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# **THE ROAD TO EUROPE**

**Values, quests, practices in 20-th century Bulgarian culture**

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## Project

### **THE ROAD TO EUROPE- values, quests, practices in 20-th century Bulgarian culture**

/ Synopsis /

*The Road to Europe* is a project focused on a cultural phenomenon, typical for Bulgaria and the Balkans, related to the integration of the idiosyncratic, the national and the traditional into the universal and its specific language of communication. This is an important and still relevant issue in the contemporary world, headed for globalization. In this sense *The Road to Europe* survey forms a part of the process of rationalizing the tendencies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which are significant for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well. From modernization of language to update of vision – this is the frame of the most characteristic features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at its beginning and its end.

*The Road to Europe* is a project of double aim and significance: on the one hand it will rationalise Bulgarian contribution and idiosyncrasy in the dialogue with Europe, the enrichment of the European cultural context; on the other hand, it will make the idiosyncrasy of the new EU partner clearer and more understandable to Europeans by means of culture. Essential goal of the project is to define the directions of impact between Europe and Bulgaria, as well as the specific cultural environment formed in Bulgaria in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact this dualism and its various embodiments represent the meaning of our cultural heritage and of the experience which is a natural

focus of this scientific research project. A major thesis in the research will be on adopting the spirit and tendencies of European models and practices, rather than imitating or imposing them artificially. The project will form values of vital importance: receptivity, dynamicity and idiosyncrasy, along with the uneven and accelerated development and of the cultural environment of Bulgaria, and its attempts to catch up with Europe, which being defined and popularised, will exercise a deep impact both on a historical scale, and with regards to the formation of the vision for Bulgarian culture in the context of Europe. Another important assumption of the project is that the difficult change starts with the missionary efforts of artists and intellectuals, which turn it into a social practice within the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus *The Road to Europe* will write the white paper of the accomplishments and historical changes made in Bulgaria within its communication with the advanced ideas, quests and practices of Europe.

*The Road to Europe* is an interdisciplinary project, involving various arts and forms of communication, fashionable at different periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The South-West University Neofit Rilsky, Blagoevgrad, as the largest state university outside the capital with a Faculty of Arts, and with excellent scientific capacity and equipment is the best of premises for implementation of such multifaceted project. The team has attracted experts on culture and theatre studies, as well as experts on separate fields, e.g. literature, visual arts and dances, from the South-West University, Blagoevgrad, and researchers from the Institute of Literature with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), The Institute of Art Studies with BAS, as well as professionals: a public-and-private partnership with Drama Theatre Salza I Smiah, Sofia, and with the modern dance formation Arabesk, Sofia. The team which will implement the project includes scientists with

professional experience in Europe and awareness of its positive cultural practices, having conducted authoritative studies: Ass. Prof. Dr. Miroslava Kortenska, Dr. Vladimir Petkov, Dr. Svetlana Pancheva. The team managed to attract Ass. Prof. Ventseslav Kisyov, currently the director of one of the biggest theatres in Sofia, Theatre Salza I Smiah. It is these names who best represent the research, educational, as well as public orientation of the project.

The visits and workshop meetings with great figures of European culture like Peter Brook, Pina Bausch and Prof. Gerorge Banu, project advisors, who will present and discuss their experience and will demonstrate useful quests and practices, will be of extreme significance for the project. This will add to the project and to the quests an air of exceptional originality, authenticity and contribution. The team members will be able to visit the places in Europe and explore the sources, representing the brightest acts, which influenced the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian cultural context. Once again this will give authenticity and originality to the research on *The Road to Europe*. All these activities under the project will support the methodology of comparative analysis, namely between the national and the universal, between the traditional and the new forms and practices. The sustainable scientific impact will be achieved through open dialogue, an international conference, publication of selected statements and scientific announcements, and a collection of translated texts, playing key role in clarification of the strategies and practices of European cultural development and leaders. The important reverberations of the project lie in connecting the research with educational forms and a succession of workshops, with mastering contemporary attitudes and communication channels. The aim of the project related to cultural attitudes in our society, is to popularise its stages and

results, in respect of influencing the tastes and preferences of a wide range of audience and experts. This is a serious social impact, which can be achieved by means of the public activities under the project, namely participation in the annual international university forum EUROART, Blagoevgrad, in its all three happenings during the three project stages, as well as demonstrations in Salza I Smiah Drama Theatre and Arabesk, Sofia. The other important media for dissemination of project achievements is the on-line edition of the *Scientific Research* journal of SWU, Blagoevgrad, which will have a special column (in English) devoted to scientific announcements, articles, etc. The South-West University has a Balkan Centre, and students from the Balkan countries, studying in bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. programs, and who can be attracted for participation in the project activities, thus providing it not only with Bulgarian, but also with regional dimensions. A serious after-effect of the project is expected to be produced by showing the documentary film about the visits of Peter Brook and Pina Bausch, which is to attract the attention of a large number of scientists and students, as well as a wide range of professionals and audience.

The first part of the project regards the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period after the Liberation of Bulgaria, when our new state and culture were formed. The project concentrates on the missionary work of the *Misal (Thought)* Circle, the first aesthetic circle in our national culture. Dr. Krastev, Pencho Slaveykov, Petko Todorov and Yavorov, four remarkable artists, are connected to Bulgarian tradition and folk art and at the same time educated in Europe and attracted to the new tendencies in European culture from the beginning of the century. The union of the four in the *Misal* Circle

is reinforced by their new art consciousness; they serve as an example for the way in which European experience spreads in Bulgaria: dramatic, complicated, but fruitful from a strategic perspective. These talented Bulgarians turn into the missionaries of cultural progress – a role of historical value, which is central for understanding the character of our nation. The mutual activity of *Misal*, initiating a line of overall transformation of our culture meets with *Bay Ganyos*<sup>1</sup> and boors, with the aggression of the average mass cultural product. However, this does not prevent them from directing their literary art towards worlds of undiscovered sensitivity, in the realms of the universal human features, and from finding the human within the Bulgarian. *Misal* sets new standards, lays the foundations of art criticism, assigns grand tasks to translation, initiates the Bulgarian into the specificity and modernity in drama, rescues Bulgarian theatre from its subjection to the consumerist taste of its audience. The sense in this historical venture lies mainly in realising that the processes in our culture and in the separate arts are not isolated phenomena and can be materialised only if intricately connected. This is an attempt of contemporary science to establish a typically Bulgarian phenomenon, connected with the accelerated development of our culture, with making up for the losses and with integration into the European ideas and practices.

The objective of the current project is to collect, analyse and review all foregoing studies related to the activity of *Misal* and the *Misal Magazine*. Facts and artefacts, preserved in literary museums and studies, employing different perspectives: aesthetics, literature, theatre, drama. A key issue is to try and free these from the dogmatic elements of the outlook imposed by the period of totalitarian rule and to reveal the real significance and experience

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<sup>1</sup> A humorous character from national fiction, representing widespread vulgarity among Bulgarians

of the journey on the road to Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This first stage of the project will finish with a scientific conference, publication of collected statements from the forum and publication of a monograph summarizing the road to Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Partners for this stage will be the Institute of Literature with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Literary Museums of Pencho Slaveykov and Yavorov.

The second part of the project researches the dynamics of Bulgarian culture within the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in respect of the renewed journey on the road to Europe and in respect of the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union. This contemporary stage made obvious the necessity of Bulgarian culture to open and integrate into the values, quests and practices of the Old Continent. The modern world is dominated by the vision, by its universality, by the motion theatre and dance, as a global language for communication. The trends on the modern stage can have wide application and development in Bulgaria, a country of rich dancing tradition. Advisors for the project will be persons of world recognition: director and experimental artist Peter Brook, choreographer Pina Bausch /Germany/, and explorer of the language of contemporary art, Prof. George Banu /France/. Considering that the foundation of the quests of Peter Brook lies in the social effect of experiment and its employment as a means of communication between people of diverse culture, religion and even race; the project is likely to contribute to the studies of art as liberation from the attitudes of separatism, conflicts and religious oppositions, which are typical for this region. Moreover, the new methods of Pina Bausch for the expression of the modern man, the new universal language, are essential for building attitudes



and skills by which to incorporate such positive European practice. A key point in this stage is that already classic figures of European culture will come to Bulgaria and show their accomplishments. This will create a new kind of Bulgarian-European dialogue; it will trigger a unique effect from the survey and its scientific and educational results. The second part of the project will consist of an exchange of visits, a succession of workshops and demonstration activities, which can be presented and popularised on the EUROART forum in Blagoevgrad, and in front of the audience of Sofia theatres. This will trigger the formation of a new generation within the contemporary culture of Bulgaria, ready for the challenges to come, for the new forms and pursuits. The whole second stage will be documented, the most important moments will be shot, the analyses and presentations will be archived and published in the form of a collection, and a documentary film. All these will be popularised among the students from the bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. programmes, and will have both a research and an educational value. This originality and the expected wide interest from the professionals and the audience of figures like Peter Brook, Pina Bausch and Prof. George Banu will create a new image of modern science, a strategic component of the tendencies of development of society: the Bulgarian-European Dialogue.

*The Road to Europe* project will confirm the dynamics and the ability of Bulgarian culture to develop, to enrich and to perfect. The 20<sup>th</sup> century experience is to be reevaluated as a significant and especially constructive phenomenon of the cultural heritage of Bulgaria, as a symbolic tradition providing rich resource for development.