

Editorial

After three years of publication, *Kritika & Kontext* deserves a moment of reflection. My purpose here is not to evaluate three years of its contents - that is a task best left to a professional reviewer - nor is it to provide a summary tour of past highlights. For the reader so inclined, I invite you to explore our back issues, available online at www.kritika.sk. Instead, I would like to turn for a moment to the broader life of the journal, to such mundane but not insignificant matters as the production, sale, and marketing of the journal as well as to its intellectual and political impact, within Slovakia and beyond.

First off, I must make clear that, as a journal committed to the promotion of critical thinking about contemporary life, *K&K* cannot but be involved in the profound struggle (some might call it a 'partisan campaign') which has been polarising Slovakia these past five years, and which the approaching September elections threaten to bring to a head. In today's Janus-faced Slovakia, this journal belongs to that part of society that refuses to be provincial and isolated, a portion that, fortunately, is growing in size and strength. We have endeavoured to make *K&K* a forum for those who wish to participate in building this 'other' Slovakia, a country that is tolerant, pluralistic, and well-informed, that is free of xenophobia and nationalism, and that may take its rightful, equal place at the European table.

We have made selected articles available in English - the *lingua franca* of trans-national integration - as well as in Slovak so that we may extend our conversation to include not only those in the English-speaking world but also our fellow central and eastern Europeans. Here at home, *K&K* has worked together with publications like *Revue Aktuálnej Kultúry*, *Občianska Spoločnosť*, *Dilema* and *Domino Fórum* to broaden the realm of public discussion and to offer a dynamic, if not always welcome, alternative to a media scene that is still dominated by highly partisan, state-subsidised publications.

Although our most devoted readers are university students in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Westerners remain our most active contributors and our most generous supporters. On those occasions

when we have had the opportunity to present our journal and its philosophy to outsiders, they have responded with great enthusiasm and encouragement. Here at home, however, it has often been a different story. The pattern of submissions to the current issue provides some illustration of this peculiar paradox. For the present issue, we had planned to include selected responses to Fareed Zakaria's article, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracies*, published earlier this year (first published in *Foreign Affairs* Nov.-Dec./97, reprinted in *K&K* 1/98). Yet, we decided to postpone this segment, for the simple reason that, although more than one hundred Slovak writers and thinkers were solicited for their views, only two responded. In contrast, we received seven replies from the thirty or so individuals we approached from the 'rest of the world', including one from a prominent American philosopher and past contributor, Richard Rorty, who went as far as sending his apologies because his busy schedule and moving from Virginia to California prevented him from participating in this discussion. Fareed Zakaria, the executive editor of *Foreign Affairs* sent us a letter thanking us for the issue featuring his article, adding how impressed he was with the substance and style of *K&K*. Meanwhile, those for whom the subject of 'illiberal democracy' would appear to have the most immediate and consequential meaning have remained silent.

How are we to make sense of this disproportionate response? One likely reason why so few of our Slovak colleagues offered a reply to Zakaria's article may lie in our collective political experience. There is no sense of shock for Slovak readers, rather, Slovakia's status in Zakaria's analysis simply reflects our common, daily experience with a "illiberal democracy".

While reviewing and discussing influential texts is the mainstay of *K&K*'s activities, the journal has also opened its pages to two important educational initiatives: The Society for Higher Learning (VVS) and *Artes Liberales*. The *Society* has been active in Slovakia for three years, providing supplemental stipends and tutoring to Slovakia's most promising young scholars. *Kritika* provides information about the upcoming activities of the *Society* and also

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Edited by
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FUND FOR
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encourages the students to get involved, either by assisting the production process, contributing their own reviews, or honing their translation skills. This collaboration has paid some valuable dividends. Most recently, Society-member Kamila Štullerová won the first prize awarded by Slovak Universities Association for her translation of Zakaria's *The Rise of Illiberal Democracies*.

Artes Liberales is a recently established regional network of educational institutions from across central and eastern Europe. In collaboration with the Educational Leadership Program of the U.S.-based Christian A. Johnson Foundation, *Artes Liberales* seeks to promote liberal education and implement innovative interdisciplinary curricula, both among participating institutions and at other interested universities of the region. A fuller description of the network's activities appears in the *Artes Liberales* supplement at the end of every issue of *K&K*. Thanks to this cooperative endeavour, *K&K* can now be found at a growing number of prominent educational institutions in central and eastern Europe as well as at liberal arts colleges in the USA.

From its inception, *K&K* has benefited from the generous sponsorship of the Amsterdam-based Fund for Central and East European Book Project (CEEPP), a foundation dedicated to the development of independent journals and publishing houses throughout the region. Thanks to CEEPP's unwavering support, and particularly to the encouragement and advice of its director, Vera Ebels Dolanova, we have been able to continue publication, despite the vicissitudes of the post-communist periodical marketplace. Early this year, CEEPP published Publishers' Portraits: Publishing in Central & Eastern Europe, a book which documents the fund's most successful projects and features profiles of the work of nine selected independent periodicals and publishing houses from central and eastern Europe. We are proud to announce that *K&K* was chosen to be part of this distinguished cast.

The predecessor of CEEPP was the Oxford-based Fund for Central and East European Publishing Project (CEEPP), founded in 1986 by Sir Ralf Dahrendorf, François Furet, Timothy Garton-Ash and other prominent scholars in order to support samizdat publications in central and eastern Europe. The account of the work of this group is described in Freedom for Publishing -

Publishing for Freedom (1995), edited by Timothy Garton-Ash. It also contains a list of the one hundred most influential books published after 1945, as selected by the members of CEEPP. We are pleased to reprint it here for our readers (p. 84).

Getting a young journal off the ground is not without its down side. Among other things, there is the perpetual search for sponsors and subscribers, frequent snags in printing and distribution, and the race to keep abreast of ever-changing regulations and tax codes. On occasion, the mistakes have been of our own making, as when we tried so hard to impress our colleagues in Prague and Košice that we let philosophical esoterica get the better of a clear presentation of our editorial goals and policy, leaving our audience decidedly unimpressed. For us, it was one of those unforgettable but instructive lessons that only self-inflicting humiliation can bring.

The public presentations in Bratislava that we now convene with almost every new issue have been much more successful. The spontaneous intellectual flavour of these meetings is enhanced by holding them alongside pot-luck dinners. Although this North American practice of bringing food along to such semi-formal discussion sessions is still unheard of here, judging by the success of our *K&K* dinners, it may yet catch on. At the most recent of these gatherings, we launched a series of roundtable discussions devoted to those topics most relevant to the current condition of society in Slovakia, so that we may place our current predicament in a wider historical and comparative context.

At our last such roundtable (*K&K* 1/98), the discussion that followed from the review of Mircea Eliade's History of Religious Ideas generated precisely the kind of broader critical inquiry for which *K&K* was founded. One Pavol Židek, a priest from a small town in central Slovakia, used the occasion of reviewing Eliade's book as an opportunity for a critical examination of the current leadership of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. Another priest, a Catholic politician, and a prominent religionist then joined Mgr. Židek in a lively debate about the present state of religion in Slovakia. These discussions prefigure the cathartic debates that Slovakia needs, if we are finally to settle the unresolved issues of our past and the current political mess which these neglected legacies have helped to create. This kind

of public discussion and debate must take place before Slovakia will be capable of making its proper intellectual and material contribution to the European community and to other common global endeavours.

It is in this spirit of constructive debate that we offer you the pages of *K&K*, as a vehicle for discussing valued books and ideas, for promoting a new generation of critically thinking citizens, and for putting transnational cooperation into practice. One venture in this direction is this issue's essay by a Canadian political philosopher, Tom Darby, whose subject concerns, among other things, the origin of the modern conception of 'the end of history' and its meaning for our globalizing world.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our offer, to our Slovak readers in particular, for their responses,

reactions, and replies to Zakaria's article. We would also welcome reviews of any of the books listed on the back cover, for future publication in *K&K*. As an addition to the list of 100 most influential books as reprinted in this issue, we asked some of our Slovak readers to provide a list of five most prominent Slovak works and the ten most important foreign books in the social sciences and humanities. Besides these lists, some readers responded with personal 'confessions' explaining the special affinity they felt for their favoured works. And why not? In today's world, when good books are more and more like an endangered species, freely expressing ones' views and ideas about them is still the only way of defending them. Please, feel free. Save a book. Express yourselves.

Samuel Abrahám



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Fareed Zakaria
Managing Editor

June 11, 1998

Dear Mr. Abrahám,

Thanks so much for sending me copies of *Kritika & Kontext*. It's a wonderful issue.

I hope the article will spark a useful debate in your country.

Yours sincerely,

Fareed Zakaria

*P.S. It's really a
first-class journal!*