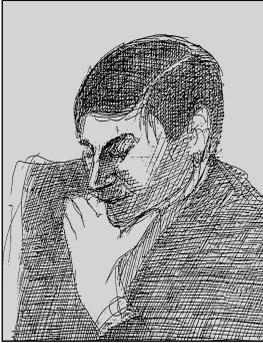


Ivan Krastev

The Opening of the Bulgarian Mind



Ivan Krastev was born in Lukovit, Bulgaria in 1965. He graduated in philosophy from Sofia University (1989) and specialized in political science at St. Antony's College, Oxford in 1991–92. In 1997–98, he was a Fellow at the Collegium Budapest and in 1998 he was a Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington. Since 1994, Krastev has been the director of the Centre for Liberal Strategies, an independent policy research institute based in Sofia. Krastev is one of the best-known commentators on Bulgarian politics. Fields of publications: the politics of East European transition, constitutional politics, democracy and security in the Balkans. Krastev's academic articles have been published in journals and books in the US, the UK, Germany, Italy and other countries. In 1999, he was the team leader and principal writer of the UNDP special report on the state of human security in South-Eastern Europe after the Kosovo war. Krastev is a member of the AGORA group and his project was "The Rhetoric of Anti-Corruption". – Address: Centre for Liberal Strategies, 4, Battenberg St., 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria.

The year of the "false millennium" (2000) is a dangerous year. Politicians tend to overpopulate the "neue Mitte", governments tend to spend billions of dollars on ridiculous projects, the public tends to be overexcited and scholars tend to sound pathetic and banal at the same time. So it is divine luck in a dangerous year like this to be a refugee at the Wissenschaftskolleg. The Kolleg is one of the few places where, even in the year of the "false millennium" and even in the framework of the millennium project, AGORA Fellows are allowed to be reasonable and even ironic.

Looking back on my Berlin year, I should confess that it was by far the most rewarding year in my intellectual and family life.

The magic of this year can be easily described in just five words: reading, writing, traveling, talking (which also includes listening) and Berlin. Four of the words are verbs and one (Berlin) is a name. But in the year of my stay, Berlin became a verb. That makes five verbs.

Reading (as always) was the most rewarding of the five dimensions of my Kolleg year. Being powerfully seduced by the problem of corruption and the current global obsession with it, I used a considerable part of my time reading books that today's experts on corruption do not have time to read or do not know how to order. Reading these books made me slightly ironical about the current global anti-corruption crusade, but I do not feel guilty. Irony is the iron guard of common sense.

The volumes that I read during this year would not be enough to build a mountain but they easily make a hill. And, of course, it should be named "corruption hill".

Writing (surprisingly) was the most mysterious part of my year at the Kolleg. Mysterious, because it remains a mystery how I managed to fill so many pages with so many words in only ten months. My writing stuck between the first letters of the beginning of the alphabet, so it was basically about "B" and "C" – "B as in Balkans" and "C as in Corruption" – and on one occasion "C as in Constitution".

As a result of this mysterious productivity, several pieces of my "Berlin Notebooks" are going to be published next year.

"Think Tanks: Making and Faking Influence" is a kind of a summary-conclusion of my three-year study of the politics of the post-communist think tanks. The article will be published in *Banking on Knowledge*, edited by Diane Stone, the book is Stiglitz's last brave project as the chief economist of the World Bank.

Two corruption (according to some "corrupting") articles came as a result of my re-reading of the current anti-corruption debate: "The Strange (Re-)Discovery of Corruption" was recently published by CEU Press in *The Paradoxes of Unintended Consequences. For George Soros*, edited by Ralf Dahrendorf, Yehuda Elkana and Aryeh Neier. The second corruption article "The Corruption Paradox" is going to be published in the AGORA book on *Bindung*. The book is called *Unraveling Ties* and, in cooperation with Shalini Randeria, Elisio Macamo and Yehuda Elkana, I am one of the four editors of this difficult book that has the ambition to be a collection of post-pathetic essays on *Bindung*, a word that we can not or do not want to translate.

The other unexpected piece of writing that came from my stay at the Kolleg and that is connected with the magic "C" is an article "Bulgarian Constitution-Making in the Chicago Laboratory". The article was not only written for a conference organized by Stefan Voigt and Hans-Jürgen Wagener on constitutions. It was to a great extent provoked by Stefan Voigt's heroic attempts to convince us at the Kolleg of the merits of constitutional economics. So he and Larry Lessig are to be blamed for my adventure in constitution-making. The article will appear in the fall issue

of East European Constitutional Review, which means that Stephen Holmes, a former Fellow of the Kolleg, is the other guilty party in my constitutional destructions. Dieter Grimm also took part in this conference, but he is innocent.

The Balkans were the other part of my academic writing. Coming from a place that is “producing more history than it can bear”, I made an effort to be an active part in the debate on the reconstruction of the region, and my article “De-Balkanizing the Balkans: The State of the Debate”, which will be published in the fall issue of *The International Spectator*, the Italian journal for foreign policy, correctly documents my frustrations with the intellectual poverty of the current discussion on the Balkans. An idea and a project that were born in the Kolleg – the *Blue Bird* project – could be a way out of this intellectual poverty, but that is a different story. A story that is too early and too risky to report.

But out of the more than 75,000 words (in English) that document my Berlin graphomania, there are one thousand words that will remain special for me. It was the challenging invitation from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to write a piece on the Kohl scandal in Germany that I will remember more than the “normal” articles born in the Kolleg. When I was writing “Is the Kohl Affair a Corruption Scandal?” I felt like a Victorian girl reading her first erotic novel. It was a liberating experience.

Traveling, luckily, was the most exhausting part of my Kolleg year. When the year was over, I blamed myself for any hour spent outside Berlin, but during the year I was not so dogmatic and enjoyed taking part in several conferences around Europe and even spending a whole week in Salzburg lecturing at the Salzburg Seminar.

The involvement with Berlin was not love at first sight, but sometime in May our family fell in love with the city that was so different from the places that we used to like.

But the magic of the Kolleg year is not in reading, writing or traveling. It is “talking” that makes the difference. In my experience, “talking” is the word that best explains the charm and uniqueness of the Wissenschaftskolleg. Talking is not speaking or giving lectures, it is not learning or convincing. Talking is this “strange exchange” when you fall in love with other peoples’ ideas. Spending a year at the Kolleg helped me redefine my understanding of AGORA, both as a project and as an ancient reality. I started to realize that AGORA is not about discussing or arguing, it is about letting ideas walk or even fly freely in a room without being sanctioned by quotes or footnotes.

The year of the “false millennium” was also the year of the opening of my Bulgarian mind. It was the year of my new geography. Vinh-Kim Nguyen and Elisio Macamo discovered Africa for me. Shalini Randeria

and her incredible stories located India on my secret map. Sebastian Conrad made Japan part of my German experience and Elizabeth Dunn easily convinced me that what matters is the self-accountable self. This is the story of my Berlin year. The rest is AGORA.