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Visegrad Herald

Our comment: Theater of Recordings

By Josef Beneš and Václav Kříž

In each Visegrad country we can find some wiretaps scandals recently. Slovakia's infamous „Gorilla” affair has shaken the whole society in 2011. The affair of the Czech Republic's former prime minister Petr Nečas led to his resignation in 2013. In 2006 Hungarian wiretaps recordings caused wide spread protests. And up-to-date Polish Tusk's government affair almost resulted into snap election.

Different type of recordings appeared in the Czech Republic in famous wiretapping of corruption in the football league, which has been adopted as comedy theater play named „Ivanek, my friend!”. This is rather hilarious aspect of the whole phenomenon, which is noticeable in all of the Central European countries. The other side of these recordings, which is certainly negative and more defining, is actually declining trust in elites as well as general disgust of the whole public with the state of the society and politics in particular. ➔ page 4



Secret-recording scandal is rocking Poland

In Brno, humor turns into politics

After 3 years of struggles against local government's corruption and lack of vision for the future, „Zit Brno”, Southern Moravian group of activists called was registered as a political party.

By Martina Menichová and Vojtěch Boháč

Although regarded as inspiring and standing up for citizen's interests by ones, the group is blamed by others for distorting reality, incorrect humour and fighting only for its member's interests. No wonder, in its activities, Zit Brno (Live Brno!) has often used controversial means (like the portrait of Adolf Hitler to illustrate an article about a city's deputy). Nonetheless, many of Zit Brno's fans consider such controversy as a necessary aspect of a good humour and an effective way to attract attention.

By using such controversy, activists of Zit Brno encouraged the growth of awareness about local political issues. Besides many others, they were pointing at abuses of city budget, presence of incompetent figures in the city administration or banning gambling machines by moving some competences from the state administration to the local level.

The example of Zit Brno can be considered as a part of broader trend in Central Europe. Activists use humour to attract broader audience and explain such issues in understandable and readable way. By means granted by the constitution and laws, they also show possibilities how to fight for one's legal rights and how to turn from an inhabitant into a citizen.

Satirical political parties are nothing new in Visegrad countries. In early 1990's, Poland experienced a turn of a satirical platform into serious political party called Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa (Polish Beer-Lovers' Party). Although, it gained several seats in parliament, its popularity went soon rapidly down. In Hungary, similar satirical initiative that began around 2006 through street art activities in Szeged has recently been registered as a political party, Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt (Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party). Their promises to voters include eternal life, two sunsets a day (in various colours) ➔ page 4

Beering together

Poles and Hungarians are having their own revolutions which reflect the world trends with local taste.

By Ewelina Sikora and Benedek Pál

„Going local” is a catchphrase referring worldwide to the beer industry, too. Everything started in the 1980's in America. Now it's hitting Central Europe. Whatever it is a craft, local, alternative, homemade or even „crafty” beer, it is revolution in a tankards happening even in traditionally non-beer countries such as Poland and Hungary. Despite the popular belief providing Poles with superpower of drying out a bottle of vodka in less than a minute, consumption patterns seems to be a bit more sophisticated. For several years Poland is undoubtedly floating on the world's „craft” wave. There are 101 beer producers, while in 2010 there were only 65. 6% of beer market consists of local, craft and microbreweries and 11% of middle sized breweries. The choice in pubs – not to mention the shops – is endless.

But it is not all about the numbers. Baltic porters, perfectly fitting the general national preferences of sweet, heavy taste are a local pride. Remaining the minority among Polish beer nation, women are the ones responsible for the revolutionary impetus. They are picky yet curious consumers, more often drinking beer just for the sake of pleasure, choosing wheat or dark beers rather than lagers, and willing to pay more for unique beer style. What is more, 9 out of 10 cervesarios (beer experts and tasters) are women.

Hungary was also never considered as a beer country. Furthermore, the communism had a disastrous effect on the beer culture. In the 1990's many people tried to run local breweries but most of them went to bankrupt and big companies started dominating the market. But Hungarian craft beer situation is different. Poland is one step forward. The main catalyator for the revolution was the Főzdefeszt, a microbrewery ➔ page 4

Tale of two identities

Brain-drain in numbers is quite shocking when it comes to V4 countries, and Hungary is no exception. As of 2013 600,000 Hungarians are permanently living abroad officially, while the real number is probably bigger than that. The issue concerns the public deeply, which has also been interpreted in a number of popular songs as well about our youngsters leaving the homeland behind. However it is not only the youth who are planning ahead. We interviewed Hungarian parents of two, who are deeply involved in this situation as highly educated employees in Belgium.

By Zsuzsa Petra Trubek and Dorottya Barta

Leaving behind the unemployment in Hungary, the solicitor couple and their children have found new home in the heart of Brussels. While the debate on brain-drain in the media focuses on the necessity to choose between the identities, their personal story shows us a different angle. Hungary will always be home for them, but that does not mean that they cannot keep their Hungarian identity and be part of a society elsewhere.

Not without roots, but without borders in mind. Their everyday life is switching between the identities. The language of the home is naturally Hungarian, the bedtime stories are told in their mother tongue, whereas the children learn in school in French. Sometimes it is easier for the kids to express themselves in their newly learnt language, but the mum does not want to fight this. She is happy that what Pili-

szky, a Hungarian poet gives to her, their children can find in a Belgian author as well.

What the children got is not only an additional language, but the privilege to think freely in multiple identities. The family takes pride in being Hungarians in Europe and it is a special pleasure for the mum to bake „pogácsa” for school fairs, where there are students from 26 different cultures.

Wearing the colours of Belgium in your heart. They are not only proud Hungarians, they are all proud Belgians too. The country's participation in the World Cup in Brazil inspired the little boy to cover his tommy in black, yellow and red paintings while cheering for his national football heroes. He adopted to the Belgian way of thinking to that extent that he actually spells his grandmothers name in French,



even though he speaks to her every evening in Hungarian – „Tsepchégue” for the Hungarian „Csóppség”.

However it is not a fairy tale of European integration. The mum cannot find of a new job and dad never learned the language. They are moving home in a year, still, what they all got from the years spent in Belgium is strong enough to plan to move back in the future.



Floods in Varna, June 2014

Bulgaria: Political flood

Natural disaster that hit the Black Sea city of Varna in June result in a fervent war of words between the government and opposition.

By Sofiya Popnikolova

The flood caused at least 13 victims, and an unknown number of people still missing. A state of emergency was declared in Varna, where many houses were flooded and dozens of cars had floated away. But the tragedy provoked also a heated conversation between the leaders of the main parties. Varna mayor Ivan Portnih told public TV broadcaster that it had taken several hours for national authorities to respond to the flood in the city. „Where is the state?”, Portnih asked. The government of Plamen Oresharski is seen as being as in its final few weeks after voters rejected the ruling party in European elections. In a statement, prime minister said that during the floods he had tried and failed to contact the mayor of Varna. Oresharski rejected allegations that the mayor had tried and failed to get him on the phone. Soon other party leader Boiko Borissov said that he had been shocked equally by the conduct of Portnih and Oresharski in engaging in verbal jousting amid the flood disaster in Varna. “The right thing to do in this situation is to express condolences because all other comments are cynical”, he said. Also, president Rossen Plevneliev called on politicians to refrain from politicking and instead to show solidarity and sympathy to the victims of the tragedy, at this difficult moment for the country.

Where have all the scholars gone?

„Theatre Studies is a luxury we cannot afford any more”. These words – spoken by the rector of the University of Leipzig Beate Schücking – are clearly displaying negative stance towards humanities in general.

By Maria Hess and Kareem Amer

Since the government of the state of Saxony has decided to save money by reducing the educational budget in 2010, overall 1.042 positions at Saxon universities have to be cut back until 2020, whereof the University of Leipzig alone has to bear 40%. Two years ago, those cutbacks already caused the closure of some of universities' departments.

When in January 2014 Mrs. Schücking decided to severely reduce positions within the institutes of theatre studies and classical archaeology, a massive outcry arose

Humor and politics

continued from page 1 → or smaller gravitation. This January anonymous Slovaks founded a popular Facebook page called Naše Slovensko (Our Slovakia) that mostly mocks the right-wing extremist Marián Kotleba and his party. It has been satirically reacting to the rising popularity of neo-fascism, nationalism or homophobia within Slovak public discourse.

In the case of Zit Brno, we have an exceptional possibility to follow a transformation of successful grassroots activist movement (blamed by some as muddy and irresponsible) into regular political party (obliged to face full responsibility for its actions). Some of its supporters are afraid that such action will make Zit Brno less effective. Despite that, its transformation can definitely contribute into Central European debate about the role of civic society.

throughout students, alumni and people engaged in the cultural sector. While taking a stand against the destruction of the only full-scale university in the state of Saxony and the abolition of unique departments in eastern Germany, activists partook in a variety of protests were initiated. The actions culminated in a large demonstration on the 25th of June with more than 10.000 participants.

The manager of the municipal theatre Schauspiel Leipzig, Enrico Lübke, as well as the manager of Leipzig's famous children and young adult theatre Theater der Jungen Welt, Jürgen Zielinski, both stated the importance of e.g. the institute for theatre studies on their own houses and for the whole of the cultural sector in the city and region. Without students and graduates, they argue, cultural institutions will suffer from a lack of qualified employers. Sooner or later, the creative life and intellectual exchange will cease to attract new audiences, students and scholars.

In an open letter to the rector of the University of Leipzig, alumni of the institute of theatre studies stressed out that the majority of them are employed in a broad range of occupations: „We work as theatre managers, journalists, educators, entrepreneurs, (theatre) directors, gallery owners, media executives, counsellors and CEOs. [...] We do not solely work in theatres, but

Beering together

continued from page 1 → festival in Budapest. It was first organized in 2011 in the university district of the capital. Soon it became so popular that it had to be moved to the river bank of the Buda side.

It seems that in 2014 the craft beer is in the mainstream. However nowadays you still can not buy craft beers in Hungarian supermarkets but most of the flourishing ruin pub scene of Budapest is selling craft beers. Contrary to Poles, Hungarians prefer the bitter taste of pale ales, lagers, and pilsners.

Providing a choice for customers or challenging the gender division is not the only lifestyle change brought by increased interest in local products. Drinking good beers and being a beer expert has not got a bad connotation as being snobbish wine expert. It is common to have beer after work, and if we do it regularly why not do it with a taste?

we work in press offices, cultural associations, universities, educational facilities, radio- and television networks, as well as in companies within the free economy.”

Obviously, graduates not only from theatre studies but from all humanities wield a significant influence on the economy, the cultural life and overall on the creative vibrancy of a whole region. Considering only one of them as some kind of luxury, definitely reduces the inestimable value of the knowledge and the skills they offer.

Theater of recordings

continued from page 1 → *When such recording is leaked at first it tackles our emotions – it is triggered by rough language as well as the bold plans of the protagonists. Much less is then discussed this crucial rational question: In who's interest did the recordings leak?*

Think about the recent political crisis in Poland – a bug was planted into favorite restaurant of Polish politicians and their political plans were unveiled to the public. In fact they were just discussing replacing of the one politician for another, without personal profit therefore standard political procedure. Rationally measured it's typical political struggle for power, nothing that condemnable, just exposing the rough language of the top political leaders and their straightforward thinking. This is however emotionally unbearable for many people. Thus the emotional view of the problem prevails over the rational one.

There is this fake feeling of understanding the inner political processes based on really small and selected part of conversations. Feeling of truth in these cases is not based on our rational deep understanding of the whole political background but rather on the current emotional experience of the tabloid information.

We are just hearing selected voices from the theater not seeing the play directly. Yet we are judging the actors. We don't argue that society shouldn't follow the wiretaps affairs but that we should be more cautious in having the instant judgment of the situation without further information. We urge people to be careful about turning these affairs directly into the negative feeling about our societies without deeper consideration.