some cases provide different interpretations of the meaning of the symbols.

1 Views of the entire installation and of sculptures of several countries can be found under <http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/fotostrecke-38823.html> (Spiegel online), <http://www.arte.tv/de/alle-Ausgaben/2409634.html>; and <http://www.funis2cool.com/unusual/entropa-original-artwork.html>.

2 Cf. <http://www.davidcerny.cz/start.html>.

3 EU2009.CZ ENTROPA (http://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/entropa_1__1.pdf).

1. In the left upper corner of the EU mosaic Great Britain is represented by an empty space, probably an indication of the deep scepticism the British have towards the EU.
2. The Netherlands are, as a consequence of global warming, completely flooded by water from which only some minarets rise up.
3. Finland is represented by a wooden floor on which there are exotic animals and a (drunken?) man with a shotgun.
4. France is covered by a huge placard with the inscription "Grève" (strike).
5. Sweden is a huge IKEA card-box containing the (Swedish) *Gripen* fighter jet.
6. Germany is covered by motorways full of cars; the pattern of motorways can be interpreted as looking like a swastika.
7. Belgium is presented as a half-empty chocolate box.
8. The Czech Republic is a billboard with neon valves displaying quotations from the Czech President Vacláv Klaus expressing critical views of the EU and of ecology.
9. Poland is represented by four Catholic priests on a potato field raising the rainbow flag – the symbol of the gay movement.
10. Luxemburg is a small gold nugget with a large "For Sale" sign.
11. Slovenia is a stone with the inscription "First tourists came here in 1213", probably a reference to the self-love of this small country.⁴
12. Bulgaria is represented by a collage of toilets which are connected to each other by red and blue pipes.
13. Flat Latvia is presented as a mountainous landscape.
14. Italy is a soccer field with players, some of whom seem to be masturbating.
15. Romania is a Count Dracula pleasure park.
16. Slovakia is depicted as a big roll of salami tied up with a cord in the colours of the Hungarian flag.
17. Post-communist Estonia is represented as a "motorised" hammer and sickle.
18. Portugal is represented as a wooden board with three pieces of meat in the shape of its former colonies of Brazil, Angola, and Mozambique.
19. In Lithuania, a group of uniformed men are depicted urinating on their Eastern neighbour Russia.
20. Denmark is composed of Lego blocks in the shape of a head with a turban reminiscent of the controversial caricatures "The Face of Mohammed".
21. Ireland is a bog with bagpipes protruding from the North of the island.
22. Hungary is an Atomium made of melons, salami and paprika – foodstuff that is typical of the country.
23. Greece is represented by a burnt-down stretch of forest, probably an indication of the mass (and often intentional) wood fires of recent years.
24. Spain is a concrete-covered country, probably an allusion to the excessive construction boom on the Mediterranean coast.
25. Austria, a known opponent of nuclear energy, is a green field with nuclear power plant cooling towers, which emit steam.

4 Cf. *Michael Archer*: David Cherny's EU art work might be a hoax, but it is still art. In: »The Guardian«, 14/1/2009 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/jan/14/david-cerny-eu-hoax?>).

26. Cyprus is divided by a zigzag line into two halves.
27. Malta is represented by a tiny elephant which has a magnifying glass positioned in front of it.

A detailed analysis of the symbolism of all national representations would certainly be a very informative and at the same time difficult undertaking, because one would also have to consider the frictions caused by the artist's perspective. In addition, many of the symbols have several levels of meaning. I can only point out that – besides the unambiguously political and religious significations⁵ or erotic and scatological allusions⁶ – many of the symbolic representations are objects of material culture:⁷ mostly foodstuff.⁸ This means that in the artwork the national stereotyping by means of objects of material culture plays a very significant role.

Bulgaria as a "Turkish Toilet": The Political Scandal

Immediately after its unofficial unveiling on 12 January 2009 the installation "Entropa" found very wide and strong international attention in the media and in politics. Although the artist pointed out several times that "Entropa" was to be taken humorously and was to demonstrate whether the Europeans were able to laugh about themselves and their stereotypes, in some countries the installation was considered a political provocation and an offense.⁹ It led to diplomatic reactions and tensions between the new Czech EU presidency and some governments, with the result, that the Czech government which had ordered the artwork was forced to distance itself from it. The difficult situation the Prague government found itself in was further heightened when David Černý – before the official opening – was forced to admit, that the artists from the 27 EU member states as well as their homepages in the Internet were completely fictitious.¹⁰ As "a piece of provocative art" the entire installation was exclusively the work of Černý,¹¹ i.e., of that artist who had already gained a reputation as the provocative "bad guy of the Czech art scene",¹² of whom it was well-known that already in 1991 he had painted a Soviet monument in the centre of Prague, a tank, in pink colour and that he had gone to prison for a short period because of this.

5 Denmark, Estonia, France, Great Britain, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Czech Republic, and Cyprus.

6 Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia.

7 Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Romania, Sweden, Spain.

8 Belgium, Portugal, Slovakia, Hungary.

9 See e.g.: Europa-Skulptur. Tschechischer Jux-Künstler provoziert Ärger in der EU. In: Spiegel online, 14/1/2009 (<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1515,druck-601352,00.html>).

10 Cf. *Nicholas Watt*: Why the EU artwork is not what it seems. In: »The Guardian« 14/1/2009 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/blog/2009/jan/14>).

11 In cooperation with his colleagues Kristof Kintera, a well-known Czech artist, and Tomas Pospisyl, a renowned art critic (see *Susanne Altmann*: Entropa. David Černý. Die Humorprobe. In: art. Das Kunstmagazin 14/1/2009 (<http://www.art-magazin.de/kunst/14239/?mode=print>)).

12 *Susanne Altmann* (see previous note).

In the international reactions in the media and in politics there was soon agreement about the fact that the most problematic and negative symbolic representation of all was the one about Bulgaria which had – purportedly – been created by the "young Bulgarian artist Elena Djelebova".¹³ It evoked – understandably – the sharpest reactions. The outlines of the newest EU member country were filled with several larger and smaller white toilets, which were interconnected by blue and red pipes (see *figure* on page 73). To equate a whole country with toilets, to make them the emblem of this country is certainly not a very friendly gesture in itself. But what came on top of this was the very grave fact that these toilets were explicitly "Turkish toilets". That the artist intentionally chose "Turkish toilets" becomes clear from a sketch in the accompanying brochure to the exhibit (on p. 7), and the published short text by the "Bulgarian artist" on the sculpture is also very explicit in its intentions: "For me, our project is an opportunity to cope with false patriotism and find relief from the destitution of Bulgarian material and spiritual life. Not least, it is sure to upset a lot of people, and that is also what I am aiming for – to cause a scandal, especially at home. It's a punk gesture, intentionally primitive and vulgar, faecally pubertal." Asked by a journalist why he had chosen "Turkish toilets" for Bulgaria, David Cherny said that as a child he had seen toilets like these on the Black Sea coast in Bulgaria, adding that Bulgaria was the only European country that had them, and insofar they were specific to the country. It is obvious that this was an error, because these toilets can be found not only in other Balkan countries, but also in Italy and France.

The identification of Bulgaria with "Turkish" toilets, and that in the very centre of power of the European Union, hit the country and above all its political class very hard and indeed provoked a major scandal. A new member of the EU, Bulgaria in 2008 had already been humiliated by the very negative progress reports of the European Commission and by the massive withdrawal of EU funds, and in addition was affected by the crisis caused by the failing gas supply from Russia. The Bulgarian government fiercely protested against the artwork and demanded – in a talk with the Czech ambassador to Sofia – the immediate removal of the toilet sculpture from the installation. In the same vein, the Bulgarian members of the EU parliament protested, and the Bulgarian representative at the EU intervened, saying that this "ridiculous piece of art" harmed the dignity of Bulgaria and was evidence of very bad taste. Soon after the installation became public, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture declared that it had not picked the artist and had nothing to do with the whole matter. Although the Czech presidency had started its term under the slogan "Europe without borders", and Aleksandr Vondra, Czech Vice Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs, had declared that in Europe there must be no place for censorship, the governments finally reached an agreement to cover the toilet sculpture with a black cloth; this indeed happened a few days later. The artist apologised to all those who might feel offended by his installation. Before the end of the Czech EU presidency the whole installation was removed.

13 See *Slavenka Drakulić: Das Loch im Boden. Europa, ein Kontinent, der nicht lacht und nicht vergibt.* In: »Süddeutsche Zeitung« no. 14, 19/1/2009, p. 11.

Reactions in Bulgaria

The representation of Bulgaria as a "Turkish toilet" as well as the official reactions of the government to the artwork provoked a tremendous amount and range of partly very strong reactions in the Bulgarian media and in the public. Some journalists immediately tried to uncover the "guilty" artist Elena Djelebova [Dželebova], for whom Cherny had invented an elaborate artist's biography in the Internet, but of course they were unable to find her. After Cherny had admitted that he had also fabricated the Bulgarian artist's identity and that he had created the toilet sculpture himself, he was accused in the Bulgarian media of falsification and of lying to the public. In the public discourse, however, the replacement of the "Bulgarian artist" by the Czech artist did not bring about any peace and quiet. It only led to some changes in the assessment of the artist: The place of "our own artist" who, depending on one's standpoint, was either "dirtying her own nest and was a traitor to her country" or was a "courageous Bulgarian who had told the truth about our country" was now taken over by the "foreigner" in the shape of "this disgusting Czech" or "Jew" with whom it was unclear "wherefrom he had gathered so much hatred against Bulgaria" or by the "foreigner who knows our country so very well".

In the following I will dwell on the opinions and attitudes that appeared in the Internet forums of the Bulgarian mass media. I have intentionally not chosen the populist and more right-wing newspapers and forums, but rather the more moderate and critical ones that practice a more objective and unbiased reporting.¹⁴ I have analysed journalistic reports published in the Internet and some 1350 comments from readers made during the period between 12 and 20 January 2009. The analysis of the reports and above all the comments shows that the sculpture obviously touched very deep-seated feelings and the national identity in a very sensitive spot. It is remarkable, though, that the reactions to the sculpture were by no means only negative and that the government's protests against the sculpture were not welcomed by everyone. Rather, the comments of the readers contain a surprisingly broad range of opinions and attitudes. From the complete and hateful rejection of the sculpture and its creator ("Miserable, sad and ugly complex-laden picture ..."; "The Belgian artist can present Belgium as a chocolate box, our slut – as a loo! Her place is in the loo! There she can produce her art")¹⁵ to full agreement and enthusiasm about the artist and the sculpture ("Unquestioned artwork of high class, and precisely targeted at that! Honest congratulations to the author!"; "Bravo for this artist, she is true to reality – Bulgaria is a toilet") the comments display an impressive wealth of differentiated views and insights, of criticism and self-criticism. While the motives for the rejection of the sculpture – feelings of offence and hurt national pride – are obvious, the motives for the partly enthusiastic agreement

14 Dnevnik (<http://www.dnevnik.bg>), Sega (<http://www.segabg.com>), Mediapool (<http://www.mediapool.bg>), Kultura (<http://www.kultura.bg>), NetInfo (<http://news.netinfo.bg>).

15 Cf. http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/novini_ot_es/2009/01/12/613306_bulgariia_predstavena_v_izlojba_v_brjuksel_kato_kenef/.

certainly need a more detailed analysis and explanation, because the background of these reactions is quite complex and must be sought in the specific history and the present situation of Bulgaria.

The comments indicate that apart from Bulgarians living in the country several members of the Bulgarian diaspora also expressed their opinions in the forums. The medium of these comments, the Internet, can probably (still) be taken as an indication that the commentators belong predominantly to the younger or middle-aged generations. As is typical of Internet forums, almost all comments are anonymous or signed with fictitious names, so that more precise data on the users cannot be provided. It has to be added that the language of most comments is very direct, informal and colloquial, and, probably due to the object matter, often rather vulgar. On the other hand, some comments have an almost scientific level. The more than 1300 comments thus provide us with an unfiltered and unadulterated picture of the views and attitudes in the younger and middle-aged generations towards the provocative piece of art, towards their own country, and their identification with it.

When we focus on the material culture presented in the installation "Entropa" we can distinguish three groups or levels in the comments. The reports and comments relate (a) to the question of how far the choice of the "Turkish toilet" as a stereotype is grounded in the Bulgarian reality, and discuss its real distribution and its qualities. Most comments, however, refer directly (b) to what the "Turkish toilet" stands for, that is, to its symbolic content. A third level is finally reached (c) in those comments (and in a petition) which debate the measures taken by the government to remove the sculpture that "offends the nation" from the installation or at least to cover it. These measures turned the "Turkish toilet" into a political piece of art and material culture.

a. The "Turkish toilet" as a real object

The comments in the Internet forums quite often discuss the reality basis of the artful expression, that is, they ask if and how often these "Turkish toilets" can be encountered in Bulgaria and whether the sculpture or the stereotype has a basis in Bulgarian reality. Hardly any of the comment deny or doubt the real existence and frequency of such toilets and many even give evidence of their existence not only in villages, but also at urban workplaces, in restaurants and in various public buildings, in offices, schools and universities – and that most of them actually stink and are very dirty.

"At the workplace the toilets are exactly of this type – squatting toilets. The woman has told the truth: that is not at all funny." – "Let's not talk about it that probably 70 % of the toilets in the villages are precisely these. However you look at them, these things stink everywhere." – "What is a Turkish toilet? That is a loo (*kenef*)¹⁶ – yes, a loo of this stinking type – in the village, in the school, at the university, in the hospital ..."

16 In Bulgarian, the Turkish word *kenef* is used as the colloquial word for toilet or loo. The Bulgarian word for squatting toilet is *kiekalo* (derived from *kljakam*, to squat, to crouch).

Several commentators make particular mention of the dirty toilets at the border crossing points as an extremely negative factor for the image of Bulgaria, and they add that the sanitary conditions in the neighbouring countries are better:

"The first impression is the one that stays! When a foreigner enters Bulgaria at the checkpoints, he will grab his head when he has to go to the 'loo'. This is where the image comes from."

"Every foreigner who has been to Bulgaria will at once notice the 'fine smell'! I will always think of the unpleasant fact that the problem with the toilets begins in the first metres after you have entered Bulgaria and ends in the very moment you leave the territory of Bulgaria. Neither in Kulata¹⁷ nor in Kalotina nor on the bridge across the Danube nor in Ilinden there exist functioning toilets.

Gjueševo has been renovated for a million leva – and there one forgot the toilets. At all these places easing yourself happens in barracks ... on squatting toilets, and it is precisely this specialty which the artist documented in her artwork."

In a sometimes very ironic and (self-)critical manner the commentators emphasise the stench and above all the filthy state of the toilets in the country, and often they compare this to the situation in other countries. "With certainty this 'toilet' [in the installation] is not a Bulgarian one, if it was one, it would not be so clean."

In view of the fact that in Bulgaria the word toilet (*klekalò*) is used without the adjective "Turkish", the expression "Turkish toilet" chosen by the artist is somewhat confusing. Many commentators take the adjective as an explicit hint at the Ottoman past of their country and at the origin of this type of toilet. This, however, leads other commentators who have been to Turkey to saying that "even in Turkey there are no such toilets any more". The following comment is even more explicit:

"It is very correct that we Bulgarians take a look at ourselves and are ashamed.

The situation with the toilets in Bulgaria is really intolerable. 'Kenef' may be a Turkish word, but in Turkey the toilets are in an ideal condition. In the bus on returning home from Turkey the drivers even warn [their passengers] that before entering Bulgaria everybody should use the toilets, because in Bulgaria these objects are not up to standard."

For Bulgarians, these are particularly painful statements, because after its liberation from Ottoman rule Southeast Europe went through a very intensive process of "Europeanisation" and "de-Ottomanisation" and considers itself to be culturally superior to Turkey. The equally radical processes of modernisation in Turkey are not taken into consideration, because they do not fit in with the dominantly negative image of Turkey.

Several other comments serve to legitimate one's own tradition by pointing out the fact that there are also these squat toilets in other European countries, even in "civilised France". In defending these toilets, some commentators even turn tables and argue that they are actually superior to the "European toilets".

"There is nothing wrong with the squat toilets; on the contrary, from a

17 The place names refer to the border crossing points with Greece, Serbia, Romania, and Macedonia.

physiological and hygienic point of view they are more successful than the sitting toilets."

The following comment, however, takes an ironic attitude towards this opinion by using numerous slogans from the vocabulary of socialist propaganda:

"In reality the Europeans have to learn from our path-breaking invention, and not vice versa, because squat toilets as public toilets are far more hygienic than 'European' toilet bowls! This is so because with the squatting toilets the direct physical contact with the body is avoided and thereby the transfer of infectious diseases. Of course there are, as with any creation of the art of engineering, still a few unsolved technical problems such as, for example, undesired sound effects from the 'laying of eggs' and the diffusion of unpleasant odours. But I hope that our *kenef* specialists will untiringly struggle for the perfection of this congenial oeuvre."

b. The "Turkish toilet" as a symbol

Neither in the artwork nor in the reports or comments can the real and the symbolic level be clearly distinguished. In David Cherny's work of art both levels are interwoven: On the one hand the motif itself is based on a real childhood experience of the artist and in its artistic representation it is quite realistic, while on the other hand it is the explicit intention of the artist not only to generally lay open and ridicule the prejudices but also to turn the toilet into a symbol of "the hopelessness of the Bulgarian material and spiritual life". By depicting a series of toilets and by joining some of them with coloured pipes (which are probably meant to refer to the rampant corruption in the country) the sculpture is clearly transformed into a symbol.

This ambivalence also finds expression in the comments, because they treat the "Turkish toilet" not only as a real object, but also, and more importantly, as a symbol; in many cases it is treated as both at the same time. In their interpretations the commentators are, due to their own experiences and knowledge, even more critical than the artist and attach meanings to the "Turkish toilet" that he most likely did not intend: They ascribe meanings to the sculpture that relate directly to the experience of the Bulgarian society with Ottoman rule, with communism, with the period of post-socialist transformation and, above all, with the present political situation in the country. Although many comments combine several of these aspects, one can nevertheless distinguish three important levels of symbolic attribution to the "Turkish toilet". It is, *first*, taken to be a symbol for the entire country or society and its lack of "Europeanness"; *second*, it stands for the whole political class or the political system; and *third*, it is taken to represent the government that was in power at that time,¹⁸ a coalition of post-communists (BSP), the party of the ethnic Turks (DPS¹⁹) and the party of the former Bulgarian tsar (NDSV²⁰).

18 The coalition parties were heavily defeated in the parliamentary elections of July 2009.

19 Dviženie za prava i svobodi (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) with its politically very powerful chairman Ahmed Dogan. Some 10 % of the Bulgarian population are ethnic Turks.

20 Nacionalno dviženie Simeon Vtori (National Movement Simeon II).

The extreme range of reactions to the sculpture can be understood only before the background of the fact that Bulgaria carries, as the only EU country to that extent, a heavy double historical burden, namely that of five hundred years of Ottoman rule and that of half a century of communism. In the collective memory and in the officially transmitted image of national history the period of Ottoman rule is deeply rooted – as in the other Southeast European countries – under the term "Turkish yoke". In spite of tremendous efforts at modernisation and the overcoming of the Ottoman legacy since the liberation of the country in 1878 the feeling prevailed – and continues to prevail until today – that one has not yet fully "arrived in Europe"; or, as the famous Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov phrased it in 1895 in his famous novel *Bay Ganyo, the rose oil merchant*: "Europeans we are, but not quite". From this historical legacy there arose the dominant feeling of being backward and irrelevant, oriental and boorish, a feeling which people in the Balkan countries like to blame on the hateful "Turkish yoke"; in Bulgaria, the lack of civility is symbolised in the character of the unkempt and boorish, but sly and self-assertive hero Bay Ganyo.

The period of socialism, on the other hand, with all its massive material and moral devastations is criticised for being responsible for the deep crisis of values in the post-socialist period, for the lack of rule of law, and for the rampant corruption in the political and economic elites. If one adds to all this the wide-spread feeling of being, as a small and peripheral country, inferior and of not being respected in and by "Europe", one can begin to understand what deep emotions such a shameful public presentation as a "toilet country" must unleash – a representation, though, that by many people was felt to be quite correct. Amplified by the periodical criticism in the annual progress reports of the European Commission about the endemic corruption in Bulgaria, there is indeed a wide-spread feeling among Bulgarians, particularly in the younger generations, that the country is in fact the "toilet of Europe". This feeling is reflected in the comments, and it sometimes takes on the form of self-hatred, not only in the frequent emotional agreement with the basic idea of the sculpture, but often also in the assertion, that the Bulgarians pretended to "Europe" to be something that they actually were not. They should finally accept reality and start cleaning up their own toilet, to overcome the "oriental" and the "communist" in their society and to finally become real Europeans.

Apart from the obvious self-criticism, such statements give expression to the general idealisation of "Europe" that is so typical of Southeast Europe.²¹

"Churchill once said that he judged the culture of a nation by the cleanliness of its public toilets. In this respect, Bulgaria is in the Orient with both its legs. Already in the 18th century the toilets with a hole and a pit underneath it disappeared in the civilised countries. Today, people from these countries experience a civilisational shock when they visit a Bulgarian village or small

21 See Klaus Roth: Von Europa schwärmen? 'Europa' und die Europäische Union in den Vorstellungen der Menschen in Südosteuropa. In: G. Schubert / H. Sundhaussen (Eds.), *Prowestliche und antiwestliche Diskurse in den Balkanländern/Südosteuropa*. Munich 2008, p. 165-179.

town where the toilets are still of this type."

"The idea [of the artwork] expresses the reality which many avoid to address openly. Bravo for the artist! Just look at the Oriental in the mind-set and in the pleasures of most Bulgarians!"

"This is the most hopeless case of the Bulgarian spiritual life. What vulgarity and hatred does a Bulgaria emanate that is strewn with TURKISH toilets even 130 years after our liberation!"

"Folks, this is the pure truth – Bulgaria is really a toilet in comparison with the European states – just compare their streets with ours, their service with ours, their interpersonal relations with ours, their politicians with ours ... I think this needs no comment, sorry, but we are a great big toilet ..."

There was hardly another European country than Bulgaria in which the society had looked so much forward to its EU accession, as this was a clear sign that they had finally been accepted by "Europe" – only to learn that from the very heart of this "Europe" their country was stamped and rejected as a "Turkish toilet", even as the "toilet of Europe". In view of the deep desire of the Bulgarians to belong to Europe, and to the EU in particular, it is hardly surprising that after this rejection anti-EU sentiments were present in some comments, as well as resigned reflections about whether the country belonged in the EU or not:

"The place of Bulgaria is in reality not in Europe, but in the CIS together with the Ukraine and Russia. That they accepted us in Europe that was a misunderstanding."

When the real artist of the installation "Entropa" came to be known, the (self-)critical sentiments mixed with anti-Czech and also anti-Semitic sentiments, because many people thought that David Cherny was a Czech or Russian Jew due to his first name David.

The criticism in the comments is even more pointed and direct when the "Turkish toilet" is taken as a symbol for the rotteness of the entire political class and the political system in Bulgaria, but also for the communists and the Soviet Russians.

"C'mon guys, pull yourselves together! Don't you understand the metaphor?"

Enough with these literal historical and material allusions ... Don't you understand that this toilet contains also our whole political and social life, the transformation, the 'elite', the business, the customs, the morality, the values, the judicial system, the lawlessness, the criminality, the poverty, the *čalga* music,²² the nouveau riches, the humiliation, the lack of direction, the derision, the cynicism? ..."

"I think that with the toilet she [the artist] wanted to direct the attention to the fact that Bulgaria is the most rotten country in Europe ..., and not that it is a stinking toilet. Just look at the elite of this country and draw your own conclusions."

"She may be right, this 'artist' – only that the toilet looks suspiciously clean and its true 'creators' cannot be seen: the basest, most criminal gang which governs

22 The word *čalga* denotes a kind of pop-folk music with Oriental and Western elements that became extremely popular since the 1990s. This music style is considered to be symptomatic of the transformation period and particularly of the new elites, their superficiality and moral decay.

Bulgaria since 1989 ... And if there is anything Turkish in this toilet country, it is because this absolutely corrupted Bulgarian gang allows it."

The criticism takes on its most biting and concrete form in those comments, however, which equate the "Turkish toilet" directly with the (then) present Bulgarian government and the political and social situation created by it. The criticism is aimed at the socialists, but even more vehemently against the then highly influential party of the ethnic Turks (DPS). This criticism is laden with anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic sentiments:

"Bulgaria as a 'Turkish toilet'. Bravo to the author, but she is not right! Apart from a Turkish we are also a Russian, a communist and a European toilet! We were given this image by those idiots who voted for NDSV, BSP and DPS and blessed us with these governing politicians."

"These Europeans are not so dumb that they do not understand the essence of this governing coalition of three. The left step [in the toilet] is Sergo [Prime Minister Sergej Stanišev], the right step is the tsar, and the hole is Dogan [chairman of the DPS] ... Unfortunately this is the truth ... – our fatherland equals a DPS-toilet."

"The Europeans and our politicians shouldn't pretend to be surprised, because they under European pressure and without anybody caring for the Bulgarians, turned Bulgaria into a Turkish toilet through the kind inactivity of the parliament and the Bulgarian DPS!!! And now they are surprised and angry!!!"

Finally, the comment "I do not know how many newly built Turkish toilets there are, but the number of newly built mosques over the last fifteen years is two thousand", which puts "Turkish toilets" in line with mosques for the Turkish minority, is certainly a particularly strong expression of ethnic hatred.

c. The "Turkish toilet" as a political object

The attempts of the Bulgarian government immediately after the first unofficial unveiling of the installation in Brussels (on 12 January 2009) to put massive pressure on the Czech government and EU presidency to remove the sculpture from the installation before its official presentation, or at least to cover it, were met with very contrary reactions in the Bulgarian media and also in the Internet forums. Some of the media and the commentators welcomed these efforts or at least pointed out the dilemma in which the government was in view of the political relevance of the installation and above all the place of its exhibition.

"Bulgaria has not been built by people dealing with art, but by people who gave their honour, their health, their property, and their life! When they humiliate it in an official building of the European Union, you cannot fall silent! You can do it, if you don't know the price of the existence of our state. The exhibition does not take place in an Art Club or in a private house, and it is not well-meaning ...

There are communists everywhere, but nowhere else has a people been humiliated in such a way. Just try it with such a map ²³ in Berlin, Paris or London, maybe

23 This refers to the sculpture in the outlines of the country.

also in Athens, Ankara or Belgrade, in case you have cultural ambitions. Try it and just smile at people without running away. Try to explain them that this was art and that they only didn't understand this because they were too dumb. He who does not understand anything of politics will pay with the fate of his people! Politics can be art, but art cannot be politics – it transforms itself into propaganda. The exhibition in an official building reveals a bad, tasteless, and kitschy attitude toward a peaceful people. In a political building such an art is inadmissible.”

Other commentators, in the vein of the old totalitarian tradition, emphasise the task and the failure of the state. One commentator asks: “And by the way, who from the Bulgarian side has entitled this [artist] at all to perform the Bulgarian part? Why isn't that investigated more closely?” According to these views the funding and evaluation of art is exclusively the task of the state.

Contrary to such views, a large part of the public, above all the more educated one, considered the actions of the government to be a kind of censorship that was totally inadmissible in our times and a very massive encroachment on the freedom of speech and artistic expression. In the eyes of many commentators their criticism was even more justified because it was precisely *that* government fighting the “Turkish toilet” that was, through its corruption on the highest political levels, responsible for having turned the country into the “toilet of Europe”. And that it was *that* government, in which the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the successor of the former communists, had a leading position, a totalitarian party for which culture and the arts had for decades been areas occupied and directed by the communist state. The critics very strongly opposed this aspect of the intervention of their government in Brussels and they stressed its negative consequences; several commentators went so far as to say that the censorship of the artwork by their government had done more harm to the country in the European public than the sculpture itself:

“The reactions against the exhibition are complex-laden. The author is a woman of the arts, and if she has such a perception of Bulgaria, then it is her granted right to express it in such a way.”

“If the Bulgarian representatives in Brussels had not ruined the oeuvre through their protests, then the author might have managed to convince the Europeans that the Bulgarians are people with intellect.”

The public protests against the infringement of artistic freedom by the Bulgarian government found its strongest expression in a petition that was put on the Internet,²⁴ a “declaration against censorship (against the censorship of the oeuvre of the Czech artist David Černý)”, which was soon signed and commented on by numerous persons. In the declaration it says among other things:

24 *Borjana Rossa*: Petición. Declaración protiv censura (protiv cenzurirane to na proizvedenieto na češkija hudožnik David Černi [Petition. Declaration against censorship (against the censorship of the oeuvre of the Czech artist David Černý)], 2009 (http://bgpetition.com/protiv_cenzurata_david_cherny/index.html).

"The censorship of the oeuvre of the Czech artist David Černý by the Bulgarian administration is a disgrace for our country and for all its citizens. It confirms the image of Bulgaria as the most backward and uncivilised country, if not in the world, so at least in Europe. But we distance ourselves from these state officials and declare that we are against its censorship and against any infringement of the right to free expression of the artists as well as of any citizen of this country or of the world.

Instead of becoming active in the support of Bulgarian culture by means of funding programmes in order to internationally shape a positive image of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian state administration reacts quickly only whenever there is something to be prohibited ... With this act of censorship the Bulgarian state administrators show ... that they are unable and unwilling to understand the role of art in the present society. Their inability to make a difference between irony and reality, their inability to acknowledge the right to artistic expression aimed at ... the overcoming of complexes, stereotypes, and prejudices, and not at offence, shows yet another time the low culture of the Bulgarian state administrators. By acting this way they have insulted every individual citizen of our country."

The declaration demands the restitution of the original work of art and a civil dialogue between those in power and the artists, because the arts are an essential form of expression of the freedom of speech and thereby of democracy. Several comments of the undersigned make it clear that they had signed this – in the end futile – petition, although they did not agree with the statement of the sculpture, but rejected any form of state censorship as an evil socialist legacy. For a society that for decades had suffered from the socialist control over the arts and culture and which had produced and "exported" so many outstanding artists, actors, singers, and musicians, these are indeed very understandable reactions.

Some Conclusions

"Nothing but a little Dala horse" the ethnologist Ina-Maria Greverus titled an article some decades ago in which she had analysed the various and contrary symbolic meanings of a small red wooden horse, the symbol for the Swedish region of Dalarna.²⁵ "Only a little toilet" one might be tempted to say about the sculpture in the "Entropa" installation, because it also evoked, as I have tried to show, various and controversial ascriptions of meaning to a European region. The grave difference is, however, that the sculpture in Brussels is not a harmless souvenir but an everyday object that is, as not many other objects, charged with very negative meanings, because the toilet is associated or even equated with dirt and tabooed bodily functions. Therefore, the scandal intended by the artist was most probably an

25 *Ina-Maria Greverus: Nothing but a little wooden Dala-Horse, or: how to decode a 'folk' symbol.* In: *Linda Dégh / H. Glassie / F. Oinas* (Eds.), *Folklore Today. A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson.* Bloomington 1976, p. 181-192.

unavoidable consequence, particularly because the sculpture was displayed officially in a highly political space; in other words, it was presented officially by and for the European Union.

One can assume with some justification that the equation with toilets would have provoked a scandal in any EU country (and beyond). However, that the reactions in Bulgaria were so sharp and so extremely controversial can undoubtedly be attributed to the fact that – given Bulgaria's historical legacy and the present situation of the country – the equation with "Turkish toilets" has touched a very sensitive nerve. The contrary and controversial reactions that found expression in the public discourse and in political actions reveal a lot about the mood of the present Bulgarian society and about its inner divisions. However, the variety of meanings attributed to this trivial object, the connotations and stereotypes, the historical and present charging with symbolic meanings as well as the fierceness of the argumentation, must surprise or even alienate everyone who is not familiar with the country and its history.

The restrictive reactions of the state as well as the controversial debate in the media about the sculpture and about the measures taken by the government did not so much aim at the real object itself, but at the many symbolic meanings attached to it in Bulgarian society. All this leaves the outside observer with the impression that the sculpture in Brussels has functioned merely as a trigger to bring to the surface the deep historical wounds, the feelings of inferiority and self-hatred of a society traumatised by communism and post-communist transformation and governed by an irresponsible elite – an elite at that which had hastily exposed its unprepared society to the stress of premature EU membership.

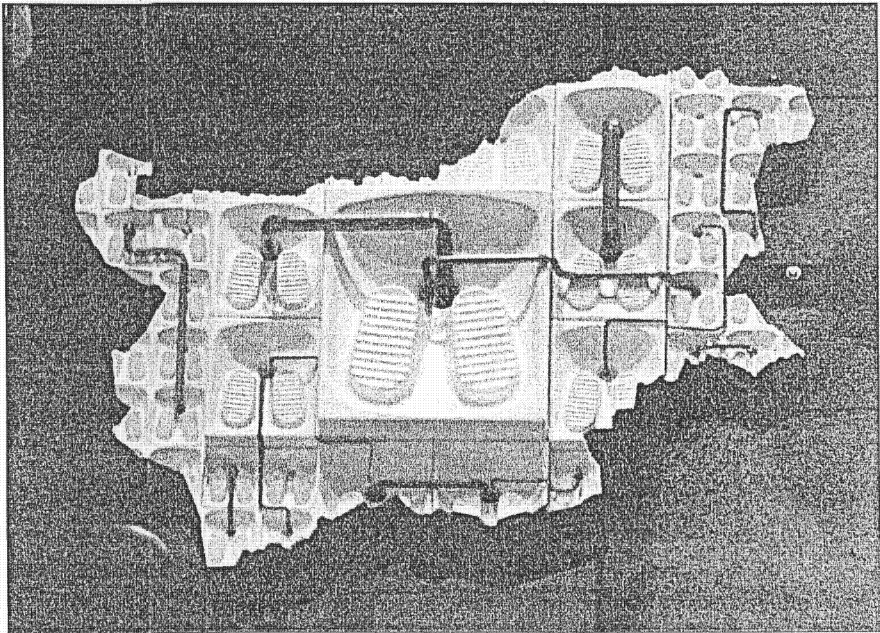
The public debate has indeed laid open all the neuralgic spots in Bulgarian society: the Ottoman and the communist past; the fragility of the national identity and of the self-concept of the society; the tension between the hollow patriotism promoted by the government through the media and the fact that precisely this corrupt political class has largely contributed to the mass exodus of mostly young Bulgarians to the West; the attitude towards the ethnic minorities in the country, particularly to the Muslims; the attitudes (and policies) towards the neighbouring countries, especially towards Turkey; the longing to be accepted by Europe, respectively by the European Union, and the simultaneous awareness not really to be a part of it, not to be an equal member of this Union. Furthermore, the debate has laid open some other frictions and tensions in the Bulgarian society, among them the rift between the "ordinary people" and the intellectuals, between the new political and economic elites and the educated elites favouring civil society. It was the latter ones who in their comments and above all in the petition insisted vehemently on the freedom of speech and artistic expression, while the former ones more frequently displayed totalitarian reflexes.

Thus, at least for a short period of time, the debate about the "Turkish toilets" provoked a discussion about the present situation of the Bulgarian society, a society

which obviously finds itself in a deep spiritual crisis that has resulted largely from the failure of the new elites – a crisis that gives many people in the country the feeling that they really live in the "toilet of Europe". The question of whether with his provocative sculpture David Černý has contributed, as was his intent, to the relief of the strain of "the hopelessness of the Bulgarian material and spiritual life" and to the breaking up of prejudices – or whether he has, on the contrary, even worsened the situation,²⁶ can be answered only by the future development in the country. In a short commentary in the daily newspaper »Dnevnik«, the well-known Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov makes the following ironic proposal, with which I will finish:²⁷

"As far as I remember, an influential patriotic initiative last year made an attempt to create a symbol of Bulgaria with which people can recognise us in the world. The 'Madara Horseman'²⁸ has now been defeated by the cloth-covered toilet. With the kind support of the sensitive Bulgarian officials and institutions. The embarrassing present has defeated the glorious past."

Figure: Bulgaria in the Installation "Entropa", Brussels 2009



- 26 Cf. *Dimităr Kamburov*: Ošte za David Černý i negovata instalacija [More on David Černý and his installation]. In: *Kultura* 5, 4/2/2009 (<http://www.kultura.bg/article.php?id=15210#>).
- 27 *Georgi Gospodinov*: Simvoli i sram [Symbols and disgrace]. In: »Dnevnik« 29/1/2009 (http://www.dnevnik.bg/analizi/kolumnisti/2009/01/29/623861/simvoli_i_sram).
- 28 Monumental relief of a man sitting on a horse, hewn into the rocks, probably from the 7th century, close to the East Bulgarian city of Shumen. The relief has been on the World Cultural Heritage List since 1979.