

**359°**

– Мрежа за локални и субалтерни херменевтики

[project\_007]

# **The Night of Long Knives**

‘Ноќта на долгите ножеви’

[документарен филм]

Viktor Dashuk

[Belorussia]

‘степен галерија’

културна локација ‘МЕСТО’

Скопје, 6. декември 2000

*Dashuk*

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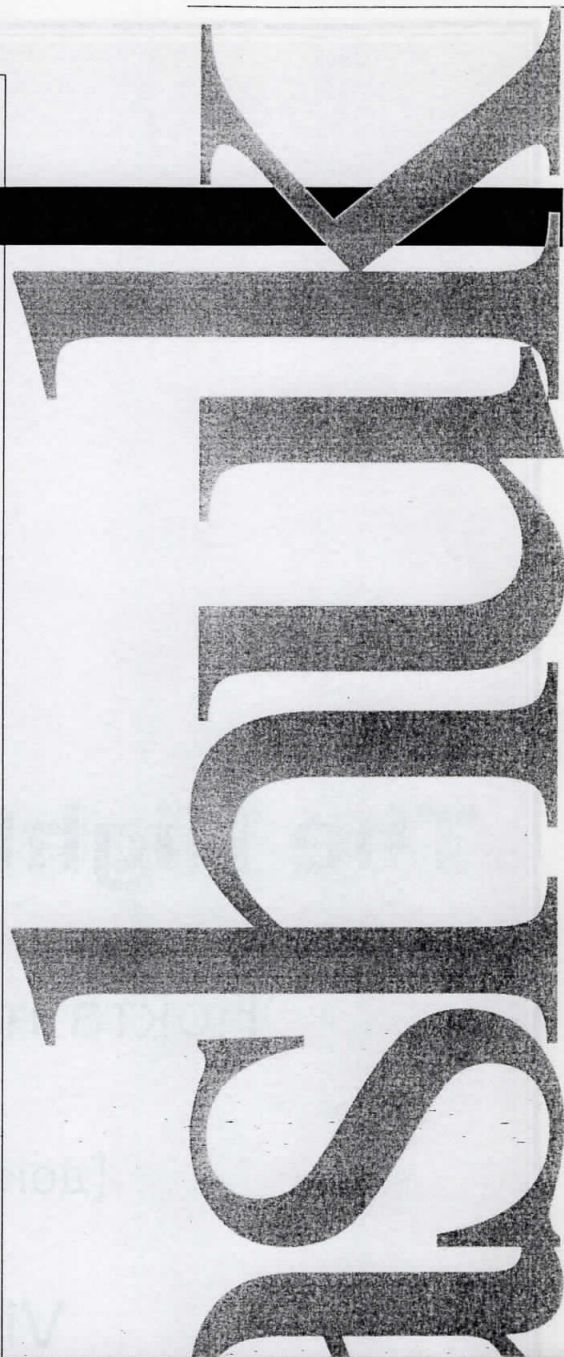
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Hyde Park of Pärnu

Free microphone in Rütli Square, Pärnu  
(The free access microphone is open during whole conference daily from 13.00 through 16.00 on Rütli Square)



Viktor Dashuk: 'The Night of Long Knives'



As the subject of conference is **Censorship in Visual Arts and Media**, we expect from the participants of Eastern Europe an actual description of situation on free speech and free expression problems in their countries. What about censorship problems in media and art in contemporary Lithuania? How much artists are violated or suppressed by gallery owners and museum curators? And what about art critics? Have there been cases where their articles are changed or censored by editors of newspapers, magazines, TV and radio? In Estonia very often manuscripts are changed in process of editing and published without any confirmation with authors. Is it censorship, too? How is the situation in photography, in architecture in Lithuania nowadays?

Како тема на конференцијата **Цензурата во визуелните уметности и медиумите**, очекуваме од учесниците од Источна Европа актуелен опис на состојба на проблемите врзани за слободниот говор и слободно изразување во нивните земји. Што со проблемите со цензурата во медиумите и уметноста во современата Литванија? Колку се уметниците злоставувани или притискани од сопствениците на галериите и музејските куратори? И што со критичарите на уметноста? Има ли случаи кога нивните текстови се менувани или цензурирани од уредниците на весниците, списанијата, ТВ или радиото? Во Естонија многу често ракописите се менуваат во процесот на уредувањето (приредувањето) и објавувањето без никаква согласност со авторите. Дали е и тоа цензура? Каква е состојбата во фотографијата, во архитектурата во Литванија денес?

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## THE CENSOR IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE CENSOR!

'The belief that censorship consists only in the state controlling the press, still persists in Eastern Europe. However, censorship takes on many disguises and can be found almost everywhere. Put simply, censorship is anything that reduces people to silence; does not allow them to put their view or express their opinion,' observed Judith Vidal-Hall, editor of the free expression magazine *Index on Censorship*, at the opening of the international conference on 'Censorship in the arts and media' held in the Chaplin Centre in Pärnu last week. Supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the Soros Open Society Institute, the conference gathered journalists, artists, filmmakers and critics from ten former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Their aim: to find a common strategy to preserve the gains made by the new democracies on the free expression front .

Dissident filmmaker from Belarus, Victor Dashuk, and the director of the Albanian National Gallery of Arts, Gesim Quendro, attracted particular attention. The former described the acute state of unfreedom in his country - the only one of the former USSR that has forced the Soros Institute to leave; the latter told of the conservative and communist forces in his country that oppose the exhibition of nudes. In Albania, as in Armenia, old habits die hard: he described the problems created by his rejection of substandard works of art submitted by a public for whom 'freedom' meant the right to submit bad art. Of the 350 works submitted by would-be artists, only 50 survived his cull. Quendro was not a popular figure in the nation's media!

Edward Lucie-Smith, whose books on art and art criticism are well known throughout the world, explained how the avant-garde had always been the object of suspicion and censorship. He went on to remark that unlike Britain or Germany, for instance, the countries of former Yugoslavia are much more tolerant of pornography and violence in art. He speculated whether this was, perhaps, an attempt to distract the public's attention from more political matters.

Meanwhile, in an ironic aside, art critic Nebojsa Vilic from Macedonia, wondered whether the return of censorship would not provide a greater incentive to artists to hone their skills in symbolism and metaphor than the present atmosphere of license.

Tiina Tamman, an Estonian journalist working with the BBC in Britain, provided a controversial view of the current situation in the Estonian media. It had not, she claimed changed much in the past ten years. Free expression was as curtailed as ever - despite the fact that the Constitution had established that right. Only the faces of the censors were different and most of the public accepted that their individual voice was of no account and would not be heard.

As was evident in Pärnu's main square during the conference. For all of the three days, a 'free microphone' was available for the public to make their voices heard. At the beginning, there was a marked reluctance to stand out from the crowd, but by the third day, people couldn't wait to pick up the microphone to express to the world at large their problems, woes and anxieties. These ranged from difficulties with housing to general grievances on healthcare and pensions. The main area of conflict in Pärnu today, it emerged from more than one speaker, was the deteriorating situation in Vana Pärnu (Old Pärnu) where noise, dust and trash from the port is seriously damaging the beautiful environment of the Old Town. Another common complaint was that Estonia's oldest paper, *Pärnu Postimees*, persistently refuses to publish the views of the town's citizens. The prize for the best speaker went to Vaike Nee from Vana Pärnu whose speech on the problems in her part of the town brought tears to listeners' eyes.

Next year's Pärnu conference, the third in the series, will focus on the creation of free community radio and TV channels.

Mark Soosaar, Museum of New Art Pärnu [<http://www.chaplin.ee/english/censor.htm>]