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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Wojciech Przybylski (Res Publica Nowa, PL)

ECONOMY

Martin Ehl (Hospodářské noviny, CZ)

INTELLIGENT MIND

Éva Karádi (Magyar Lettre Internationale, HU) and Marta Šimečková (www.salon.eu.sk, SK)

BOOKS

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Miklós Székely (HU)

LANGUAGE EDITORS

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PROOF READING

Adrianna Stansbury (Res Publica Nowa, PL/USA)

ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR

Anna Wójcik (Res Publica Nowa, PL)

GRAPHIC DESIGN

 RZECZYOBRAZKOWE.PL

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EUROPE

RISE AND FALL OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

SURVEY WHAT IS THE CONDITION AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE REGION?



PAGE

6

In recent years, the middle class have demonstrated throughout the world more than ever. Some have protested about economic conditions, some about perspectives for higher education, others fought for regime change. Despite cries for its end, the middle class is on the rise, including Central Europe.

This question is answered by sociologists, analysts and politicians from four V4 countries:

Iveta Radičová |SLOVAKIA|, Gábor Takács |HUNGARY|, Anna Giza-Poleszczuk |POLAND|, Roman Joch, Vladimír Špidla, Ondřej Liška |CZECH REPUBLIC|

- 17 **The Way Things Stand** Péter Nádas
- 23 **In Search of a Usable Past: Who Were the Ancestors of Polish Middle Class?** Tomasz Zarycki

THINK TANKS WATCH

GEOPOLITICS AND MONEY

- 26 **Banking Battlegrounds**
Marc Lanthemann (Stratfor's Europe Analyst)

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

CHINA AND THE CLASS PROBLEM

- 30 **Deregulation and New Trust in the State**
Interview with Csaba László by Martin Ehl
- 32 **Who Fights for the Middle Class?** Igor Janke
- 34 **Chinese Middle Class at European Doorsteps**
Marta M. Golonka

INTERVIEW

LIFE AND DEBT

- 38 **The Traumatic Symbol of the Middle Class.** Interview with Don Kalb by Zoltán Sidó and Dénes Csurgó

INTELLIGENT MIND

THE END AND THE FUTURE

- 42 **The End of Future** Rudolf Chmel
- 44 **Farmers in Fairy-Tale Land. Poland and the European Crisis** Marcin Król
- 48 **The Land of Dilemmas** Magdalena M. Baran

PROSPECTS FOR EUROPE

Interview with Timothy Garton Ash Wojciech Przybylski

Europe looks shattered, yet there is hope for even further enlargement and integration. Wojciech Przybylski interviews Timothy Garton Ash
— a renowned British historian of Central Europe and Professor of European Studies at Oxford University. They discuss the political condition of the continent and perspectives for Turkey and Maghreb countries to join EU.



PAGE

50

VISEGRAD ABROAD

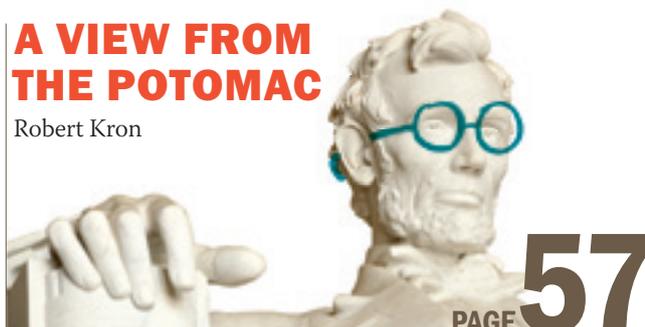
IN COOPERATION WITH EUROPEUM

EASTERN AND TRANSATLANTIC ANALYSIS

- 54 Ukrainian "Stagnarchy" Buries the Eastern Partnership As We Know It Alexander Duleba

A VIEW FROM THE POTOMAC

Robert Kron



PAGE **57**

- 62 The Visegrad Group in Eastern Europe: an Actor, Not a Leader (Yet) Jana Kobzová

COMMUNITIES

NATIONS WITHIN NATIONS

- 64 The Rusyn Revival in Slovakia - or How to Create a Nationality at the Margin of Europe Paul Bauer

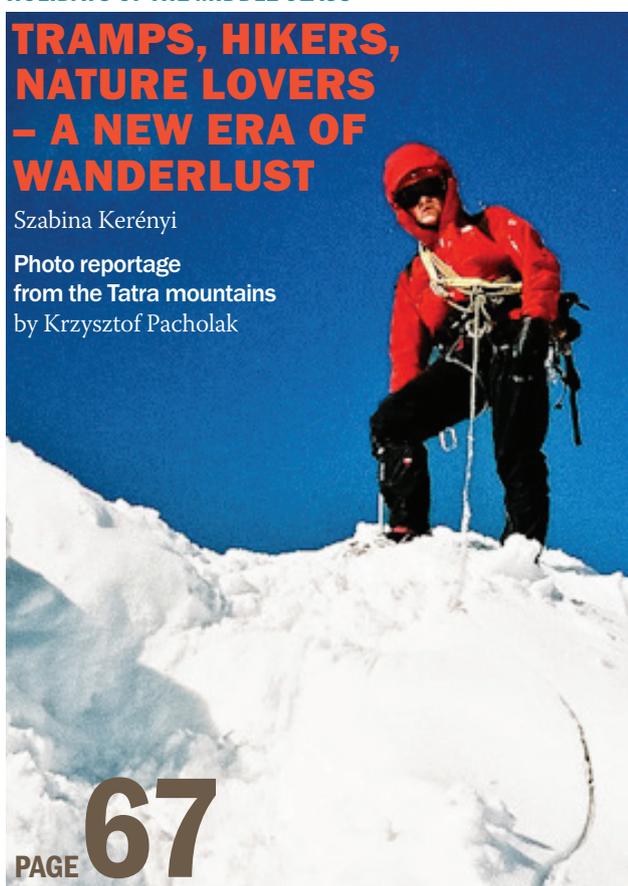
REPORTAGE

HOLIDAYS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

TRAMPS, HIKERS, NATURE LOVERS – A NEW ERA OF WANDERLUST

Szabina Kerényi

Photo reportage from the Tatra mountains by Krzysztof Pacholak



PAGE **67**

URBAN

POLITICS OF EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

- 76 The Chances of Cultural Renewal in Hungary András Bozóki

BOOKS

WINNING BOOK AWARDS

- 82 When Literature Becomes Politics: Probing the Visegrád Countries' Systems of Literary Awards Marek Sečkař
- 82 Winged Victory of the Nike. The System of Literary Prizes in Poland Cezary Polak
- 85 Literary Awards as Feedback in Literary Communication: The Typology of Literary Awards in Slovakia Pavol Rankov
- 88 Conservative Confirmation or Progressive Lottery? The World of Czech Literary Awards Eva Klíčová
- 90 My Prizes Endre Kukorely
- 92 Literary Prizes in Hungary. A Short Survey Orsolya Karafiáth

LOOKING BACK / ARTS

IN COOPERATION WITH EUROPEUM

POTENTIAL OF ARTS

- 94 Irritation, Unrest and the Politics of Questioning: the Eventful Relationships of Art and Nationalism Margaret Tali

ART MUSEUMS AMONG TECTONIC MOVEMENTS

Gábor Rieder

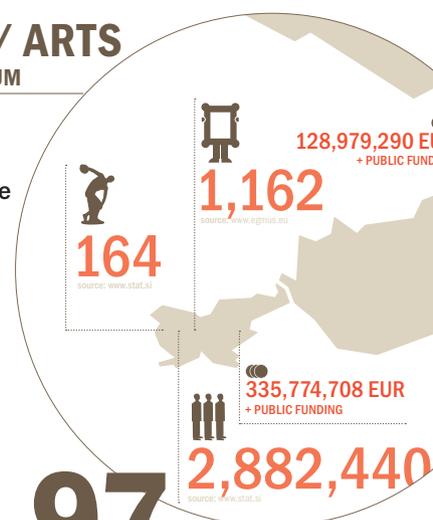
PAGE **97**

OPPORTUNITIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 100 Social Innovation in the Limelight Judit Barta
- 102 Summer School Central Natalia Sawicka

ESSAY

- 104 The Metamorphosis of the District Gergely Angyalosi
Essay on a book by Adam Bodor, 2012 literary award winner of the Belletrist Society. Bodor's latest book *The District at the New York* is coming out later this year.



Social Innovation in the Limelight

Fritz Moser and Wanda Moser-Heindl, the founders of Unruhe Foundation, which awards the SozialMarie Prize, realized back in 2005 that whereas technological innovation was supported in many ways, social innovation was not recognized on its real merit. The SozialMarie is one step to change that.

JUDIT BARTA

Monica (63) a resident of Graz and a grandmother of three, had been taking antidepressant pills for years, and was in a stable condition despite being diagnosed with chronic depression. In the gloomy autumn of 2010, her condition began to deteriorate, and she was unable to go outside and later attempted suicide. Eventually, Monica was taken to a mental clinic, where she stayed for five months.

Before going back to her family, she lived for a year in a residential home, named “Swallow,” with seven other women, who had also been treated in a psychiatric hospital for longer periods. In that safe intermediary world between the medical environment and the outside world, she grew strong and when the time came to go home, she felt she was ready to resume her roles as wife and grandmother.

Although the name and story are made-up, “Swallow” is a real place. The building is located in Styria, southeast Austria, run by seven women who suffered from mental illnesses. The house operates on a daily schedule from Monday to Friday, which includes gardening and kitchen work, as well as various opportunities for relaxation. This month, “Swallow” was one of the 1000 Euro-award winners of the SozialMarie Prize for social innovation, announced for the 8th time since 2005.

In 2012, SozialMarie received 233 submissions from more than 200 organizations, mainly from Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Each year around 30 projects are shortlisted, and 15 programs are awarded. The first prize is worth 15,000 EUR; the second, 10,000 EUR; and the third, 5,000 EUR; while the remaining 12 winning projects receive 1,000 EUR each. It is the first year that the Austrian and Hungarian public could vote for projects, and the two winners got a 3 minute promotion video.

PHILANTHROPY IS NOT DEAD

Most social innovations are done by quixotic NGO’s, less frequently by large companies with CSR dedication, and even less frequently, by socially concerned individuals. However, social innovators rarely receive the same recognition and fame as technological innovators like Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, Apple’s Steve Jobs, or Microsoft’s Bill Gates. This is the void that SozialMarie seeks to fill. That this prize is still funded by private means, shows that philanthropy is not dead even during harsh economic times such as this.

WINNING SOCIAL INNOVATIONS: WHAT IT TAKES

“Swallow” is a good example of what social innovation should entail according to the SozialMarie Prize distributors. The

major criteria are originality, creativity, and operability. This means that the innovation must demonstrate that it has been implemented for a while and has proved to be efficient at inducing change either in the lives of those concerned or in the attitude of wider society. The original idea back in 2005 was that any organization – an NGO, a local government, a company or an individual – can apply if they are operating within a 300 km radius of Vienna. But later that constriction was removed. “Borders were never an issue, it is outdated to think within the boundary of a nation state”, says Nora Somlyodi, the project coordinator of the Prize. The four-language-webpage in Czech, English, Hungarian, and German also reflects its transnational focus. “The prize via the award-giving ceremonies and conferences and workshops dealing with social innovation with the participation of the Unruhe foundation also creates opportunity for leaders of the nominated and the awarded projects to meet, exchange ideas and meet with journalists”, she adds.

Since 2010, projects from all over Hungary can participate, next year it is planned that the entire Czech Republic will be included in the compe-

tition. “There is no quota on how many Hungarian, Czech or Austrian projects should win, but the projects’ originality is measured on a country basis, whether there have been similar projects implemented, or not. This year it turned out that the first three winners were all Austrians, while last year a Hungarian community building project was selected for the first prize.

EMPOWERMENT AND SOLIDARITY ARE THE GOALS

The projects entering the annual competition have been tackling a wide range of issues such as migration, homophobia, parenting, environmental protection, renewal of residential buildings, and poverty. The connecting themes that seem to run through all of them are empowerment and solidarity. A program entitled “Children of imprisoned parents”, submitted this year from the Czech Republic, helps families with one parent in custody to keep regular contact. In September, they will start a Skype-based pilot project in one prison in Prague. Another selected

project this year illustrating empowerment is called “When I think of home” coming from Salzburg, where fifteen homeless persons under the guidance of a professional writer, wrote autobiographical or fictional accounts of what “home” means to them.

PATRONS PAVE THE WAY

The Mosers came up with the bright idea that two patrons are appointed each year, one from Hungary and one from Austria, to choose a program from among the nominated ones. Milan Gauder (35), a regional director of MasterCard, who has assumed the role of the Hungarian patron this year, opted for a Hungarian project taking place at the Hétes-settlement of Ózd in northeast Hungary to help a poor Roma community. He was struck by the enthusiasm of the founder of the project and is also aware of the dire situation the impoverished Roma are in Hungary. “I see myself as a sort of interpreter”, he says. “I know the language of the business world, so I can help the organization to communicate better with it to attract sponsors”. “All the investors look for systems that work, where they feel safe to pour their money into. With the help of his network, he will try to enhance the visibility of the program. The

other patron, the couple Susanne Schubert-Lustig and Francis Lustig support the “Swallow” program for women with mental illness.

GOOD PRACTICES CATCH ON

Partly due to social network sites such as Facebook, SozialMarie is gaining recognition; between two and three hundred projects are handed in each year. There is also growing evidence that it is conducive to the spread of good practices. A Czech project called “Next door family,” which was launched in 2004 and won an award in 2011, has just expanded into a European wide international project spanning Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Slovakia and Spain. “Next door family” is based on a very simple idea, as all great ideas are. On a given day, local and immigrant families sit down to have their Sunday lunch together in order to get to know each other, and break down the walls built from ignorance, prejudice, and fear. This project seems to symbolize the credo of the SozialMarie Prize for Social innovation. Without mutual help, responsibility and solidarity, societies do not work, It is vital to realize that the walls people and communities erect between each other are mostly fake, they can collapse easily if people take the effort to look closer. /

The author is a Hungarian freelance writer and translator, PhD candidate in Film, Media and Contemporary Culture at ELTE University, Faculty of Humanities.

FIRST PRIZE

€ 15,000

went to the Viennese project Children’s Hospice Network (Kinderhospiz Netz). Families with terminally ill children or adolescents are offered free medical and nursing care, as well as psychosocial care, and counseling for the financial and practical aspects of everyday life. According to the jury, “with its combination of services, Children’s Hospice Network is unique in the Germanosphere! What is of central importance is that illness is not considered in isolation from its social context. Financed almost exclusively through private donations, the network strives to integrate children’s palliative care into the public health system.”

SECOND PRIZE

€ 10,000

Eltern.chat – Expert talk by parents for parents, a project from Vorarlberg, won second prize (10,000 euros). Roughly 100 times a year, parents and legal guardians gather in twelve communities in Vorarlberg for an ‘elt ern.chat’ – a parents’ circle, where they speak Turkish, the Vorarlberg dialect, or Russian. They discuss pedagogical topics introduced and moderated by a specially trained facilitator, topics such as how to make children strong, managing television, sibling relationships, bedtime, learning to speak, nutrition, sources of energy, and puberty. The jury appreciates: “This system is self-managing, built on a well-structured and well-equipped configuration, and it is easily expandable. It contributes to the practice of communal learning – one-eighth of communities in Vorarlberg already participate!”

THIRD PRIZE

€ 5,000

The project – Junior City Farmer Schönbrunn – was awarded the third prize (5,000 euros). In the heart of Vienna, under expert, age-appropriate guidance, children and pre-teens aged between 4 and 12 plant vegetables, harvest, cook and eat together, as well as play in a miniature (fairytale) pine forest, and frolic through nature among fruit trees. “Fallow land has been transformed into a garden – grounds for a collective experience for children and pre-teens from the city; in this way, untapped potential can be used to accomplish social, integrative learning,” the jury stated.