

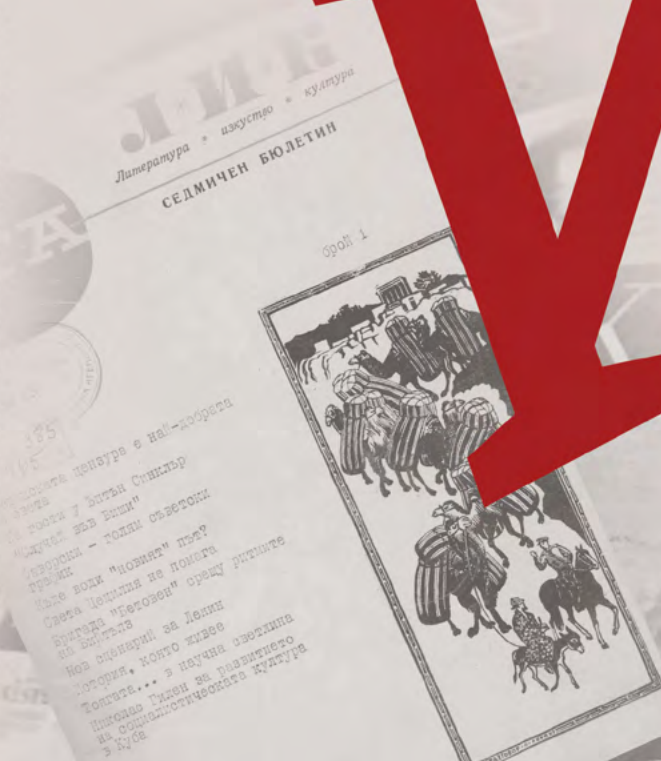
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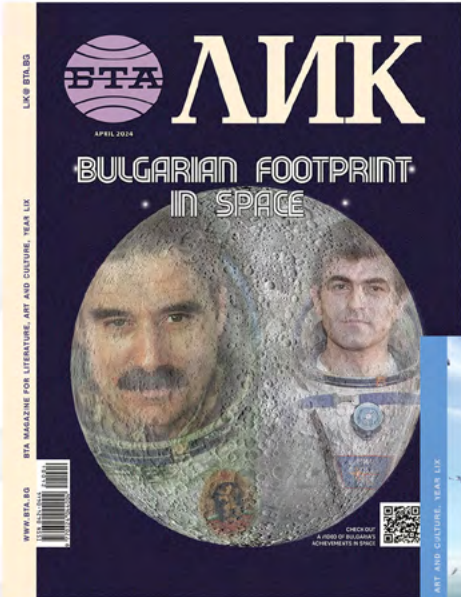


LITERATURE
ART
CULTURE



ЛИК at 60





APRIL 2024



MAY 2024



OCTOBER 2024



ЛИК

JANUARY 2025

SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE BULGARIAN NEWS AGENCY

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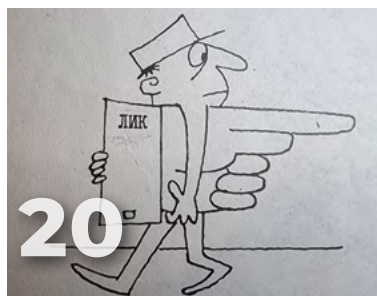
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The Enduring Purpose of *LIK Magazine*



BTA Director General Kiril Valchev

LIK magazine is turning 60. Its first issue was published on January 8, 1965, so the January 2025 edition will celebrate the magazine itself.

Over the past six decades, LIK magazine ceased publication twice: from 1992 to 1999 and from 2013 to 2021. Since March 2022, however, it has resumed its monthly publication schedule.

During its early years, LIK magazine provided Bulgarians with cultural insights from across the globe at a time when information was heavily restricted. For

this reason, its first 25 years are often described as "a window to the world." LIK was often the only way for Bulgarians to learn about major figures and events in international culture. A large part of this anniversary issue highlights those connections, including special interviews with Agatha Christie, Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, and Maya Plisetskaya, as well as coverage of how cultural icons such as Gabriel García Márquez, Kenneth Clark, Karl Lagerfeld, Federico Fellini, Luciano Pavarotti, and Umberto Eco were presented in its pages.

After the magazine's first sus-

pension in 1992, its revival in 1999 focused on placing Bulgarian culture within a global framework. This emphasis arose naturally: unlike earlier decades, the 1990s saw Bulgarians gain widespread access to information about global culture, prompting a need to understand their role in the wider world. However, with the advent of the open market in all sectors, including culture, the magazine again proved financially unsustainable and ceased publication in 2013.

Nearly a decade later, in 2022, BTA relaunched LIK with an issue dedicated to the 60th an-



BTA Director General Kiril Valchev (left), presenting a copy of the issue of LIK magazine dedicated to the Bulgarian Footprint in Space to the first Bulgarian cosmonaut Georgi Ivanov, Ihtiman, Western Bulgaria (BTA Photo)

niversary of the March Music Days Festival in Ruse. Since July 2024, the magazine has featured a new design, based on proposals by three students from the National Academy of Arts (NAA): Viktoria Dimitrova, Elisaveta Dragomirova, and Teodor Mirchev, who were selected by a joint committee of BTA and NAA faculty. In 2025, LIK magazine will adopt the new BTA font (LIK Sans), intended to evoke the milieu of medieval Bulgaria, where the disciples of Cyril and Methodius first created the Cyrillic letters. This redesign is part of BTA's larger initiative to set an example for the Bulgarian state by standardizing its visual identity and fonts.

So how does LIK magazine continue to fulfil its enduring purpose today?

The answer relates to five strategic goals that Bulgaria's national news agency has set for the 2020s, reflecting its 125-year history.

Firstly, LIK magazine is necessary for the truth.

Truth cannot be just another commodity for sale. In the following pages, Totka Monova quotes J. Chalaby, who emphasizes the notion that classical journalism disappears when media outlets function purely as an industry—turning reporting into a product aimed at attracting audiences and pushing serious topics to the margins.

LIK magazine's revival signifies a return to classical journalism characterized by editorial responsibility and clearly identified information sources. Its purpose is not to chase attention but to reveal truth and encourage readers to engage with it. According to the publication, the strongest argument is that humans possess a soul—something the media should nurture.

In short, LIK magazine marks a return to higher human values after Bulgaria's prolonged, often fruitless pursuit of insatiable ma-

terial desires.

Secondly, LIK magazine must be freely accessible.

Because of the truths it conveys, LIK magazine is distributed freely. All issues from the relaunch to the present can be downloaded as electronic files from the BTA website: <https://www.bta.bg/bg/lik-magazine>.

Printed copies are sent free of charge to over 300 libraries, cultural centres, universities, government offices, and media outlets.

Even so, this issue offers a fair recommendation that BTA should do more to distribute print versions to readers who prefer physical copies. Past experience shows that LIK issues can gain collectible or bibliographic value—such as the February 9, 1990, edition featuring a cover drawing by Keith Haring, offered at auction by Sotheby's for USD 425.

By investing its own revenues in making LIK magazine freely available, BTA upholds its statutory mission to safeguard and promote Bulgarian culture. Beginning in October, LIK magazine will also be featured on the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) Hristo Botev cultural programme.

From October, the magazine will be featured in the cultural programme "Hristo Botev" on Bulgarian National Radio (BNR). On "LIK Radio", broadcast on the first Sunday of each month, Editor-in-Chief Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov and selected guests present and expand on the magazine's monthly themes.



President Rumen Radev receives an issue of LIK magazine dedicated to the Festival of the Rose from Kiril Valchev at the closing event of the 18th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media in 2023, Kazanlak, Central Bulgaria (BTA Photo)

Moreover, BTA is committed to extending LIK magazine's reach beyond Bulgaria.

In February 2023, an issue titled *The Voice of Bulgarians in Ukraine* was introduced to the Bulgarian community in Odesa on March 3 of that year. Several presentations were held for fellow Bulgarians living in Ukraine, where over 200,000 Bulgarians reside.

Some issues appear in foreign languages as well. The Ukraine-focused edition was published in English. Issues marking the 45th anniversary of the first Bulgarian cosmonaut Georgi Ivanov's flight, the maiden voyage of the Bulgarian naval research vessel *Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii* to Antarctica and back, and Bulgarian scientific endeavours in Antarctica have

also been released in English; the Antarctica issue is additionally available in Spanish. An English version for the 155th anniversary of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is forthcoming, and several 2025 editions are also slated for English translation.

By introducing LIK in foreign languages, Bulgaria can present its cultural achievements to the world—an area typically more appealing than politics—and in so doing, provide Bulgarians with a modest source of pride, given their inclination to focus on the darker aspects of life.

Thirdly, LIK magazine is necessary for knowledge.

For 60 years, LIK has enlightened Bulgarian readers about the achievements of human culture. At times, it was among the

very few sources of such information, if not the only one.

Knowledge as a human right—stemming from rational nature—also encompasses values-based knowledge, sometimes referred to as knowledge of values, echoing the work of Lompscher. Indeed, access to national and universal cultural values is expressly recognized in the Preamble and Article 54 of Bulgaria's Constitution.

When BTA relaunched LIK, it also created a new editorial department named after the magazine, on par with the agency's political, economic, and sports sections. To enrich the content of LIK magazine, BTA has begun to sign partnership agreements with cultural institutions, universities, NGOs, and prominent figures in the cultural sector. These



Presentation of LIK magazine, Odesa, March 3, 2023 (BTA Photo)

agreements ensure the regular submission of materials about their activities and resolve copyright issues that often went unaddressed during the agency's early years.

LIK magazine—in both its printed and news-bulletin formats—has begun to acknowledge and thank patrons of Bulgarian culture, education, science, and sports by publishing their names without treating it as commercial advertising or requiring payment, in contrast to other media outlets. Such acknowledgments are part of our collective knowledge of Bulgarian culture and can also serve as a model to encourage more people and organizations to contribute.

Fourth, LIK magazine is essential for building a joyful community.

Over the decades, LIK's readership has become a community that celebrates humanity's cultural pinnacles. Interacting with inspiring personalities and events—across times and places—brings a unique satisfaction and sense of shared celebration.

To engage more people in the joy of Literature, Art, and Culture (the initials of LIK in Bulgarian), BTA began hosting monthly launch events for each new issue in the spring of 2024. These events feature guests participating via video link from the 42 BTA press clubs around the country and abroad.

Fifth, LIK magazine preserves memory.

A hallmark of the revived magazine is its thematic approach, drawing extensively on BTA's own archive. It revisits archival bulletins and broadcasts on a chosen figure or event in Bulgaria's cultural and social life, while also offering contemporary interpretations via diverse experts.

Lozanov refers to the BTA archive as "the Magic Room", as it allows us to build on the spiritual heritage of those who came before us globally. Lozanov points out that by preserving past traditions, we can grow and adapt today for the future.

Alongside LIK's revival, BTA has focused its efforts on preserving its entire archive, particularly as the agency celebrates its 127th anniversary. Bulletins dating back to the inaugural issue in 1898 will soon be stored in modern facilities, moving them from dusty attics. The goal is to digitize all archived materials, including every issue of LIK, and make them available online by next year.

This improved access will allow us to better utilize what Jorge Luis Borges described in *The Garden of Forking Paths* as "an infinite series of times ... a growing, dizzying network of diverging, converging, and parallel times."

And yet, throughout the decades, LIK magazine has remained a light in what Mikhail Bulgakov, in his short story *Egyptian Darkness* (published in LIK's Issue 16 of 1972 and reprinted in the current anniversary edition), describes as an all-enveloping gloom.



Issues of LIK magazine after the relaunch in 2022 (BTA Photo)

Media Review of the Survivors



Georgi Lozanov, Editor-in-Chief

LIK magazine's issue dedicated to LIK itself raises a question that many might avoid but one that the editor-in-chief is compelled to ask and answer. Is it not an act of media narcissism for a magazine to focus on itself? The answer is no. What makes LIK a subject worthy of its own pages is its editorial mission – to revive the collective memory of notable personalities and events, and LIK itself has become one such event. This is especially true when we think about the communist era, which, from the

historical perspective adopted herein, seems particularly intriguing due to being both near and distant in time. While now part of the past, it was once the lived present for older generations, leaving a lasting imprint on their lives and shaping the lives of the generations that followed.

Thanks to BTA's substantial archives, the magazine revisits those 45 years as a kind of media experiment – one in which journalism and history not only collaborate but also exchange

roles. Yesterday's cultural news becomes today's cultural chronicle. The archives seem to have become a "magical room" where journalistic narratives transform into historical ones, with the essence remaining unaltered.

The thing is that journalism is a narrative propelled by the media to turn into a narrative of the present. It reports on events as they unfold, thereby deliberately or accidentally influencing them and reinforcing the cliché that if something is not covered by the media, then it does not

exist. But just as important as whether something was covered is how it was covered. As another cliché goes, nothing is as old as yesterday's newspaper, meaning that narratives quickly lose their relevance and thus, their journalistic purpose fades, giving way to their role as a preserved memory. However, in the experiment extending over LIK's latest period, archival materials (accompanied by expert and memoir-style commentaries) take on a dual function: they serve as both a "self-generated" historical memory and a journalistic re-intervention, as the magazine pulls them from the archives and places them back in the media spotlight. It goes without saying that this intervention cannot affect the past, but it can influence how it is perceived in the present.

In this way, LIK magazine has the potential to spark a never-held-before debate on the re-evaluation of the communist past and its culture. Such a debate always fails to take place, as the topic tends to polarize into two contrasting viewpoints, radicalizing them and leaving no room for another perspective that could challenge both and ultimately reconcile them. On one side, those nostalgic for socialism see the culture before November 10 as a pinnacle, never to be reached again. On the other, democrats dismiss this culture as nothing more than collaboration with a totalitarian regime, rendering it "morally flawed" by default. But it is only by adopting a third perspective that acknowledges the existence of writers capable of preserving their creative autonomy, regardless of the circumstances, that cultural achievements can be highlighted against the back-

drop of ideological defeats. The magazine has taken on the responsibility of promoting these achievements as an indispensable part of Bulgaria's cultural identity in issues dedicated to Konstantin Pavlov, Pancho Vladigerov, Boris Hristov, Dechko Uzunov, Shturtsite (The Crickets), the Apollonia Festival, and even LIK itself. Re-evaluating the past requires linking the question "Who am I?" with "Who was I?"; rejecting convenient and preconceived judgments in favour of the value-based work of memory. There are many criteria for identifying survivors, but the primary one remains Eurocentrism. What we now clearly acknowledge – but once had to wisely keep private – is that Bulgaria has belonged to Western culture ever since its liberation. And this magazine works to reclaim from obscurity and prejudice the personalities and events that once preserved this connection so that today they may be protected by it.

The magazine fully meets this main criterion, as it served as a peephole through the Iron Curtain, allowing intellectuals here to keep up with intellectuals beyond it and to compare. It played a crucial role in shaping a non-communist identity—and not just for intellectuals—due not only to its informative function but also to its ability to create a mythos around itself. This mythical appeal rested on three concepts: the unknown, the forbidden, and the inaccessible. The magazine was given the opportunity—first incidentally, then predominantly—to introduce unfamiliar personalities and phenomena of Western culture. Preferably approaching them with a critical tone, but, back then, this was the only way to find out about their existence.

At the same time, the magazine carried an air of something forbidden, as if peering through an "ideological keyhole", even though you are not supposed to. Initially, LIK was just a typewritten bulletin, almost as if it had accidentally slipped out of BTA's classified bulletins meant for the privileged few. In its early days, the magazine was largely inaccessible, as its circulation was far too limited to meet the demand it immediately generated. Its mythical status was reinforced by the fact that it was difficult to get a hold of. Only its most dedicated readers managed to get each new issue, while for many others – bridging the gap between rumour and reality – it remained more of a topic for table talk, a popular subject for discussion, and a three-letter word...

Apropos of that, the name LIK itself is the fourth concept that the magazine's mythical appeal rests on. It is both self-evident and mysterious. In Bulgarian, LIK means "face," "image," or "physiognomy" ...but in order to figure out whose face it is, one must read it as an abbreviation. The abbreviation neatly defines its thematic scope, following a matryoshka principle: starting with the narrowest layer – literature (literatura), expanding to the middle layer – art (izkustvo), and culminating in the broadest one – culture (kultura). But even this largest matryoshka fits into another, unspoken one – that of Western European culture, which is done, by default, by reactionary politics. It has remained unchanged in its essence, sustaining LIK's 60-year continuity.

Stage Three



Yanitsa Christova. Personal archive photo

"LIK magazine? But is it still coming out?" was the regular question asked with excitement, wonder, delight and surprise by our authors and interlocutors when I called them in the first months of 2022, after the magazine had resumed its periodic publication. Today, three years later, almost everyone we approach with an invitation to collaborate not only knows that LIK exists again but is also aware that it has a new vision and a new thematic profile.

Sometimes I can detect the nostalgia in their voice. And sometimes even they themselves, especially when they remember from their youth what LIK was like in its best years, tell me how they used to buy it and even still keep at home specially bound issues, how the magazine was really a "window to the world" for them, how they greedily devoured page after page... and how they had sincerely regretted when later it stopped being published.

I don't know if there is a cure for nostalgia whether it should exist.

I think all our readers need to remember their LIK - as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, or in the 2000s, because the magazine has made its mark and spiritualized them and has accompanied them on the road of their personal and professional growth.

The world today has changed, however. The Web is taking over ever larger territories, while AI is likely to change the familiar media landscape very soon. In the 21st century, LIK magazine needs a new role and a new direction. Our Editor-in-Chief, Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov, says that LIK is now in its third stage of development, focused on cultural memory of important events and figures of the past.

If before 1989 the magazine acquainted us with examples of Western culture, and after 1989 it set high standards for Bulgaria's own culture, now, in its third stage, LIK is looking for the enduring values and examples that have left their mark on the history of culture.

This is the core of one of the specific features of the revived magazine - each issue is dedicated to a particular topic, a significant person, event or phenomenon from the cultural and social life of this country, with part of the content showing chronologically how the subject was present in the news from the BTA archives. The magazine also seeks a contemporary interpretation of the subject, inviting various experts as authors and interlocutors to tell readers more.

Several extraordinary issues precede the monthly LIK return. In July

2020, the first special issue appeared on the market, *The World after the Coronavirus*, its theme provoked by the pandemic. It featured 61 figureheads from various spheres of Bulgarian culture reflecting on the inevitable changes in life brought about by the pandemic. Another issue was published that year to mark the 90th anniversary of writer Anton Donchev. In 2021, there were three special issues of LIK: the first was titled *Art Against the Pandemic*, the second was dedicated to BTA Director General Maxim Minchev, who passed away in the fall of 2020, and the third was dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Askeer Theatrical Awards.

From March 2022, LIK resumed its monthly publication with an issue dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the March Music Days festival in Ruse. And now I'd like to tell you about some of the steps we've taken in these almost three years to get to this point today. And what better way to tell this story than through our issues published so far?

And so...

Ruse March Music Days: A Fest with a History (March 2022)

On March 27, minutes before the final concert of the 61st edition of the March Music Days International Festival at the emblematic neo-classical Dohodno Zdanie theatre, we presented the thematic special issue dedicated to the music forum in Ruse. BTA Director General Kiril

Valchev announced that LIK will be published regularly again. "With LIK magazine and its relaunch we are trying to answer what the image of Bulgaria is," he said at the time. While our Editor-in-Chief, Assoc. Prof. Lozanov, emphasized that the magazine is published on paper because a text rendered in a paper edition comes closer to the body, as opposed to the distant text in the abstraction on the screen. Lozanov also stressed the importance of memory. As BTA has one of the largest archives in Bulgaria, this is an extraordinary opportunity to bring these archives back to life. "This is the first issue that we are already calling 'regular,' and it sets the pattern for how BTA and LIK magazine will henceforth try to gauge the memory of the nation that is contained in these archives," our Editor-in-Chief added.

Lili Ivanova
(April 2022)

The fascinating story of Bulgarian pop star Lili Ivanova, seen through the BTA archives, was published in the second issue of our relaunched magazine.

One of the texts in the issue, titled "No Success Comes without a Strong Character, Discipline and Talent," presented the opinions of people side by side with the singer not only on stage, but also in everyday life. These include journalist Georgi Nedelchev, composer Aleksandar Kiproff, artist Ivan Tenev, poet Aleksandar Petrov, and actor Stefan Valdobrev, among others.

On April 17, the LIK issue was in Ivanova's hometown of Kubrat for the concert of the celebrated performer, which launched her national tour.

50 Years Southern Spring in Literature
(May 2022)

The 50th anniversary of the Southern Spring National Competition for Debut Literature in Haskovo was our inspiration for the May issue. There we followed the entire chronology of the competition, as reflected in the agency's news flow and accompanied by a variety of photos. We also featured interviews with poets, writers and critics who have won prizes and awards over the years, including Georgi Gospodinov, Ivan Landzhev, Hristo Rayanov, Georgi Gavrillov, Angel Ivanov, Violeta Kuneva, Elena Borisova, Stamena Datseva, Yordan Eftimov, Joanna Elmy and Eva Gocheva.

Shturtsite (The Crickets) at 55
(June 2022)

We released an issue dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the legendary rock band. On June 10, the presentation of the issue was scheduled to take place in Varna before the concert of the supergroup Fondatsiata (The Fondation), which also celebrated their anniversary but with a tour.

The interviews in this issue include conversations with two of the founders of the band, Kiril Marichkov and Petar Tsankov. The musicians reminisced about the past and the road to Shturtsite becoming a Bulgarian rock legend. But besides the past, Marichkov and Tsankov also talked about the



The cover of the March 2022 issue of BTA's LIK magazine, marking the renewal of its monthly issuance.

present, not only about the development of music but also about current social issues.

Burgas and the Sea

(July 2022)

A summer theme took us to the sea in July. The issue dedicated to the Burgas and the Sea national song contest was released on the eve of the 39th edition of the music competition, July 30.

Artists, whose careers are remarkably connected with Burgas and the Sea, revealed in interviews with LIK stories about their first musical steps at the Summer Theatre in the seaside city. Composer Stefan Diomov, poet Nedyalko Yordanov, singers Toni Dimitrova, Orlin Goranov, and musician and artist

Stefan Ilchev shared the role the Burgas song festival had played in shaping them as individuals whose lives are connected to music.

Apollonia: The Fest of Arts Goes On...

(August 2022)

The August issue was dedicated to the Apollonia Festival of Arts. It was presented on September 3 within its Price of Success Format at which Assoc. Prof. Lozanov underscored that this particular issue was rather special because of the deep connection between BTA, LIK magazine and the festival. "None of the topics of the magazine so far has been so related to BTA and LIK as the topic of Apollonia," the Edi-

tor-in-Chief of the publication said. Special issues of the magazine discuss poet Atanas Dalchev, composer Pantcho Wladigeroff, artist Dechko Uzunov, writer Aleko Konstantinov, public radio pioneer Sirak Skitnik and actors Nevena Kokanova and Stefan Danailov.

Varna Golden Rose Film Festival

(September 2022)

The 40th anniversary edition of the Golden Rose Film Festival in Varna attracted our attention in early autumn. On September 24, BTA Director General Kiril Valchev and LIK Editor-in-Chief, Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov, presented the issue at the forum. It was also announced that LIK magazine would be published digitally on the BTA website.

Mihail Belchev

(October 2022)

Our October issue was dedicated to Mihail Belchev. BTA's publication traced the creative career of the poet and singer through the agency's feeds and newsletters. In an interview with the publication, Belchev described how he came to write some of his most famous songs, which became part of the repertoire of singers Lili Ivanova, Vasil Naydenov and the FSB rock band.

15 Years Manager of the Year Awards

(November 2022)

We published an issue for the 15th anniversary of organizing the Manager of the Year competition. In this case, we sought to track the connection between business, culture and art. The discussion came



Sozopol, September 3, 2022. BTA Director General Kiril Valchev, LIK Editor-in-Chief Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov, and Apollonia Artistic Director Margarita Dimitrova present a special issue of BTA's LIK magazine dedicated to the Apollonia Arts Festival. Photo: BTA

to include the then finalists in the competition Management Financial Group CEO Antonia Sabeva, Moto-Pfohe Manager Atanas Furnadzhiev, Sutherland Global Services Bulgaria CEO Dimitar Galabov, Cargill Bulgaria CEO Eva Elges, FAAC Bulgaria General Manager Svetlana Stefanova, Modis Bulgaria General Manager Philippe Rouvrais, MagnaPharm Bulgaria General Manager Yuliy Hristov and Smart Organic owner and Executive Director Yani Dragov.

140th Birth Anniversary of The Master

(December 2022)

In the field of fine arts, the entire year 2022 was packed with events marking the 140th anniversary of the birth of the beloved Bulgarian artist Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master. So, we too devoted an issue to the artist in December. One of the oldest news items we found about him in the BTA archives was from April 19, 1938. "Her Royal Highness Princess Eudoxia visited yesterday the art exhibition of Vladimir Dimitrov – The Master in the salon of the Academy of Arts, where she bought a painting," the announcement said at the time.

130 Years Sofia Philharmonic

(January 2023)

The year for us began with an issue inspired by the 130th anniversary of Sofia Philharmonic. The issue was released on the eve of BTA's anniversary, with the agency celebrating its 125th birthday with a concert of Sofia Philharmonic under the baton of Maestro Emil Tabakov at Bulgaria Hall on February 16. The all-Bulgarian programme included works by Pantcho Wladigeroff, Marin Goleminov, Lyubomir



The cover of the January 2023 issue of BTA's LIK magazine.

Pipkov, Emil Tabakov, Veselin Stoyanov and Petko Staynov.

In the introduction of the issue, the Director General of BTA Kiril Valchev drew a parallel between Sofia Philharmonic and the agency, pointing out that there is a connection between the two institutions, and it is one related to memory. "Both are institutions whose glow derives not from self-aggrandisement but from the genuine good performance of others – the orchestra interprets music written by composers, while the agency reports news created by others," Valchev wrote.

"The Voice of Bulgarians in Ukraine"

(February 2023)

This issue, entitled "The Voice of Bulgarians in Ukraine", was provoked by the fact that one year had passed since the beginning of hostilities on the territory of Ukraine. In this issue we focused on the fate of our compatriots living in that country. This was our first issue that was officially published outside Bulgaria. On March 3 we celebrated Liberation Day in Odesa, and a few days later we had our premiere in Bolhrad. The issue was also translated into English, with more meetings with our readers in Ukraine to follow in the coming months.

The Kazasyan Musical Family

(March 2023)

Sometimes described as "one of



Bolhrad, March 6, 2023. LIK Managing Editor Yanitsa Christova, BTA Director General Kiril Valchev, and Deputy Director of the Bulgarian Media and Communities around the World Directorate, Yulia Hristova, at the second presentation of the February issue of LIK in Ukraine. Photo: BTA



Issues of LMK magazine on board the Bulgarian naval research vessel Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii, docked at the port of Varna ahead of the magazine's premiere on July 27, 2023.

the icons of Bulgarian jazz", maestro Vili Kazasyan has a worthy successor in his daughter Hilda. In our March issue, we recounted the musical journeys of both of them, refracted through the prism not only of the agency's archives, but also through the memories of their relatives and acquaintances. "The taste of life depends on how you look at life. The taste of life can be very sweet, exciting and provoking, but it all depends on what you put into it," said Hilda Kazasyan in a special interview with LMK magazine.

Poet Konstantin Pavlov
(April 2023)

We produced a special issue for the 90th anniversary of the birth of the poet Konstantin Pavlov. "Suf-

fice it today to read Konstantin Pavlov's poems to see their undermining power. They are subversive to any power, and in relation to a totalitarian regime their power is enormous," literary scholar Mikhail Nedelchev said in an interview with us.

Rose Festival
(May 2023)

The air around our May issue was redolent with the scent of roses. We dedicated this issue to the Rose Festival, which was held for the 120th time in Kazanlak. The 18th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media, organized by BTA, also took place during the celebrations. LMK magazine was included in the Holidays and Media panel.

To the Antarctic and Back
under Bulgarian Flag
(June 2023)

The historic maiden voyage of the Bulgarian naval research vessel Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii (RSV 421) was in our sights in June. The main account of the voyage was chronicled in Bulgaria-Antarctica BTA's Log by Konstantin Karagyozev, the agency's special correspondent who travelled with RSV 421 throughout the 31st Bulgarian Antarctic Expedition. The issue was presented on board the ship on July 27 as part of the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy's celebration of the second anniversary of RSV 421's christening. LMK was later translated into English. According to the feedback we got, it has been extremely well

received by the foreign partners of the Bulgarian Antarctic expedition.

Varna Summer Festival on Stage

(July 2023)

We published an issue dedicated to the 31st edition of the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival. "Varna sets the directions of theatre in Bulgaria with the Varna Summer International Theatre Festival, said Kiril Valchev at the presentation of LIK on September 18 at the agency's National Press Club in Varna. The participants in the discussion in the seaside city included directors Stoyan Radev and Bina Haralampieva, actors Veselina Mihalkova, Ivan Yurukov, and others.

Fondatsiata Rock Band

(August 2023)

Ten years of creative activity proved sufficient reason for putting together a LIK issue. This anniversary of the founding of the supergroup Fondatsiata (The Foundation) the magazine marked with its August issue. The magazine was presented by the rock band and BTA staff on September 5 in The Price of Success discussion format of the Apollonia Festival of Arts in Sozopol.

Nevena Kokanova and Stefan Danailov

(September 2023)

In September, LIK brought together two beloved Bulgarian actors, Nevena Kokanova and Stefan Danailov. The two actors' careers, achievements and the mark they left in Bulgaria's cultural life were also reflected in BTA's news stream

over the years. The first reports about them date back to the 1950s, when the agency reported on screenings of films in which they acted, and which launched their professional careers.

The issue was presented on September 28 at the Varna Festival and Congress Centre before the closing of the Golden Rose Bulgarian Feature Film Festival.

Sirak Skitnik at 140

(October 2023)

Our October issue was dedicated to the 140th birth anniversary of outstanding artist, poet and critic Sirak Skitnik (the artistic pseudonym of Panayot Todorov) who was appointed first Director of Radio Sofia (today Bulgarian National Radio). On October 22, when he was actually born, the publication was presented at the BTA Press Club in his hometown of Sliven.

As Managing Editor of the publication, I still think a certain miraculous magic surrounded the produc-

tion of this issue. Our collaborators were colleagues from the National Library of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who provided us with photographs from their collection. And before we closed the issue editorially, they contacted us and told us that they had found an interview with Sirak Skitnik by chance and if we wanted, we could take a look at it... The interview was wonderful and went into our edition, complementing it in an extraordinary way.

Aleko Today

(November 2023)

The theme "Aleko Today" was inspired by the 160th anniversary of the birth of writer and public figure Aleko Konstantinov. In 2023, BTA ran a campaign to commemorate this special anniversary. All national press clubs across the country hosted discussions on the contemporary dimensions of Aleko Konstantinov and his relationship to the zeitgeist of today. They were moderated by



A scene from the premiere of BTA's LIK magazine issue dedicated to Sirak Skitnik (Panayot Todorov Hristov) in Sliven on October 22, 2023. Photo: BTA

writer Yordan Eftimov who invited 160 Bulgarians across the country with a significant presence in public life to write 160 words for the anniversary of Aleko's birth. The LIK issue summarized the campaign and presented some of the most impressive statements that came as a result of the discussions.

The issue had several premieres. On December 10 it was presented at the Sofia International Book Fair in the capital, on January 13, Aleko's birthday, at the BTA National Press Club in Svishtov, and on Liberation Day, March 3 - at a meeting with Bessarabian Bulgarians at the Consulate General of Bulgaria in Odesa. A day later, on March 4, on the initiative of Bulgaria's Consulate General in the city and BTA, a commemorative plaque of Aleko Konstantinov was unveiled at the Faculty of Law of the I.I. Mechnikov Odesa National University, where he studied law between 1881 and 1885.

The Salvation of Bulgarian Jews

(December 2023)

The year 2023 marked the 80th anniversary of the salvation of Bulgarian Jews, and we dedicated an issue to the subject. "The salvation of Bulgarian Jews is an exception to the general idea that the Holocaust could not have been avoided. Bulgaria proved that it could," Romyana Bachvarova, who served as Bulgaria's ambassador to Israel from 2019 to 2023, said in an interview with LIK magazine.

Balkan Athlete of the Year

(January 2024)

We kicked off 2024 with an issue inspired by the 50th anniversary of the launch of the Balkan Athlete of the Year poll organized by BTA.

This is also the month that LIK

introduced open access – its issues from 2022 onwards can be downloaded in e-format from the agency's website. Additionally, in January, in fulfilment of its obligation to protect and promote Bulgarian culture, and in accordance with the BTA Act, the agency began sending issues of the magazine's hard copy version free of charge to some 320 libraries, cultural institutions, universities, government offices and media outlets.

Dechko Uzunov through the Lens of Time

(February 2024)

We prepared an issue for the 125th anniversary of the birth of artist Dechko Uzunov. On February 29 the issue was presented at the BTA press club in Uzunov's hometown of Kazanlak, with the participation of our Editor-in-Chief. On the same day in Sofia, the Secular Monumental Art exhibition was unveiled at the Dechko Uzunov Gallery-Museum in Sofia, where the Managing Editor also presented the issue.

Pantcho Wladigeroff: A European in Bulgarian Music

(March 2024)

March was a musical month for us, inspired by the 125th anniversary of the birth of composer Pantcho Wladigeroff. The first news item mentioning the composer's name in the BTA archives is almost a century old, dating to 1927. Prof. Sava Dimitrov, Rector of the National Academy of Music named after Wladigeroff, was among our interlocutors in the issue. The Music Academy hosted the premiere of our issue, which took place on March 28.



Sofia, December 10, 2023. Writer Assoc. Prof. Yordan Eftimov, LIK Editor-in-Chief Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov, LIK Managing Editor Yanitsa Christova present an issue of LIK entitled Aleko Today as part of the 50th anniversary edition of the International Book Fair at the National Palace of Culture. Photo: Tsvetomir Petrov, BTA



Ihtiman, November 10, 2024. Georgi Ivanov receives the first copy of the English-language issue of LIK magazine dedicated to the 45th anniversary of his space flight. BTA Director General Kiril Valchev presents the magazine's copy at Golf Club Sofia Air near Ihtiman, Bulgaria's oldest golf course, co-founded by Ivanov in 2000. Photo: BTA

Bulgarian Footprint in Space (April 2024)

April 10 marked the 45th anniversary of the first space flight by



The cover of the March 2024 issue of LIK, dedicated to the 125th birth anniversary of Bulgarian composer Pantcho Wladigeroff.

a Bulgarian, Georgi Ivanov, whereby Bulgaria became the sixth country to send a man in space. This provoked us to dedicate an entire issue themed "The Bulgarian Footprint in Space".

The premiere of this issue marked the beginning of a campaign to present each issue with in a single event, which includes guests from BTA national press clubs in the country and abroad via video link. The magazine was also translated into English.

I think I'll always remember the excitement around this issue. Because after it came out, Georgi Ivanov himself called to say how touched he was by the magazine we had prepared. He said that the issue had brought him much joy. He also said that many authors of documentary books had failed to do what we had managed to achieve with this LIK issue... This appreciation, this space evaluation of the work we had done,

gave me a sense of meaning that I cannot put into words today...

Something else related to LIK also happened in April. Students from the National Academy of Arts proposed their projects for a new graphic design of the magazine. Twenty-nine young people from three majors - Advertisement Design, Book, Illustration and Print Graphics and Poster and Visual Communication - presented their ideas to the BTA management on April 5.

Bulgarian Science in Antarctica (May 2024)

This issue tells the story of the second voyage of the naval research vessel Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii (RSV 421) to the Ice Continent and back, focusing on the scien-

tific projects that were part of the 32nd Bulgarian Antarctic Expedition.

The magazine was presented at the end of the month in all press clubs in the country, the main discussion being in Varna, with some of the scientists participating from Sofia.

The issue was translated into English and Spanish.

On September 26, the English-language version was presented at an international conference in Aheloy on the collaboration of Balkan countries in polar regions under the EU-backed programmes EUPolarNet-2 and POLARIN.

Copies of the magazine's translated issues are on board the RSV 421 during its current third voyage to the Antarctic, launched from the port of Varna on November 7.

Following the deep traces of Atanas Dalchev

(June 2024)

We celebrated the 120th anniversary of the birth of the poet Atanas Dalchev with a thematic issue and a premiere on June 27, which was also attended by his daughter, Victoria Dalcheva.

On September 15 the issue had a second premiere - in Thessaloniki, where on the initiative of BTA a memorial plaque to Atanas and Lyubomir Dalchev was unveiled at the Consulate General of Bulgaria in the city where they were born.

55 Years Our Albena in Our Hearts

(July 2024)

We dedicated one of the summer issues to the 55th anniversary of one of Bulgaria's oldest sum-

mer resorts. The title of the July issue of LIK magazine, "55 Years of Our Albena in Our Hearts", was inspired by a poem by Nedyalko Yordanov. In 1975, based on his text and with music and arrangement by Nayden Andreev, Margarita Hranova performed the song Albena, a sort of anthem of the resort. The issue was presented in the eponymous resort on August 24.

This was also the month when LIK's new look was introduced, a result from the competition for new graphic design uniting three projects of students from the National Academy of Arts.

Bulgaria's Olympic Glory

(August 2024)

In August, the world became Olympics again, - because of the games, which this time were hosted by France. The sports forum provoked us to turn to the archives and trace Bulgaria's Olympic glory accumulated over the decades. Our account begins in 1896, when Bulgaria was one of the 13 countries taking part in the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens. And the finale is a recap of the Paris Olympics, where BTA had a special correspondent, sports journalist Dimitar Velyov.



The August 2024 issue of LIK debuts its new design on the beach of Albena resort. Photo: BTA



Sofia, September 30, 2024. Readers browse through *The Great Bass Boris Christoff* issue of LIK ahead of its premiere in the capital. Photo: Milena Stoykova, BTA

Boris Christoff: The Basso (September 2024)

The autumn issue was dedicated to the famous opera singer Boris Christoff in connection with the 110th anniversary of his birth in May of that year.

The issue was presented on September 30 simultaneously in the BTA press clubs in the country and abroad. "To make such issues of LIK means to preserve memory, but also to set some markers for the future," said Elena Dragostinova, director of the Boris Christoff Museum, during the launch of the issue in Sofia.

155 Years Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (October 2024)

LIK's October issue was dedicated to the 155th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). On October 28, the magazine was presented at the BTA National Press Club in Bucharest. "I would like to thank the Director General of BTA, Kiril Valchev, and the entire agency staff for the October issue of LIK magazine dedicated to the 155th anniversary of the Bulgarian Literary Society, transformed by law into the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1911," BAS President

Academician Julian Revalski said in his speech. He added that he found this presentation in Romania significant for two reasons. First, he pointed to the fact that BTA has always been extremely attentive to the achievements of Bulgarian scientists, and second, that BAS was founded on Romanian soil, in the city of Braila 155 years ago.

Since October, the magazine also has a place in the Hristo Botev cultural programme of the Bulgarian National Radio. On Radio LIK every first Sunday of the month, Editor-in-Chief Georgi Lozanov and selected interlocutors present the content of the relevant monthly issue, enriching and building on it.

CineLibri Festival Turns 10

(November 2024)

Our November issue was dedicated to the decade-long history of the CineLibri film and literature festival. The issue was presented on November 25 simultaneously across BTA's press clubs at home and abroad. The presentation in BTA's MaxiM Hall in Sofia was attended by BTA Director General Kiril Valchev and LIK's Editor-in-Chief, Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov. CineLibri founder Jacqueline Wagenstein participated online.

120th Anniversary of Ivan Vazov National Theatre

(December 2024)

We ended the year on a theatrical high. We marked the 120th anniversary of the opening of the Ivan Vazov National Theatre and premiered the magazine on December 27. The first words in the issue belong to 19th century national poet Ivan Vazov. The magazine discusses the need of a national theatre, allows readers to meet some of the stars who worked at the theatre and dwells on some of the hotly debated issues in recent years, enacted right around Bulgaria's prime stage.

... and so, we come to the issue

you are holding today (or can see on your screen thanks to the online version of the issue).

With this brief overview, I have tried to show that we are all making tremendous efforts to preserve memory. We keep watch over memories. And we continue to write history...

As I was writing this text about the three years of LIK's third stage, I recalled Isaac Newton's statement, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." For it is thanks to the experience of those before us that LIK is what it is now. And that is both inspiring and a responsibility. We can only hope that those who come after us will see even further...



Sofia, December 27, 2024. Presentation of the LIK issue marking the 120th anniversary of the founding of Ivan Vazov National Theatre. Photo: Vladimir Shokov, BTA



Photo: Milena Stoykova, BTA

The Big World of the Small Magazine



Prof. Totka Monova. Personal archive photo

Everyone should have their own little world that will protect them from the big world.

Erich Maria Remarque

LIK turns 60, and it has been present in my academic lecture practice for several decades, though in a different way. The magazine began as a weekly bulletin of BTA with 40 pages and six sections: Literary News; On World Stages; Fine Art; Music World; Screen; and Mosaic. Situated in the field of social and media anthropology, it is a particular phenomenon in our contemporary cultural history and deserves a thorough monographic study. LIK successfully survived its first hiatus in March 1992 and returned as a monthly publication with an updated concept in terms of content and design in May 1999.

While being in the classroom, my students and I have actually experienced the three stages in the history of LIK's development, which Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov has defined (the first is political, the second is of taste, and the third is related to memory).

Until 1989, LIK was not just a window on Western culture and a source of rich information. In those years, the digest format was unknown to the Bulgarian public, and few people actually had access to the world press and to newspapers like The New York Times, Le Figaro, The Daily Telegraph, and many others. But for students studying the Journalistic Genres discipline, and especially for my colleagues from the Culture profile, the magazine was a desktop reference book. The reports with essayistic elements, including short polls, experts' opinions, a kind of background information setting the historical or political context of the event; the interview with its many versions such as the problem interview, the portrait interview, the interview presented in the form of a free monologue, and the interview-questionnaire; the review with all its varieties and specific genres of art criti-

cism; literary or musical "walks" - extensive textual forms including elements of fiction, time and space travel, the essay, the extramural or imaginary interview with artists from past eras. Individual issues of LIK were studied, as we said then, with underlining. And, yes, I admit: we imitated those writing styles and techniques, so different from political journalism. The direct explicit presence of the author in the text made a strong impression then; not the deliberately adopted posture of a bystander (a distance rather imposed by the party authorities), who does not allow himself to demonstrate his emotions and subjective experiences, but the open reflections and self-reflections, without which any text that has to do with creativity and the creative process somehow objectively becomes boring and cannot infect/charge/send the audience into those magical spaces that only



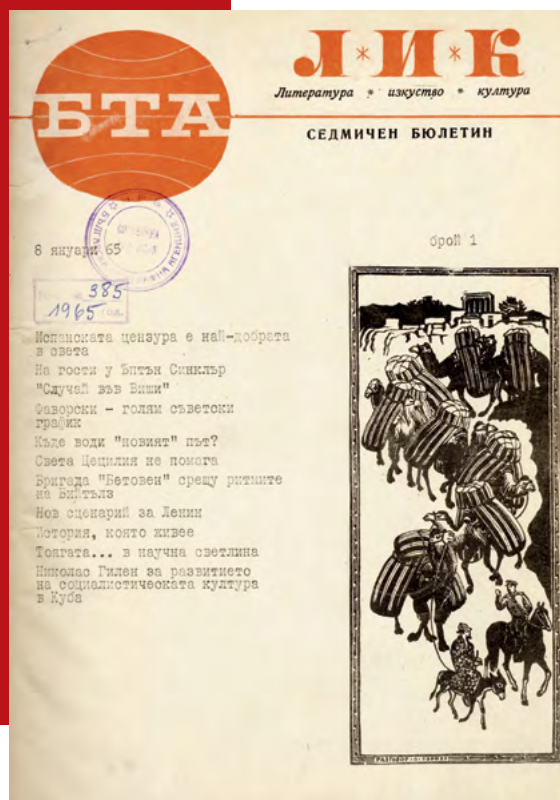
A caricature from issue 15 of LIK, 1966.

art creates.

I have a particular bias towards the LIK magazine during its second period from May 1999 to March 2013. The pathos and euphoria of the first decade of the transition [to democracy] were already fading. As Pierre Bourdieu once said, complexity is always in the social reality. This reality slowly but steadily began to produce a new media environment. Forms of a new kind of authoritarian rule began to emerge, tentatively at first but then more and more clearly as time passed, building a media monopoly to serve its interests. Oligarchy and corporations wove specific financial circles around the media, with ever-changing interconnections and forms of ownership. Already at the end of the last century, a number of media researchers (Sparks, Golding, Bell) warned that the gap between the informed elite and the entertained masses was steadily widening – processes increasingly visible

today in our media space. Over the past nearly two decades, the battle between culture and tabloidization ended in favour of tabloidization, conceived broadly as the ultimate simplification of the complex world in which we live. And since we are seeing a specific corporate journalism today, it is important to note that it is tabloid formats in all their varieties that are the trend of this corporate media world. As J. Chalaby noted, the end of classical journalism comes when media turn into an industry: "journalism becomes a product to attract an audience, a commercial commodity whose value depends on its power to attract... Serious theses are pushed to the periphery and, at the same time, a wider range of things and activities are covered." In this context, it is imperative to note that the entire team who created and published the LIK magazine between 1999 and 2013 deserves more than our admiration. It is worth tell-

ing in detail about the work of the people who read hundreds of pages from numerous foreign publications and selected the texts, about the high professionalism of the translators, the editors and the Bulgarian authors included – as part of the new concept, whose journalistic skill and mastery of the "craft" is in no way inferior to their foreign colleagues. During this period, LIK was a benchmark of elite quality press. To be included in LIK was a recognition of high value: aesthetic, literary, cultural, philosophical; a recognition of competence, which in turn gave value to the opinions expressed and the assessments, analyses, and forecasts made. It was not a magazine for the mass taste, it stood quite apart from the lifestyle formats that appeared later, but even those who did not read it knew that it was there, that it was present in the public space and set a measure, an aesthetic taste, taught the ability to think and feel in high categories. In order not to make all this sound boastful and nostalgic, I did a little research. I analyzed the content of 20 randomly selected issues: issue 7 of 2006; issues 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12 of 2008; issues 1 and 12 of 2011; issues 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 of 2012; and issue 1 of 2013. Each issue begins with a one-page European Notebook, chronicling current cultural events. The long sections cover the whole genre spectrum of the first period of the publication – extensive interviews, portraits, analyses, reviews, event reports, and, quite naturally, the texts follow a modern discourse in terms of style, language, and visuals. These are accompanied by small columns, usually on a single page, which



The cover of the first-ever issue of LIK, January 8, 1965.

present individuals and events with short informative texts, announcements, and reviews. This is how these small and large sections are "paired": Literature - Bookstore; Theatre - Stage; Fine Arts - Gallery; Cinema - Screen. Each issue begins with the Culture section and also includes The Bulgarians, Music, Highlight of the Month, Special Insight, LIK Library, Last Page. The magazine guides us through the world's museums and galleries, summer festivals, opera and concert halls, various literary forums, fairs, it presents the rules of prestigious literary awards. Subsequently included were the sections Dance, Routes, Media, Found in Translation, and Labs.

Due to the limited length of this text, I cannot present even a summary content analysis of these 20 issues. However, since I have been teaching the elective course Literature and Me-

dia in recent years, I have done a quantitative sampling of the four sections presenting the world of literature. The result: in 20 issues, LIK introduces its audience to 147 writers, 81 of whom appear in the major Literature section. Those are essentially 81 views/narratives about the world, about people and their feelings, thoughts, and suffering, about the creative laboratory and how they write, about their personal lives. I will present the names of the writers by column because this is an indirect assessment of the scale of the magazine and the incredible work of the editors, translators, and Bulgarian authors.

Literature section:

Yuri Andrukhovych, Toni Morrison, Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Philip Roth, John Updike, Jean Echenoz, Françoise Sagan, Julien Gracq, Charles Chadwick, Ulf Erdmann Ziegler, Maxim Biller, Vladimir Nabokov, Arseny Tar-

kovsky, Siri Hustvedt, Amos Oz, Orly Castel-Bloom, Etgar Keret, Martin Walser, Jhumpa Lahiri, George Steiner, Stieg Larsson, Michel Le Bris, Boris Strugatsky, Antoni Casas Ros, Armistead Maupin, Hanif Kureishi, Jacques Bouveresse, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio (presented in two issues in separate periods), David Foster Wallace, Fabrice Lardreau, Norman Mailer, Frédéric Beigbeder, Atiq Rahimi, Tierno Monénembo, Alain Claude Sulzer, Jean-Louis Fournier, Sandro Veronesi, Marc Bressant, Colin Thubron, Krasimir Damyanov (presented in two issues), Haruki Murakami, Alexander Chudakov, Laura Kasischke, Péter Nádas, Damien Walter, Guy Goffette, Pierre Bayard, Yoko Tawada, Yoko Ogawa, Ryoko Sekiguchi, Umberto Eco, Michael Bond, Catalin Dorian Florescu, Érik Orsenna, Patrick Chamoiseau, Enrique Vila-Matas (presented in two issues), Elfriede Jelinek, Carlos Fuentes, Russell Banks, Emil-Michel Cioran, Ray Bradbury, Claudio Magris, Gore Vidal, John Lanchester, Herkus Kunzius, William T. Vollmann, Vida Ognjenović, Vasile Gabor, Michael Ondaatje, Hilary Mantel, Goce Smilevski, Georges Simenon, Julian Barnes, Vasily Grossman, Jeanette Winterson, Andrew Wylie, A.B. Yehoshua

LIK Library section:

Manuel Puig, Cees Nooteboom, Benjamin Black, Sándor Tar, Jorge Luis Borges, Mikhail Ageyev, Fabrice Lardreau, Michael Cunningham, Sarah Waters, Guy Goffette, Yu Hua, China Miéville, A. S. Byatt, Imre Orovicz, Philippe Grimbert, Theophano Kaloyanni, Hilary Mantel, Daniel Kehlmann, Julian Barnes, Alessandro Baricco

Last Page section:

David Albahari, Asli Erdo an,

Mikhail Shishkin, Hakan Yel, Tanja Maljartschuk, Aura Christi, Alben Stambolova, Olya Stoyanova, Lyubomir Nikolov, Vladimir Sungarski, Ivan Dimitrov, Stefan Ivanov, Silvia Choleva, Palmi Ranchev, Kalin Terziyski, Bistra Velichkova, Hristo Karastoyanov, Gergana Pozharski, Vladislav Hristov

Bookstore section:

Wolf Lepenies, Venedikt Erofeev, Michel Tournier, Vladimir Sorokin, Alek Popov, Guo Xiaolu, Léonora Miano, Colson Whitehead, Karen Duve, Luc Mauriac, Samuel Shimon, György Dragoman, Marc Levy, Timur Kabirov, Aravind Adiga, Michel Houellebecq, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Orhan Pamuk, Stoyan Atanasov, Maggie O'Farrell, Richard David Precht, Krasimir Spasov, Asen Terziev, Anna Topaljikova, Vladimir Popov, Rabee Jaber

Here is a small selection of the names of musicians interviewed (classical music only, and only performers and conductors; no jazz, rock, composers, formations, orchestras, festivals, no portraits or reviews): Daniel Barenboim, Pinchas Zukerman, Neville Marriner, Yuri Bashmet, Gidon Kremer, Herbert von Karajan, Isabelle Faust, Yevgeny Mravinsky, Riccardo Muti, Krystian Zimerman, Vladimir Horowitz.

Why did I list so many names? By the way, the quantitative sample with the names of all the artists presented in the different types of art gravitates towards 500. Not by design, of course, but because I fully support media researcher Daniel Dayan's thesis: "As opposed to disinformation, which can eventually be challenged, uninformed pre-empt debate." We live in a complex global media

and digital world. We are less and less impressed by concepts such as hybrid warfare, information fascism, corporate slavery, media terrorism, hyper-politics, post-postmedia. And 80 years after Nuremberg, a fierce war is being fought in central Europe. Modern man finds it increasingly difficult to differentiate in his mind between real, media, virtual, fantasy/art worlds. The uninformed mind has no capacity for critical thinking; it works on the principle of clichés, postulates, ideologies, it is susceptible to all kinds of manipulation. In this context, it is more than concerning that a whole section of journalism - cultural journalism, expressed in the serious genre forms of art criticism - has disappeared from the mainstream media. The coverage of cultural processes and events in the country has migrated to specialized websites, blogs, platforms, podcasts, but they generally have a limited and specialized audience. The absence of high culture, aesthetically adapted as a message to a broad mass audience, provokes deficits in the culture of everyday life, in the culture of communication, in public speaking, in politics. The lack of publications and primetime broadcasts of the electronic media, which regularly present to the general public the world culture in all its diversity, objectively leads to closure in narrow national frames full of stereotypes, socialist rhetoric, pathos and nostalgia, nationalisms of various kinds and messages related to sacred dates for the national consciousness or personalities from our history. In this context, the return of LIK to our media space in 2020 is encouraging. Its new thematic concept, which focuses

on the construction of cultural memory for important events and figures of the past, proved capable of provoking a larger public discourse. I hope that financial resources will be found for the eventual publication of several issues a year that will again present to the Bulgarian audience the cultural panorama of the world stages. What Petya Alexandrova wrote in the introductory text for issue 1 of 2012 sounded very relevant to me: "Entire spheres of culture have fallen out of the State's gaze, but in response it has fallen out of theirs too (...) Finally, it turns out that most renewing and fruitful processes in culture start outside and independently of the State. And its main purpose is to make them dependent, to canonize them - that is, to shelter them under its banners. To use them in its own way and privatize them. Which is normal and of mutual interest. I emphasize - normal and of mutual interest. I cannot believe that no one is interested in art in times of crisis (by the way, the same applies to times of prosperity) - one would simply be too bored." Everybody, willingly or unwillingly, strives to find through their favourite books, paintings, films, music, and dance their own little world, a world of inner harmony where you can dream, wander, and perhaps even meet yourself. A world that hides surprises, where it is always fun. Each reader, a member of the Big Magazine's faithful audience, was gifted with one such small personal world throughout the years, events, transient, and timeless things. LIK was our Big Magazine. And after its third comeback, it can start creating our little personal worlds again.

Detonator LIK



Panayot Denev. Photo: BTA

"Work at BTA inevitably involves explosives, but in the case of the new publications the explosives have detonators."

It is important to note that these words came from Rusi Bozhanov^{*}, a man who knew about detonators and explosions in every sense of the word. He was the news agency's Deputy Director.

On March 16, 1966, the chief editors were discussing the LIK bulletin after 63 issues had already been made, published and sold. The first issue had a print

run of 1,800 copies, with no clear data on sales. By the 11th issue, the print run had reached 4,200 and sold out promptly. Bozhanov expected the circulation to reach 10,000 soon and said: "Explosive material has been scattered across the country, legally or by stealth, and, depending on our detonators, it is crucial how this material is ignited and where it will fly off – whether it will destroy new, good things, or will clear away old things to make way for the new."

The disciplined professionals at BTA were well aware of this. At the time, the Bulgarian press avoided any coverage of Western art that did not exude hostility, even hatred, and showed a complete lack of real understanding.

Two years earlier, the news agency's new leadership had begun organizing discussions in the form of "theoretical conferences." Although these discussions paid lip service to the mandatory clichés and phrases of the time, they actually addressed specific work problems.

The first topic, in May 1963, was "BTA's News in Light of the

Resolutions of the 8th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party." Reports by Mira Todorova and Alfred Krispin advocated for "cleansing the news agency's information of the sediment and rust of dogmatism, rigidity, schematism and canon, and restoring the edge, temperament and combative party spirit of the revolutionary years." They cited examples to demonstrate that intelligent, cultured and persuasive information was possible.

A conference on "Journalism and Politics" in June 1964 featured a keynote report by Prof. Vladimir Topencharov with all "the right concepts", and supplementary reports by BTA's Paris correspondent Albert Cohen and seasoned diplomat Nino Ninov. The gist was that the main damage caused by the personality cult period was that the reader's unique interests, needs and demands were ignored. "During the personality cult period, the reader was treated as an empty vessel into which content must be poured forcibly," A. Cohen said. He emphasized that entertaining reading could also

^{*} In 1944, Rusi Bozhanov was not yet 20, but he was a resistance fighter. He fought in the war against Germany. He graduated from the Naval Academy, as well as from the School for Torpedo Boat Commanders and the Naval Academy in Leningrad (modern-day St Petersburg). A captain first rank, he served as chief of staff of the Bulgarian Navy until 1958, and then became a military attaché in the United States. In 1963, he demobilized and, not yet 40, transitioned to a career as a journalist, writer and playwright. He authored books of travel essays. The agency's Director General, Lozan Strelkov (1911-1981), invited him to join the management team for five years and tasked him with overseeing the nascent weekly publications after reading his play *Shtastlivetsat Idva* (*The Happy Man Is Coming*), which was later a stage success. After his time at BTA, Bozhanov managed two newspapers, *Otechestven Front* (*Fatherland Front*) and *Literaturen Front* (*Literary Front*), as well as the *Balgarski Hudozhnik* (*Bulgarian Artist*) publishing house.

serve political purposes. Examples from foreign news agencies illustrated thematic breadth and anti-dogmatism. The conclusion was that the thematic and genre diversity of information was the most powerful tool for influencing a broad readership. According to N. Ninov, Lenin's words that the press is "a collective agitator, propagandist and organizer" were applied by inertia. International journalism had been undervalued as something secondary, a sort of a loudspeaker for chanting slogans against imperialism without documentality or concrete analysis. The need for the level of writing to match the level of reading was often overlooked, whereas oversimplification, short-sightedness and narrow practicality are alien to Marxism-Leninism. An international news desk staffer must write about everything and write truthfully. A comparison was drawn between bourgeois objectivism and dogmatic subjectivism, which are equally estranged from the party spirit.

A conference held in November 1965 addressed the "Ideological Struggle in the Conditions of Peaceful Coexistence." Rusi Bozhanov delivered a report. The main takeaway from the discussion was that "peaceful coexistence is a state of class struggle in the modern world. The ideological struggle is growing more intense than ever, which elevates the role of ideology in societal life..."

At first glance, those discussions resembled most talking shops of that kind about socio-political, economic and cultural issues. Still, the specifics revealed ambitions for significant changes at BTA.

This was part of Lozan

Strelkov's new strategy. One of his first observations upon becoming Director General on September 1, 1962, was the accumulation of vast amounts of information that was not being used effectively. He showed a flair for organization and administration, coming up with an idea that was inconceivable at the time: to sell part of that information to the public. This was done neither in the USSR nor in any other Soviet bloc country. Being a state news agency, BTA held a monopoly on information. Still, Strelkov said the monopoly could turn a profit.

He initiated an in-house bulletin to discuss ways to improve operations in all departments. Dimitar Kostov (1923-2018), editor in the International News Desk, suggested creating a new type of bulletins for public sale. The prototype of *Po Sveta* (Around the World), which Kostov managed later for 20 years (without being a communist party member!), was the Soviet weekly *Za Rubezhom* (Abroad). The idea was to make a digest of the world press featuring texts on international politics aimed at the general readership, with articles, analyses and interviews from the biggest global newspapers, with mandatory attribution of the source. The editors were tasked with writing the right afterword or introduction to ward off the infiltration of "hostile Western ideology and propaganda" as the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the special services kept insisting.

Three more publications followed: the first illustrated weekly in the People's Republic of Bulgaria covering human interest and entertainment, with

many illustrations; a specialized bulletin for art and culture; and a science and technology bulletin – all of them unique in the Soviet bloc. Since they were published by a news agency, they were all registered as bulletins and stayed that way even when they became more like magazines. According to the notions of that time in Bulgaria, this addressed, at least to some extent, the issue with copyright if raised. It was not raised for nearly 30 years.

Anonymity, which was a key principle at BTA, was also important. News bulletin authors and editors signed their initials. For example, an article could start with New York (BTA)... and end with PB/DS (reporting by Petko Bocharov, editing by Dimitar Shishmanov).

The new weekly publications included sources such as *Paris Match* (Paris), *Saturday Review* (New York), *The Listener* (London), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Zurich), *Forum* (Warsaw), *Film a Divadlo* (Prague), *Theater der Zeit* (Berlin) and *Iskusstvo* (Moscow). It was impossible to determine, however, if the translated and published material had been abridged or edited... BTA's hugely popular and profitable publications were conceived in sin...

LIK had a predecessor. In 1962, a weekly bulletin titled *Kulturni Vesti ot Chuzhbina* (Cultural News from Abroad) was launched and published almost until the end of 1964. It was issued by the Observers section of the International News Desk. Each issue contained up to 40 news items per week without specifying their sources. For instance, one issue in 1963 featured three items about literature, five about theatre, four



Sofia, June 6, 1973. BTA's LIK journalist Boyana Petrova interviews the famous Italian pop singer Gianni Morandi during his stop in the capital en route to the Golden Orpheus festival.
Photo: Dimitar Viktorov, BTA

about the visual arts, six about music, seven about films, and ten or so on other topics. The purpose of the bulletin was unclear - it was likely sent to the editorial offices of newspapers and the radio station. Soviet-style ideological control shaped all the items, with titles such as "Adenauer's Germany Fears the Truth of Brecht's Plays" and "The Dire State of British Scientists."

Paraleli also had a predecessor. The PressPhoto Desk, equipped with a good laboratory, had been selling three types of photo displays—political, human interest and sports-themed—at high prices for over a year. As television was only just emerging, people's interest in images and visual depictions of what they were reading was growing. The news agency would receive

packages of photos from global and specialized news agencies on a daily basis. Magazines and newspapers were filled with cartoons, mostly of a political nature. Photos were also received via wire photography transmissions, which BTA monopolized until the internet era. The photo boards that subscribers displayed in public places enjoyed growing popularity. The news agency brought in significant profits. This is how the idea for a biweekly printed publication was born. It was Svetat v Snimki i Karikaturi [The World in Photos and Cartoons] initially published by the PressPhoto Desk. After the third issue, the circulation of the unassuming pages—where texts were typewritten—reached 18,000, making the publication a market leader. In 1966,

Strelkov invited Stefan Prodev (1927–2001)—a respected professional temporarily out of work (after the scandalous closure of the Literaturni Novini weekly (1961–1964)—to head the Weekly Publications Desk, specifically focusing on Svetat v Snimki i Karikaturi.

The LIK team included Vera Gancheva, Chavdar Chendov, Mariana Nedelcheva and Boyana Petrova. Correspondents Mira Todorova (1921–1997) in Paris, Boyan Traykov (1932–2014) in Warsaw, Goran Gotev (1935–2014) in Algiers, Stefan Tihchev (1929–2011) in Moscow and Georgi Naydenov in New York contributed articles and interviews.

LIK was born on January 8, 1965.

The mandatory documents required in such cases stated the

mission:

"A special bulletin for literature, art and culture.

To offer articles, news and correspondent reports from magazines and newspapers previously unknown or inaccessible to Bulgarian readers."

A year later, it was reported that "the department has subscribed to over 65 newspapers and magazines from the socialist bloc, Western European countries and the USA."

In 1965, 52 issues of LIK were published with a total of 2,080 pages containing 1,600 articles, news items, correspondent reports, reviews and news briefs. These issues featured 470 photographs illustrating most stories. The news agency's management reported that a crucial balance between items from socialist and capitalist countries had been maintained. In the Literary News section, the ratio was 57 to 55; in The World Stages, 39 to 37; in Visual Arts, 31 to 20; in Cinema, 40 to 55; and in Music World, 43 to 31.

The authorities accepted the outwardly nondescript weekly publications as social vents.

They grew, encouraged by the readers' hunger for information from the other side of the Iron Curtain. In the autumn of 1965, having done conscription service, I was astonished—these pamphlets were like barred openings but still were windows to the light.

Lozan Strelkov, who headed BTA between 1962 and 1981, devised the strategic plan. People working at the news agency at the time confirmed that, without opposing party directives, he consistently imposed his own ideas—for instance, regarding personnel policies. He had nei-

ther the authority nor the inclination to object to mandatory appointments, such as foreign correspondent posts which often served as covers for intelligence agents. Still, he sometimes managed to send genuine journalists, advising them not to serve ambassadors or intelligence officers. When appointing a local correspondent, he consulted the local party leader but always relied on his own judgment. This was also the case with chief and deputy chief editors—positions included in the so-called nomenklatura list of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), meaning they could only be appointed with the Central Committee's approval. Strelkov chose people he knew personally and trusted, as he wanted the news agency to function effectively. When hiring translators and reporters—those who often remained anonymous behind their initials—the Director General brooked no interference. Thus, during his tenure,

the news agency employed individuals who might have had "unfavourable" State Security files, but were highly cultured, knowledgeable and fluent in several languages and had been unemployable by the radio, television, or other central ideological institutions.

In May 1966, Strelkov encouraged the editors of LIK (the news agency's culture bulletin):

"We have a very diverse readership. The way our bulletin is currently written undermines the prestige and the standard of the Bulgarian press in the eyes of the intelligentsia. There is not a single daily with as high a standard of writing as LIK. Even our literary publications are below this standard, because LIK features works by world-renowned contributors. However, although this is good and useful, we should be mindful about setting limits and a scope. This is the point—let's not get carried away."

From the beginning, there were debates—should LIK and Nauka i Tehnika [Science and Technology] cater to a specialized readership, or should they rather appeal to a broader audience? The prevailing view was that the publications should target the "average intellectual", not specialized in any particular art form. Editors argued that content should introduce Bulgarian theatre professionals to productions, which were the talk of Europe, and Bulgarian writers to newly released books abroad. There were doubts as to whether a popular publication could serve this purpose. The question of scientific consultants was also raised. The lack of translators from Polish, Czech and Hungarian posed a serious challenge, and the Balkan News Desk saw an increase in its



Vera Gancheva in 1973. She worked at BTA between 1966 and 1976, where she was successively a reporter in the International News Desk, an editor, deputy editor-in-chief and LIK's editor-in-chief
BTA Photo/Stefan Tihov



The cover of LIK issue 47/48, November 1990.

workload when interesting magazines were received from the Balkan countries. Competitions for translators from those languages were announced urgently. The practice of using SoWevens taking place in Czechoslovakia or Romania was deemed unacceptable.

"Gigantism"—overly long texts sometimes carried over from one issue to the next—was rejected. Diversity was considered crucial. More interviews and profiles were needed, along with a slight lowering of the intellectual style,

as advised by Deputy Director Stoyne Krastev.

At one point, someone even suggested printing a glossary of "difficult and unfamiliar words" on the last page. This idea was dismissed on the grounds that "this is the editors' job."

Ultimately, the consensus was for "LIK to be a popular publication for as wide an audience as possible," "to offer knowledge-enhancing content useful to all readers and aid the ideological struggle—a struggle that will continue for a long time."

R. Bozhanov recalled: "Our first and foremost task is political—broadly speaking, the affirmation of socialism and the exposure of capitalism. But let us remember that tomorrow we will be building a single world with people who live in that capitalist world."

In the early years, it was layout design that drew the most criticism. Both the texts and the photo compositions were sometimes unsophisticated, and the page and section design lacked aesthetic refinement.

Typesetting machines were purchased, and a third colour was introduced—red for LIK, blue for Po Sveta, and green for Nauka i Tehnika. Artists were hired for each publication to professionally design the pages with taste and balance.

Lozan Strelkov commissioned Boris Angelushev to create a logo for the front pages. The renowned artist designed the globe with the equator and parallels, which quickly became the news agency's trademark.

Both experienced editors and young journalists agreed that the brief but bare information in LIK should be complemented by more in-depth analytical stories. However, the bulletin was to remain a classic news agency publication, even as efforts were made to deepen its scope and diversify its genres—changes that would not strip it of its dynamic nature as a news agency product.

In May 1966, Strelkov stressed the significant contributions of Georgi Todorov and Krastan Dyankov, both 33 years old, in ensuring diversity and especially balance.

Balance is of the utmost importance, he would say, insisting

that no more than two or three issues be planned in advance to maintain relevance.

Dimitar Shishmanov (1919–2002), the experienced head of the International News Desk, led the teams at the start.

The erudition, experience and ideas of the extraordinary intellectual talent of that era were essential. The material for the early issues of LIK was selected by Georgi Todorov, Krastan Dyankov and Albert Cohen, in consultation with established translators and editors such as Dimitri "Dzhimo" Ivanov, Todor Valchev, Petko Bocharov and Neli Dospevska.

When Vera Gancheva took over as head of the team, she established strict order. The stacks of foreign publications arriving daily were distributed among the editors whose primary role was to select articles and propose them for translation. The news agency's large team of highly qualified translators was fully utilized.

Mariana Nedelcheva, who joined the team in the early 1970s, recalled that the editor-in-charge would write a brief introduction, always signed as LIK. Some articles were preceded by brief editorial introductory texts, distinct from the translation itself.

Strelkov criticized the editors, saying: "You are not monitoring or studying the world-renowned illustrated magazines... Publishing an illustrated magazine is an art. It must be mastered to achieve the goals set by the bulletin."

After G. Todorov left to become a correspondent in Algeria in October 1967, the editorial team was briefly led by theatre critic Asen Todorov and then, for

eight years, by Vera Gancheva. During that time, Nina Venova joined the team and became the leading intellectual and driving force in the decades to come. The editorial team included people who later gained prominence in prestigious publications, organizations, and institutions: Chavdar Chendov, Rada Sharlandjieva, Boyana Petrova, Raymond Wagenstein, Albena Sharbanova, Emilia Maslarova, Mariana Melnishka, Tolya Radeva, to mention only a few. To ensure stable political leadership, Violeta Mitseva and Sirma Veleva were appointed editor-in-chief in succession.

In three years, the bulletins were ready to become independent. As of January 1, 1971, *Snimki i Karikaturi* was renamed *Paraleli*. It was published weekly, with more texts than illustrations and a larger format. By 1974, circulation reached 140,000, rising to 300,000 in the late 1980s. Subscription requests exceeded half a million, but the printing process at the BTA printing office and chronic paper shortages limited production. Six days a week were dedicated to printing *Paraleli*, with one day allocated to the other three bulletins, of which LIK was the most sought-after, reaching a circulation of 23,000. Post offices would often reach the subscription limits in just a few days, and people sometimes resorted to bribing postal workers. Thousands of readers are known to have kept issues of *Paraleli*, LIK and *Nauka i Tehnika* for years, well into the 21st century.

During internal discussions, Stefan Prodev and others argued that LIK editors should be sent abroad to gain first-hand experience of events and people covered in the bulletin. Mariana

Nedelcheva was sent to Poland, where she met film director Andrzej Wajda and avant-garde composer Krzysztof Penderecki. Editors also attended film festivals in Belgrade and Thessaloniki.

Vera Gancheva is known to have been close to state leader Todor Zhivkov's daughter, Lyudmila Zhivkova, which provided her with a solid backing. "We took the liberty to publish things unthinkable in any other publication in Bulgaria—stories about the Documenta avant-garde art exhibition in Kassel, West Germany, and much more," Mariana Nedelcheva recalled.

Years later, Vera Gancheva described the excitement of preparing each issue of LIK from heaps of literature and art publications: "We were not just witnesses, but participants in a burgeoning cultural revolution."

As early as 1971, V. Gancheva invited more news agency journalists and external contributors to write for LIK. These included Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov (on ancient Greek literature), Georgi Vasilev (on Buddhism), Vasil Georgiev (on ancient Egyptian painting), Lyubomir Halachev, Sibila Dimova, Radka Dimitrova (on the 25th Avignon Festival), Todor Harmandzhiev, Stefan Kozhuharov, Georgi Vedrodenski, Krasimir Drumev, Violeta Mitseva, Lilia Racheva (on Kazimierz Brandys), and Krasimir Mirchev. Still, the names of translator-editors, including her own as editor-in-chief, were not printed.

Of course, the BCP Central Committee stayed vigilant. A January 1970 decision recommended:

"The editorial teams of LIK, *Po Sveta*, *Paraleli*, and *Nauka i Tehnika* must demonstrate high

vigilance and a class-party approach when reprinting materials from the bourgeois and revisionist press, and must always provide the necessary analysis and commentary."

In a climate of lingering suspicion towards jazz, LIK's January 3, 1971 issue featured a lengthy overview by Raycho Ivanov, titled "The American Vocal Jazz Scene."

In addition to his managerial skills, Lozan Strelkov was well-versed in the ideological rhetoric of his youth (in the 1940s and 1950s) and employed it in the interest of his creations and BTA as a whole. To protect the editorial teams, the news agency and himself, the Director General wrote in a letter to Todor Zhivkov in 1978:

"The four weekly bulletins published by BTA are increasingly sought by readers and are ever more effectively fulfilling their tasks: (a) to expose capitalism and its system; (b) to affirm and promote socialism; (c) to use materials from the capitalist world to reveal its inhumane nature. Alongside these ideological and party goals, the publications generate profit for the news agency, providing for its maintenance. Without these profits, which come solely from the public and constitute 75% of BTA's total income, the news agency would not be able to cover its costs, let alone grow."

The publications were part of a larger project. BTA's well-preserved archive reveals that in late 1964, Strelkov reported to the Politburo of the BCP Central Committee and to Zhivkov himself that preparations for a new model of financing the news agency—on a cost-accounting basis—had yielded excellent results.

In essence, he asked for permission to launch four new weekly bulletins for public sale. At the same time, Strelkov managed to convince party leaders—the regular recipients of the news agency's news bulletins and services—to become subscribers, i.e. to start paying. This was a lot of money at the time. The subscription fee for most bulletins was high, especially for the official and confidential ones of the International News Desk.

In BTA's building, basement premises were converted to accommodate two Rotaprint offset litho printing presses from West Germany and folding and stapling machines. Operators of this equipment were hired to work in two and, occasionally, three shifts. Ordinary newsprint paper was used. Strelkov proposed first to the Politburo, and then to the Council of Ministers, what to decree. There are no documents in BTA's archives about the person whom the Director General may have consulted before coming up with the revolutionary idea. The search revealed that most of the work was done by a legendary budget expert, a senior official at the Ministry of Finance – Nikola Babamov, who headed the State Expenditures Department for many years.

"Very good results were achieved during the 1964 preparations," the proposal to the government said. BTA requested official approval for the publication of four new bulletins for public sale in 1965. "They will account for over 51% of total income. Additional income is expected from selling photographs domestically and abroad, i.e. they will be paid for with foreign currency. The comrades at BTA

believe that if they are provided with the required quantity of paper and one more imported printing machine, they will fulfil their financial plan," the Finance Ministry said in its proposal to the Council of Ministers.

On September 29, 1964, the Bureau of the Council of Ministers ordered:

"As from January 1, 1965, the Bulgarian News Agency will be a separate entity operating on a cost-accounting basis"

[i.e. financing itself without a state subsidy, roughly equivalent to a profit centre in a free market economy], its line of business being to collect, produce and distribute political, economic, cultural, technical and sports information and photos, as well as official materials through print, radio, and television, and to have its own publications intended for the public, enterprises, institutions and organizations in the country and abroad." The document was signed by deputy prime minister Zhivko Zhivkov.

New Regulations on the Tasks and Organization of the Bulgarian News Agency entered into force as from January 1, 1965. This instrument ushered in several important novelties. "While instituted as a government body, BTA under the Council of Ministers is also a legal person in its own right operating on a cost-accounting basis. Along with all the previous tasks, the news agency issues its own publications and organizes photo displays intended for the public, enterprises, institutions and organizations in the country and abroad."

All the proposed and planned targets were met in 1965. The revenue came from the following sources: 56% from the sale of

the weekly publications, 5% from the sale of photos and information abroad, 20% from the sale of photos and information in Bulgaria and to the mass media, and 19% from sales to public organizations and state institutions.

During that and subsequent years, BTA published ten daily bulletins (non-confidential, restricted and confidential), two weekly bulletins for the press, radio and television, five weekly bulletins for foreign audiences (in Russian, English, French, Spanish and German), four weekly publications (Paraleli, LIK, Nauka i Tehnika and Po Sveta), the People's Republic of Bulgaria Reference Book, and the World Reference Book.

The weekly editions were priced at BGN 0.30 per copy.

At the time, a newspaper cost BGN 0.02 or 0.04, a tram ticket BGN 0.04, a trolleybus ticket BGN 0.06, and a loaf of brown bread (1 kilogram) BGN 0.15.

In reality, the state was transferring money from one pocket to the other. In various forms, the budget supported state institutions, newspapers, radio and television. For example, the budget fully financed the Komsovol (Dimitrov Communist Youth Union), which in turn funded its newspaper, Narodna Mladezh. To sustain its operations, the newspaper subscribed to BTA's products using state funds. The government granted BTA the right to purchase a substantial amount of foreign currency – US dollars (about USD 1 million a year at an exchange rate of BGN 0.88 to the dollar) – to maintain its network of foreign correspondents, subscribe to international news and photo agencies, and buy foreign newspapers and magazines.

Strelkov kept seeking oppor-

tunities to offer fair pay to BTA's staff. In the early 1970s, he was the first (or among the first) in the country to introduce a performance appraisal system based on a scale from 6 to 0. Initially, five criteria were set: politico-social, professional, ethical, discipline, and a drive for self-improvement. Over time, their number increased. Employees were appraised according to

their roles, in terms of leadership, organization, co-ordination of creative and administrative tasks; efficiency and a responsible attitude; work quality; adherence to deadlines and to labour, state and financial discipline; measures to prevent political, factual or other errors; initiative and competence; collegiality; and general knowledge. The score total led to a work contribution



The cover of the April 2010 issue of LIK.

coefficient. The individual salary of the employee concerned was arrived at by applying this coefficient to the standard individual salary. The Director General managed to convince all state control bodies and institutions that employees should receive individually determined salaries due to the specific nature of BTA's activities.

Lozan Strelkov became so immersed in the subject that in 1979 he wrote the play *Ates-tatsia* (Appraisal), performed at the Youth Theatre with Nikolay Binev as the leading actor and featuring the immensely popular television anchor Brigita Cholakova.

By Decree No. 5 of February 1, 1977, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Central Council of the Bulgarian Trade Unions regulated an improvement of the salary organization. This made it possible to eliminate wage-levelling that was typical of the socialist state. In some cases, the standard individual salary of a leading specialist could be higher than that of his or her immediate superior.

The supervisors from the BCP Central Committee and the State Security were concerned all the time. Restrictions were imposed over the years. Certain names and titles declared enemies of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc were officially or unofficially banned in the editorial offices. These included French actors Yves Montand and Simone Signoret and American writer John Steinbeck, who had all visited the USSR and spoke unfavourably about the construction of communism; Russian Nobel

Prize-winning writers Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky. Added to this list were intellectuals associated with the Prague Spring of 1968, who emigrated to the West—writer Pavel Kohout and filmmakers Miloš Forman and Jiří Weiss. Also included were East German actors Armin Mueller-Stahl and Manfred Krug, who signed a protest against the expulsion and forced exile from East Germany of poet and singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann—a protest, incidentally, signed by more than 100 prominent figures. Dozens of names were banned following crackdowns on dissidents and samizdat in the USSR, as well as during the emergence of Solidarity in Poland.

Only BTA transcribed Georgi Markov's essays, broadcast by Radio Free Europe and Deutsche Welle Radio, and published them in a special top-secret bulletin. This is the "dangerous" text the news agency published at its own risk 14 months before Markov's assassination in London:

"... A positive trend was also evident in the development of Lozan Strelkov when he became Director General of BTA. While he was deputy editor-in-chief of *Literaturen Front*, Lozan Strelkov most energetically implemented the crippling policies of socialist realism. He invented concepts such as 'the image of the communist'. Later, however, he seemed to have realized some things, and probably saw the results of Bulgaria's cultural isolation. Under his leadership, BTA began publishing a whole series of magazines which became extremely popular and essentially served as a kind of bridge between the West and Bulgaria. It

is true that magazines such as *LIK*, *Nauka i Tehnika* and *Paraleli* were not wished into life by one director or another but emerged due to the utter failure of ideological isolation in the communist countries. At a certain point, the party realized that the masses (and even its own members) had their ears glued to foreign radio stations, that every magazine or book brought home from the West was treasured, and that people's genuine thirst for knowledge had reached an unprecedented level. That is why the authorities decided to exploit this thirst by feeding it with their own controlled information. BTA's publications are often examples of falsification, distortion and misinterpretation. In the end, however, they still contain quite a bit of information—even when things should be interpreted in reverse. Lozan Strelkov's contribution lies in his choice of a successful format and his ability to sustain it.

"... To assess the *LIK* magazine properly, one needs to answer two questions: To what extent does it truthfully reflect significant ideas, phenomena and trends in the life of contemporary world literature, art and culture? And to what extent does it sate the thirst for information and new ideas of the ordinary, intelligent Bulgarian reader? Clearly, people at BTA act on the principle that, rather than banning information, it is better to present it in a way that serves the interests of ideology. Why does *LIK* enjoy great popularity in Bulgaria despite having profound and crippling flaws? The answer lies in comparing it with other Bulgarian publications, the vast majority of which

are utterly unreadable. In LIK, one can still find, albeit heavily distorted and misrepresented, some idea of the real world, real art and real life. In this regard, the old saying applies: In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

(Markov, G., In Absentia Reports on Bulgaria, Deutsche Welle Radio, July 7, 1976, BTA Archive)

There is debate over who came up with the name LIK. In his book BTA's Days and Nights (2001), Georgi Vedrodenski

says it was Strelkov himself who coined it. However, another BTA veteran, Dimitri "Dzhimo" Ivanov, wrote in his column in the Sega daily on October 3, 2007:

"... BTA, which had only published confidential and non-confidential bulletins until then, entered the market with weeklies. But what should they be called? 'Think,' the new director, Lozan Streltkov, told us. We sat in the upstairs café at BTA—Krastan [Dyankov], Tosho [Valchev], and I—and began to brainstorm.

Krastan's favorite publication

was The Seven Arts.

'Art is fine, as long as it's not culture!' I countered.

'Why? Maybe when you hear the word culture, you reach for your pistol? Some agent you are—you don't even have a pistol.'

'Literature,' Tosho suggested.

'Art,' Krastan added.

'Culture,' I muttered, defeated.

'Literature, Art, Culture. LIK! This is it!...'"



Sofia, May 4, 1999. Readers look through the new issue of LIK magazine, released after a 7-year hiatus, during its presentation at the BTA Press Club. Photo: Svetlana Bahchevanova, BTA

Fragments of *LIK*'s History



Survey on *LIK*'s 15th Anniversary

"BTA's news weekly for literature, art and culture, *LIK*, is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary," read a boxout published in issue 45 of the magazine in 1979. – "In that time, it has won loyal readers and friends and has become their indispensable companion, adviser and consultant, bringing them the latest, the most significant and the most up-to-date of world culture," the editors said. The publication asks our prominent cultural figures to share their impressions of the content and layout of the magazine, its usefulness in their daily creative practice and life. The thoughts of the respondents are published in two consecutive issues.

Among the personalities addressed by *LIK* is Katya Zaharieva, Director of Theatre 199:

"I've been following the magazine since its launch. I have been a regular subscriber for a long time, because I want to have all the issues. The specificity of *LIK* is such that no other publication in our country can be found to replace it as a source of such rich

*As we turn the pages of old issues of the *LIK* magazine, we discover not only valuable information about various fields of art and culture or portraits and conversations with renowned artists but also news about the magazine itself.*

Here, we will present highlights from some publications related to the fate of the magazine, which have appeared in the news flow.

and diverse information about cultural life around the world.

I am interested in it not only as a professional but also as an ordinary reader. It is very important for me that I receive regular information especially on the art of theatre, its problems, demands and trends in other countries. The magazine has the nice practice of closely following the development of contemporary theatre and, for many experiments and decisions, it is the first and sometimes the only informant of the Bulgarian reader.

The digest format adopted by *LIK* allows it to reflect equally well the contemporary state of all arts, and so far, none of them has been neglected or highlighted at the expense of the others. As for the genres used, I particularly like the discussions on individual works. It is through these that the aesthetic position of the author and of the scholars of their work is best revealed. Serious argumentation appeals to readers because it allows them to become acquainted with artists whose works have not yet reached them. Concise information combined with a

photograph is also a very successfully used genre. It perfectly suits the operational spirit of the magazine.

As a regular reader, I would also like to make some recommendations, because I sincerely wish that *LIK*'s level is constantly improving. I think that whenever more unfamiliar names are mentioned in this country, brief notes about them could be given so as not to unduly burden the reader."

Atanas Neykov, Director of Sofia City ART Gallery:

Even now, as I write these lines, I do not understand why *LIK*'s editors wanted to know what I thought of the magazine?

LIK gets into the City Gallery but hardly makes it to my desk. There are two possible explanations: either *LIK* is too interesting and art historians hide it jealously from me, or *LIK* is so bad they want to keep me out of it. The truth is, I only sometimes manage to get it. *LIK* is 'incomparable' and 'one of a kind,' not as an assessment of its level and quality, of course, but in the literal sense.

There is no other magazine of

БТА ЛИК 17

КОЛКО СТРУВА „РОБИНЗОН КРУЗО“ или
 КОЛКО СТРУВА „БРОДУЕЙ“ или
 ИСТИНИТЕ НА КАРАЯН ••••• МАРЛЕНА
 ДИТРИХ при собствената си изгнание ••••• ФЛОРА
 от Франсоаз Саган •••••

Ако искате да бъдете редовно информирани за най-значителните събития и явления в световната култура, абонирайте се за

ЛИК

седмично издание на БТА

Годишен абонамент 20,80 лв.
 Полугодишен абонамент 10,40 лв.

Крайният срок за записване на абонати за 1984 г. е 30 НОЕМВРИ!

LIK magazine subscription advertisement in issue 46 of 1983.

this nature in the country.

LIK has created a face for itself in terms of layout - it resembles both a magazine and a newsletter. These are both merits and demerits, but the most important thing is that we are used to it as it is. LIK is a necessary magazine that fills a huge gap in the lives of the people who create our culture.

Through its information on cinema and dance, theatre and music, painting and poetry, LIK fills the lost link between the arts and we rediscover common creative searches and concerns.

With the extraordinary flow of information, the multifaceted

information that is derived from LIK will inevitably be directional and not always exhaustive. The artwork, photographs and reproductions, with their important objectivity, is the equivalent of text but suffers irreparably from poor paper.

LIK is often late with information on a number of facts in the fine arts that have long been on the agenda in this country.

However, all this is unimportant compared to the comprehensive information from all over the world that LIK gives us. Quite simply, LIK is a good, informed, smart and generous friend."

Ivan Radoev, playwright at Sofia Theatre:

"If someone is curious about something, they look for a way to it. If they are interested in a magazine, for example, the surest way is to become a subscriber. I have been a LIK subscriber for many years. I have known this publication since its first issue. Therefore, not only do I follow it, not only am I interested in it, but I love it. I do not take kindly to some snide quips of a pseudo-intellectual nature that the magazine is for people who do not know foreign languages, that it offers synthetic pills to those hungry for popular reading. First

of all, it is not. Second - even if it were, in a dynamic time, filled from end to end with our daily professional and civic duties, one needs information that one can get on the go, on the move. And however brief this information may be, it finds a place in the files of our memory, and tomorrow or the next day, it will prompt us to take a closer interest in a sub-issue. In this sense, LIK does not offer us something chewed up and finished, on the contrary, it opens the doors to an intelligent curiosity about aesthetic and social problems.

I am connected to literature and theatre. In the magazine I come across the names of prominent world figures whose temperamental interviews, polemical articles and controversial views make my professional world more mobile. Even the small literary snippets in column 416 introduce us to the literary styles and mannerisms of magnificent storytellers in a flash, awakening our interest in them.

I do not want to recommend anything to the talented LIK team. It is quite obvious that the people there have both the strength and the taste to arrange lively and interesting news and issues for us in a narrow format."

LIK's First 1,000 Issues

"Date of birth: January 8, 1965. Originating as the Bulgarian News Agency's weekly bulletin for literature, art and culture, LIK has changed its appearance and its printing machinery, but it has not changed its basic purpose - to make its readers aware of the main aspects of global culture, of the movement and clash of ideas, of the great achievements of the creative genius of yesterday and



The 1,000th issue of LIK, 1984.

today, of the spiritual upsurge and the exuberance of the free socialist person. It is invariably born every week to reach you today at number 1,000. A thousand issues, a period significant in the creative and human dimension, we might even say equivalent to a generation. And for us, a milestone in the midst of which we pause to look back, to look far ahead, to seek a direct response from you, the readers," wrote the LIK editorial staff in Issue 12 in 1984.

After 999 more or less successful attempts at contact, this time the LIK staff sought the publication's readers face to face. "We asked for the opinion of a few of our friends, asked them not only to be flattering, but also to make complaints, to tell us what else they find lacking in our pages. For the kind words, the heartfelt wishes, the frankness and the smart recommendations - thank you!" the anniversary issue reads.

Respondents included:

Georgi Minchev, composer, secretary of the Union of Bulgarian

Composers:

"Those 20 years carry the mark of youth, maturity and skill, they also carry the affection of the people, their trust and appreciation. Appreciation for the dedicated work, for the joy brought, for the fact that every Friday in our home a window to the world opens wide and makes us empathetic to the problems of the planet. LIK has become a part of our lives, a moment in our daily lives, and we seek it out as something expected and desired. Because its pages reveal other people's confessions and destinies, but in them we seek a piece of ourselves.

How much skill and labour, how much taste and patience accompany the birth of each individual issue - we hardly realize it. But in these days, let us offer words of sincere gratitude to all those who have given us the joy of knowledge for so many years.

Thank you, dear friends!"

Nikoleta Marokindzhieva, librarian at the National Library:

"A popular and widely read BTA publication celebrates its 1,000th issue. The publication is specialized in literature, art, culture, it informs about their development in the world, but it is not pretentious. It is equally well received by people competent in these fields and by others who want to find information about the latest on the stage, on the screens, on the typewriters of artists. LIK's popularity is due to the good selection of the material, which is always printed with a flair for the truly new. The reader learns about a favourite author, actor, singer, is confronted with an unfamiliar story by an established writer, returns to the first steps of a film star.

Here is a reader who congrat-

ulates LIK on its anniversary and wishes it to be even more interesting, to maintain and increase its popularity!"

Todor Andreykov, film critic:

"A thousand issues is really a lot. To appreciate the value and necessity of LIK for our cultural life, the first few hundred were enough for me personally. I am not exaggerating when I say I would feel really robbed if LIK suddenly stopped coming out. I think this would be confirmed by anyone belonging to the type of people who seek more information (in general and in the field of culture and art in particular), who can't imagine life without a continuous flow of information in the fields that interest them professionally and by inclination.

The quantity and variety of information - this is LIK's undisputed and firm conquest. In the area of information quality, the achievements are also significant. But in both areas, of course, there is no ceiling and so I will allow myself some recommendations. Diversity and quantity of information is achieved by a successful in most cases combination of translations from sources of different nationalities for one event. But this is where, on the basis of a well-intentioned principle, more could be desired, especially when it comes to very large-scale cultural events that have quickly gone beyond the national. Also very important is the exact - on a case-by-case basis - proportion in combining material from specialist and more popular publications. This principle is excellent but is not yet applied with the necessary flexibility and thoroughness. In general, material from non-specialist publications (especially on cinema from Western countries)

is preferred. Perhaps this is determined by the popular nature of the LIK publication itself, but still everything should depend on the specific event or phenomenon in art. Past practice shows that it is when materials are combined more boldly and cleverly that a positive effect is achieved. And something very concrete: while the film distribution system in many countries universally changes the original titles of films from other countries, it is absolutely necessary to specify the original titles."

LIK Turns 25

"Together with our readers, we enter 1989 with that awe of hope and trust, that kind thought for those near and far, for prosperity and peace in the world, with which we meet each New Year. But now, for us, the feelings surrounding an anniversary are added. At the end of the first week of the first month, January, LIK enters the ripe old age of its 25th anniversary. It's not much for a human being, but for a periodical it's a solid stretch of road that has taken joy, effort and rigour ahead of the scrutiny of 1,248 encounters with those for whom communicating with LIK has become a necessity," the editors wrote in Issue 1 of 1989. The team adds that they are trying to embrace the world of art in all its diversity and interconnections - of the timeless, the eternal, and of that which is being created in the moment with all the assertiveness and sometimes challenge to our senses.

The Printing Paper Crisis

"Dear readers, unfortunately, I do not know when you will read

these lines. Sadder still, I do not know if you will ever read them. The printing paper crisis and some other factors have played their brutal part, and we have reached the critical point where we are wondering whether LIK will exist," wrote the magazine's editor-in-chief, Sirma Veleva, in the introduction to Issue 36/37 of 1990.

"For many years we lived with the conviction - no, not an illusion! - that we were doing a noble work. I am speaking of the present team, but this also applies to all our colleagues who have blazed the trail before us. Looking through almost the entire world press, we tried to the best of our abilities and according to our understanding to extract, to find for the Bulgarian reader the most interesting and the latest, written by the most prestigious names of world journalism in the field of culture. Naturally, we made mistakes, and of course, each of us has our own biases. But your letters and phone calls to the editorial office, our meetings with readers were and are irrefutable proof that LIK has an audience that believes in it, that seeks it out and loves it. Amidst our bleak reality, we have so far had one joy that no one can take away from us - the production of every issue of LIK is a celebration for us. Are there many newsrooms that feel cheer every day when they go to work? Are there many newsrooms where the youngest do not leave despite tempting offers of triple the salary?" the editor-in-chief adds.

"How many vicissitudes has your LIK experienced! We have no thought of self-promotion, but I think it is an indisputable fact - the magazine was a pioneer in a field that has no boundaries,

unless the spirit has boundaries. And it does not. In a time of total darkness, LIK tried to be a beacon, small as it was, but never flickering, an open window into the culture of a world we knew existed but could not reach. In fact, even today it is still unattainable for Bulgaria. In the age of fear, there were times – thank God, few – when we were forced to submit to those superior to us. But the most important thing was – and I think we did it – to remain honourable and to protect our own dignity," Veleva adds.

"Unfortunately, there are people, even among our colleagues, for whom it is irrelevant whether LIK will continue to come out in the future. I personally think that they have never read us, because they have always been absorbed by the obsessive thought of personal prosperity, they have never looked into our editorial office and do not even suspect how much professionalism, idealism and how much love it takes to work for LIK. I am not exaggerating. At the moment, no one on the LIK staff cares about their personal futures or their personal careers. At the moment we want to save LIK because we are convinced that without it Bulgarian culture would be impoverished," writes Sirma Veleva. At the end of her text she asks, "Are we not already poor enough materially to add to our misfortunes the spiritual poverty that deprives man?"

Readers as a Force in the Fight for Survival

"The LIK editorial board has never been one of those edito-

rial boards that proudly – no, haughtily – announces, 'This month we received this many letters. They write to us, they praise us, they recommend to us...' It always seemed to me that this was cheap advertising, because anyone who has worked in an editorial office knows that a lot of letters are just a number, raising minor issues or containing unreadable verse. But now I have a solid folder in front of me, and there is not a single letter in it that is just a reported issue," wrote editor-in-chief Sirma Veleva in the introduction to Issue 51/52 of 1990. "During the last difficult months, when our life, that is, the life of your LIK, dear readers, hung in the balance, we received correspondence (plus phone calls) every day that gave us strength in our struggle for survival. We all read the lines together, which oozed so much love and sincerity, so much goodwill, so much desire to help us. Your hope and your belief that LIK must be saved, 'so that the LIK [wordplay – 'lik' means face in Bulgarian] of the spiritual life of Bulgaria may be saved,' is the support that has been sustaining us."

"I cannot but thank you. For the kind words that gave meaning to our work, for the conviction that LIK is needed in the spiritual wilderness that surrounds us, for the fact that there are people for whom LIK is a breath of fresh air in the midst of the nightmare that we are in.

Unfortunately, we are not dreaming.

An outburst of sincere feeling is so shattering that words of response are not easily found. We did not answer many letters. I am trying to do that now..." Veleva writes and shares more

thoughts and emotions with the LIK audience.

And among the letters shared by readers are opinions like these:

"Is it possible, is it possible for readers to be left without LIK...? Honestly, I choke up just thinking about such a thing. The magazine that I cherish most of all, even today, after the appearance of so many different publications, the magazine that for me is a model of professionalism through and through – I do not want and cannot agree that it deserves such a fate." (Tatiana Antonova, Targovishte)

"Now it is very important to have one's own islands of hope, outlined by people who, although strangers, are so close to one! Know that you have many friends; think of them especially when it is difficult for you." (Margarita Dimitrova, Veliko Tarnovo)

"For years, I have lost count how many, I have been an avid reader of your magazine. For years your magazine has been a beacon in the darkness for me, a small window into other cultures. Actually, come to think of it, not all that small. Because you have obviously always chosen valuable material, small in quantity but large in quality." (Vilma Vlaseva, Varna)

A Prayer for LIK

"I was shocked by the news that there will be no subscription for LIK," wrote Margarita Dimitrova from Veliko Tarnovo. "I do not watch TV, I do not read newspapers, I do not listen to the radio, only LIK. I do not want to accept that I will be deprived of the breath of optimism, the

drop of courage it gave me. Keep LIK as it was before November 10 and after November 10 – the only one that has not changed its face. It is VITAL in this time!"

"Thanks to Margarita, thanks to 18-year-old Panayot, thanks to everyone who wrote to us with words of love and loyalty, thanks for the dozens of anxious calls every day to the newsroom from all over. Can one forget a voice that claims that LIK helps them to keep their self-respect, the self-esteem of a civilized person?" These were the first words of the address to the readers of issue 51/52 in 1991 written by LIK editor-in-chief Sirma Veleva. She regretfully stated that at that time it appeared that everything was measured in money. "Sometimes I even think that despite the nightmares we have experienced, my generation was happier because for us money was never a measure of value. It is perfectly natural for LIK not to be profitable today. It is appalling but a fact, in the wolfish times of the market economy that culture does not generate money. And when we realize that without culture there can be no progress, I am afraid it will be too late," the address reads.

Veleva wrote about the difficult time experienced by LIK. "We were told that the only thing we needed was mass culture and that since only a handful of people read us, we had no right to exist. And there was no other magazine like it in the whole of Europe! In fact, we could have taken it as a compliment, but that was not our point," she added. Sirma noted how on one of her sleepless nights she listened to Bulat Okudzhava's "The Prayer of François Villon" – "the song of the old dissident". "After the

sleepless nights, we tried to forget the bitterness of the insult, we continued and continue to believe that beauty will save the world," said the editor-in-chief. Sirma Veleva added that for a long time now they have been making every issue of LIK as if it were their last. "We were painfully aware that every authority wants to have obedient performers as its subordinates, not critical and independent thinking people. We fought furiously to survive, and around us many possessed the skill to survive through all times and all regimes. Sometimes we

despaired. But if nothing else, at least we felt satisfaction that we had not lost the dignity that is the pillar of man. And to the reproaches that we were not pragmatic, we could reply: yes, alas, we were not, but we were never servile either. Just as we have always detested the impersonality of mediocrity," she stresses.

The address concludes with the good news that LIK will continue to be in print in 1992. "At the last minute before the crash we found a sponsor who will help us. We'll be coming once every two weeks, and starting in February, you can



LIK issue 5, 1992—the last edition before the magazine's first 7-year hiatus.

Sofia, June 14, 2004. The LIK magazine team receives the journalism award for the 2003-2004 season at the 9th Salon of the Arts. The award, a crystal pyramid featuring the NDK logo, is presented to BTA Deputy Director General for Print Publications Yuri Lazarov. Photo: Bistra Boshnakova, BTA



Noah's Ark for Culture

subscribe. We want to hope that in the new year we can keep the loyalty of our readers. We are counting on them, on their love for all that uplifts the Spirit. After all, that affection may be the only thing that keeps a little piece of heaven in our souls today!" the editor wrote.

The Little Note with the Heavy Message

In Issue 5 of 1992, on one of the last pages, there is a little message which reads as follows:

"DEAR READERS, LIK is discontinuing publication for the time being. To our subscribers, we suggest that until the end of the year they receive MORE, BTA new weekly shop publication on Bulgarian and international politics, economy, business, culture, entertainment, sports..."

This marks the end of the first stage of the publication of LIK magazine.

LIK's Return

"BTA restores LIK magazine", wrote Panayot Denev in Issue 1 of May 1999. "Seven years ago, when ideological bars and filters

no longer existed, LIK could not withstand the rough and tumble of a Bulgarian market intoxicated by its freedom. BTA was then quite self-supporting, without any help from the state, and could not save the magazine," he recalled. – "Without illusions, we are trying to revive LIK. Making a magazine for real culture is not easier today than it once was," Denev stressed.

A short news item was featured at the beginning of Issue 7 of 2001. It reads, "LIK Magazine was awarded the Special Jury Prize 'for layout and structuring of a specific theme' at the Golden Pages Press Festival held in Albena in early June 2001. At the award ceremony, jury member Krastyo Krastev described LIK as 'Noah's Ark for culture' and moved BTA Secretary General Yana Kozhuharova, a LIK alumna, upon receiving the statuette."



Albena, June 10, 2006. At the 12th International Media Events in Albena, BTA receives a special jury award for its two magazines, LIK and Paraleli, recognizing their support of Bulgarian culture and the First World Meeting of Bulgarian Media. The award is accepted by BTA Deputy Director General Yuri Lazarov. Photo: Krastimir Krastev, BTA



Sofia, November 10, 2006. Georgi Gospodinov, Dubravka Ugrešić, and David Albahari at a reading at the Andrey Nikolov Red House Centre for Culture and Debate, part of the Balkan Writers' Meeting. The occasion is the LIK-published anthology *The Golden Feathers of the Peninsula* comprised of short stories and essays by Balkan writers from the magazine's Last Page section. Photo: Bistra Boshnakova, BTA

Spotted and Rated

"LIK Magazine won the prestigious Journalism Award from the Ninth Salon of Art. This is good and we at BTA appreciate this award very much, it is important for us. Because it means that intelligent people are noticing and appreciating us," wrote Yuri Lazarov in the Second Page column of Issue 8 of 2004. In his words, LIK magazine remains a cultural oasis. "Many years ago, it was the only place to read what was happening in world culture. Every week. Now it is the only place where you can read what is happening in world and Bulgarian culture. Every month," he writes.

"The awarding of the prize is joyful not only for us. It comes to show

that culture dies last. That after a reprint of Joyce's *Ulysses* – there is hope. The bad thing is something else. That for so many years now culture in Bulgaria has survived somehow in spite of everything..." the author added.

Award for Contribution to Culture

"The two fine magazines of the Bulgarian News Agency - *Paraleli* and LIK, won the prestigious Special Jury Award at the Golden Umbrella Media Festival in Albena. The reasoning: for overall contribution to Bulgarian culture" - these were the opening words of an article in *Paraleli's* Issue 24 in 2006.

"We at BTA love this festival and are actively preparing for it. During the presentation to the jury, we did not focus on the obvious – the

exquisite design and the good reception among the readers, but on exactly what was noticed and awarded. The support for Bulgarian culture," the publication says. *Paraleli* is presented with its national poll "Favourite Bulgarian artists", and LIK – with Alek Popov's essays and the collection *Companion of the Radical Thinker*. This alongside everything else impressed the jury.

A Cause for Pride

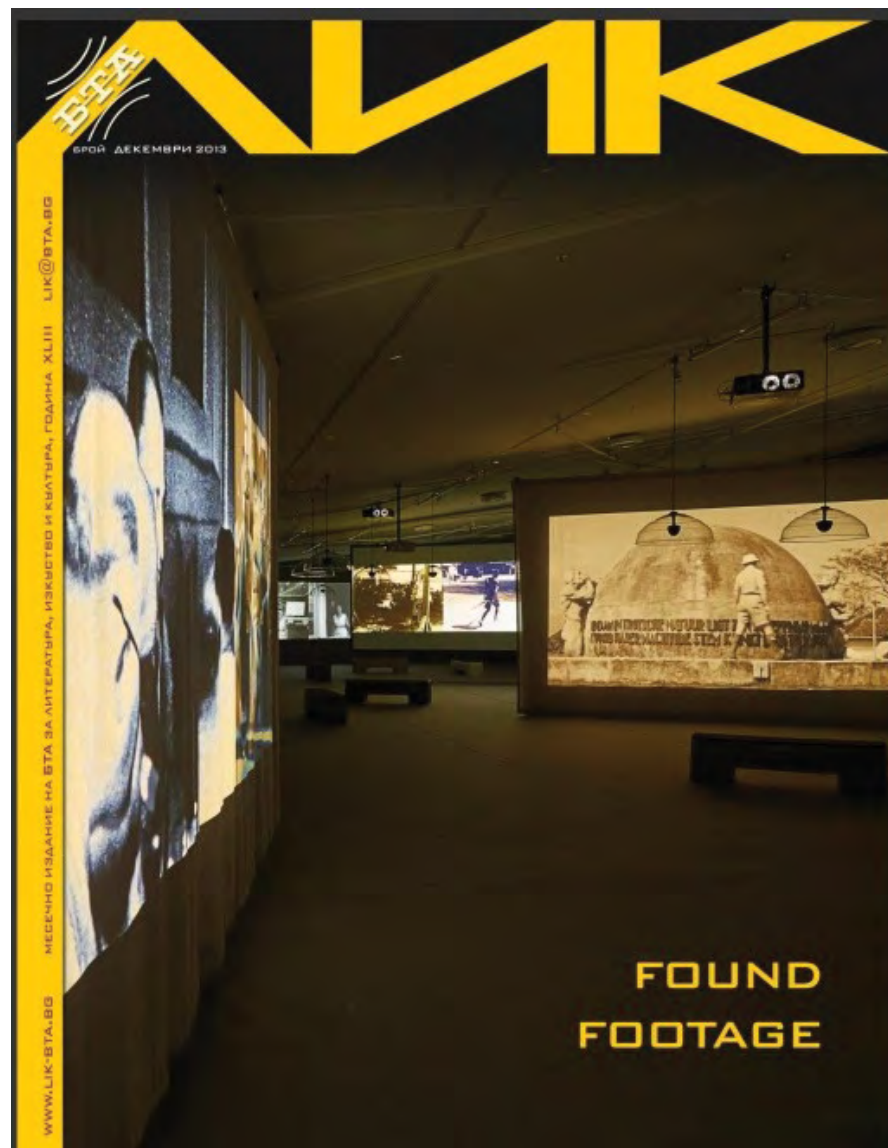
"We wholeheartedly confess: we are proud that LIK magazine has received the 'Selected Literature for Art Writers' award!" with these words begins Page Two of Issue 8 in 2011.

The award – an initiative of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Sofia – was conceived as "an

encouragement for those actively writing about contemporary art, who through their activities contribute to the development of critical thought, responsibility and the ethics of public debate, and thus help to educate audiences, broaden perceptions of art, and establish a dignified role for art in society." In 2010, it was awarded to the LIK magazine team, and the decision of ICA - Sofia, was taken unanimously – "for the active and consistent interest of the editorial staff in covering the most important events in the visual arts in Bulgaria and around the world, for the motivated critical texts, and for maintaining the debate on the role of contemporary art and criticism in our country." We really do cover the most important events in the visual arts, trying to strike the right balance between the global scene and the Bulgarian one, and the connections between the two. "Indeed, we support the debate on the role of contemporary art – we strive to be the scarce 'meeting place' in the Bulgarian cultural environment: between artists and viewers, writers and readers," wrote the LIK team. "Why are such awards actually valuable? Because they are from colleagues who are your equals in the craft. The malicious on the sidelines see this as an example of quid pro quo, but the ones who give are the ones who can judge best," they added.

The Digital Shift

"Since you, dear reader, are reading these lines, LIK's path has obviously been consistent. The last uncovered or privatized state-owned print publication established in communist times back in 1965 is before you. Albeit (or fortunately) in a digital body," wrote the magazine's editor-in-chief, Yassen Atanasov, in the March 2013 Issue – the month it stopped publishing on paper and went digital.



The cover of LIK's December 2013 online issue, after which the magazine ceased publication for a second time.

nasov, in the March 2013 Issue – the month it stopped publishing on paper and went digital.

"I celebrate the digital body! Because of freedom/free access. Because of the opportunity to have LIK at a time when investment in culture [...] is seen as a waste," the editor added. He agreed that "nothing compares to the pleasure of the book body." "There will be nostalgia, but the important thing is that LIK will continue to connect all those who realize that Literature, Art, Culture [art is *izkustvo* in Bulgarian, and culture is *kultura*) are not just words in an acronym, but possible

foundations for building a new society," said Atanasov. "There will be nostalgia, but this is the time. And it has its LIK," he stressed.

The Second Ending

Yassen Atanasov's opening words to the December 2013 Issue are heavy. It is his fate to announce the second interruption of the publication. He wrote:

"Straight to the bad news – the online version of LIK stops too. At first, temporarily. The reasons, of course, are financial. The magazine

was free to read and download, and we relied on voluntary support from you, our readers. Alas, the help was token at best. Of course, we thank those who supported us.

The BTA, a government institution, has no right to support loss-making activities. The law makes no distinction between BGN 100,000 lost on the sale of, say, electricity, and BGN 100,000 'spent' on culture. The State itself is not ripe for the idea that this 'spending' is actually an investment. With a guaranteed return, something that is rather dubious in relation to the government's fixation on nuclear power, for example.

For me personally, and I guess for many of LIK's readers too, the closure of the magazine is yet another symptom of the deep crisis in our society. I have said it before: our crises – financial, political, economic, social – emerge all the time, because they are born out of a super-crisis from which we have been unable to emerge for decades. The cultural one.

I would like to thank the team of the publication – Nina Venova, Petya Aleksandrova, Vasilka Nikolaeva, Zdravka Pentieva and Danail Aleksiev, as well as our hundreds of contributors, for their excellent work.

It is time for new beginnings. And every new beginning is actually good news!"

Collector's Value

Apart from the knowledge and emotional value that LIK issues carry with them over time, it turns out that they are even a collector's rarity.

This is evidenced by news from mid-November 2023, when it was reported that the auction house Sotheby's was offering an issue of the Bulgarian News Agency mag-

azine on its website, featuring a drawing of Pop Art artist Keith Haring with his autograph on the cover, for a maximum price of USD 425. On the cover of the issue, which measures 26.67 by 19.68 cm, Haring has depicted the traditional dancing figures of his work.

The LIK issue is included in Sotheby's "After Keith Haring" collection in

the Luxury Books and Manuscripts sale section. The website indicates that it will be consigned from New York to its future owner.

The copy offered for sale from the LIK edition came out days before the artist's death on February 16, 1990. Haring's drawing is on the cover of the February 9, 1990 LIK.



The cover of LIK issue 6, February 1990, featuring an illustration by Keith Haring, auctioned at Sotheby's for USD 425.

LIK, a Window to the World Not Just for Its Readers but Also for Its Creators

Poll

For the six decades that connect LIK from the moment of its first issue to the present, its team has included remarkable professionals – both journalists and translators. For them, the magazine became a platform where they could showcase their exceptional qualities and enrich the intellectual horizon of the readers of this emblematic BTA publication.

From the black-and-white pages in the mid-1960s to the luxurious

paper and impressive colour covers of the late 1990s, LIK has held an indispensable place among print publications on the market. This is thanks to the dedicated staff who sought out exciting topics to piece together the content puzzle of each issue. Everyone involved in this process contributed to making LIK the magazine remembered by several generations of Bulgarians.

We cannot include in the anniversary issue's survey all those who

were part of LIK over the years, but we take this opportunity to express our gratitude for their work.

On the following pages, you can read the thoughts and memories of Petya Aleksandrova, Nina Venova, Mariana Melnishka, Lyudmila Dimova, Rada Sharlandjieva, Raymond Wagenstein, and Yuri Lazarov. They share reflections and recollections of their years in the magazine's editorial team.



Advertisement of LIK, 1988. Photo: Dimitar Altankov, BTA

Petya Aleksandrova:



Petya Aleksandrova. Personal archive photo

A School of Erudition, Writing Discipline, and the Ability to Communicate with Authors

What did your work entail, and what were your workdays like?

The magazine's new image was fundamentally different, not only visually but also in terms of content. Until 1992, it was mainly a digest with predominantly translated materials. In the 21st century, original Bulgarian texts dominated. We chose themes, commissioned materials, edited and refined them stylistically with the authors, and curated photographs.

We were also active writers. Each issue typically featured one original piece from each of us. LIK's main categories traditionally included literature, theatre, music, cinema, and visual arts, supplemented by additional sections. Nina Venova excelled in literature, Lyudmila Dimova in visual arts, and I focused on cinema and theatre – although these were flexible roles, as we all reviewed and commissioned across categories.

For translated materials, Nina followed the French press, Lyudmila the German, and I the Russian, with shared responsibility for English. We translated extensively and compiled information from various sources. Initially, we had subscriptions to specialized arts publications, but these gradually diminished as online resources took over.

Our workdays were spent in a shared space with the Paraleli magazine team, and we often relied on them as contributors and translators for LIK. We spent

our days reading, writing, editing, and constantly on the phone for inquiries and author communications. Almost every evening, we attended cinema screenings, plays, exhibitions, concerts, or literary events. Participation in cultural life was essential, and we considered it unprofessional not to be familiar with the works featured in the magazine.

How did your time at LIK influence your professional and personal growth?

Personally, this period greatly expanded my general culture and professional knowledge. It was a school of erudition, writing discipline, and learning to communicate with authors.

Did you witness direct or indirect censorship?

There was no censorship during my time, but we were sometimes influenced by politically correct or friendly suggestions.

What is the most vivid memory you keep from the magazine?

Not one, but a process – meaningful reading, watching, and listening; meeting interesting people; enriching travels and experiences from art events.

How did the world look through the magazine's pages when you were part of its team?

My youth was marked by

Ms Aleksandrova, when and how did you become part of the LIK magazine team?

At the end of 1999, I met with the then-director of BTA, Panayot Denev, whom I had known since the 1980s from shared journalism and film projects. He told me he had revived LIK magazine a few months prior (it ceased publication in 1992). Nina Venova had returned as its editor, but one person alone was not enough for the team, so he invited me to join.

The magazine was already published monthly, with a more modern design and full colour. I had previously worked with Nina Venova on other publications and had an excellent impression of her as a translator, editor, and person, so I agreed without hesitation. Furthermore, Panayot Denev was passionate about LIK, knowledgeable about its topics and style, and our work took off with enthusiasm. Later, Vasilena Mircheva joined us briefly, then Lyudmila Dimova joined permanently, and Yasen Atanasov joined in the final year.

reading LIK – it was my window into the world of contemporary art. Later, while working for the magazine, access to information became exponentially faster and more diverse.

After 2000, the magazine's focus shifted: rather than introducing works, events, and personalities from beyond the Iron Curtain, it curated a selection from the oversaturated information landscape, prioritizing analysis and highlighting cultural values. In the midst of this information flow, LIK could not compete by merely being up to date but had to present what was truly worth reading.

How did changes in Bulgarian society and politics affect the media?

The media landscape flooded with countless outlets, making diversity overwhelming but not necessarily proportional to quality. New technologies altered everything more profoundly than politics – especially by blending traditional and hybrid media.

What role should a magazine like LIK play in Bulgaria's cultural life today?

It's hard to say. Today's LIK is quite different from the version I

know from 2000–2012. It now resembles the former 100% magazine (also a BTA publication) with its focus on a single theme or personality explored through various materials and perspectives. While this approach may be more comprehensive in a specific direction, its role seems to have shifted toward serving events or figures in focus, rather than the broader cultural process in Bulgaria.



Sofia, June 14, 2004. LIK team members Nina Venova, Yuri Lazarov, and Petya Aleksandrova pose with their journalism award for the 2003–2004 season at the 9th Salon of the Arts. Photo: Bistra Boshnakova, BTA



Nina Venova. Personal archive photo

Nina Venova:

We Saw Our Work as a Mission

When and how did you become part of the team at LIK magazine?

My connection with LIK is long-standing, both professionally and emotionally. I joined the agency shortly after graduating (with a degree in French language and literature from Sofia University), with no experience, let alone recommendations, but after passing a rigorous entrance exam for translator-reporter with English and French. I underwent an "intensive course in journalism basics" in the Reference department and International News before moving to LIK in the early 1970s, at the moment when Vera Gancheva became the magazine's editor-in-chief, shaping its identity.

What did your work entail, and what did your working days look like?

I became the permanent deputy editor-in-chief (until retirement) and sometimes acted as interim editor-in-chief when necessary. My responsibilities included assembling, discussing, and editing

the magazine. Issue after issue, LIK underwent transformations in line with the times and technological advancements – from a thin, weekly publication in modest black-and-white (the first incarnation of the weekly bulletin created by Lozan Strelkov and Krastan Dyankov) to a colourfully illustrated weekly, then monthly paper edition, which, after the political changes, became more open to Bulgarian authors and themes. This continued until the end of 2013 when LIK was discontinued, existing only in digital format.

My working days felt like diving into a fascinating world, inaccessible to the broader public under the conditions of that time. I worked among motivated colleagues, well-versed in various languages and cultures, with a keen sense and knowledge of valuable and enduring works, as well as an ability to navigate the rapid development and challenges of contemporary art. The magazine was conceived as a digest, utilizing foreign information received by the agency. The idea was for the agency to inform readers about personalities, events, and cultural trends worldwide through translated materials—insights that were otherwise inaccessible behind the Iron Curtain. You can imagine how crucial our role was as curators of cultural information. LIK's great success was underpinned by high quality, dedication, and expertise—not merely by the monopoly on information.

Each issue began with a review of authoritative foreign publica-

tions, many of which were highly specialized, delivered to the agency. We would then discuss themes and authors, often competing for the most interesting pieces. This is how we compiled a digest of translated materials, always citing the author and the foreign publication. The faces behind the selection and adaptation of complex cultural phenomena and messages into clear and precise Bulgarian remained anonymous. We covered global artistic movements, avant-garde explosions, and influential figures in the arts. Imagine how all of this contrasted against the rigid, uniform, propaganda-heavy backdrop of the periodical press of that era!

After translation, editorial review, and selection of accompanying images, we proceeded to layout. The layout days were a highly anticipated and enriching experience, working with maestro Stefan Markov, the magazine's designer from 1968 to 1992—a painter with a guitar, a devotee of French chansons, and a lover of the sea, as reflected in his graphics. He nurtured many young illustrators who created artwork for the short stories and excerpts published at the end of each issue—literary works we would only gain full access to years later.

The editorial team only made its presence known (but still without individual names) in thematic introductions and when necessary for forewords or explanatory notes.

Final routine operations: submitting the issue to the printing

house, reviewing and signing off on the proofs—there was no room for sloppiness. We treated our work almost as a mission, given the complete isolation behind the Iron Curtain. Our goal was to keep Bulgarian readers informed about global literary, artistic, and cultural processes and figures.

How did your time at LIK influence your professional and personal growth?

I owe a great deal of my professional and personal development to BTA and LIK. BTA taught me how a supportive environment—created and protected from external pressures by an exceptional leader like Lozan Strelkov—can foster growth, dedication, and collegiality.

I had the privilege of receiving my "baptism by fire" as a translator under the guidance of an extraordinary constellation of translation experts: Todor Valchev, Krastan Dyankov, Alfred Krispin, Petko Bocharov, and Dimitri Ivanov. I was also fortunate to work alongside Neli Dospevska at LIK and, over the years, to collaborate with wonderful colleagues. This environment shaped me, and I built life-long friendships there.

Did you witness direct or indirect censorship?

LIK was often described as a "window to the world." But every window has a frame. Still, through that window, we could see the world.

I took it as a high compliment when a Bulgarian, reflecting on November 10 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, said that the col-

lapse did not reveal an entirely unknown land to him—there had been breaches in the barrier.

As far as I know, there was no direct interference in our editorial work. However, it was widely understood that certain people, topics, and subjects were absolutely off-limits at that time. Self-censorship was unavoidable. We navigated carefully. We worked in relative peace, relying on Lozan Strelkov's support—and indeed, he protected us during one particularly memorable and comical blunder...

As Soviet leaders started passing away one after another, we had to place mourning portraits on our cover pages. On one occasion, we overlooked something, and opposite the page with the latest deceased leader, the table of contents still listed the headline of a previous article (which had since been moved further inside the issue). The title read something along the lines of: The Puppets Change, but the Theatre Continues. Lozan Strelkov was summoned to the Central Committee, but fortunately, no sanctions were imposed on our editorial team.

What is the most vivid memory you still hold from your time at LIK?

I see the magazine as an incubator of talent and a breeding ground for friendships. I picture the faces of Rada, Roni, Emi, the two Marianas—Nedelcheva and Melnishka—Albena, Tolya, Yulia, Viktoria... Today, they are respected translators, publishers, university professors, and established professionals. I also cherish the memories of Boyana Petrova and Chavdar Chendov...

What did the world look like through the pages of LIK when you were part of its team?

Not dangerous or frightening at all but interesting, diverse, rich in meaning, intellectually challenging, different, and liberated (sometimes to the point of excess), fascinating and astonishing—but not beautified, because it was forbidden and inaccessible. Before we could finally "taste" it for ourselves and decide what we liked or didn't like.

How did societal and political changes in Bulgaria affect the media?

Not as positively all the time as we had hoped and expected. Freedom of speech must go hand in hand with responsibility and ethical standards. This is where self-regulation plays a crucial role.

What should be the role of a magazine like LIK in the country's cultural life today?

A similar one—but in the opposite context. While LIK once saved readers from an information famine, today, a cultural magazine must save them from drowning in an overwhelming flood of indiscriminate and unfiltered information. It should rely on the authority and judgment of knowledgeable and competent individuals with expertise and discernment. After all, it is essential to learn how to swim so you don't drown.



Mariana Melnishka. Personal archive photo

People's Creativity Is an Illustration of the Essence and Quality of Their Lives

What did your work entail, and what did your daily tasks look like?

The editorial office, consisting of two small rooms with six large typewriters (first mechanical, then electric, and finally... computers), was like Aladdin's cave—filled with jewels of diverse information about all forms of art worldwide, people's lives in different geographic regions, social movements, trends, and aspirations.

To compile the weekly 40-page black-and-white issue—printed on thick, matte paper at the time—each of us, based on the languages we knew, would sift through a pile of large-format, colourful magazines and newspapers, including the most prestigious global publications: The New Yorker, Rolling Stone, Village Voice, Art, Zeit, Epoca, Lire, Literaturnaya Rossiya, The Times, and Newsweek. We selected the most recent and interesting cultural developments of the past week or two from major capitals, as well as from cities and locations of significant artistic events, led by our knowledge in the different fields, such as literature, arts, music, history, sociology, geography, etc.

This way, LIK readers could "attend" theatre performances in London, art exhibitions in Paris, concerts in Berlin and Moscow, festivals in Edinburgh and Venice, and film screenings in New York—at a time when leaving Bulgaria for personal travel was not just impossible but also illegal. Through LIK, we first "heard" about The Phantom of the Opera on Broadway. We inter-

viewed award-winning film directors, explored architectural wonders like the newly opened San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and read about the controversies surrounding the glass pyramid in the Louvre courtyard. LIK conveyed the cinematic pulse of films we could never hope to see, introduced us to the philosophy in Talking Heads' lyrics, and showcased Japanese prints, Indian temple sculptures, and African Shona sculptures that influenced Picasso.

Despite tight deadlines for translating and editing materials—often supplemented by extensive research—the work in the editorial office (and frequently at home) was an enriching pleasure, like peeking through windows beyond our closed national borders.

How did your time at LIK influence your professional career and personal growth?

For me, it was like a second university, a kind of master's degree in History and Present of Art! With an expanded and enriched worldview, knowledge that until 1989 was accessible in Bulgaria only to specialists in various artistic fields, and well-honed skills for accurate and stylistically rich literary translation, I became a sought-after translator from English and German. I also became competitive in other related fields of humanities when democracy broadened our opportunities for professional realization. The same can be said by other "graduates" of LIK, as publishers and editors have rightly recognized us.

Ms Melnishka, when and how did you become part of the team at LIK magazine?

From the moment I joined BTA in 1974 through a competitive selection process, I dreamed of working for LIK. However, the team had been complete long before that, and I was assigned to the International News editorial office. This turned out to be very beneficial for a novice reporter with two Romance languages, as it allowed me to develop professional skills, reflexes, and a broad perspective on life beyond the Iron Curtain. I was fortunate because, had we wished, even those of us in the news department could contribute and translate articles for LIK from the vast array of art and culture publications that BTA received—being the sole monopoly on diverse global information until 1989. Only after more than a decade did I get the opportunity to become a full-time reporter in the six-member editorial team of this unique publication in Bulgaria.



The cover of LIK issue 30, 1975.

Did you witness direct or indirect censorship?

In reality, censorship was mostly self-imposed. In the arts, most personalities and their works inherently leaned "left," so there weren't significant political risks. Without resorting to false propaganda, we maintained a good balance between what was permissible and what was possible.

The few topics that couldn't be published in LIK were related to "dissidents" and writers like Pasternak, Nabokov, Orwell, Solzhenitsyn, and even Steinbeck. However, we did have an article on Anna Akhmatova. Yet, our globally renowned Christo (Hristo Javacheff) was entirely off-limits! Kubrick's film adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* was never mentioned, and it never occurred to me back then that I would translate the book in 1991.

Articles on newly released novels or theatre productions could be prefaced with a short editorial note explaining which particular dark or

decadent aspect of capitalism the author was criticizing. It sounded unconvincing, like the long forewords attached to translated Western novels of the time, but it was a necessary precaution to get published.

The editorial team's unofficial "heretical" commentary was led by the unforgettable designer of the magazine, the artistic graphic artist and painter Stefan Markov, whose free spirit rejected conventions and deceit wherever he sensed them. He worked boldly, broke through propaganda barriers, and called things by their true names.

What is your most vivid memory of the magazine?

We had to master languages in their nuances and also deeply understand the history and culture of the countries we covered. If we ventured into a "foreign" territory for an event, the colleague fluent in that language would help with

contextual insights.

I remember how Albena, with her French, introduced me to Jean Genet, while Viktoria, with her Russian, told us about the Chekhov school, where her mother's (a Russian) relatives had studied—some of whom later disappeared in the gulags. With Yulia, I exchanged English-language materials, but she also worked with Italian and French, which Tolya later took over. I primarily handled German publications, and years later, Emilia and I collaborated on translating the seven Harry Potter books.

How did the world look through the pages of the magazine when you were part of the team?

The world is big, and salvation... lurks around the corner, as long as we believe that culture brings salvation and that creativity embodies humanity. The world beyond was colourful, while Bulgaria was black and white with a bit of red—just like LIK's colour scheme.

What set LIK apart from any other Bulgarian arts and culture publication before 1989 was its content and its very mission—whether intended by its founders or not—to reveal to at least a part of the Bulgarian audience how the free world lived across all continents. Because people's creativity is an illustration of the essence and quality of their lives.

How could the art of the entire world fit within the covers of a single publication in just a week or a month? None of us who compiled LIK ever imagined we would visit, see, or experience the events and places we wrote about. But in the last decade of the 20th century, those opportunities suddenly opened up. LIK even became glossy and full-colour... but its readership

declined, as the salvational information was now around every corner. Travel to the Louvre, the Colosseum, and global events became accessible, and the magazines we once translated were now readily available at newsstands.

Our beloved magazine was put into hibernation "for practical reasons." However, the team remained ready to revive it a few years later—in a stunningly beautiful new form! Though no longer working together in one office, we continued contributing even more intriguing translations and, for the first time, original articles. The new full-colour LIK stood alongside the world's finest publications... and my happy memories of it last until 2013.

How did the changes in Bulgaria's social and political life affect the media?

The freedom of the media in our democratic world comes as a relief for my journalistic conscience. Naturally, such freedom is sometimes abused, but there is always space and interest in high-quality publications and electronic media that, even today, successfully cater to the spiritual needs once met by LIK.

What role should a magazine like LIK play in Bulgaria's cultural life today?

A beautifully curated LIK digest would enrich Bulgaria's cultural landscape—even as a mere "anti-

dote" to vulgarity, hybrid propaganda, and ignorance regarding the lasting values in our brief human existence. With concise, well-selected, and beautifully illustrated information and analyses of global cultural events, a renewed LIK could provide an intellectual identity for young readers and seasoned connoisseurs alike.

Once, the sign on our editorial office door bore a drawing of a white silhouette of a faceless figure with the caption: "This is not LIK!"



Editor-in-Chief Sirma Veleva, Deputy Editor-in-Chief Nina Venova, Mariana Melnishka, Victoria Melamed, and Albena Sharbanova. Photo: Mariana Melnishka's personal archive



Lyudmila Dimova. Personal archive photo

Ms Dimova, when and how did you become part of the team at LIK magazine?

In 2001, Panayot Denev, who was BTA's director general at the time, with whom I had previously worked on the bulletin for the Varna Summer theatre festival, asked me to write a piece about a major exhibition of Christo in Berlin. At the time, I was doing a one-year specialization at the Free University of Berlin. And, overwhelmed by the cultural buzz around me, I continued writing more pieces. After I returned to Bulgaria, I started working as an editor at the Paraleli magazine but kept writing for LIK and eventually became an editor there as well. This continued until 2012 when I was invited to help create the Portal Culture website.

What did your work consist of, and what did your workdays look like?

I did interviews, wrote texts about exhibitions and theatre premieres, assigned and edited texts

Lyudmila Dimova:

LIK Was a Magazine for Slow Reading and Collecting

from other authors, and translated... I liked the variety of tasks at LIK.

How did your time at LIK influence your professional life and personal growth?

It was a very active period for me. I entered the profession in the 90s directly after university. I started as a journalist – reporter and editor in the culture department of the largest daily newspaper in Varna at the time. Joining BTA and LIK was a next step in my career. By then, I had already realized how closed the Bulgarian cultural scene is, and it still is today – so LIK really was a window to the world. Actually, even when I was just a reader of the magazine, it took me to places I couldn't physically reach. But mostly, through it, I got in touch with instances of cultural journalism from around the world and the standards in this field. My first degree is in philology, and I gained my journalistic skills and knowledge through specializations and "stealing the craft." I learned a lot from my colleagues – from Nina Venova, who remembers the magazine from its early period, from Petya Aleksandrova, from my colleagues at Paraleli, with whom I shared common space. Personally, the tolerant attitude I encountered at LIK today somehow obliges me in my interactions with younger colleagues.

Have you witnessed direct or indirect censorship?

I don't remember. Quite the opposite actually, while working on your questionnaire, I came across several old issues of LIK that I keep, and I accidentally found a bold expression by one of the authors that goes beyond today's political correctness. It wasn't censorship that worried me back then, it was more the lack of connection with the readers, the desire to somehow understand who you were writing for. At that time, social networks weren't what they are today, even though they don't provide a reliable picture of readers' attitudes, quite the opposite. In fact, I think that cultural publications in Bulgaria still struggle to reach their readers, and there are still many untrodden paths in this regard.

What is the most vivid memory you still keep from the magazine?

It's hard for me to pinpoint one – my memories are of the everyday work with the colleagues who remained my friends. I would like to mention the photographer at BTA, Bistra Boshnakova, may she rest in peace, who worked with great enthusiasm and talent for the magazine. When I close my eyes, I picture the room at LIK, where the three of us editors worked, the paper proofs, something that I'm sure no one carries around the floors today... I remember conversations about art, exchanging books, going to the movies together. I remember the goodness I encountered and the pleasure of the work.

What did the world look like through the pages of the magazine when you were part of its team?

These were the years at the beginning of the 21st century, around the time Bulgaria joined the EU. Back then, it wasn't easy to take a plane and go to a concert or a big exhibition somewhere in Europe. LIK compensated for this physical impossibility. But the truth is, even today, there is no media platform that covers what is happening in the cultural field even in Europe, a publication where you can read translated texts by journalists from different countries and encounter different perspectives. LIK was doing something similar at that time. Furthermore, it was a magazine for slow reading and collecting. Today, borders are more permeable, people travel much more than they did 20 years ago, but that hasn't changed the media landscape,

which remains confined to the national boundaries of each culture.

I had intuitively found a way to present cultural events abroad through reviews in media there and through the debate they created. Most major media (I mostly worked with the ones in German) were still open on the internet at the time. It was labour-intensive, but it allowed us to capture certain dynamics of the cultural scene, create a broader context, and provide additional information to our readers. On the other hand, we increased the presence of Bulgarian topics and creators in the magazine's pages, trying to find common ground between "here" and "beyond."

How did the changes in Bulgarian society and politics affect the media?

I entered journalism a few years after the 1989 changes. The envi-

ronment was turbulent but quite free. There were still no PR departments at cultural institutions, and I created most texts without intermediaries, through live meetings, sometimes accidental ones. This spontaneity added a special pleasure to journalistic work and made it creative. As a young reporter, I was taught that information shouldn't be gathered over the phone. I should remind you that the internet was not a thing yet. Today, the media environment is different, and new skills are required from journalists. However, the lack of quality press in Bulgaria affects the overall state of society.

What should be the role of a magazine like LIK in the country's cultural life today?

Today, LIK has a different profile, and it is naturally aligned with the role and activities of BTA, which preserves a vast amount of information about Bulgarian culture and history. However, BTA, as a news agency, is also oriented toward the world, so I remain hopeful that one day a platform will appear that will expand the scope – with a view toward the European cultural field.



Mock-up of the LIK May 1999 issue cover, marking the magazine's relaunch.



Rada Sharlandjieva. Personal archive photo

Ms Sharlandjieva, when and how did you become part of the LIK magazine team?

I joined the editorial team of LIK magazine on January 1, 1974. This was my first full-time job. I had graduated in English philology from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, with Bulgarian language and literature as a second major, and I had taken Serbian-Croatian philology as an elective. I had worked for two semesters as a part-time English lecturer at the language school of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, where I was finally convinced of something I had known since my early student years: teaching would not be my path. My whole being was focused on engaging with literature, literary translation, cultural journalism, and publishing. After spending two more years in Paris for specialization in French language and literature, I returned with hopes for a professional start. All my university colleagues had already taken their chosen career paths, many worked at BTA, and a few were already working for or with LIK magazine. They recommended me as an external collaborator to the then leadership of the magazine, represented by Vera Gancheva and Nina Venova. After

Rada Sharlandjieva:

The Years at LIK Became My Second, Third, and Fourth University

a few "trials," I gradually started contributing with translations from the languages I worked with (English, Serbian, and French), notes, information, and summaries from the press in "my" languages, presenting facts and events from "my" regions... This initial familiarization period lasted about five months. Then, an opportunity opened up for me to apply for a permanent position, which involved a written test and an interview with editorial representatives. I took the test, and after that, I was appointed for a probationary period of six months; only after that was I offered a permanent employment contract. I worked at LIK for five and a half years – exciting, turbulent, inspiring, and formative – which became my second, third, and fourth university...

What was your work and what did your working days look like?

My position was reporter-translator. During the longest period of my work at LIK in the same position, there were four of us: Chavdar Chendov, Boyana Petrova, Raymond Wagenstein, and myself. The creative team also included Mariana Nedelcheva – editor, Nina Venova – deputy chief editor, Vera Gancheva – chief editor, and Stefan Markov – artist. The entire editorial office occupied two rooms with a connecting door on the ground floor of BTA. There were no offices. We had eight battered office desks, a few filing cabinets for our fold-

ers, a typewriter at each desk, and several phones for internal lines. Connection to the outside world went through an automatic exchange. In the editors' room, there was also a sofa and two armchairs for meetings and guests, with a low table piled with our huge mail. Cramped, Spartan-like, we barely managed to move around. Well, there were only eight of us! And we worked in shifts: half of us in the morning, all of us together at noon for meetings, planning sessions, task assignments, reporting on completed tasks, urgent actions, etc.; in the afternoon, the other half. The shifts alternated the following week. Officially, the editorial office was operational from 8 AM to 7 PM. In practice, it was longer, with no one counting working hours or overtime; we were only obliged to complete the task we set for ourselves within the deadline – to deliver the next issue of LIK, ready for production and printing, on the scheduled day and hour. However, we had a mandatory monthly production quota – three pages of translation per working day. At that time, the magazine was a weekly, and its volume was around 85 standard pages of text, which required us to constantly assign translations to external collaborators, predominantly from the excellent teams of other editorial offices at BTA. Our task was to present the most valuable cultural processes, phenomena, and facts from the cultural life of the world to the Bulgarian public, as reflected in foreign press. The

rhythm and dynamics were at maximum speed.

How did we do it? Despite the modest working environment, the conditions for professional work were exceptional. Before I get into the specifics of the editorial office, I will just mention BTA's remarkably rich library, which contained the agency's archive, unique dictionaries, encyclopaedias, historical and geographical atlases, studies on politics, history, and the arts, and various specialized reference books in many languages. All of us spent hours there, and under the skilled guidance of our librarians, we managed to find difficult-to-access resources for the analogue era but essential for our work. The foundation of our work was the foreign press. The leadership of BTA and director Lozan Strelkov understood that quality performance required quality materials to work with, so the editorial office of LIK had the right to subscribe annually to both global and Bulgarian periodicals almost without restrictions. (Of course, none of us ever thought of exploiting or abusing our subscription orders. It would have been impossible – the people who approved the requests were well-versed in the field. Moreover, the professional-ethical self-regulation of each of us and all of us together kept our requests strictly focused on the most authoritative print media and specialized publications.) We received newspapers, weekly, and monthly publications from all countries and languages that we handled in the editorial office: French, English, American, Italian, Russian, German, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Serbian. For important countries

and cultures whose languages we didn't speak, like Hungarian, Greek, Finnish, etc., we relied on specialists working at BTA, and for rare languages – on external collaborators. From this ocean of resources, each of us selected the most powerful materials in our respective languages to offer for work. Each issue of LIK had a responsible editor, whom we simply called "person on duty," and who guided the issue from its conceptualization through the creative and production stages until it went to print. The editor on duty collected topic and material proposals from everyone, developed a concept and content plan, and presented it at an editorial meeting. We all shared our opinions on the plan, no one held back critical comments, we added and expanded topics with more proposals, and came up with new ideas. Thus, no issue was "authorial" – its content was a joint product of a common vision, often following passionate debates. Then, the editor on duty assigned tasks to everyone on the team, and we got to work. Let's not forget that, due to the frequency of the periodical and the size of our team, we worked concurrently on four different issues at various stages: one in its conceptual phase, one in task assignment, one in editorial execution and processing, and one in production and printing. We worked in shifts without the chief editor, who directed the whole process and had the final word, though they also took shifts if someone had to leave for an extended trip or other duties. At the end, we openly discussed each printed issue of the magazine in all its aspects, as it was crucial for us to evaluate our work internally and learn from

both our mistakes and successes.

The work was dizzying, all-consuming, bringing meaning, knowledge, skills, criteria, and examples; it confronted us with challenges and mobilized us to overcome them; it developed in us self-demand and self-criticism, and sometimes, a sense of satisfaction; it defined our goals and made us clearly realize the huge responsibility we had towards our readers – to be accurate and honest in our reporting and translations to gain the readers' trust. We worked with global cultural and informational standards and didn't allow ourselves any liberties... Of course, all this was accompanied by tension, emotions, frustrations, successes and blunders, joyful smiles and swallowed (and not swallowed) tears. Luckily, the male members of our team had a great sense of humour. All three of them were real characters. The wit of Stefan, Chavdar, and Roni added colour, laughter, cheer, and mood to the office, and we learned not to get too caught up in our anxieties, not to take ourselves too seriously. Well, there were times when they got emotional, and then we switched roles. In short, throughout this whole experience we shared, we became true friends.

That's how we worked on the magazine issues every day. But there was another deep aspect, the active journalism. As a specialized publication on foreign culture, LIK covered significant events with foreign participation in Bulgaria, both international and individual, with reports, information, and interviews. Depending on their thematic or linguistic expertise, one of us would become a reporter. It's hard for me to list all the names with-



Sofia, September 25, 1986. Advertising image of BTA's issue. Photo: Georgi Kazakov, BTA

out digging through old issues, but during that period, many world-renowned artists visited Bulgaria, and some of their performances became global events. My personal meetings and interviews with writers, poets, artists, and theatre and film professionals remain memorable.

The work was most visible when the agency sent a special correspondent from LIK to major international cultural forums. In this regard, BTA's management highly valued the need for Bulgarian journalistic presence and supported LIK's aspirations within the possible limits. Our representatives covered international literary events, film and theatre festivals in Cannes, Moscow, Karlovy Vary, Warsaw, Tashkent, Prague, Belgrade... At various times, I was a special correspondent for LIK at the Moscow Film Festival, twice at BITEF in Bel-

grade, at the International Theatre Festival in Warsaw, at the PEN Congress in Belgrade, and at the Poetry Nights in Struga. Unforgettable, unique, fruitful encounters.

Without hesitation, I would define the period during which I worked at the magazine as the first golden era of LIK. Built on the founders' concept, the team, of which I was a small part, opened wide windows to the world for Bulgarian readers (back then, they were numerous). The need for the magazine was immense – the unimaginable circulation figures today speak for themselves.

Long years after I left LIK, I worked for the magazine again as an external collaborator. This was during the team of Petya Aleksandrova – Lyudmila Dimova – Nina Venova, which I would consider the second golden era of the publication. They implemented an updated concept for LIK, placing Bulgarian culture and arts on the global platform and resisting the pressure to turn the magazine into a lifestyle claim. I don't know what the circulation numbers were back then, but I have every reason to say that there was a significant need for LIK as it was at that time. Its closure was a national disgrace.

I hope the third transformation of LIK will find and protect its identity. I wish for it to become a much-awaited publication. I sincerely wish for that.

How did your time at LIK affect your professional life and personal growth?

Fundamentally. In terms of attitude toward work: Vera Gancheva demanded and imposed absolute responsibility to-

ward the commitment – precision, fact-checking, and quality of execution. She didn't tolerate even the slightest slack. She herself was exceptionally erudite, and no detail escaped her. Her critiques – sharp, sometimes overly sharp – were always specific and never aimed at insulting the person, but rather at stimulating their abilities. And in most cases, they mobilized your drive to prove yourself. For me, and I believe for my colleagues, this maxim of 100% responsibility toward the task, which we all initially carried within ourselves, became ironclad and permanent. My involvement in LIK also affected my personal life by raising my conscious drive to constantly expand my knowledge, skills, and understanding, to explore new worlds through written words in space and time, to understand other perspectives on the world and current events, and to seek truths and values. All the professional, cultural, journalistic, and social experience I gained at LIK, as well as the primary information on political realities, became an invaluable foundational factor in the subsequent stages of my journey: 13 years at the Narodna Kultura publishing house, advancing through all stages of professional development from a trainee-editor on a half-time probationary period, to editor, head of the Dramaturgy department, head of the Poetry and Dramaturgy editorial section, deputy editor-in-chief, and editor-in-chief of the publishing house; cultural advisor to Vice President Blaga Dimitrova and President Zhelyu Zhelev; coordinator of the Balkan Political Club; advisor on cultural projects at the European Commission Delegation in Sofia; deputy editor-in-chief of the Bulgarian edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Have you witnessed direct or indirect censorship?

Not direct censorship – neither toward me nor my colleagues. I'm not sure what you mean by indirect censorship. If you're asking whether there was interference in the translated texts, the answer is definitely no. We strictly adhered to translation ethics. When we made edits, we always labelled them "With omissions." When we arranged the selection and organization of the facts from the sources, we always indicated – "Based on materials from..." but the translated and quoted facts were exactly as in the originals. Perhaps you're referring to the selection of topics or whether there were any taboos. Of course, there were taboos. As there are today, everywhere in the legal world. For

example, the regulations of all current European literary and translation support competitions state that the work submitted must not contain hateful ideology, must not degrade human dignity, must not preach hate in general, or hate specifically toward..., and must not incite or propagate Nazism, racism, etc. All institutions, both state and international, defend universal human rights, humanism, and humanity. These are the mission and purpose of the institutions we create to safeguard our values. The BTA, and the LIK unit at that time and even now, are state institutions. Every intelligent person carries and follows these fundamental taboos within themselves, and there's no need for anyone to enforce them. The free market is a different matter – there, you can find

everything, from masterpieces to obscurantism. As for what kind of freedom and happiness the free market brings, I cannot say. If you're asking about ideological taboos – no one imposed banned names or lists on us. But as reasonably intelligent people, we were aware of the potential degrees of ideological acceptability, and yes, to publish some of the more "strong" materials without provoking consequences, we would write introductory notes with the "correct direction." I don't think anyone read them at that time, except those who needed to. I don't know if we bear any guilt for that. Back then, there were no open verbal uprisings in the public space. For me, that period was about maturing through art, awareness, and thought. That's what we were doing.

Advertising image of LIK magazine, 1985.



LIK 2025

What is the most vivid memory you have from the magazine?

I don't have just one vivid memory. All the days of those five and a half years are vivid for me. But here's a brief sketch of the bright personalities from the remarkable environment at BTA, at least from the part I got to know. The LIK team I was part of was made up of younger members. In the most important editorial office at BTA, International News, in a huge hall on the top floor, the "lions," the top journalists, worked around the clock, monitoring the world wire agency reports in real-time. I only knew by name and reputation those working in English, who had already translated and introduced major names from American and English literature to the Bulgarian audience. At that time, we held great respect and admiration for these authorities, and I was no exception. So when these figures, who were like stars to me back then, started stopping by the editors' rooms to offer material, I was absolutely stunned. They were Alfred Krispin, Dimitri Ivanov, Petko Bocharov, Todor Valchev, and Krastan Dyankov, who had already retired but would regularly come by to visit his old place. Each one of them was an incredible communicator, always sharing anecdotes, stories about books, incidents, or just some fun nonsense. We would drop everything and listen. Gradually, it became the case that – week after week, sometimes unexpectedly – we'd meet in the staff canteen with one, two, or three of them, depending on their complicated

shifts. We would quickly crowd together at the biggest table and would start talking. Our conversations were humorous, serious, professional, personal, paradoxical, adventurous, filled with tales from their business trips around the world. It was generous, deep, human, and enriching communication, like life lessons wrapped in laughter. From their artistic self-irony about their successes and failures in work and life, I learned to accept my own missteps and value them for the fortification and growth they bring, from them I learned the peace of understanding that the more you know, the more you realize you don't know. In the early stages of a professional career, this helps a lot.

What did the world look like through the pages of the magazine when you were part of its team?

That era was one of peace, a spiritual opening between our world and the West, and from the West to us. It never crossed our minds that peace, at least in Europe, could ever be temporary. The apocalypses were over. Physical and other barriers remained, but ideas, thoughts, and values could no longer be stopped, and it seemed that no one was even trying to stop them anymore. LIK conveyed, "translated" values, and the rising generations believed they would let the sun shine through. We didn't think specifically about what would come after. When you add youth to the mix, everything seemed meaningful, worthy, and beautiful. Of course, culture recognized the deep, dark currents.

It warned us. But back then, we didn't imagine that the darkness would engulf us so monstrously.

How did the changes in society and politics in Bulgaria affect the media?

Catastrophically. We all see that. I hardly need to describe it.

What should be the role of a magazine like LIK in today's cultural life of the country?

Today, the role of authentic cultural media is crucial not only for the growth of a nation but for its very existence. But the nation must need these media. If the nation is in an anti-culture wave, market mechanisms will resurrect neither the authentic media, like LIK, nor their role. However, Bulgaria's small cultural community must come to life in order to pass on what has been created through time. This is a state task. All national cultural achievements in our history and in all civilizations are directly or indirectly the product of statesmanship thinking – shall we recall alphabets, enlightenment missions, writing centres, the creation of academies, museums, theatres, and libraries from the dawn of civilization until today? It's time for some to wake up. I do not know if it's possible or how.



Raymond Wagenstein. Personal archive photo

Raymond Wagenstein:

LIK Was an Island of Freedom among Other Media

Mr Wagenstein, when and how did you become part of the LIK magazine team?

I joined LIK in 1975 and worked for the magazine for almost four years.

What was your job and what did your workdays look like?

I translated from German and Russian, conducted interviews, and wrote texts.

How did your time at LIK affect your professional life and personal growth?

BTA received many foreign newspapers and magazines – more than the National Library. I learned a lot about cultural life around the world. Of course, I didn't just read materials on this topic, but also on various others, so I became the most informed person among my acquaintances.

Were you a witness to direct or indirect censorship?

There were such cases. I specifically remember one incident. We were punished because we published an article about the Belgian ballet. It turned out that the author

had had a slightly dissident interview with Blaga Dimitrova, which we hadn't been informed about. But we should have known. They were closely monitoring to ensure only ideologically "correct" materials were published. Despite this, LIK was somewhat of an island of freedom among the other media. That's why it was difficult to find, even though its circulation exceeded 20,000.

What is the brightest memory you still hold from the magazine?

My work was quite interesting, but I was bothered by the almost obsessive requirement to adhere to formal discipline. You could have completed your work, met your quota (there was a quota for submitted pages), but you would still have to sit for nine hours, and that's it. That's why in the afternoons, I often played chess with Stefan Prodev, who was the editor-in-chief of the Paraleli magazine.

How did the world look through the pages of the magazine when you were part of the team?

Diverse, interesting, and cultural.

How did the changes in Bulgaria's social and political life affect the media?

The media developed very strongly, especially at the beginning. Later, some started to decline. Unfortunately, even today, we still encounter self-censorship and dependencies.

What should the role of a magazine like LIK be in the cultural life of the country today?

Above all, efforts should be made to ensure there is some distribution, even if limited. I recently wanted to buy a particular issue, but it turned out to be impossible. The entire circulation went to libraries.



Sofia, August 9, 1989. Advertising image of LIK magazine. Photo: Ruslan Donev, BTA



Yuri Lazarov. Personal archive photo

Yuri Lazarov:

We at LIK Not Only Wrote a Magazine but Also Organized Events

Mr Lazarov, when and how did you become part of the LIK magazine team?

You could say I was part of the LIK team even before I started working there. Because I was one of its many loyal readers. At the time, the magazine was a window for us into world literature, music, visual arts, cinema, theatre... LIK was published weekly, and each issue had a short story. That's how I got to know authors I hadn't even heard of, like Horacio Quiroga, that grim Uruguayan, and his *The Feather Pillow*...

I actually started there when Maxim Minchev invited me to work at BTA and be in charge of the magazines – because back then, in addition to LIK, there were *Paraleli* and *100%*. That was back in 2003.

One of the great things about LIK was that it didn't have an editor-in-chief, poor thing. It was managed by three talented women – Nina Venova, Petya Aleksandrova, and Lyudmila Dimova. The colleagues from *Paraleli* and the whole agency offered a lot of support. There was also a small circle, which included me and Borislav Kolev, the editor-in-chief of *Paraleli*. *Paraleli* had an editor-in-chief, but that was important.

What did your work consist of, and what did your workdays look like?

Even before I started, I had ideas for what could change in the magazine. But delicately. There's nothing worse in the job than someone coming in and saying: "What's been, has been." Thanks to Orlin Hristov, whom I invited to work on the design of the publications, LIK's appearance changed for the better. Bulgarian culture was placed on a larger area, even on the cover. Extensive interviews with Anri Kulev, Ivo Hadjimishiev, Nedko Solakov... My favourite section, *Last Page*, came into being, as well as *Second Page*, which I also love. From time to time, I wrote there... That sort of thing.

Otherwise, like everywhere else – meetings and phone calls with authors, discussing ideas for the next issue with Nina, Petya, and Lucy. The difference between them and me was that I dealt with the nasty part of the process – fees, distribution, printers.

And the days in several editorial offices of a news agency are the same – from morning till night near *Tsarigradsko Shose*. You don't have time to look around. I decided to walk home and buy books from the *Helikon* bookstore at the Bulgaria Hotel once, and when I reached the Russian Church – what do I see? The writers' café next to it was no longer there.

How did your time at LIK affect your professional life and personal growth?

During that time, the most enriching thing for me was interacting with amazing people. We at LIK didn't just write a magazine; we also organized events. First, we started with my friend Alek Popov's project, *Companion of the Radical Thinker*. It appeared after much struggle with state funding and was published as a book. We distributed *The Magnificent Poems* by Boreto Rokanov with the magazine, and we held premieres at the BTA Press Club. Then, based on Alek's idea, writers from *The Neighbourhood* (that's what I call the Balkans) started writing in the *Last Page* section. Unbelievable talents – Dubravka Ugrešić, Nenad Veličković, Aleksandar Prokopiev, Ivica Djeparoski, Anastassis Vistonitis, Yljet Alička, Nora Luga, Svetislav Basara... We published a book with these stories – *The Golden Feathers of the Peninsula*, invited the authors to Sofia, and it was very nice at the Red House with Plamena Getova and Miro Kosev, who were reading the texts. What is sad is that to this day, many people in Bulgaria know who Ceca Veličković is, but don't know who Nenad is.

Should I continue? ... After *The Golden Feathers of the Peninsula*, we invited writers from the Black

Sea region. Back then, it was still possible to meet (because we invited them too, but by the sea) writers from Ukraine, Russia, and Georgia – Tanya Malyarchuk, Gleb Shulpyakov, and Dato Barbakadze; as well as Cezar Paul-Bădescu, Nermin Mollaoğlu... And here's another book – The Golden Feathers of the Black Sea.

The next idea was for Last Page to feature Bulgarian writers living outside of Bulgaria – Ruzha Lazarova, Nina Bozhidarova, Kolyo Nikolov...

In LIK, writers like Hristo Karastoyanov, Boyko Lambovski, Zahari Karabashliev, Georgi Gospodinov, Lyuben Petkov wrote. Even Georgi Lozanov did.

Most of them are still my friends. Even those who look down on us from above. So, I hope that from interacting with these incredible people, I've at least grown a little as a person.

Have you been a witness to direct or indirect censorship?

No. It's impossible for me. I can't censor anyone, and if someone tries to censor me, I simply break free, and – poof, I'm gone. Oh, there was an attempt from a very high place for a relatively famous woman to be pushed as the editor-in-chief of LIK, but I resisted strongly. What editor-in-chief of LIK? As I said before, there is no editor-in-chief...

What is the brightest memory you still hold from the magazine?

I wish there were just one to answer briefly. But there isn't. Still, one memory stands out. A plein air event we organized in Pomorie – Sun and Breeze: In the Season of the Flounder. The idea was to invite seven artists and seven writers, and – of course – the former to paint,

and the latter to write. Andrey Daniel, Bozhidar Boyadzhiev, Dinko Stoev, Stefan Bozhkov, Hristo Vachev, Todor Terziev, Georgi Dinev... Kristin Dimitrova, Silviya Choleva, Kalin Donkov, Jordan Popov, Emil Andreev, Palmi Ranchev, Kalin Terziyski... Priceless interaction with these people over those seven days – that's my brightest memory.

Also, a performance by Paraskeva Djukelova at the Apollonia Festival in Sozopol. She was painting strange things barefoot in the yard of the old school in the old town. We were presenting LIK.

How did the world look through the pages of the magazine when you were part of the team?

Quite different and somehow more decent than the one near Tsarigradsko Shose, or in the kingdom at large. You realize that good and right things are happening around you. For example, that there's an important profession in publishing – editor. It had been forgotten in our country along with the profession of proofreader. And they're important. It's good that lately, they've reappeared.

How did the changes in Bulgaria's social and political life affect the media?

I'm trying to find a difference between social and political here. But since I can't, I arrive at the famous conclusion: the difference is the same. So, to answer your question: in short, badly.

Some daily newspapers are still trying their best, but something isn't working. They are printed out of stubbornness and with many professional compromises. Only pensioner and ultra-yellow newspapers are winning. Where is my favourite Standart? What happened to Sega? Dnevnik? Where is Egoist?

What should the role of a magazine like LIK be in the cultural life of the country today?

Only one: to exist. Because the easiest thing is to kick it for non-artistic reasons.

(Outside of the questions: I've probably missed many names and events in my answers, so I apologize. But still, this is nine years' worth. One could not remember everything, and I never kept notes.)



The cover of the LIK March 2000 issue.

Celebrities Gracing the Pages of LIK

Over the decades, the pages of LIK have introduced numerous world-renowned figures, offering Bulgarian readers the unique opportunity to engage with some of the greatest talents in literature, visual arts, cinema, performing arts, and music. Thanks to its long-standing presence in the media, the BTA magazine has captured some of the earliest interviews of rising stars, allowing readers to follow both their professional and personal journeys over the years.

Those international creators often connect with Bulgarian audiences through interviews conducted by the LIK team or BTA correspondents, or at times, through collaborations with foreign media outlets.

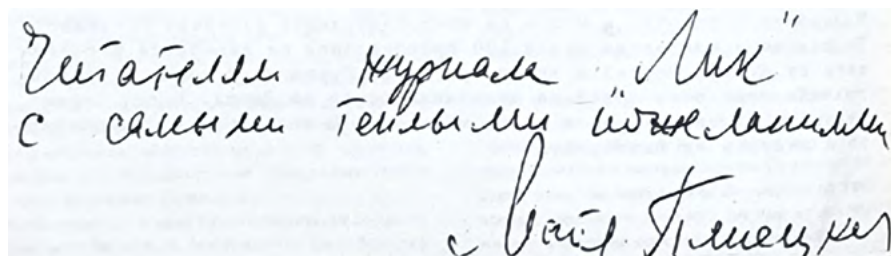
In this anniversary issue of LIK, we spotlight 11 prominent individuals, revisiting their stories as they were originally portrayed in the magazine during the years their interviews were first published.



Sofia, December 27, 1988. A LIK magazine advertisement. Photo: Dimitar Altankov, BTA

1968

Fifteen minutes with Maya Plisetskaya



Maya Plisetskaya's autograph for LIK readers: "To the readers of LIK magazine, with my warmest wishes!"

In LIK's December issue of 1968, we find an exclusive interview with ballerina Maya Plisetskaya, conducted by Henry Savov, BTA correspondent in Havana.

"There are events in art that shine for a while and then fade, leaving only a faint memory, or they disappear without a trace. But there are others that captivate us from the very first moment and hold us captive for a lifetime. Plisetskaya's art belongs to the latter," Henry Savov writes. He mentions that this is the ballerina's second visit to Cuba and shares that he was able to catch a glimpse of her at the end of one of her rehearsals, "stealing" a little of her break time with the help of her brother Azari, a long-time soloist in the National Ballet of Cuba.

Here's an excerpt from their conversation:

Maya sits on the rocking chair, resting after rehearsing a difficult fragment from the ballet Carmen, created especially for her by the renowned Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso.

"For me, Carmen holds great significance," says Plisetskaya. "I would even say it is my creation, my child, an achievement I am truly in love with. In this context, my new visit to Cuba is also very significant because, for the first time, I will perform this ballet not on a Soviet stage. For me, Carmen is an extraordinary ballet, and its creator, Alberto Alonso—the only choreographer in the world who has created a ballet specifically for me—demonstrates in it the maturity of a true dramatist."

What do you think is the role of ballet today?

"I would say that the question concerns the artist—in this case, the ballet artist—and how they should reflect the era they live in through their art. In my opinion, they have a duty to reflect their era. This is their great mission."

What are your impressions of Bulgarian ballet?

"Oh, to be honest, rather faint. I have been to Bulgaria a few times. The last time I was there was some 7-8 years ago, and since then, I haven't had the opportunity to see Bulgarian ballet. But I assume your ballet has developed, because it impressed me even back then, and I believe it has great potential."

Maya expresses her regret that she cannot participate in the international ballet competition organized in Varna. "Who knows, maybe one day I'll participate as a jury



Plisetskaya in a reproduction from the pages of LIK issue 52, 1968.

member," she laughs.

I decide to wrap up with a request for her to write a few words for our readers, who are also great admirers of her art. Maya takes the pen I hand her, and with the same

humility with which she answered my questions—the humility of great artists—she writes on the blank page: "To the readers of LIK magazine, with my warmest wishes!"

1969

The Magical Realism of Gabriel García Márquez



Gabriel García Márquez gives his autograph for LIK, surrounded by Vasil Popov and Rumen Stoyanov. The inscription reads: "To the readers of LIK—from yet another of its grateful victims."

In the spring of 1969, LIK introduced us to the 40-year-old Gabriel García Márquez, one of the finest writers in Latin America. He hails from Aracataca, a tropical village in Colombia named after a banana plantation that is no longer there. His magical childhood unfolds in a large house filled with ghost stories told by his grandmother and memories of the civil war recounted by his grandfather. The writer shares that his extraordinary childhood ended when he was 8 years old—his grandmother passed away, and young Gabriel left for Bogotá to study.

But Márquez's birthplace never left his memory and imagination. All its features were transported into Macondo—the imaginary village that appears in his first novel, *Leaf Storm*, and reaches its pinnacle in *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude published two years ago. The novel caused a sensation and was hailed as a masterpiece.

Gabriel García Márquez himself admits that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was meant to be his first book. He began writing it when he was 18 but quickly realized he was not ready yet. He needed to master the craft of writing, to gain experience and develop the right technique. He also needed to discover the language that could tell the story of Latin America, as he felt ordinary Spanish was not sufficient.

The writer views Latin America as "completely fantastic, even in its everyday life," and his characters reflect this fantastical reality. "Latin American reality is peculiar, and literature is its reflection," Márquez says, but he adds that he prefers the term 'magical realism'—a term used by writers Car-

pentier and Asturias to describe novels where reality and fantasy intertwine.

Márquez approaches his novels and novellas without a preconceived plan or knowing where the story will lead him. "I put all my strength on the scales, release my obsessive thoughts and passions, and stop reasoning. At the moment, the book itself is not what matters but the path it reveals to me," the writer shares. According to him, stories should be told without any prejudice. "One must open the door wide to fiction, even to all the extremes of imagination. Writing should be driven by a single concern—what will happen to the characters tomorrow," he firmly believes. And the rest... he leaves to the critics.

* * *

In issue 47 from 1982, we find a brief remark by Rumen Stoyanov about his meeting with Gabriel García Márquez in Sofia. He recounts the opportunity to interview the writer and even obtain an autograph for the readers of LIK.

In it, Márquez writes: "To the readers of LIK—from yet another of its grateful victims."

1972

Agatha Christie does not condone violence for the sake of violence



Illustration by Stefan Markov for Agatha Christie's story "The Chocolate Box" published in LIK issue 12, 1973.

In 1972, the magazine launched its Club LIK column. The editorial team was hoping that members of the new initiative would include prominent cultural figures from all continents, as well as, of course, the numerous LIK readers and con-

tributors. The club's activities primarily consisted of conversations with writers, artists, composers, and directors who visited Bulgaria or were interviewed by the magazine's correspondents in various corners of the globe.

Asked to explain how she succeeded in a literary genre considered to be typically 'male' since crime and violence are essential elements of detective fiction, Agatha Christie told Kolev she does not believe that writing detective stories is a typically 'male' phenomenon. In her words, women read detective stories no less than men. So why shouldn't they write them, she asked rhetorically. She shared that when she and her siblings were aged between 12 and 18, they would read the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Christie shared that after a few of her poems had been published and

learned new words. Later, my attention shifted to other languages, and my distant encounters with Agatha Christie became less frequent, but I never stopped marvelling at how, at 60, 70, 75, and even 80 years old, the writer never ceased to work and create."

He adds that, for her 80th birthday, the writer delighted her many fans with her 80th novel, *Passenger to Frankfurt*, in which she demonstrated that she had not fallen out of touch "with the pulse and issues of our time."

The guest of Club LIK in 1972's issue 12 was Agatha Christie, who was interviewed by Svetoslav Kolev. Kolev shares with LIK: "Years ago, as a self-taught beginner polyglot, I started learning English using a very simple method. I crammed two to three thousand words into my head and was reading detective novels. That is how I became acquainted with the works of Agatha Christie. I devoured them one after another. And, as paradoxical as it may sound, I gained more from them than from classics like Dickens or Brontë, because I did not skip a line in order to grasp the intrigue, constantly reached for the dictionary, and continually

to be filled with brutality and cruelty. She emphasized that in her own books, violence never takes place for violence's sake.

When asked if her numerous novels not only entertained readers but also encouraged them to fight against crime and violence, Christie remarked that 'entertained' was not the most fitting word to describe her connection with her readers. She shared that a significant portion of the letters she received came from people who found solace in her books during challenging times or illnesses of loved ones. These readers explained how her mysteries provided temporary relief

at least three of her novels were rejected by publishers, she decided to try writing detective fiction. She explained that she approached eight publishers, receiving rejections from all of them, until John Lane from The Bodley Head finally approved her book—though only after the manuscript had sat in his drawer for nearly a year. Christie admitted being both surprised and delighted by this development, noting it was how her journey as a detective novelist began. She also expressed her belief that violence is not necessary in storytelling, adding that she never enjoyed the American type of detective novels, which she found

to be filled with brutality and cruelty. She emphasized that in her own books, violence never takes place for violence's sake.

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from their woes.

She mentioned that her readers often expressed gratitude for the comfort that her books brought them, with many of these readers being well into their eighties or nineties. While young people also enjoyed her works, Christie admitted she was not not certain to what extent her stories could prevent the

rising tide of crime.

She aligned with the opinion of writer Dorothy Sayers, who viewed crime fiction as a modern continuation of medieval morality plays. These stories condemned wrongdoing, upheld justice by punishing the guilty and vindicating the innocent, and ultimately stood on the side of fairness. Christie emphasized that

her iconic characters, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, exemplified the struggle against crime, proving that their efforts were not only a pursuit but also a triumph over evil.

1973

Kurt Vonnegut: 2 B R O 2 B

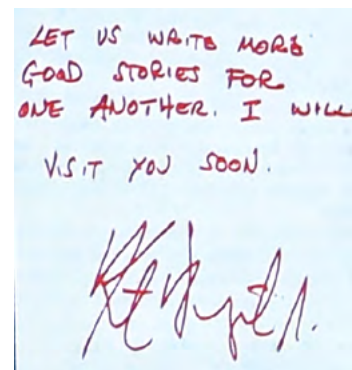
"The formula above, placed as a title, appears strange and indecipherable. It is unlikely that one would guess that it refers to the famous Hamlet question, expressed in this extremely concise manner by Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer and a devoted philanthropist, a character from the novels Slaughterhouse-Five and God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater by Kurt Vonnegut. We ran into him [the writer] in the foyer of the building where, the next day, the International Writers' Meeting was set to begin," writes Vera Gancheva in issue 24 from 1973. She adds that she recognized him from the numerous photographs published in periodicals and reasoned that it might be significantly more difficult to request an interview later. So, she decided to seize the opportunity and secure his consent during this unexpected encounter. "Vonnegut not only nodded affirmatively but actually led me towards the lobby, which unmistakably meant he had no objections to our conversation taking place immediately. This, in turn, sparked new concerns in me, as I did not feel prepared and had no questions in mind," Gancheva admits. However, the exceptionally witty and candid interlocutor managed to dispel all her doubts within the first few minutes of the conversation, which continued until late in the night.

The editor of LIK managed to ask him, for example, how he envisioned life on Earth in 20 or 50 years—whether such a time span would be sufficient for fundamental changes in our consciousness and mentality. Nature will suffer, he replied, but, on the other hand, he voiced hope people would remain the same – whether good or bad, selfish or selfless, he was hopeful that they would always be dreamers...

"Vonnegut speaks slowly and carefully, as if weighing his words on invisible scales to determine their true value. He is direct in his judgments, warm-hearted, and generous in his interactions with others," Gancheva writes.



Kurt Vonnegut. Photo reproduced from LIK issue 24, 1973.



Vonnegut gives his autograph for LIK: "Let's write more beautiful works for each other. Soon I will visit you."

In Gancheva's interview, Vonnegut shared that he likely became a writer by vocation. However, he originally prepared for a completely different career, as he was deeply interested in the natural sciences and studied chemistry and anthropology. He admitted that he had never felt a strong inner need for fiction and hardly read anything in his early years. For instance, he only came across Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* after turning 30, at which point he thought it would have been great to have read the novel much earlier. Nevertheless, he stated that his lack of deep literary knowledge had never hindered his work, although it sometimes made him feel insecure, especially in the company of fellow writers who effortlessly played with names, dates, titles, facts, and concepts.

When asked about what it meant to be a writer in the United States, Vonnegut explained that the American Establishment repressed many cultural figures who had the audacity to openly criticize it. However, he pointed out a notable exception—fiction writers, poets, and playwrights were not persecuted, regardless of how angry, heretical, or rebellious their works might be. In contrast, journalists, teachers, and others were imprisoned and had their basic human and civil rights restricted, but not writers.

Vonnegut speculated that the explanation for this paradox might lie in a simple childhood rhyme that he had remembered from an early age:

Sticks and stones
may break my bones,
but words shall never hurt me.
He noted that official circles in

the United States did not take artistic creation seriously. Their narrow-mindedness and reactionary attitudes prevented them from recognizing the explosive potential that a printed line could contain. He argued that this was evident in every major social and political conflict in American society. Referring to the Vietnam War, he stated that almost every honest writer in the country had spoken out against the government's aggressive policies. Novels, poems, stories, and plays had been used as a form of protest, carrying a detonation force no less powerful than that of a hydrogen bomb.

However, Vonnegut described the actual effect of this supposed detonation force on the political leadership as equivalent to dropping a giant banana cream pie from a height of ten metres. He emphasized that for a writer, it was crucial to know that their coded message, expressed in ordinary words, reached its intended audience, that every tone of their voice was heard, and that every expressed opinion was respected. Unfortunately, he and his fellow writers in America were deprived of this sense of validation. The disregard shown to them by those who most needed to listen was both painful and demoralizing.

At the same time, Vonnegut expressed hope, stating that even if they had failed to change political

policies, no one could take away the consolation and possibility that their books had influenced thousands, maybe even millions of people. He speculated that their writing might have managed to penetrate the thick shell insulating public consciousness from pressing societal issues and that, in the end, writers might not be as insignificant as they sometimes felt.

When asked whether he placed strong emphasis on the formal structure of his books and whether he spent a long time considering their 'external form', Vonnegut likened writing to ski jumping. He explained that once a writer 'leaped from the platform', they had no choice but to land somehow—there was no time for overthinking. He believed that a writer's style and skill were shaped not only by innate talent but also by experience and practice, just like in sports. His own approach, he said, was simply to dress his thoughts and emotions in appropriate words without consciously structuring them. However, he speculated that somewhere in his brain, an invisible mechanism was likely "editing" his manuscript as he wrote.

Finally, when asked about his current projects, Vonnegut revealed that he had recently completed his latest novel, which was set to be published in New York. He had titled it *Breakfast of Champions* with the subtitle *Goodbye Blue Monday*.



1973

Kenneth Clark's Advice on How to Look at Works of Art

According to Kenneth Clark, works of art should be viewed with respect, excitement, and focus. The art historian, featured in the December 1973 issue of LIK, believed that one must be intuitively alerted by some secret inner feeling that the painting before them has something to say.

Kenneth Clark was born in 1903 and is one of the most authoritative experts on the history of visual arts. He dedicated many years to academic, teaching, and public work. Notable scholarly studies of his *The Gothic Revival*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Looking at Pictures*. Clark was also the author of dozens of television programmes about visual art.

"The name and vast knowledge of the British art historian are well known both to the readers of LIK and to Bulgarian television viewers, primarily thanks to the series of lectures entitled *Civilization*, published in the pages of our magazine and broadcast by Bulgarian Television," the December 1973 issue of LIK reads.

Clark viewed as a positive trend the increasing number of monographs on artists and studies on various fields of art in recent decades. In his opinion, a greater number of works also means more readers familiar with visual art. However, he acknowledged that authors sometimes become overly detailed in their analyses or focus on insignificant problems.

The art historian stated that he had attempted to use psychoanalytic methods in studying an artist and interpreting their works, but this had not led to any results. In most cases, he believed, psychoanalysis leads down roundabout paths, obscuring the true goal of revealing an artist's creative personality in many but

ultimately insignificant dimensions.

He openly admitted that he finds it difficult to understand the visual art created in the last 25 years. His attitude toward the works of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg was relatively positive. However, when it came to the most radical avant-gardists, his heart rate would spike. Clark conceded that this might be a sign of aging, yet he could not accept their experiments.

According to him, the role of museums in contemporary cultural life is to demonstrate to visitors the perfection that human genius is capable of achieving. Additionally, he believed that museums have an educational function—they cultivate aesthetic appreciation.

1974

Ray Bradbury: I Would Like to Blow Up the Mirror-Black Skyscrapers!

Readers of our magazine had the opportunity to meet American writer Ray Bradbury in issue 45 of 1974. Toma Tomov introduced him in the Club LIK column.

The journalist and the writer had scheduled a meeting at a Beverly Hills address at 1 p.m. After arriving in a yellow taxi, Tomov noticed:

"There was no one in the hallway on the sixth floor. The last door on the right, labelled 'Ray Bradbury', was wide open. There was no one inside. A huge plush giraffe, covered in large patches and, for some reason, coloured like rosewood, occupied half of the first room, with a bicycle tossed on top of it. The walls were adorned with

maps of other planets and images of people with yellow pupils. Everything else was books. In the middle of the room, next to the desk, there was a suitcase packed and ready to go. Voices were heard from outside—first a man's, then a woman's reply. Moments later, Ray Bradbury quickly entered the room. The conversation began..."



Ray Bradbury says for LIK: "I would be glad if people from all over the world get closer and get to know each other, if they begin to 'trade' with humanism..." The writer is in his office with Bulgarian journalist Toma Tomov. Photo reproduced from LIK issue 45, 1974.

Ray Bradbury shared how his journey as a writer began, recalling that he was just 12 years old—a wonderful age, as he put it. He felt fortunate to have started writing so early, knowing that some people have to wait much longer for that moment of inspiration. His love for literature stemmed from his fascination with fairy tales, and Greek and Roman myths from a very young age. By the age of 8, he was already captivated by the works of Alfred Bohn and Edgar Allan Poe, later moving on to the comic books about Buck Rogers. As a teenager, he became enthralled by the writings of Edgar Burroughs and John Curry. He acknowledged the profound influence these stories had on his development, combined with his deep love for all magical things—whether it was the magic of the stage, inventions, the future, architecture, or illustrations. He was particularly drawn to visual imagery, especially cinema. This passion for storytelling and creativity naturally led him to start writing.

Bradbury reminisced about his early attempts at writing, explaining that his first works were essentially continuations of the Tarzan books, which he also il-

lustrated himself. He wrote every single day—radio scripts, school theatre plays—and by the time he graduated high school, he had already written close to a million words. However, he admitted that the results of these efforts were rather poor. His early works even included poetry, though he never considered it his strength. By the time he was 19 or 20, he had devoured the works of most contemporary science fiction writers, along with those of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and later, Aldous Huxley. He was an avid reader of magazines such as *Science*, *Invention*, and *Popular Mechanics*, which fuelled his curiosity about how machines could change the world. He also lived through the golden age of radio before witnessing its gradual decline with the rise of television. All of these technological marvels, which he saw unfold in real-time, felt like they were in his blood—he experienced them with his whole being, knowing he was truly a child of his era.

Reflecting on his early years as a writer, Bradbury described the hardships of his childhood. His family was poor, and his father often found himself out of work. Despite this, his father encouraged

his 'magical tales' and even staged them in various clubs. The family would sometimes attempt to read each other's thoughts, and he believed that being poor was a challenge that stimulated imagination. When one lacked something, they had to create it for themselves. If he couldn't afford to go to the movies, he would imagine a movie of his own. In other words, he learned to discover things on his own. A significant part of his upbringing took place in the public library of his hometown, which he considered his true place of birth, growth, and education, since he never attended college. He never had a room of his own to retreat to for writing; instead, he wrote in the living room while his parents and brother listened to the radio. For this reason, he found it hard to understand writers who claimed they needed a special space to work. In his view, if one truly wanted to write, they would write—regardless of poverty or family circumstances. Nothing could stand in the way of true creative passion.

When asked which of his works he valued the most, Bradbury admitted it was a difficult question. However, he expressed a particular fondness for *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He described it as a kind of super-metaphor for everything in life—a grand statement, he acknowledged, but one he only realized after the book was already written. It was only in hindsight that he understood he had woven together themes of life and death, love, aging, and foolishness. All of these ideas were present in the book, but it was only upon finishing it that he could step back and say, "Wow, did I really write that?"

When asked what message he

would send to Bulgarian readers who know and love him as a creator, Bradbury said that one can only respond to love with love. He shared that he was always de-

lighted to learn that readers enjoyed his books, because it meant he was not alone but represented millions of people around the world who were very much like

him—people who dreamed of the same things he did and nurtured the same hopes for a bright future.

1976

Karl Lagerfeld – The Arbiter of Fashion

In issue 12, we find an interview with fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, described by LIK's editorial team as one of the most gifted and authoritative arbiters of fashion in Paris.

Lagerfeld's pool of inspiration is boundless. Sometimes he would be inspired by a gesture or something else seemingly unrelated to fashion. When designing his pieces, he borrows elements from the world around him, but they are always filtered through his personal perceptions. Illustrating and drawing are in his past, as he now opts to only sketch his designs. He even claims to have acquired the precision of a real stenographer.

According to Karl Lagerfeld, people in his profession should not speak much. Their thoughts and

principles should stand out clearly and decisively in their creations, not in their statements. "My colleagues should stay silent and create," he insists.

For Lagerfeld, this craft requires 20 years of hard study, followed by a self-imposed amnesia, in order to create purely on instinct. "Once you start forcing yourself to be logical and functional, your work becomes suspicious," he explains. He believes that on a subconscious level an artist seeks to embody in their work the elements that have marked their life, allowing external influences to emerge only later. "For me, the key is to express the qualities deeply rooted in one's personality, so that the final product becomes unique and deeply personal. In art, the issue may be different, which is why I'm convinced we must not

confuse art with fashion—fashion is an applied art," Lagerfeld adds.

He does not ponder whether he influences others' tastes. According to him, even thinking about such influence is both arrogant and pretentious. Lagerfeld claims there is no connection between what he has created in the past and himself. He is entirely devoted to his current work and future ideas. This mindset is so strong that he often loses interest in a design as soon as it is completed. "Perhaps that's why I never keep the sketches," the designer shares.

1980

Federico Fellini – A Cinematic Legend at 60

"60 Years with Federico Fellini" was the leading topic of a 1980 autumn issue of LIK.

From the publication, we learn that the celebrated director had not watched some of his earlier films, such as *I Vitelloni*, *La Dolce Vita*, and *The White Sheik*, in de-

cadés. For Fellini, his films are not separate works but rather a long, albeit chaotic, reflection of his life. He claims to carry them with him always, just as he carries all 60 years of his life.

Fellini believes this may be because he works in a studio, which he likens to a church. For him, the

studio disconnects him from the outside world, and everything that happens there follows rituals. "Before me move the ghosts I've summoned, scenes are built and disappear, but the environment remains the same—like a chapel or a spaceship—and you lose the sense of time passing," says the director. He

adds that he doesn't feel the need to step out of this bubble to view it from the outside.

Fellini does not consider himself a happy person but says he is incredibly lucky, as he has achieved all of his childhood dreams. He believes that everyone lives according to a certain prototype, and the director's prototype is that of a Leader or even a Father. He accepts this role for himself but admits he needs the camaraderie of the people he works with, as if his films were a friendly adventure.

The director feels that he must start a new project soon, as he

dislikes the breaks between films when he is forced to do nothing.

On summer evenings, he has toured as many as 14 cinemas in Italy with friends only to find that in none of them were the audiences larger than the staff. The empty theatres reminded him of abandoned planets, evoking an indescribable feeling in his director's soul. Fellini finds it hard to believe that audiences could stop being captivated by the charm of the cinema screen—a gateway to magical lands—or fail to appreciate a beautiful image or a well-crafted scene.



Federico Fellini on the cover of LIK issue 44

1986

Luciano Pavarotti – 25 Years on Stage

In mid-1986, LIK magazine introduced its readers to Luciano Pavarotti – the opera singer who debuted 25 years ago, whose voice has not lost its charisma and continues to captivate audiences to this day.

When Pavarotti's career began, there were at least twenty other tenors ahead of him, a situation quite different from that faced by newcomers today. According to him, it is easier to debut nowadays but harder to sustain a career. Through Pavarotti's eyes, the world of opera today seems less nurturing to performers. Often young singers would even get pressured to take on unsuitable roles, and they lack the strength to refuse. "We had that strength. It was clear that the first wrong step would cost you immediately," the tenor says. He believes that specialization was some-

thing extraordinary back then. Nowadays, there is a noticeable shortage of specific opera voices – for example, a light lyric tenor who performs exclusively light operatic music.

Pavarotti credits his success entirely to his vocal teachers. At 19, Maestro Arrigo Pola established the foundation of Pavarotti's voice, a technique he still uses today. Maestro Ettore Campogalliani, on the other hand, guided him down the right path, tailored to his abilities. However, it took Pavarotti a decade to become a professional. His breakthrough came at the age of 26 – the average age for a tenor. Pavarotti won the Achille Peri competition in Reggio Emilia, with the prize being a debut role as Rodolfo in La Bohème. The opportunity, however, came without payment. The conductor was Molinari-Pradel-

li, and the director was Mafalda Favero. Recalling this experience, Pavarotti still sees himself on that stage, utterly unaware of what was happening around him, so focused on his performance that he barely registered the moment. He remembers feeling intimidated by the famous conductor and the audience. But it was during this debut that he first felt the magnificent sensation of winning the audience over to his side.

Now, at the age of 50, Luciano occasionally feels signs of fatigue. He knows that even something as minor as the flu could compromise a singer's voice for several seasons. He does not make grand plans, even though he keeps a little notebook with engagements scheduled years ahead. He hopes his voice remains in good condition because he wishes to continue singing.

1988

Awaiting Umberto Eco's Second Novel

LIK introduces Umberto Eco as readers around the world eagerly await his second novel. Foucault's Pendulum is scheduled for release this autumn. Following the success of *The Name of the Rose*, even before its Italian publication, the second novel has already been purchased by publishers from numerous countries. The author modestly notes that simultaneous publication in different countries is now a common occurrence. Eco acknowledges that writing a new book always carries risks, but crafting a second novel after one as overwhelmingly successful as *The Name of the Rose* feels like being lynched in public.

However, Eco felt compelled to write *Foucault's Pendulum*, and now that the novel is complete, he is ready to face any criticism as an author. "I love this novel, and if many speak poorly of it, I'll do what mothers do – love their disabled child," he remarks.

Eco describes the way he ap-



Sofia, November 26, 2004. World-famous philosopher and writer Umberto Eco is in the capital to participate in a two-day conference at the Sheraton Hotel, together with Bulgarian and foreign scholars. Photo: Bistra Boshnakova, BTA.

proached writing his debut novel as irresponsible since no one had expectations for *The Name of the Rose*, and he did not feel the need to prove anything to anyone. His passion alone drove him. That was not the case with *Foucault's Pendulum*. Often, he found himself questioning whether he was

writing out of a genuine need to tell a story or merely to prove to himself that he could write another novel. These doubts led to months-long pauses in writing, numerous rewrites of individual pages, and abandoned chapters so numerous that their drafts fill several boxes.

Another challenge for the author was the complex narrative structure he chose. While the story in his debut unfolds linearly over seven days, in *Foucault's Pendulum*, the tale begins at the end, then moves three days back, then ten years into the past, before returning to the present, and so on.

Eco experiences each of the novel's ten parts as if they were the Cape of Good Hope: if he couldn't navigate past them, there was no way to move forward. "I suffered through it because at no point did I know if I would reach the end: perhaps that's why the novel primarily tells the story of its own creation," he reflects.



Sofia, November 29, 2004. A press conference with Umberto Eco is held at the BTA National Press Club, after which the author signs autographs for his admirers. Photo: Elena Dikova, BTA.

2000

Stefan Markov: Graphics Are Not Black-and-White

In the March issue, we meet one of the pioneers behind the creation of the LIK magazine. Graphic artist Stefan Markov was part of the team of this iconic BTA publication during its first phase until 1992. Not only was he responsible for the magazine's design, but he also created many of its covers as well as numerous illustrations for the stories published at the end of each issue. Over the years, he provided opportunities for young artists such as Gredi Assa to showcase their illustrative talent.

The author of the interview, Ruen Ruenov, notes that in the last decade, Stefan Markov has held about 30 exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad (France, Switzerland, Portugal, Austria, Germany, Finland, Japan, and the U.S.), and has received numerous awards from national exhibitions and competitions, as well as seven international distinctions. His work spans graphics, mixed media on handmade paper, painting, and illustration.

Markov talks about studios brimming with memories, his past in LIK magazine, survival, the meaning of creating art, and the sea in every season.

Here, we present a segment of the interview:

Didn't your generation have to change quite radically in its later years?

Before the closure of the old LIK, there was an article that was very interesting to me, titled "The Euphoria Is Over". It explained that, in the new era, the initial flirtation and interest in Eastern artists were fading and coming to an end. It was time for each of us to compete on equal footing with the world. That's really what it comes down to. There is good and bad art, not Eastern and Western art, and a person who works seriously and puts in the effort does not engage with such distinctions. It is true that, after the events, there was an explosion of diversity and formats in our art—a great sense of liberation, which was often only apparent. Because in all this abundance of variety, it is important for each individual to seek their own path, that personal expression they

have to share. I believe two things are of particular importance: an artist must have their own world and their own style of drawing. I have struggled for years to achieve exactly that. I feel the same when interacting with, say, a gallery owner from Paris or Switzerland. If you show them something abstract, which for us is still relatively new, they might think it's borrowed from their art of decades past. They are looking for personal experience, individual sensitivity, a unique world of expression. That is the path I follow.

The studios are filled with memories. A guitar with only two strings left. A bunch of old cast keys, the kind you can't find anywhere anymore. And an orange press that holds many stories. Let's open the old folders. Inside are the illustrations for Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Notes on Bulgarian Uprisings—with the moustaches of



Stefan Markov in his studio, 1988.
Photo: Zhivko Angelov, BTA.

the rebel leaders, their rifles, the Turks with their fezzes and braids. Precise, detailed, full of character. Even Zahari Stoyanov looks like himself, and so does Rayna Knyaginya. We reach the great old LIK. That LIK, from which we learned who Picasso's last wives were, who Lacan and Derrida were. And what, for heaven's sake, was post-modernism? The bosun, eyes wide open, is grumbling again.

I worked at LIK from the beginning until its final issue. That's 29-30 years—I feel a sense of tenderness, a pleasant nostalgia. But I owe LIK a great deal. The team was wonderful, and the magazine was the only window into European and world culture. We received a lot of mail, and each of us had access to it. I was able to see art that could not be found anywhere else and to collect it in reproductions. The magazine was always searching for something new in

every period. Yes, there was some political influence, but overall, those were good years. I was not the only one illustrating the stories—I had a large group of collaborators, young artists to whom I gave a chance to shine.

Didn't working at LIK drain your energy for fine art?

I only feel that now when I do nothing but draw from morning to night. But I probably would not be able to think this way if I didn't have the experience from the magazine.

What is the challenge of transitioning from a salaried job to freelance work? In the early years, many people went through severe crises—there were even suicides.

That's true. One day, a person wakes up with a pile of work and realizes that people simply aren't buying art. I never advise my colleagues to stop at that moment. Work has always kept me going—each new painting is a new plastic challenge, a new immersion. Hopefully, every now and then, something gets sold.

Who were your friends during those years?

A large group of graphic artists from my generation and many 'distant' friends from the pages of LIK. I also want to say a good word about the Union of Bulgarian Artists—back then, everything passed through it, and one strived to be recognized. Looking back, I see that beyond everything else, the essence of the UBA was communication, competition, and the chance to be in contact with remarkable individuals.

The painting Island by Stefan Markov (64x46 cm, mixed technique on handmade paper). Photo reproduced from LIK issue 3, 2000.



What are the themes of a man of the sea—born in Burgas, the son of a skipper, a traveller himself? The sea of all seasons. Images emerge from the details—the movement of water and air, the cry of a seagull, the geometry of a wave, rusty fishing gear, sand, shells.

Often, elements of the marine world have been crucial in shaping a painting. When things aren't going well and the work feels dry, a single detail can bring immediacy and suddenly resolve the problem. Forgotten Bays, Distant Shores, My Islands—these are the names of some of my series.

What do you think about the fate of Bulgarian artists?

It's harder for the young ones.

They need a normal artistic environment in which to develop their individuality, but they don't have it. They have galleries, but they lack support, and selling is difficult. How will they manage? That worries not just me.

What do you think about everything that is going on?

What, about the European Union? I'm a bit of a sceptic. From the outside, it looks like the politicians will enter, but the people won't. That, of course, doesn't stop me from working at full speed and focusing on my brush.

Black as an Egypt night

Mikhail Bulgakov



Illustration by Stefan Markov for Mikhail Bulgakov's story "Egyptian Darkness," published in LIK issue 16, 1972.

Where has the whole world gone today, on my birthday? Where are the electric lights of Moscow? Where are the people, the sky? Nothing but darkness behind the windows...

We're cut off from everyone. The nearest kerosene street lanterns are six miles away at the railway

In January 1972, LIK magazine launched a new section, which was initially called 52. "It is not difficult to decipher: in the fifty-two issues of LIK printed throughout the year, readers will find fifty-two stories in translation, unknown in this country, by writers from different countries and different literature genres. These stories will not be just more or less pleasant reading. Through them we shall try to illustrate both the problems we have already discussed and the most characteristic and recent trends in the development of the short story in world literature," the editors said at the time.

One of the first featured in the column was Mikhail Bulgakov. His work appears in the pages of the magazine's 16th issue.

At that time, the translator from Russian, Lilyana Minkova, described "Egyptian Darkness" as one of the writer's first stories, united in the short story cycle "A Young Doctor's Notebook". She writes: "This doctor is the author, who graduated in 1916 in medicine in his hometown of Kiev and worked for a year and a half in the village of Nikolskoye, Smolensk province. Like A.P. Chekhov and V. Veresaev, he made his first attempts at fiction to describe the sad and funny sides of man that his profession had revealed to him. Starting as a doctor, Bulgakov later devoted himself to the no less difficult profession of a theatre artist - playwright, director, author of plays. Many of them are performed to this day with success in the Soviet Union and abroad: "The Days of the Turbins", "Flight", "Ivan Vasilievich", etc. Bulgakov's widest popularity was brought by his brilliant prose, the novels "The White Guard", "The Master and Margarita", "Theatrical Novel", "The Life of Monsieur de Moliere". In them we find both a vivid reflection of contemporary issues and an inspired resurrection of history - closer or more distant, deep philosophical reflection and light sparkling humour. Certain characteristic features of Bulgakov's style are evident in his very first stories: the frequent transitions from the comic to the tragic, the author's penchant for self-irony, the masterly dialogue and, above all, the writer's humanism, the overwhelming desire to serve people selflessly and valiantly through his art."

The English translation in this issue is by Neyko Genchev.

And here is the story itself, accompanied by an illustration by Stefan Markov:

station. A lantern must be flickering there, its light dying in the blizzard. The express to Moscow will dart past at midnight whistling and won't even stop - it does not need this forgotten halt, buried in the snowstorm. Unless the tracks are snowed over and blocked.

The first electric lamps are thir-

ty miles away, in the district town. There's a sweet life there: there's a cinema, shops, etc. While the snow billows and rolls in the fields, there on the movie screen perhaps the reed floats in the breeze, palm trees sway, a tropical island flashes.

But here we are alone.

'Black as an Egypt night,' said De-

myan Lukich, the feldsher, my paramedic, raising the curtain.

He expresses himself a bit solemnly, but very aptly. Exactly Egyptian it is!

'Please have another drink,' I invited. (Oh, don't judge us, please! After all, we - a doctor, a feldsher, two midwives - we are human too! We see no one but hundreds of sick people for months. We work separated from the world, buried in snow. Can't we drink two shots of diluted spirit according to the prescription and have some local fish sprats on the doctor's birthday?)

'To your health, doctor!' Demyan Lukich said with a feeling.

'We wish you to get used to this place!' said Anna Nikolayevna, toasting, as she smoothed her festive dress with colour ornaments.

The second midwife, Pelageya Ivanovna, raised her glass, sipped it, squatted down and poked the stove. A hot gleam flashed across our faces, and the vodka made our chests warm.

'I really don't understand,' I said excitedly, looking at the cloud of sparks rising under the poker, 'what that woman has done with the belladonna. It's just a nightmare, isn't it?'

Smiles played on the faces of the feldsher and midwives.

Here was the thing. Today, at the morning appointment, a ruddy-faced peasant woman in her thirties squeezed her way into my office. She bowed to the midwife's chair behind me, then pulled out a wide-necked vial from her dress and sang flatteringly:

'Thank you, citizen doctor, for the drops. So helpful, so helpful!... May I have another bottle, please?'

I took the bottle from her hands, looked at the label, and my vision turned green. On the label was written in Demyan Lukich's sprawl-

ing handwriting. 'Tinct. Belladonnae...' etc. 16 December 1917.'

In other words, yesterday I had prescribed a decent portion of belladonna to this woman, and today, on my birthday, 17 December, she had arrived with a dry vial and a request for a repeat.

'Did you... did you... take everything yesterday?' I asked in a wild voice.

'Everything, dear batyushka, everything,' said the woman in a sing-song voice, 'God bless you for these drops... half bottle as soon as I arrived, and half a bottle as soon as I went to bed. And the pain just disappeared...'

I leaned against the obstetric chair.

'How many drops did I tell you?' I spoke in a choked voice. 'I told you five drops at a time!.. What are you saying? What are you doing, woman? You are... I am...'

'By God, I took it!' said the woman, thinking that I did not believe her she had taken my belladonna.

I put my hands round her ruddy cheeks and looked into her pupils. But the pupils were like pupils. Quite beautiful, perfectly normal. The woman's pulse was lovely, too. She showed no signs of belladonna poisoning at all.

'This can't be...' I spoke and shrieked: 'Demyan Lukich!'

Demyan Lukich in a white coat came out of the pharmacy corridor.

'Look, Demyan Lukich, what this beauty has done! I don't understand it...'

The woman was shaking her head fearfully, realising that she had done something wrong.

Demyan Lukich took the bottle, sniffed it, twirled it in his hands and said sternly:

'You, my dear, are lying. You didn't take the medicine!'

'My God, I swe...' began the wom-

an.

'Don't fool us, woman' Demyan Lukich said sternly, curving his mouth, 'we understand everything thoroughly. Confess, who did you treat with those drops?'

The woman raised her normal pupils to the immaculately whitened ceiling and crossed herself.

'I wish I had...'

'Stop it, stop it...' Demyan Lukich muttered and turned to me: 'They all, doctor, do it the same way. Such an actress goes to the hospital, we prescribe her a medicine, and she comes to the village and treats all the women...'

'What are you saying, citizen farshal?'

'I've been here for eight years. I know. Of course, she's been giving a few drops from the bottle in all the courtyards,' he continued to me.

'Give me some more of these drops,' the woman begged me sweetly.

'Well, no,' I answered and wiped the sweat from my forehead, 'you will not have to be treated with these drops anymore. Does your stomach feel better? What about the pain?'

'Just like I said - it disappeared!...'

'Well, that's great. I'll prescribe you something else, also very good.'

So I prescribed the woman some valerian and she left, very disappointed.

That's what we talked about in my doctor's quarters on my birthday, while the heavy curtain of Egyptian darkness hung outside the windows.

'That's what,' Demyan Lukich said, chewing delicately on a fish in oil, 'that's what. We've got used to it here. And you, dear doctor, after the university, after the capital, will have to get used to a lot of things.

The wilderness!

'Oh, what a wilderness!' Anna Nikolayevna echoed.

The snowstorm blew somewhere in the chimneys, rustled behind the wall. A crimson glow fell on the dark iron sheet of the stove. A blessing on the fire that warms the medical staff in the wilderness!

'Have you heard about your predecessor Leopold Leopoldovich?' spoke the feldsher and, after delicately treating Anna Nikolayevna to a cigarette, he lit one himself.

'He was a marvellous doctor!' Pelageya Ivanovna said enthusiastically, gazing with glittering eyes into the benign fire. A Sunday-best hair comb with false stones was flashing and going out in her black hair.

'Yes, he was an outstanding personality,' confirmed the feldsher. 'The peasants adored him. He knew how to approach them. They were always ready to go to Lipontius for an operation! They called him Lipontiy Lipontievich instead of Leopold Leopoldovich. They had faith in him. Well, he knew how to talk to them. For example, a friend of his, Fyodor Kosoy from Dultsevo, came to see him. So-and-so, he says, Lipontius Lipontiitch, I have a stuffy chest, and I can't breathe. And, besides, it seems there is a rasping in my throat...'

'Laryngitis,' I said automatically, having got used to the village's lightning-fast diagnoses in a month of frantic racing.

'Quite right.' 'Well,' said Lipontius, 'I'll give you a remedy. You'll be well in two days. Here are some French mustard plasters. Put one on your back between your shoulder-blades, and the other on your chest. Hold it for ten minutes and you'll be fine. Go on! Do it!' He took the mustard plasters and left. Two

days later he came to the reception.

'What's the matter?' - asks Lipontius.

And Kosoy said to him: 'Well, you see, Liponty Lipontiitch, your mustard pots do not help at all.'

'You're lying!' answers Lipontius. 'French mustard-plasters must help! I suppose you have not put them on?'

'How could I not,' he says? 'And they are still there...' and turning his back, he shows a mustard-plaster stuck on his sheepskin coat!

I laughed, and Pelageya Ivanovna giggled and fiercely poked a log.

'But it's an anecdote, isn't it?' I said, 'it can't be!'

'An anecdote?! Anecdote?' in chorus shouted the midwives.

'No!' exclaimed the feldsher fiercely. 'Our whole life, you know, consists of such anecdotes... We have such things happening here, that...'

'What about the sugar?!' Anna Nikolayevna exclaimed 'Tell him about sugar, Pelageya Ivanovna!'

Pelageya Ivanovna closed the stove shutter and spoke, looking down:

'I come to the same Dultsevo to see a woman in labour...'

'This Dultsevo is a notorious place,' the feldsher couldn't resist and added: 'My bad! Do go on, colleague!'

'Well, of course, I examine her,' continued colleague Pelageya Ivanovna, 'I feel under the spikes in the birth canal something incomprehensible ... then grains, then small pieces ... It turns out - granulated sugar!'

'So much for the anecdote!' Demyan Lukich triumphantly remarked.

'Excuse me... I don't understand...'

'Wise-woman!' Pelageya Ivanovna echoed' The wise-woman had taught her. She said she's having a difficult labour. The baby doesn't want to come out into the light of God. So she had to lure it out. So they lured it out for sweets!'

'It's horrible!' I said.

'They give hair to women in labour to chew,' said Anna Nikolayevna.

'Why?!'

'They don't know why. Three times they brought us women in labour. A poor woman is lying there spitting up. Her whole mouth is full of hair. There's a belief that says the labour will be easier...'

The midwives' eyes sparkled with memories. We sat around the fire for a long time, drinking tea, and I listened as if enchanted. They told me that when they had to take a woman in labour from the village to our hospital, Pelageya Ivanna always let her sledge go behind peasants' sledge: so that they wouldn't change their minds on the way, and return the woman back to the wise-woman's hands. There was once a woman in labour hung upside down from the ceiling in order to turn the baby around in the right position. Pelageya told about how a wise-woman from Korobovo, having heard that doctors puncture the birth-sac, had cut the baby's head with a table knife, so that even such a famous and skilful man as Lipontius could not save him, and it was good that at least the mother was saved. About...

The stove door was closed long ago. My guests had gone to their quarters. I saw Anna Nikolayevna's window glowing dimly for a while, then it went out. Everything disappeared. The snowstorm was joined

by the thickest December evening, and a black veil hid both heaven and earth from me.

I paced round my study, and the floor creaked under my feet, and there was warmth from the Dutch stove, and I could hear a mouse gnawing busily away somewhere.

'Well, no,' I pondered, 'I shall fight the Egyptian darkness as long as fate keeps me here in the wilderness. Granulated sugar – Oh, my goodness!..'

In my reverie, born in the light of the green-shaded lamp, arose a huge university city, and in it a clinic, and in the clinic a huge hall, a tiled floor, shining taps, white sterile sheets, an assistant with a pointed, very wise-looking, greying beard...

A knocking at such moments is always exciting, terrifying. I shuddered.

'Who's there, Aksinya?' I asked, climbing down from the balustrade of the internal staircase (the doctor's flat had two floors: upstairs – an office and a bedroom, downstairs – a dining-room, another room of unknown purpose, and a kitchen, where this Aksinya – the cook – and her husband, the hospital's permanent watchman, were housed).

A heavy latch rattled, the light of a lamp went on and on downstairs, and a cold draught came up. Then Aksinya reported:

'Yes a sick man has come..'

I was delighted, to tell the truth. I didn't want to sleep yet, and the mouse gnawing and memories made me a little depressed and lonely. Moreover, the patient being a man meant it couldn't be the worst – childbirth.

'Can he walk?'

'He is walking' Aksinya answered,

yawning.

'Well, let him go to the study.'

The stairs creaked for a long time. Someone solid, a man of great weight was coming up. In the meantime, I had already sat at my desk, trying to keep my twenty-four-year-old vivacity from leaping out of the professional shell of an Aesculap as far as possible. My right hand lay on the stethoscope as on a revolver.

A figure in a sheepskin coat and felt boots came through the door. The hat was in the figure's hands.

'Why are you so late, uncle?' – I asked solidly to clear my conscience.

'I'm sorry, citizen doctor,' the figure replied in a pleasant, soft voice, 'the snowstorm is pure misery! We were delayed, what can we do, so please forgive me...!'

'A polite man,' I thought with pleasure. I liked the figure very much, and even the thick red beard made a good impression. Apparently, this beard had received some grooming. The owner had not only trimmed it, but even oiled it with some substance in which it is not difficult for a doctor who has been in the country for even a short time to identify as clarified butter.

'What's the matter? Take off your coat. Where are you from?'

The coat lay piled on a chair.

'I have a fever,' answered the patient, looking dolefully.

'Fever? Aha! Are you from Dultsevo?'

'That's right. The Miller.'

'Well, how does it torment you? Tell me!'

'Every day, like twelve o'clock, my head starts to ache, then I get a fever... Two hours of shivering and then I start to ache, then I get a fever... Two hours of shivering and then it goes...'

'I've got a diagnosis already!' rang out triumphantly in my head.

'And the rest of the hours, nothing?'

'My legs are weak.'

'Aha... Unbutton! Ahem... that's right.'

By the end of the examination, I was fascinated by the patient. After the old ladies, the frightened teenagers, terrified by the metal spatula, after this morning's thing with belladonna, my university-trained eye rested on the miller.

The miller spoke in a reasonable way. Besides, he appeared to be literate, and even his every gesture was imbued with respect for the science I consider my favourite, medicine.

'Here's the thing, dear fellow,' I said, tapping his broad, warm chest, 'you have malaria. Intermittent fever... I have a whole ward free now. I strongly advise you to come and stay for treatment. We'll observe you properly. I'll start you on powders, and if that doesn't work, we'll give you injections. We'll make it work. Ah? What do you think?'

'I thank you most sincerely!' the miller replied very politely. – We have heard so much about you. Everyone is pleased. They say you're so helpful... and I'll take injections, anything to get better.'

'No, it's truly a ray of light in the darkness!', I thought and sat down to write at my desk. I felt so pleasant, as if not a stranger, but my own brother had come to visit me in the hospital.

On one slip I wrote:

'Chinini mur. – 0,5

D.T. dos. N 10

S: Miller Hudov. One dose in powder form at midnight.'

And put a dashing signature.

And on another form:

'Pelageya Ivanovna!

Please admit the miller to the 2nd ward. He has malaria. Quinine one powder at a time, as it is supposed to be, four hours before the seizure, i.e. at midnight.

Here's an exception for you! An intelligent miller!

Already lying in bed, I received from the hands of the frowning and yawning Aksinya a note in reply:

'Dear doctor!
All fulfilled. Pel. Lobova.'

And I fell asleep... And woke up. 'What are you? What? What, Aksinya?!', I mumbled.

Aksinya stood, embarrassed, covering herself with her dark skirt with white polka-dots. A wax candle tremblingly illuminated her sleepy and anxious face.

'Marya's come running now, Pelageya Ivanovna told me to call you right away.'

'What's the matter?'

'The miller, she says, is dying in the second ward.'

'What?! Dying? What do you mean, dying?!'

My bare feet instantly felt the cool floor, failing to get into my slippers. I broke matches and poked and poked the burner for a long time until it glowed with a bluish flame. It was exactly six on the clock.

'What is it? What's the matter? It's not malaria, is it?! What's the matter with him? His pulse was fine...'

No later than five minutes later I, in my socks on inside out, my jacket unbuttoned, dishevelled, in felt boots, sprinted across the courtyard, still completely dark, and ran into the second ward.

On an open bed, beside a crumpled sheet, the miller was sitting in

his hospital linen. A small kerosene lamp illuminated him. His red beard was ruffled, and his eyes seemed black and huge to me. He swayed like a drunken man. He looked round with horror, breathing heavily...

The nurse Marya gaped at his dark scarlet face.

Pelageya Ivanovna, in a crooked dressing-gown, with her hair down, rushed towards me.

'Doctor!' she exclaimed in a hoarse voice. I swear, it wasn't my fault. Who could have expected it? You wrote yourself - intelligent...'

'What's the matter?!'

Pelageya Ivanovna splashed her hands and said:

'Imagine, doctor! He took all ten quinine powders at once! At midnight.'

* * *

It was a cloudy winter dawn. Demyan Lukich was removing the stomach tube. It smelled of camphor oil. The basin on the floor was full of brownish liquid. The miller lay emaciated, pale, covered up to his chin with a white sheet. His red beard was sticking out. I bent down and felt his pulse, and made sure that the miller had survived.

'Well?', I asked.

'Egyptian darkness in my eyes... can't see a thing. Oh... oh...' said the miller in a weak bass.

'Me too!', I replied irritably.

'What?' asked the miller (he was still hard of hearing).

'Explain to me only one thing, uncle: why did you do it?' I shouted louder in his ear.

And a grim and unpleasant bass echoed:

'Well, I thought, what's the use of messing about with you over one powder? Take it at once and it's over.'

'It's monstrous!' I exclaimed.

'Anecdote!', sarcastically added the feldsher...

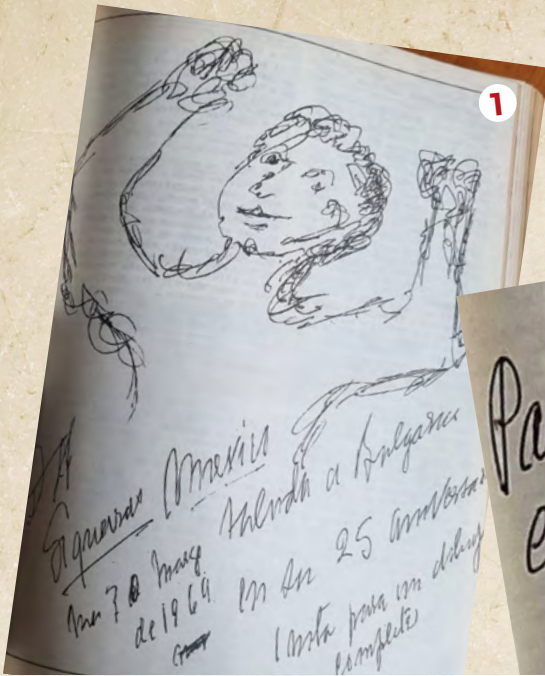
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'Well, no... I'll fight. I will... I will...' And a sweet sleep after a hard night took over me. The shroud of Egyptian darkness stretched out... and in it I was standing... holding as a weapon something - was it a sword, or a stethoscope, I couldn't say. I'm walking forward... fighting... In the middle of nowhere. But not alone. And there was my army: Demyan Lukich, Anna Nikolayevna, Pelageya Ivanovna. All in white coats, and all pressing forward, forward...

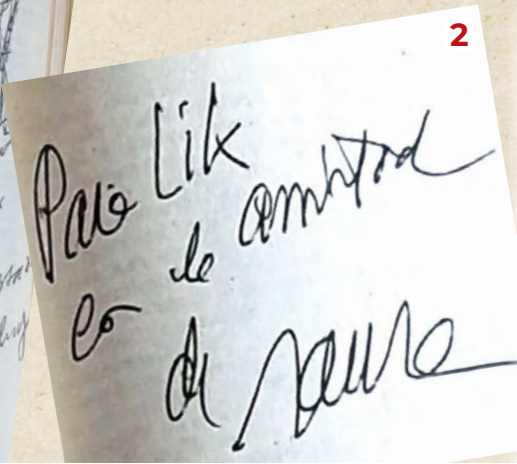
Sleep... what a blessing...



Over the years, world-renowned names from various fields of art and culture have given autographs for their admirers and for LIK readers. Here is a small part of them:



1



2

1 Through BTA correspondent in Havana Henry Savov, Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros sends a drawing and warm greetings to the Bulgarian people for LIK. The autograph was published in LIK issue 36, 1969.

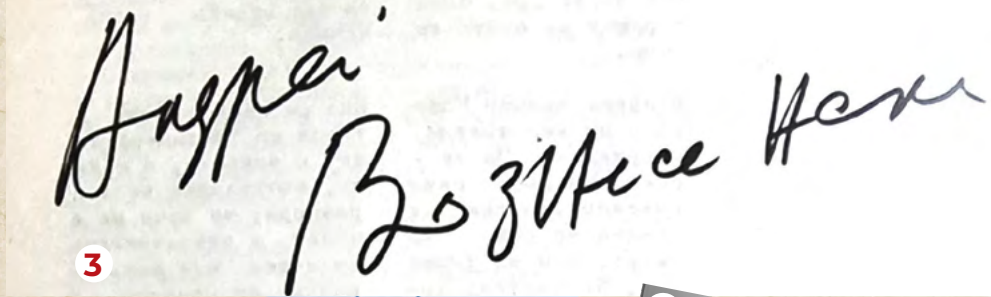
2 Autograph from Spanish director Carlos Saura for the interview in LIK issue 29, 1974: "To LIK – with friendly feelings!"

3 Poet Andrei Voznesensky's signature. He visited Bulgaria for the first time in 1966 and took time to talk with a LIK representative.

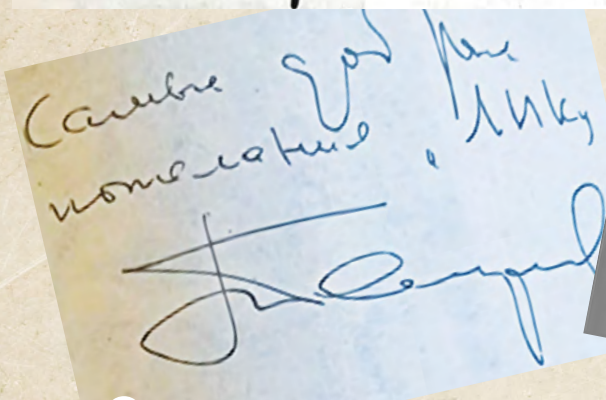
4 Soviet conductor Yuri Temirkanov's autograph: "Best wishes to LIK," following his interview for LIK issue 47, 1973.

5 Spanish film director Pedro Almodóvar's autograph for an interview from July 2000: "To the readers from Bulgaria – good luck!"

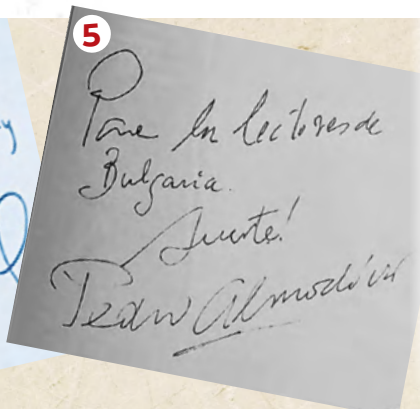
6 Cuban artist Carmelo González's autograph published in LIK issue 26, 1973: "I send a heartfelt, tender, and sincere greeting to the Bulgarian people, whom I feel as part of myself, and who undoubtedly read LIK. Greetings to all from my country Cuba. Thank you, Carmelo."



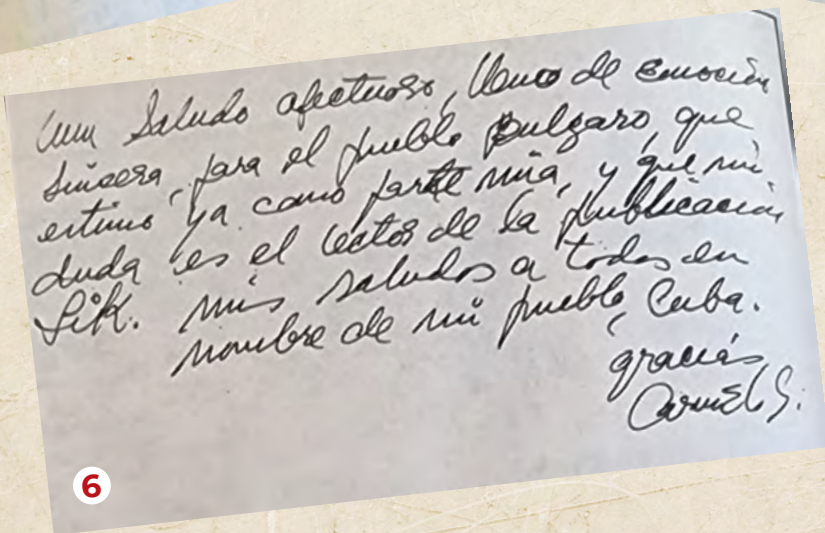
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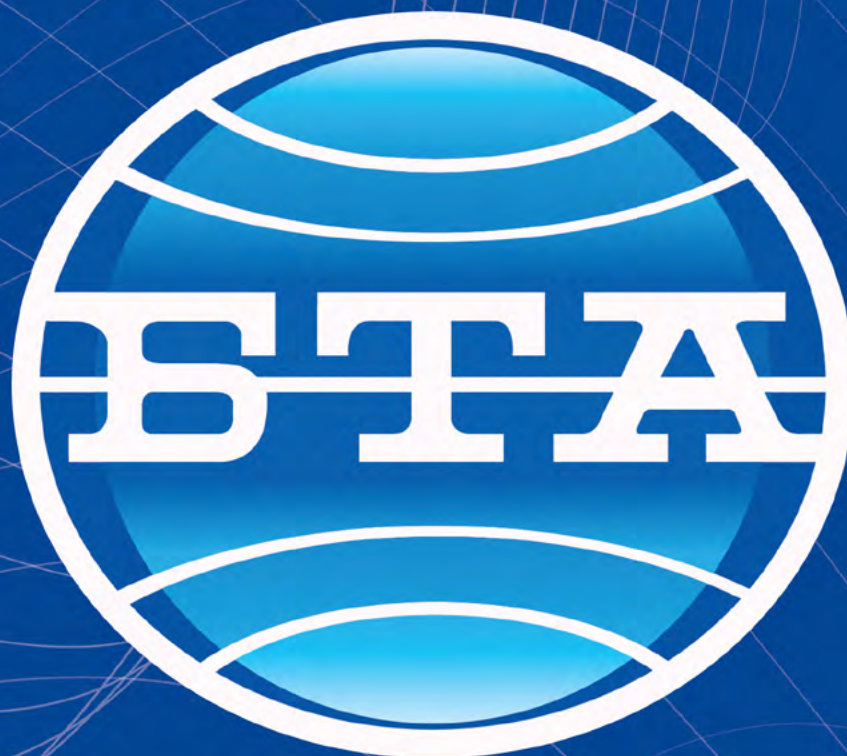
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6



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