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The following account about the current situation in the field of performing arts in Moldova was written by Michael Wiersing Sudau, an international author and journalist based in Chisinau, Moldova in early 2007. The text was originally written in Romanian and German. The author was not consulted by his publishers over the question of a translation into English, elaborated by an unknown person and published without his consent. The translation you find here has not been authorised by M. Wiersing Sudau, not least because a number of mistakes have been introduced. You should therefore read this translation with caution. Nevertheless Mr. Wiersing has agreed to publish the translation on this site, in order to convey a vision of the state of performing arts in Moldova for an English-speaking public.

Chisinau, March 2007

MICHAEL SUDAU WIERSING Moldova 2006: Cultural review of 2006 against the background of last years' cultural life

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There are two opinions which, I believe, are shared by most residents of large cities throughout the world with regard to the cultural offer in their locality, and namely: either they always complain that "absolutely nothing is happening there", although they do not really know what is happening in their cities, or they praise it up exaggeratedly without checking its quality. Thus, the same happens both in Chisinau and Rome, for instance, as a cultural event does not become better or more beautiful only because it takes place in Rome rather than in Chisinau.

A review of cultural events that took place in Moldova's capital city in 2006 as well as their critical analysis seem to be important this year particularly because the theatre, movie, music and dance events were outstandingly rich, diverse and of good quality. It is after a long time or maybe for the first time ever that we can place Moldova's cultural life at an international level, without fear of exaggeration.

Before proceeding to analyze the events that took place in different cultural sectors, it is necessary to touch upon the most important, probably, factor that has been actively impacting Moldova's cultural life. Certainly, the cultural events conducted here are created and staged by local artists to a great extent. Yet, it is worth mentioning that the international institutions' support for Moldova's cultural events has significantly increased throughout 2006.

The French Alliance has long ago stopped dominating this involvement as, presently, there are more collaboration offers, to say so, in the local cultural field due to the fact that the number of foreign embassies, consulates and organisations opened in Chisinau is continuously on the ups. Among the diplomatic circles, there is a common agreement regarding the need to yearly back at least one cultural event no matter how small it is, despite the fact that most employees of the state-owned international or inter-state institutions are not really interested in them, as they rather belong to that category of people who can appreciate positively only the cultural offers coming from their native countries. The exception proves the rule: former German Deputy Ambassador to Moldova, who has musical education herself, has organized concerts for several years, although she was not directly in charge of the embassy's cultural sector. When she left, the German embassy's contribution to Moldova's cultural life plunged under the level that should be characteristic for such a big state.

Moldova is undoubtedly taking advantage of the foreign institutions working in the country as they have been contributing to the fact that its recent cultural life has become much more international and more varied as compared with the one in the Soviet period. There is little probability that this diversity would have been maintained if Chisinau were only a province town and Bassarabia dissolved itself in the cultural space of the neighbouring state.

This positive impact that the international organisations have on the development of Moldova's cultural activities should be compared with their negative impact. The Moldovan state seems to ignore more and more its duty to actively back culture, hoping to lay this burden upon the foreign institutions. A similar situation can be noticed in many other developing countries all throughout the world, where either there are no cultural events without the involvement of the Western states, or the few events, which are more elaborate, are addressed exclusively to the diplomatic diaspora and some members of the local government. It is presumed that Moldova's 2007 state budget will allocate ten million lei less to the cultural sector. The tendency to set a situation similar to the one registered in most South American, African and Asian countries points to another imminent capitulation in the cultural field of the Moldovan state, which unfortunately, is somehow indirectly backed by the foreign institutions. International organizations, such as the delegation of the European Union, have not hesitated to repeatedly remind to the Moldovan state about the deficiencies (as well as about the unwillingness to fight them) in economy, justice, health protection, human rights observance and, apparently, in all the public life sectors except for the cultural field. We cannot remember any official of a foreign organization or institution who would have urged the country's president or government to continue reducing the level of the local cultural life rather than to make sure that it is preserved and developed. Is it possible that no representative of no matter what foreign embassy has ever thought of the development of Moldova's cultural life; are there no experts in this field?

But the Moldovan state dismantling or stagnating the cultural sector continues instead of coming to an end. Events, such as the *Festival of Contemporary Music*, which is being constantly deprived of its substance, has the possibility to propose fewer concerts as the time passes. The events enjoying the state's support often match its political and ideological line. Artists who have always enjoyed the authorities' support, and whose value has sometimes been embroidered, such as opera singer Maria Biesu or composer and conductor Gheorghe Mustea, have had the opportunity to carry out their projects in 2006 too, and they will

certainly do it again in 2007, but, unfortunately, the price for it is the shadowing of other artists who are as talented as Biesu and Mustea and of their projects. Over the last year, a series of international festivals ripened in Moldova, such as the ***Festival of Documentary Film, Cronograf [Chronograph], and the Festival of Modern Dance, Interactiune [Interaction]***, which have stopped relying on the state financial assistance, and maybe, this has even been in their favour.

The cultural events fully financed by international organisations can be recognised by the fact that they are usually free of charge, except for the Festival of Japanese Film, and its organizers, probably, have already regretted it. What organizer of cultural events could oppose or would not enjoy a situation that occurred in December 2005 when a play staged at the Ionesco Theatre, that had been broadly covered through and with the assistance of various institutions, organizations and media means, brought together more than 400 viewers with invitations during four evenings, about 100 spectators stood between the rows of chairs, and dozens of other people, who were less lucky, were hoping to enter somehow the hall even after the play began? A similar situation could have been seen several times in 2006, when those 532 seats of the Organ hall were occupied during 15 minutes only, and those who remained seatless for more than two hours to enjoy Mozart's Magic Flute – concert financed by the British embassy in Chisinau. The intention to maintain prices for cultural events at a level that would leave no other option to the public but of going to shows matches any well-thought state policy. Nonetheless, the fact that many events are held for free, but with the financial assistance of certain organisations and institutions from outside the country, makes the public opinion think more and more often of "What would we have done without the foreigners' presence?" a thought which is not necessarily productive.

The fact that alongside financing, the content of cultural events is confirmed by people from abroad certainly has both positive and negative aspects. As to music, for instance, such an intervention could play not too big a role, or, on the contrary, it could have a positive impact from an artistic point of view. But when it comes to staging a theatre play following an initiative by some international organizations, it gets more problematic. An example to this is the play, *Oameni ai Nimanui [Nobody's People]*, which is about the life of Moldovan emigrants in Italy, and which was staged with the support of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The today's spectator should be aware of the fact that the theatre plays do not appear as a result of the interest the stage manager has in certain subjects. Often, behind the plays, there can be hidden concrete themes related to the policies promoted by the EU, which seeks to provoke or stimulate the interest of the local population.

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Moldova's theatrical life in 2006

The cultural life in Moldova in 2006 was impregnated with many events related to music, dance and film, which, fortunately, was due not only to the increasing number of all sorts of festivals meant to make up for the lack of cultural offers over the year. The theatrical life should be assigned a special place, as in 2006, it was characterized by an unusually big number of events: anniversaries of two theatres, festivals of national and international theatre, staff exchange, the 60th anniversary of Theatre Union of Moldova (UNITEM) – in other words it boiled on big fire and there is much probability that it will not enjoy such an effervescence the next year.

The 2006 theatrical year was marked first and foremost by the 15th anniversary of two theatres: the ***Eugene Ionesco Theatre*** and the ***Satiricus Theatre***. No one can underestimate the importance and influence the two institutions have had on the development of Moldova's theatrical life during these 15 years. The activity of both institutions can sometimes become an essential element of the history of the Moldovan theatre after 1991. Even more pleasant seems to be the fact that both theatres, and mainly their artistic directors, are the advocates of strongly different working methods due to which they are not and will never be suspected of having tried to somehow copy one another.

If it came to the basic elements of the theatre's activity, we should mention that Sandu Grecu from the very beginning has drafted a clear-cut activity profile of the Satiricus Theatre which is oriented towards the national-Romanian classics and the current local playwriting. The spectators can see the actors' joy of playing in a string of plays staged by Satiricus, which is not always noticeable in a theatre. In addition, the Satiricus Theatre keeps on using many of the traditional theatre means that have disappeared from the modern-abstract theatre. There are few theatres in Moldova to have so many famous absolutely unique actors, who stood out at the very moment of the theatre's foundation. Also, it seems that a special emphasis is laid on the

creation of a genuine troupe, which would include not only stars, but the member of which be appreciated as a component part of it. Grecu has the Chisinau-based hall which is the most appropriate for theatre performances from the point of view of size and equipment, and which provides optimal possibilities for achieving a closer relation between spectators and actors. It is also worth mentioning the spick-and-span repertoire policy, due to which the spectators are certain that this theatre plays every week throughout the entire theatrical season, while the other Chisinau theatres do not give such a guarantee. As we are referring to the repertoire, then we should also mention here the successfully designed webpage which has been launched some time ago and which transmits the spirit of the theatre. This year, Grecu brought a group of graduates from the Academy of Arts, bringing about the idea of an active, functional and lucrative theatre in the landscape of the Moldovan theatre. A special emphasis is laid on the young audience; although they can often be “seen” and mainly “heard” bothering during the play, the young spectators are indeed involved in the process of selecting a permanently new audience, which is worth being mentioned.

The situation of the Ionesco Theatre, managed by Petru Vutcarau, is somehow different. As to the theatre’s profile, it is more difficult to define it since few new plays are being staged: throughout 2006, there has been only one premiere, which is certainly too little, while in 2005, there have been five, of which two monologues. Vutcarau’s theatre oscillates between plays by French authors of Romanian origin, Russian classics and contemporary authors of Anglo-Saxon origin, and, seldom, by some local authors. Until nowadays, the theatre does not have its own building, and year after year, it seems more difficult to find another solution to this problem but the construction of new premises. There have been times when the theatre was forced to cease its activity for a longer period, because all those who had contributed to the theatre’s foundation left, except for Vutcarau and his wife. Currently, the theatre’s troupe comprises mainly young actors. The terms of leasing the hall in the building of the Ginta Latina cultural centre, which allow using it only 12 days a month, are the main cause of the big breaks in the theatre’s activity, particularly in the first half of 2006, when the theatre has not performed for several weeks or even months. The strong self-confidence of the theatre’s founder and actors come to oppose this pause, and it is also largely due to the fact that short after the foundation, the theatre has already become a sort of favourite child of critics and of a certain group of audience. Accordingly, there is an impression persisting that each play performed by the Ionesco theatre is simply “brilliant”, and that here, inside the country, all the good plays are written by Crudu, staged by Vutcarau, music is composed by Starcea, and costumes are designed by Popescu, as all of them either collaborated with this theatre in the past or are continuing to collaborate. They have also been cooperating with other Chisinau-based theatres. Vutcarau has become a famous stage manager beyond Moldova’s borders too, being frequently invited to international festivals. This year, for instance, he is to leave for Italy and Pakistan – although, most often, just monologue plays about Picasso’s former wives involving only one actress each are performed at such events.

Besides, the stage manager also works for other theatres in Chisinau - over the last years, he staged two plays at the Chekhov State Theatre – and is one of the few Moldovan stage managers who has been repeatedly invited to stage plays abroad, for instance, in Japan. Unlike Sandu Grecu, who has been repeatedly coerced into postponing his several times announced comedy festival, Vutcarau manages however to organize an international theatre festival in Moldova once in two years. While Satiricus has been isolating itself from the Chisinau theatre criticism, deliberately as it seems, and consequently, did not enjoy a special issue of the national theatre magazine, *Teatractie*, as it happened in Ionesco’s case, the latter has been isolating itself to a certain extent from its spectators by having limited their access to information about its development and activities for several years. Until recently, it has been difficult to find out the names of actors as well as other essential information about one or another newly staged play, which is usually presented in a brochure-type theatrical programme. There have been no such programmes over the last years, a conspicuous gap especially in 2005 when a play focused on the issue of Moldovan immigrants dedicated mainly to youth was staged. Consistent in this context is also the fact that the only moment of the last years when the **Ionesco Theatre** had the possibility to present itself to the public during an official meeting held at the Mihai Eminescu National Theatre, and particularly, the presentation of an album launched over its 15th anniversary, was programmed so unsuccessfully (Wednesday at 12:00) that most of the public – numerous spectators who have contributed to creating the theatre’s reputation – could not participate. Let’s hope that its webpage, opened only last autumn, will be able to cover the existing deficit of information and ties in the relations with the best-known Moldovan theatres at the international level.

As to the concrete activity account of both the Teatrul Ionesco and the Teatrul Satiricus one can notice that in 2006, Sandu Grecu managed to successfully end the project of staging all the plays by Ion Luca Caragiale, becoming thus, as he has said himself, the only theatre in the Romanian space having all of them in its repertoire. With a new play by Constantin Cheianu, the Satiricus Theatre has successfully continued its second long-lasting project, and mainly to stage contemporary Moldovan play writers. Although the graduation plays by students of Grecu’s group have not been included in the theatre’s repertoire, it is however worth mentioning that the theatre has committed to actively work both with actors and spectators and to try new

things, that is, to stage more premieres, which is characteristic mainly of 2006. Certainly, there are plays that have been staged less successfully or others that have been in the theatre's repertoire for too long time although they are considered successful (the Ciuleandra play for instance is part of this category). Nonetheless, the theatre's desire to make progress is notorious.

This year, the Teatrul Ionesco put on the stage an absurd play, *Si cu Violoncelul Ce Facem?* [So What Shall We Do With The Cello?], the title of which seems to suggest a continuation of a play by Patrick Süßkind, *The Double Bass*, but which, in fact, is an original staging by Vutcarau of a play written by his favourite author, Matei Visniec. In addition, for the current season, the theatre has announced a project of retrospective – performing the best plays staged over the 15 years since the theatre's foundation. The project was launched by Nikolay Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, which was staged in 1997. It is a long play, and sometimes it becomes even excessively long. As it happened before, this play takes advantage of the pluses that the staging of a Russian play has in Moldova, repeatedly using full sentences in an interpretation of the Russian language characteristic only of Moldovans. It is not clear yet what play of the retrospective series will be given next. For the time being, it seems that certain projects announced by the theatre, among which the staging of plays about Picasso's wives, are beyond the possibilities of implementation, and, probably, will not be brought to an end. At the same time, despite certain positive changes, it seems that the theatre's future remains still uncertain as it has been so far.

In spite of certain problems and deficiencies, and as long as the others cannot catch up with them, Petru Vutcarau and Sandu Grecu remain at the helm of the current Moldovan theatre. The fact that the two theatres run by these two stage managers and having a very personal profile continue their activity being relatively independent of the state is largely due to their personal engagement. Unlike the national theatres, they cannot be directly influenced by certain decisions of the government which are sometimes politically motivated. Nonetheless, we still cannot see who will be able to continue the activity of the concerned theatres in case the two actors, who became subsequently stage managers, will no longer stay behind them. For the time being, we are looking forward to seeing again Petru Vutcarau as actor, as he himself has said...

There have been no reasons for celebration at the ***Mihai Eminescu National Theatre*** in 2006. The theatre's ticket desk repeatedly closing down during the opening hours, the postponed performances and the latest date of opening the theatrical season in Chisinau are concrete facts that drew the sporadic spectators' attention to the existence of certain problems within the theatre which is considered by the authorities as "Moldova's first stage". There has been at least one moment when one could presume that something does not go quite right, and namely at the beginning of the 2005/2006 theatrical season, when the theatre's director-general, Iurie Negoita, replaced the *Uncle Vanya* play staged at his theatre by a performance of the same play brought from outside. Then, one Sunday evening, it became obvious that the theatre has problems, as those 40 spectators with tickets were less numerous than the spectators with the right to attend the play for free (students) and those who came in an organized manner (servicemen of the national army). This way, the theatre's reputation was damaged, remaining without a clear-cut profile except for the fact that it is financed by the state. A play performed by mid-June to pay homage to Mihai Eminescu, *Pe Mine Mie Reda-ma* (Give Me Back To Myself) was an expression of the artistic void. The play had so little inspiration that it could have prompted serious reactions if most of its spectators were not only retirees who came to a free of charge performance. It remains unknown what the English version of the song *Memory* from the English musical, *Cats*, had to do with Mihai Eminescu...

In an interview with the *Timpul* newspaper in April 2006, Andrea Battistini, director of the performance *Henry IV*, staged by the National Theatre, said the following: "I have seen many plays during my stay in Chisinau. I did not like several of them at all. However, they had a great success with the public. Unfortunately, you do not have what to choose from... Foreign theatres are very seldom coming on tours to Chisinau and no foreign directors are invited to Moldova. Therefore, the public cannot make a comparison." At a news conference in June 2006, the artistic director of the National Theatre, Vitalie Rusu, resorted to counterattack in order to justify the lack of success of his management: "I have trusted this director [Battistini]... I regret the fact that this performance [*Henry IV*], on which I had pinned great hopes, failed to meet our expectations. It was not the fault of actors. However, the fact that the director's vision was very bad is certain. That was the greatest blow received during that theatrical season. Hedda Gabler was also expected to produce better results." (23.6.2006)

These statements could be interpreted as sincere, honest and somehow positively intentioned as some critics have already interpreted them. In reality, that was a method which is not characteristic of the theatre world, with nuances of scandal, when the artistic director of a theatre is attacking from the back the directors who were selected and invited by himself. He also assessed their plays, staged only several months before, as being of very poor quality (Rusu: "The failure of the theatrical season"). This way he, of course, assessed the work of actors from his own theatre. Then, if speaking about drawbacks, one can reach the conclusion that quitting the theatre because of their own inability to offer high-quality theatre performances to spectators

would be a solution, thus ceding the place to a person who is better prepared from the professional point of view. None of the projects announced during the same news conference in June, including the possibility of inviting Vutcarau (a miraculous solution) to stage a play at the National Theatre, was later fulfilled.

It seems that the Moldovan Culture Ministry has observed the critical situation in this area and as a result Ion Grosu was appointed director general of the theatre and Alexandru Cozub was appointed artistic director. Cozub is a representative of the so-called Ionesco-Italians group - former actors from the Eugen Ionescu Theatre who had worked in Italy for a certain period and most of whom are now working at the National Theatre. Since his appointment as director, Cozub has brought to stage only one play - South Pole by Manfred Karge - which has already been staged four years ago. Undoubtedly, this optimistic and amusing comedy was exactly what the theatre needed after having faced numerous problems. The play was liked by the public, including by the youths who are often very capricious in this regard. However, it would be recommended to watch this play only until the break. We have the impression that in the second part the director tried to write another episode in the life of the heroes, maybe based on his own imagination. But it was so badly staged that it risks discrediting the good impressions created by the first part of the performance.

What will happen with the National Theatre in the future remains hidden in the mist. We enjoy the well-deserved success of Mihai Fusu's *Povesti De Familie (Family Tales)*, but for the time being the theatre seems to have lost its profile. The National Theatre has a large number of actors from whom one can make a selection. However, other forces should be mobilized in order to appear in Chisinau's theatrical life as a rival of other theatres. This is not an easy thing to be done because the National Theatre does not have the freedom enjoyed by the Satiricus and Ionesco theatres, the repertoires of which contain plays that the government would give up with pleasure.

The *Lucafarul Republican Theatre* has been trying for a longer period to attract new spectators after obviously losing its old ones. The performances staged by this theatre are being watched mainly by schoolchildren and students, with half of the places remaining empty many times.

On 9 December 2006, the theatre had a premiere - Princess Turandot by Carlo Gozzi. The stage management and the actors' playing were mainly successful, although the question may raise whether the musical accompaniment was always necessary or maybe it would have been better to leave more space for the spoken scenes. The costume designer (Vitalie Vasilache) has managed to impress both the youths and the adults. In general, the play meets the expectations of people of all ages. By staging Berthold Brecht's Three Penny Opera in early April 2006, Lucafarul's artistic director Boris Focsa continued to implement two of his key projects: to bring Brecht back to the Moldovan stage - he has already staged Brecht's Good Person of Sichuan in the same theatre - and to stage well-known classical performances in versions which differ very much from the original. The Three Penny Opera was a success compared with the musical performance West Side Story in which Focsa removed the original music and proposed a wrong interpretation compared with the initial one. In fact, the songs written by Kurt Weil for this opera in cooperation with Brecht were replaced by Yuri Alyabov's music. In spite of this, the Lucafarul theatre should be praised for managing to stage this performance in a topical, completely experimental and unusual way, giving it the nature of a musical based on an older content. The premiere performance lasted for more than three hours without a break, but later on a shorter version of the play was proposed. Young actors, in particular Dumitru Acris who is playing the leading part, are rather persuasive. However, it would have been better to have live music instead of records.

The same thing can be said about the play Stefan cel Mare Public Garden staged by the amateur actors from the *Teatrul de Revista* which is sporadically staging plays at the Ginta Latina cultural centre.

As during many previous plays, at the most recent one it was too obvious that the director was controlling the actors, the cliché of the drunk man, who should also be comical, as well as the repeating and tiring exchange between dialogues and songs were too often used. In spite of this, the play as a whole seems to be sufficiently fluent and funny, giving a certain sense to the content, including to the meeting between Russian poet Pushkin and Moldovan poet Eminescu. This play is one of the few which can be described as a musical play about Moldova. Unfortunately, all the songs were played back.

Joyful and Sad Ballads by Ion Toparceanu is the title of a performance staged in 2006 by the *Chisinau-based Mateevici Theatre*. This small and "poetic" theatre is functioning in a building in Sciucev Street near the State University of Moldova. The three-actor theatre does not have a computer to write its repertoire, while its telephone is not functioning sometimes for weeks because of debts. Unfortunately, nobody seems to carry too much about this. This is regrettable given the fact that the plays staged by this theatre in its 40-seat hall are good, full of ideas and a kind of mystery which is worth becoming known to a larger audience. The prelude of the Joyful and Sad Ballads consists in the arrival of three persons, who walking in wind and snow, finally reached a warm and dry place. The actors are playing well and with self abnegation and the delight that they feel during the play seems to successfully reflect on the spectators. The price of the tickets - 10 lei - is undoubtedly too small.

The ***Ion Creanga Ethnography and Folklore Epic Theatre*** seems to be functioning in a similar clandestine way as the Mateevici Theatre. The Ion Creanga Theatre was rather well known and assessed some years ago and now, like in the past, it has its headquarters on the territory of the Moldexpo exhibition centre. This situation is regrettable because through its plays, such as *Andrei Cap de Iarna – Datini Si Obiceiuri De La Cumpana Dintre Ani* (*Andrei Head of Winter - Traditions And Customs At The Crossing Of Years*) which is now on, this theatre has managed to create a really holiday atmosphere, presenting dances, songs, games and popular legends which are not artificially compiled but which seem to result one from another in a natural and totally special way.

In 2006, the ***Licurici Puppet Theatre*** continued to stage a play from 2005 - *Planeta De Roua* (*The dew planet*) - based on a poem by Grigore Vieru and which has undoubtedly been a great success. This is a beautiful staging. The word beautiful is characteristic to the whole play, which is sometimes maybe too beautiful, risking in some cases to take wrong turn into kitsch. At the same time it is unclear why a puppet theatre which is looking for new forms of artistic expression has not tried to stage a play for adolescents or youths in 2006. While foreign puppet theatres are staging puppet plays for adults - even Chisinau hosted a puppet representation of Nikolay Gogol's *Inspector-General* as part of an international theatre festival last May - we are raising the question whether this search is motivated at the end of the day. Whatever the situation were, the enlivenment of the puppet theatre would undoubtedly be appreciated by everyone.

However, in the opinion of the author of this review, the play *Lady-Birds Return to Earth* by V. Sigariov staged by the ***Theatre from the Street of Roses*** seems to be the best theatre play staged in Moldova in 2006. This theatre, which is functioning in one of Chisinau's sectors, has a professional management and it is staging plays every week, a thing which is not characteristic of all the theatres located in the centre of Chisinau. In spite of this fact, the Russian-language theatre is not too often mentioned by the Moldovan theatre critics and newspapers such as the *Timpul* newspaper which deliberately never publishes its programme. One should not be a Russian national in order to be able to assess the good quality of many plays staged by this theatre, which has in its repertoire very difficult plays from the point of view of dramaturgy, such as Sigariov's play *The Fate Of Some Youths* (director Iurie Harmelin), which depicts youths who during the post-Soviet period became pariahs of society because of the lack of prospects and drugs, is one of the greatest theatre plays staged in Chisinau recently and it can be recommended to all those interested in theatre, as well as to active actors and directors. The art of the young but already professional actors is authentic and honest, something seldom observed in Moldovan theatres. We all know that if the Moldovan theatre develops only in one direction, then it will lose its multiculturalism, which has undoubtedly contributed to its cultural enrichment.

While reviewing the cultural year 2006, it is worth paying specific attention to the ***National Opera and Ballet Theatre***. Over the recent years, this theatre has had an obscure and almost unknown existence. While the other theatres have sporadically been in the media spotlight, announcing new smaller or bigger projects, nothing has been heard about the Opera and Ballet Theatre. Yet, this is happening in spite of the fact that the public is as interested in this art as it was before (maybe because of the lack of alternative?). The new director general of the National Opera has been appointed without informing the public and the society in general as it had usually happened during the Soviet period. The advertising made by the theatre itself is not always very impressive. Even the theatre's web page, the creation of which had been kept in secret for a long period, does not say how many opera and ballet performances are being really played by this theatre. The dates of premieres are being probably overlooked because no new plays have been staged by this theatre over the last few years.

Indeed, several years have already passed since a new play was staged by the Opera and Ballet Theatre. Even the English version of *Liliacul* (*Lilac*) opera in the German language, which the theatre showed last autumn in Great Britain, was a revival of an older production by the Chisinau theatre. The complete disappearance of opera critics in Moldova has been one of the consequences of the lack of new opera plays. On the other hand, the opera theatre troupe has split in a way and got older because of lack of new material and criticism. When the Opera and Ballet Theatre stages classical operas showing the population of the 18th and 19th centuries, this reminds about the population of a country facing demographic problems rather than the crowd the authors of librettos had thought about. Older actors have to make jumps that they easily carried out 15 years ago but which at present create a state of discomfort among the public. The next remark seems to be superficial, but there are other details which make spectators to wonder: scene workers could have been often seen walking in the backstage in 2006; sometimes they even looked at the public or this is something unacceptable on international stages. Why to play theatre when its illusion is being destroyed?

The ***international opera festival Maria Biesu Invites***, which marked its 15th anniversary in 2006, is not very well known abroad and it seems to be an advertising board for the Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Culture Ministry. During this festival, soloists from foreign countries are playing certain roles in some older plays staged by the Chisinau theatre. The festival is enjoying a generous financial support from the Culture

Ministry. Probably it is being regarded as a cultural area that deserves the state support more than other innovative areas which are being so often ignored. In fact, the burden for organizing the festival is being put on the shoulders of the theatre employees. In an interview given last September, conductor Alexandru Samoila said: "Greater efforts were needed in order to ensure a high quality of the plays. In addition, the organizers did not have the possibility of providing the guests with accommodation in hotels for a long period and as a result too many performances were played in too short a period. The orchestra played during rehearsals in the morning and performances in the evening. No foreign orchestra would accept the conditions in which our orchestra is working", Alexandru Samoila said. According to him, the Opera Theatre in Chisinau receives four times less financing than the operas in Odessa or Lviv (Ukraine) for instance (18.9.2006). After the festival, the Opera Theatre usually suspends its activities in Chisinau for several months and, for 12 years in a row, it goes to Great Britain where it plays for the British public. The tickets for the operas staged by the Moldovan theatre are cheaper than those for British opera. The theatre returns back to Chisinau in mid-December.

If this situation persists then the crisis faced currently by the National Opera and Ballet Theatre will continue for years or even dozens of years. This institution has remained at the level that it had had during the Soviet times. Of course, the theatre has an artistic quality which could have been seen in 2006, like for instance in *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini. However, theatre-trained spectators have the feeling that much more could have been done at the opera theatre in Chisinau if it will existed. Finally, the National Opera and Ballet Theatre has a professional staff which has the possibility of staging at least one new performance every year - and this is the most important aspect of functioning of such a theatre. Indeed, there are many other professional composers in Moldova apart from Mustea. They have written or continue to write opera and music for theatre but they apparently seem to be ignored by this theatre. "For more than 20 years, I have been waiting to see *Lucefarul* on the stage of the National Opera in Chisinau", composer Eugeniu Doga has said in an interview last summer. And what is happening with the modern opera at the Opera and Ballet Theatre as well as with the encouragement of a new generation of composers? Of course, there is life even after the death of Alexandru Lapusneanu! The local authors would most probably be ignored in case of a premiere, as preference is usually given to classical operas which are well traded at the international level. Moldovan operas represent only an impediment to this process. However, instead of staging the same performances for years in a row, maybe it would be better to stage new versions of some older plays.

We can only hope that something will change after the appointment of a new leadership of the theatre which will mark its 50th anniversary in 2007. If we read the biographies of the artistic directors of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre we can see that, after graduating from the Moldovan Academy of Arts, they did not have many possibilities of studying or attending long training abroad.

Currently we are not at all surprised that the only new opera theatre performance in Moldova has taken place this year at the initiative of the Organ Hall, which is situated in a historical building in the centre of Chisinau and where pieces by classical composers are usually played. At the beginning of the 2006/2007 theatrical season, the full and original concert version of *Mozart's Magic Flute* opera in the German language was played for two evenings at the Organ Hall for the first time ever in Moldova. The event was free of charge for the public and was organized with the support of the British embassy in Moldova. Apart from the conductor and director, who were British, all the other participants were from Moldova. Except the national camera and chorus orchestra, all the other soloists were students or artists from the Opera and Ballet Theatre. The performance was a success for all those involved, most of whom also showed good theatrical skills. Let's hope that such concerts will help filling in the gap currently existing in the Moldovan music theatre.

** The Russian Theatre Anton Chekhov has not been forgotten, but it has not been included in this theatrical review because its author has not attended any premieres staged by the Chekhov Theatre in 2006, a fact which obliges us to refrain from making any commentaries regarding its activities. The author of the review assesses the things from his own point of view, the one of a critic or an informed spectator who attended all the performances mentioned in this review and, like all the other spectators, paid for them.*

DISCUSSIONS

The situation of the Romanian dramatic theatre in Moldova at the current stage

In order to get an impression about the place of the theatre in the cultural life in Moldova and in the relation between the theatre producers and their critics, for the beginning, we will focus on the events organized at the end of November 2006 on the occasion of the ***60th anniversary of the Theatre Union of Moldova***, as well as on the debates conducted within the ***National Theatre Festival*** which took place in Chisinau in early December.

A number of events were organized between 22 and 24 November on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Theatre Union. This was done thanks to the sense of duty rather than because those about 700 members of the union considered that there was something worth or deserving to be celebrated in the activities of the largest association of art people in Chisinau. Undoubtedly, all the unions of creation of such kind have lost much of their reputation after the fall of the Soviet Union, as they have become unable to fulfil their financial and organizational duties.

The grandiosely-named **"International Scientific Conference: Theatre In Time: 1946-2006"**, which took place as part of the events marking this jubilee, has failed because of insufficient organization by the Theatre Union, as well as because of the presenters and the unprepared and partly unmotivated public. The event, which was conducted in the hall of the Theatre Union, was not attended by too many people, with only one third of all the places being occupied. If somebody would have tried to discover theatre students, actors or theatre directors working currently in Moldova among the participants in the conference, all their efforts would have been in vain. Most of those who took the floor expressed the opinion that the UNITEM has turned into a lucrative Soviet style union of creation, into a purely ceremonial organization. The older members of the union were enthusiastically recalling the good times when the critics, actors and all the other employees of theatres had their own section as part of the Union. It is possible that this was true or, as university lecturer Leonid Cemortan said during the conference: "We have many things to learn from our past". The founder of the Theatre Union, Victor Gherlac, who has reached the honourable age of 91 years old, took the floor at the end of the conference. His speech was accepted with tolerance rather than taken seriously. The most important event related to the **UNITEM's** jubilee was a homage ceremony which was given a less adequate title, **Solemn Plenum**, and which took place at 17:00 on Friday in the Hall of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre. The time for the ceremony was set inappropriately as at least four Chisinau-based theatres (Chekhov, Eminescu, Ionesco and Satiricus) had performances at that hour, a fact which had been known at least three weeks beforehand. Therefore, there has been no surprise at all that very few active theatre producers were seen in the hall, while the number of theatre veterans was prevailing. The programme of the event included many congratulatory speeches on the behalf of many creation unions of Moldova. Noisy hits which had nothing to do with the theatre were played between these speeches and bit by bit they dominated the event. UNITEM awarded three "gold" (as it was stressed) medals in honour of Eugen Ureche. The director of the Theatre Union was right when he apologized to the public for the lack of inspiration during that evening.

Indeed, if the Theatre Union had nothing else to do in 2006 but award gold medals, while the overwhelming majority of its activities are being frozen, then we should seriously raise the issue whether its existence has any sense at all. The issue of the Teatractiv magazine published on the occasion of the jubilee illustrates the nostalgia for a period that disappeared a long time ago (see the words of Nelli Kameneva), as well as the frustrations over the last 15 years. Someone can get the impression that everybody has lost following the changes registered over the last years. From the material and psychological points of view this could be true to a certain extent. Certainly, the business trips have been an irreplaceable element in the process of professional development both in the past and at present as they are educating in a separate way. However, it is very much possible that not everyone has been always satisfied with the uniformity and the plain tune of the society from that period in general and with that of the staff of the Theatre Union in particular, the omnipotent ideology and the silence imposed when it came to history issues. Blaming the economic changes and their consequences for all the hardships would be too simply an approach. This nostalgia for the Soviet times, which is characteristic even for some people who are only 40 years old, discourages and even frightens the young generation. It is not known what is more important: to have the possibility of discovering the art world and the own skills both in Moscow and Moldova during the glasnost period and the movements for independence, being witnesses to important historic events, or to have strength of character and creativity to face the hardships without any nostalgia. As regards the UNITEM, it has failed to turn from a well financed and clearly orientated professional organization which it was during the Communist dictatorship into a free union which would function in the conditions of the market economy. It is very much possible that these completely different social conditions require the creation of a completely new organization.

A similar image, dominated by the experience of the past, is also characteristic for the **theatre criticism in Moldova**. Certainly, the theatre critics are facing a problem similar to the one faced by the country's newspapers and magazines. Like in the past, they prefer to write beautifully about the theatre, while the direct criticism is absent as such, probably under the influence of the idea that "we should be grateful for the fact that culture performances in general are taking place in Moldova". The lack of a real (negative in case of need) theatre criticism, is obvious, while the media is not doing its best to discover and encourage new talents. However, the opinions of the critics tell us more about them, about the fact that many of them are not prepared to overcome the loss of their favourite actions and directors from the Soviet time and recognize the new talents, which they should not undermine, sometimes unconstructively and without any reasons.

During the discussions based on the theatre performances staged the day before, as well as during some not very well organized debates focusing on the modern dramaturgy in Moldova, which took place during the National Theatre Festival, the same group of older critics was taking the floor on a daily basis. The young critics were not heard at least once. Either they do not exist in general or they were discouraged by the presence of some experts persuaded that their opinions are absolutely true. The talks showed what nostalgic feelings some critics have. Thus, during the first day of the festival one of the critics expressed the opinion that the theatre in Moldova has almost no talents at present, given the fact that the really talented actors have left the country. Another critic was mentioning with regret that Moldova does not have young play writers, aged between 20 and 30 years old. He also regretted the fact that studies at the Music, Theatre and Plastic Arts Academy leaves much to be desired and unfortunately we do not have any more the possibility of sending students to the Russian universities as it happened with the current active generation of theatre directors and producers. We are asking ourselves whether young actors from Chisinau should be recommended to participate in meetings with the local theatre critics if at these meetings they will be told that their studies are not sufficiently good, while the possibility of studying abroad is not real any more. However, the studies made in Chisinau are not always worse than the knowledge that could be acquired in St Petersburg or Madrid. A similar situation is registered in the case of young play writers. At another event conducted as part of the festival - the reading of a play written by a young writer - the chairman of the association of theatre critics has arrogantly said the following: „He is only a senior student, what do you expect from him...?” This shows the lack of respect towards the author who was present at the meeting. The entire discussion was almost empty, and the experienced critics "condescended" to say something about the play, but without being very constructive. Such an attitude does not encourage the dialogue between the authors and critics.

At the same time, the opinions of critics seem to be changing very quickly and during the next day of the festival they were stating already the contrary. "Wonder child" Nicoleta Esinencu was praised up to the skies for her play of accidental success, *Fuck You, Eu.ro.pa!* She was described as a representative of the young and dynamic generation of play writers. And all of a sudden, Moldova seems to be a country where there are young play writers and where most theatre directors and actors are young, although we were surprised that theatre directors over 40 are also described as representatives of the young generation.

It was astonishing that these discussions between play writers, theatre critics and directors were not attended by literary editors from theatres, apart from the Eminescu Theatre, as well by lecturers from the Theatre Department and the UNITEM chairman. There are not so many meetings of such kind in order to be able to justify the absence of the above mentioned people. An interesting situation was registered during the debates on the modern theatre plays. A local theatre critic said on a neutral tone that a play by Dumitru Crudu is not his best work. Participating in the debate, Crudu reacted very sensitively. Asked about their attitude towards the performance in which they were playing, the actors from the Eugen Ionescu Theatre, including the person in charge of foreign relations, preferred to abstain from talks and even quit the hall shortly afterwards. Are the actors of the Ionescu Theatre, who in other situations seem to be very confident in their own forces, so unsure in themselves that they can not justify their opinions or activities during debates?

Leaving aside UNITEM as an organization, together with its members and those who preferred not to join it, the angry play writers and the nostalgic critics, then what is the reality in the theatre area in Moldova ?

It is obvious that at present there are many talented actors in Moldova, and this regardless of where, when and in what country they had studied. As regards the new play writers, they are growing and developing, let's hope without taking too much into consideration the opinion of critics. The creation of the ***literary club*** in March 2006, which is meeting every Monday evening at the premises of the Union of Writers, is decisively proving that there are in Moldova young authors who wish and can write. Referring to the play which won the largest number of awards at the National Theatre Festival – ***Family Tales by Serbian writer Biljana Srbijanovici*** – we could say here that there are many other theatre plays about the events in Yugoslavia written by authors from this region. At the same time, there is only one play in which the Transnistrian war is mentioned. The well-written boulevard comedies are also welcome, not only plays-analysis full of social problems that the dramaturgy too much associates with at present. A real crisis seems to be existing in the area of theatre directors. It is caused by the fact that the young theatre directors do not have where to stage test plays even if they risk being complete flops. No theatre in Moldova offers them such a possibility. Because of economic reasons or vanity, as well as because of the personal conception about the theatre, the artistic directors of the most important theatres in Chisinau insist that they stage almost all the new performances. As a result, for instance, Sandu Grecu staged at the theatre headed by him 16 out of the 18 performances played so far (while at more than half of them he was also responsible for the scenography). We should not look for too many reasons explaining the lack of possibilities for the young producers in such a situation. The initiative belongs to the ***directors of theatres*** who, together with the Academy, should cooperate at the creation of an experimental theatre where both the young play writers and producers would be given the chance of staging their plays.

The current theatre critics are presenting the situation in darker colours than they were in reality. Their problem resides, to a large extent, in the fact that the theatre art in Moldova is being compared with the theatre life in Russia and the former Soviet Union. I think that it would be useful to see what is the situation in this area in the countries which are facing a situation similar to the one in Moldova. Why not to study the theatre life in Finland, Slovakia or the Baltic states - countries in which the population is only a little bit higher if not even smaller than in Moldova - and, based on their experience, to analyse what could be taken over and learned and how some problems can (or maybe cannot) be solved. Maybe in some cases the situation in Moldova is even better than in the above mentioned countries. Thanks to the Romanian language, which is an obvious advantage, the representatives of the Moldovan theatres have more possibilities than their counterparts in Bulgaria, for instance. It goes without saying that the theatre life in the great countries should be watched, but referring to the logistical possibilities of development, one should take into consideration the dimensions of the own state, but this should not mean a decrease in the quality.

One of the best memories about the Soviet period is the fact that in those times actors of various theatres attended the plays staged by their colleagues. At present, such visits to the rival theatres are a rare occurrence as most theatre directors and actors in Moldova are focusing on their own institutions. Where is the newspaper which would carry out surveys among the active actors and directors in Chisinau about what recent plays they have seen ?

In this connection, apart from the performance staged after the already mentioned play by Sigariov it is also recommended to see the play ***Golanii Revolutiei Moldave (The Pools of the Moldovan Revolution)*** by Constantin Cheianu not only because it is a product of the local dramaturgy and has tangents with the 15 years of the existence of the Republic of Moldova (as well as the Ionesco and Satiricus theatres), but also because it is at present one of the best performances in Moldova. The play is successful because it has brought to the stage the enthusiasm and the problems which appeared after Moldova gained independence in 1991. The play presents the environment of artists in particular. Maybe it would have been better if the author included in his play some ordinary characters, representatives of less unordinary professions in order to represent the misery and the changes in a much more universal way. Of course, there is nothing new in the fact that over the years many people have been completely disappointed and that there are many disappointments in every society. It would have been better if the author paid more attention to the specific nature of the disappointment in Moldova over the last 20 years. But, in general, the play is depicting the reality rather truthfully, because in the case of a play about the present-day life there are many requirements in order that it were accepted by the public. In his play, Cheianu has managed to do a thing which happens very seldom in the theatre: the eyes of spectators were full of tears and this could be seen. Watching this play, many spectators and authors had the possibility - or where forced - to confront with their own memories and history. The author himself is part of this category of people - the generation which has known the Soviet reality and the changes that followed as schoolchildren or students.

The actors playing in this performance are persuasive. In his role of a failed writer, Igor Mitreanu manages to maintain the psychological tension till the end without becoming comical. Ludmila Gheorghita has played one of her best roles, showing the courage of representing the abjection on the stage. She managed to embody in a very truthful way both the superficial Russian student and the failed artist. Cheianu's play is not perfect - some things are even aggravating by the end - but, undoubtedly, it is one of the best dramatic plays about Moldova's history over the last 20 years. For sure, this play could satisfy the Western countries' interest in the theatre achievements in the former Soviet republics referring to the period before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. We hope that this play will be staged at least in Romania.



MICHAEL WIERSING SUDAU *Twenty years later: reviewing memories*

Twenty years later: reviewing memories

A history that cannot be seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled

The second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s is a period characterized by an extraordinary high number of events, the echo of which we can feel even nowadays. They happened outside Eastern Europe too – the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the liberation of Mandela – but, first and foremost, in this region, the realities of which are much more complex than one can believe at a first sight.



On 26 April 2006, we marked the 20th anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Besides the significant influence it had on the subsequent evolution of the “Perestrojka” phenomenon and on the collapse of the Soviet Union, this disaster, whose historic meaning is beyond any doubt, also gives contemporaries – victims, politicians, and, in general, society – the possibility to assess how its importance has been appreciated from various perspectives over the years. This happens in a period when, it seems, the Ukrainian society shows very little interest in subjects such as “Chernobyl” or “atomic energy”, and the public had no access to the two conferences occasioned by the anniversary, in the first case accidentally and in the second because so it had been planned.

East and West: Different memories and their possibilities

What are our memories about the Chernobyl event and how have they changed over the years? A historical description of those events was prohibited from the very beginning in the Eastern Europe and it continues to be discouraged. Even three years after the disaster, all the information about the accident was described as state secret and was under the KGB’s supervision. This state of things changed only in the spring of 1989. Aspects such as pregnant women living in the region adjacent to the plant being forced into aborting nine months after the accident were unveiled much too late to raise the public opinion’s compassion. As long as the Soviet Union existed, there were speculations about the so-called class enemy from the capitalist West, who, allegedly, was responsible for what had happened. Once governments accepting democracy to different extents came to power in Russia and Ukraine, namely starting with Yeltsin’s governance in 1991 and ending with Yushchenko’s in 2004, it was proposed that the Communists and the Soviet negligence should be blamed for the accident. All these happened despite the fact that many scientists dealing with nuclear power – although Communists, they were however interested in investigation in order to bring the truth out – tried to speak against the official policy of reducing the catastrophe to silence.

In Western Europe, even nowadays, the official memories about the Chernobyl event chiefly match information on the matter spread by the publications of the official bodies in charge of atomic power (IEA), which until 2005, maintained that the accident took 39 lives. Since this modest figure raised doubts from the very beginning, collaboration with the World Health Organisation was perfectly welcome. It is not quite clear who and to whom was indebted, but, when the researches concluded, this organization came out with a total number of 4,000 victims in the aftermaths of the nuclear accident. And this figure seems to perfectly suit the adepts of the atomic power, while the others regard it as being of an absolute cynicism. So, who would like and who needs memories? The memories about World War II are coming to an end too as the eyewitnesses are passing away. But the aftermaths of the Chernobyl accident – and this is a great challenge to the memory – will be active long time from now on. Svetlana Alekseyevich, in her work, *Author’s Interview with Herself about a Lost History*, published in the compilation, *Chernobyl. A Chronicle of the Future*, describes

this accident as “catastrophe of the time”, which, to a larger extent, seems to be a catastrophe of all the human senses. Yet, what does our memory tell us when even now just as twenty years ago, tasty mushrooms are growing in the forests adjacent to the city of Chernobyl, and the rivers are full of fish there? Who can ever recall a danger that can neither be seen nor smelled or tasted? The memory can cheat, particularly when it is the memory of “something” that does not exist.

Twenty years after the Chernobyl accident, in April 2006, Kiev hosted an exhibition displaying pictures and memories of people from all over the world who have been suffering more or less because of the consequences of decades-long radiation. There were mentioned names of settlements which were hardly known for most of the visitors: Semipalatinsk, Tomsk-7 and others, which also pose a serious international danger, but which did not equal Chernobyl’s baleful historical importance. Chernobyl is an event important for Africa’s modern history too, because entire regions in the northern part of this continent have been affected by radioactive clouds. Unlike most of the disasters that hit the humankind all throughout its history, in this case, Chernobyl has gone into the life of remote regions, which triggers inter-cultural problems too.

These various and very complex aspects of Chernobyl’s memory, as they are perceived in the West and East, as well as their subsequent analysis were brought to light at a three-day conference, Chernobyl +20, which the German Green Party held in Kiev short before 26 April 2006. In Western Europe, the so-called non-official memory of the event has taken shape within the civil society, being deprived almost completely of censorship. In the former Soviet Union, the situation was completely different, at least the first years after the disaster, as even nowadays the states created after the empire’s collapse lack a true civil society. “Greenpeace” disappeared from Ukraine in late 1990s because of the population’s rather tepid support. Could this be the reason why the historic memory of this event is better defined and kept in the West? This opinion seems close to the reality, mainly if it is to take into account that the overwhelming majority of participants in the conference were from the Western European states. The conference was really flooded by organizers from Germany, although probably it would have been more necessary that Ukrainians, and mostly the young generation, prove and deepen their interest in this subject.

The interest of the conference’s organizers in sociological or cultural approaches to the event was also very limited. Only in the afternoon of the opening day, there were presented some works dealing with the 1986 tragedy. A documentary, screened as an illustration of the music of a Canadian requiem dedicated to Chernobyl, which shows the lifeless region in the precincts of the accident, has rather failed to motivate the audience for reflections on consequences other than technical: the memory remains incomplete and, naturally, lifeless without people who had once lived in the now empty apartment blocks, without children, whose classrooms are empty, and without old people who used to sit on the benches in front of their countryside houses. Financial possibilities are also in force to determine the memory, and this could have also been seen at the Kiev conference. That is why, nowadays, there are U.S. activists visiting the Chernobyl zone, and no Russian or Ukrainian who would visit Harrisburg, the place where the biggest nuclear accident took place in the USA in 1978. Most of the Western visitors come with an unconscious feeling of superiority towards the Eastern regions, which often impedes them to notice some of the local realities. Who would go to gather mushrooms in the Western countries?

Also, given the fact that there were no French, Japanese or U.S. relief forces – people who participated directly in removing the accident’s consequences –it is assumed that the Ukrainian population rejects the atomic energy from the same reasons as the Western European states’ population. But the history of the Western German “greens” is very distinct from the history of many environmentalists from the Eastern European states. In Ukraine, there are “green” racists, just as in Great Britain, there are Marxist archaeologists. The social initiatives regarding the biggest in Europe atomic power plant, Zaporozhskaya, which are also religiously motivated, such as the one in the town of Nikopol, on the border of the Dnepr River, have differently treated the memory of what happened. At the same time, people from the West – most of whom took the plane to come to Kiev for a few days – are those who have been working out projects for children in the Chernobyl region, have been inviting them to visit them, promoting, inter alia, a Western interpretation of the Eastern European history and triggering the danger that the opinions and positions of the region’s scientists be no longer taken into consideration, just as it happened in the case of a report by the World Health Organisation. I said “inter alia” because no social or historical comment upon the accident was made

either at the “greens” conference against atomic power or at another state event held at the same time at one kilometre far from the other.

The memory's current practice

Certainly, the Chernobyl case, as a historic event, could be approached naturally in Eastern Europe if such a natural approach were allowed. Last March, the Russian president promulgated a law under which any use of nuclear power, either for peaceful or military purposes, will again become a top confidential process. Whoever has visited over the last years smaller or bigger regional museums or even museums from Russia's two main cities, could get a clear idea about the effectiveness of the way in which the memory of certain things is tarnished. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, historic exhibitions have been modernized only in absolutely exceptional cases; most of them have remained unchanged for more than 20-25 years. Thus, the visitors have the possibility to visit exhibitions which have become “historical” by themselves in terms of their organization, didactic concept and, of course, dominant ideology. Yet, there is nothing to impede the guides to present them as modern and “correct” exhibitions of the history, which allegedly represent the current state of the science of history. It is worth mentioning that, until 2005, tons of materials commemorating the victory over fascism have emerged in the Russian museums, and even presently, the exhibitions are elaborated and presented in the same manner as 30 years ago. The Russian memory of the 20th century focuses mainly on the victory over the Hitlerist Germany, and, apparently, on the rest of the world, rather than on facts which the visitors could refer to in the everyday life. A correct historic assessment of the Chernobyl event has little chance in a state which has recently decided to construct 40 new atomic reactors – and this in the circumstances when the population's number decreases dramatically – and which is not interested in a critical assessment of nuclear power. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which has partnership relations with Belarussian and Russian officials, in 2002, created a webpage, www.chernobyl.info, the goal of which is “to offer an Internet connection to people living in the worst hit regions”, and to ensure their “access to independent sources”, which Russia certainly does not wish.

An exhibition titled Chernobyl was opened in Kiev, Ukraine, in 1992, and nowadays, it has the status of a national museum and can be found in all western tourism guides. It is visited mainly by foreign tourists, official guests and UN secretaries, which view this event as a part of the folk culture on the 1980s. The walls of the central stairs leading to the exhibition halls display road traffic signs which were once pointing to the exit from the evacuated cities and villages, which, once without residents, disappeared from the map. The main exhibition, which has not been changed for 14 years, is sometimes supplemented by temporary exhibitions, such as an exhibition of works that won a poster contest, which are aimed at recalling about the disaster with the aid of text and graphic images. “Still life – Nature morte – Stilleben – Tschernobyl” – this is how the memory chain of an author looks like. But although these works, most of them impressive, have enjoyed the public's interest, issuing catalogues and albums could not be but beneficial, yet, there is only one brochure that can be bought at the museum, and even this one is translated into a pretty queer English. Of course, it can be done more in order to point out the museum's profile, but it seems that President Yushchenko's orange government is no longer interested in it.

“Among the old photos you might recognise somebody who serves to protect the law today. And you may change your opinion of your local or neighbourhood militiaman, who once became a hero in the name of the present day” – this is how a fragment of the brochure's text sounds like. The notion of “hero” is a frequent element of the Soviet historical practice, according to which, even the cities made of stone and concrete were given the title of hero made of flesh and blood. Those six firemen who 20 years ago died among the first during the Chernobyl clean-up operation have been declared heroes too. Over the years, they have been symbolically declared the first victims of the tragedy, and there is absolutely no mention about those 20 people who were in the reactor command hall and died even earlier, suffering not less than the firemen. Unlike the traditional Soviet heroes from the time of World War II, a historic re-assessment has already taken place in Ukraine when it came to Chernobyl heroes. The Ukrainian society does not question the features of a hero, but there are talks whether the six firemen and, implicitly, their descendants should have the right to money given in connection with the status of hero, although, as a matter of fact, they were fulfilling their professional duties. Although, the world history has seen not too many people who would have liked

to become heroes if it meant to die, a part of the Ukrainian society backs a position which, first and foremost, helps the state to avoid meeting obligations imposed by the history.

Thus, the Ukrainian authorities have often turned down complaints by hundreds of thousands of people – the staff who survived the incident and the so-called relief workers who participated in the clean-up works in the subsequent days and years – citing as reason the fact that Ukraine sent nobody to Chernobyl (the Soviet Union did it then) and that it can assume no responsibility for the former empire's mistakes. Instead of making sure that the victims benefit from medical treatment free of charge, the state covers only a small percentage of the spending the relief workers need to make. They are said to have been "volunteers". Those who joined the colours at that time have no right to the status offered to those three millions of Ukrainian victims, because it was "normal" to be sent to Chernobyl during their compulsory military service. By cancelling all historical responsibilities as a state inheriting institution, any state can shun the memory of those historic deeds as they are unfavourable to it, which, let us admit it, also has some financial advantages: the state "leaves" as much history as it can afford paying for. And since the life of the veterans of the Chernobyl accident is shorter than the life of World War II veterans, the memory too disappears much quicker at the same time with them.

There is deep disappointment among those who believed that the environment protection and other ideals of the leftist politics will indeed interest the current Ukrainian pro-Western democratic government - whose coming to power is considered by the German "greens", who participated in the Kiev conference, as their merit too. The president has already given the go ahead to the construction of 22 atomic reactors, and independence from Russia is one of the causes. So, it is not only a problem of energy security, but also a political issue. Thus, the new Europe, and namely Ukraine will lay the basis for an elaborated atomic future, and the European Bank for Reconstruction will certainly participate in the process. As to alternative energy, it does not enjoy a special attention in a country wasting extremely much energy – as all throughout the ex Soviet Union, as a matter of fact. And this happens despite the fact that the public opinion firmly speaks for renewable energy, and 11 per cent of Germany's overall energy is produced by the wind. The USA has built no atomic reactor for 30 years because of the lack of a solution to the liquidation of radioactive waste, Germany and Switzerland have been transporting radioactive waste to France and Great Britain, while Ukraine is going to stock them in Russia until 2013, after which they will return home. No political changes in this respect have been noticed by the environmentalist organisations in the region, for instance, by Svit based in Artemivsk, east of Ukraine, where it is set to build up a warehouse for nuclear waste in one of the biggest salt mines of the world, which has been ensuring a quarter of the world consumption.

Future of the memory about Chernobyl tragedy

Victims are saying that the state has failed to meet the earlier assumed commitment of paying compensations. Ukraine is telling the West that the accident's consequences are graver and graver in order to obtain financial means necessary to straighten the budget out. People are told that it is necessary to set up new atomic plants in order to get energy independence from Russia. The world policy – most of the international institutions are however dominated by the Westerns – represented by officials of the World Trade Organisation, claims that the accident was not so grave though, since only a few thousands of people died. Eastern European doctors and other scientists have been reproaching Western experts with diminishing the accident's impact, and ignoring the outcome of the work of the local physicians who were in contact directly with those ill. For the time being, the Eastern European public opinion says nothing as well as the young victims of diseases and evacuations from the region adjacent to the reactor.

This state of things could indeed change in the future. In the meantime, we have got used to festivities over World War II held once in ten years, which the more the historic moment remains in the past the more they get pompous and somehow bizarre. And if in 1945 a five-year-old could not imagine that the events he/she passed through would get public resonance sometime – because there have always been thousands of adults, former eyewitnesses of those events – then his/her chances of being heard become bigger and bigger with the passage of time. Svetlana Alekseyevich writes: "History has always been the history of wars and commanders of

armies, and the war - a dimension of horror. That is why people confuse the notions of war and catastrophe. Almost all the features of a war were present in Chernobyl: lots of soldiers, evacuation, abandoned dwellings, ruined day-by-day life. Newspaper articles were full of military elements: atoms, explosions, heroes... Even the monuments to the Chernobyl heroes reminded of the monuments built in the memory of heroes dead during wars..." One could also assume that the 30th anniversary of the accident will be marked otherwise than this year, particularly due to a more active participation of younger victims of the disaster. They are now 20-25 years old and they are up to their studies of professional life. They probably do not have children yet. But it can be expected that in ten years, they will be somewhere in the first ranks of those who do not want to forget about Chernobyl and who (let's hope) will try to motivate the society to take attitude. In the next decades, there will probably be no such unnoticed commemoration as in 2006. This year's lack of symbolic commemorative and gratitude actions - moments of silence to commemorate the victims, divine services, lit candles - will probably be compensated. Also, it is very much possible that in ten years, the state will keep the promises made to all the victims a few decades ago under the imperative need to create a positive image of itself among the population. Monuments will be built up, and meetings with the survivors will get a higher and higher importance. Taking into account the international character of this historic event - in the clean-up of which participated relief workers arrived from Brest and up to Vladivostok - Chernobyl has all the chances of becoming a concrete, central and international event, which, in addition, is beyond any competition. Stories, such as the one about a group of Moldovan musicians who had been promised a holiday in Spain provided that they give concerts to relief workers during a few weeks and of whom only a few were healthy enough to see their holiday country, can hardly wait to be told and filmed.

Of course, no one will go so far with the reconstruction of memories about the accident as to build up memorial compounds as in the USA, where pedagogue-museologists, with the aid of halls and epoch clothes restored as truthfully as possible, would try to tell visitors about the invisible danger of the atomic energy. In a state where the atomic reactors are just epoch constructions and which has a special relation with the so-called history fear, this could happen any time. However, we can be certain that the interpretation of Chernobyl as a historic event will change in the next decades. Those 442 atomic reactors operating in 31 states worldwide will take care of it too. "There has never been any danger to the population..."

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Michael Wiersing Sudau was born in north-west of Germany. In 1992, he graduates from the Detmold-based secondary school, and is employed as social assistant at two charity organizations in France.. In 1994, Sudau leaves for Russia, where he works as volunteer at a society for the protection of human rights, Memorial, set up by political dissident Aleksandr Sakharov. He follows university studies at the Essex University, Great Britain, and he also follows two-year research studies in Omsk (Siberia, The Russian Federation). At the Essex University he studies to the same extent two courses: International Relations and History of Arts. Then, he makes another halt for cultural and sociological research in the Latin America: Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Since September 2005, he has been living in Chisinau and wants to stay to work here for several years. Sudau believes that Moldova is one of the most interesting countries at this stage, where the social situation is determined by an identity bordering the East and the West. He speaks several languages: German (native), English, French, Russian, Spanish, Romanian and quechua (language of the indigenous population). The first of his articles placed on Europa.md, was written after he had visited several cities in Ukraine.