

MODERN TIMES REVIEW
THE EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY MAGAZINE

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Does Europe exist?



Review written by **Dieter Wieczorek** AUGUST 21, 2024

EUROPE / Researching the sources, challenges, failures and the future of the phenomena «Europe.»

The Song of Others - A Search for Europe

Director: **Vadim Jendreyko**

Producer: **Mira Film**

Distributor: **Mira Film**

Country: **Switzerland**

The Vadim Jendreyko documentary *The Song of Others – A Search for Europe* was presented with its international premiere at the 58th Karlovy Vary Festival. It starts with underwater images from the Rhine, the river for him marked as a mystical place where the pebbles, coming from far away, were slowly pushed into an endless open ocean.

But soon, the Rhine became more renowned, mostly as a frontier between countries in **war**. Is there any possibility of overcoming the repetition of these disasters? After **WWI**, there were such statements and cries from the heart: «Never again!» Some years later, Europe was in ruins again, and the same statements and cries were again pronounced.





The Song of Others, a film by Vadim Jendreyko

Never again?

To break the circle of violence and revenge, Simone Veil, a victim of the **Nazi** regime, became a leading figure as the first president of the **European Parliament**, warning that a «Never again!» would not protect anybody in the future. More than nice words and declarations are needed. The key question is overcoming a Europe based on opposition and hostilities. In the voice-over, director Vadim Jendreyko introduces historical speakers, confirming that Europe will not be formed at once or by an overall effort based on concrete achievements, which first can create a de facto solidarity and trust towards initiated supranational institutions. Maintaining **peace** should be the most precious asset.

Folding old documents and photography in front of the camera, Jendreyko states the lost spirit of these first engaged intentions.



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Wire fences

On the other side, more and more wire fences were again created after the fall of the **Berlin Wall** on European ground. Jendreyko meets a mayor who, during filming, is interrogated by police on his territory on the Hungarian side at the border to **Serbia** when he expresses his contempt facing the actual local politics, not hesitating to express some cynical comments about «freedom of press» in his country. But for him, keeping silent would be an act of collaboration. People start to die again at these European frontiers. The new politicians in charge, as if there never had been a past.

And the nightmares start again.

Vadim Jendreyko will travel to more of the most marking places in recent European history, starting with the battlegrounds of the **Vosges**, where thousands of German and French soldiers lost their lives, mostly still buried between old munitions and weapons. Local people continue their work to render an identity to the bodies of these soldiers, hoping their work is a reminder that can save lives in the future.

A lot of material about the war had been archived, but only very few about the consequences, the millions of orphans, the war wounded, destroyed homes and memories. But still, more and more powerful weapons are being created and can cause total destruction.

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Hitler's headquarters, the next station of Jendreyko's voyage, was settled at **Ketzynin** in Poland. It was a 200-bunker complex for 2,000 people, the main bunker being built with meter-thick walls, the control room connected with all frontiers, the place where the idea of a homogenous society was put into practice, which spread out his disastrous fruits, which can still be felt today in nearly all European nations.

Unfortunately, Vadim didn't try to answer the question of why this idea of superiority and homogeneity could have been so successful. Here, we could find some useful hints in Friedrich Nietzsche's reflections about the upcoming nihilism, as the existential motivating fears and desires for homogeneity.

Breaking the circle: Going back to mythology, Jendreyko reminds us that Europe was an abducted woman brought by Zeus to an unknown territory. Her name could be read as «woman with the broad view.» Her wisest son was Minos, who created the first advanced civilisation, a matriarchate society at Santorini. Neither fortress nor weapons have been found in this civilisation more than 3600 years ago; today, they are mostly buried under the ashes of a volcanic eruption. Also Jendreyko reminds us that in Athen's democratic society, the separation of politics and economics has been settled as the most important. Long-term common good on one side and the dynamic of short-term economic thinking on the other side were clearly separated.

Today, this boundary is forgotten. The short-term thinking is so dominant that even the future is subjected to it. Actual Greece is marked by privatisation proceedings. Ports and airports, railways and highways are now in the hands of investors and subject to the market law. China's businesses dominate and create contracts for European and Greek workers, paid 40 Euros a day. Throwing a cigarette butt on the ground is a reason to get fired. An analysis is applied to identify the smoker, as one of the workers explains. And still, 13,500 labour applicants are looking to get a job there.

Europe has lost its broad view.

Looking for solutions, Jendreyko enters the last primeval forest in Europe, Bialowieza, in Poland. Here, the highest diversity of species, especially birds, can be found in

Europe. This diversity is based on different environments and microenvironments. Species with different requirements can be met in one place. They need a horizontal trunk. Diversity is the condition for everyone's survival. Nature tells a convincing lesson of humility. Losing diversity means losing all potential as well. Homogeneity is a survival risk.

The Balkans are the negative mirror. The polyphony of voices has gone, which marked this landscape. The daily newsletters in different languages for diverse ethnic peoples and religions had been lost. People of many faiths and ethnographies lived peacefully together until the wars had been declared. Just in **Sarajevo** alone, 10,000 habitants lost their lives, and when the library had systematically bombed out, again, it had been the habitants of all beliefs and national backgrounds who sometimes risk their lives to save little fragments of their common cultural heritage.

Europe has lost its broad view.

Jendreyko found a first-hand testimony from Dzevad Karahasa, a Bosnian writer, reminding us of all of what had been destroyed there. People called the library «Palace of Knowledge.» Already up from the **Ottoman Empire**, cultural outsiders, the unwanted alchemists, mystics, and thinkers found a place for their manuscripts and survival here. More than this, the library was a place for all the marginalised or insecure people to share community. Discussion with long-dead interlocutors established a place they couldn't find anywhere else, not to mention all the young people who found just a place to dream here.

Today, the library is just a tourist spot, and in a world of tourism, no one is at home anymore.



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Not in the plan

Still, there are activities to overpass the barriers, like with a multiethnic choir, founded on the conviction that our beliefs should be a tool to approach the other, an invitation to get to know each other, not to assimilate, but to experience personal growth.

In Sarajevo's library, a document from 1463 can be found, in which Sultan Mehmed II granted religious freedom to the Franciscans:

«No one shall disturb them or their churches. Let them live in peace in my empire. Let those who have become refugees be safe. Let them return and let them establish their monasteries without fear.»

Today's politicians mostly refuse an education based on truth and reconciliation because, with possible changes, they would lose power. Tolerance and peace are not the plan.

Travelling from country to country, Jendreyko mostly uses sounds directly taken from the original places. So, the most repeated noises are rolling trains and station announcements of his route. Undoubtedly, he wants to give space to the personalities he meets.

One of these short portraits is dedicated to the former Serbian general Jovan Divjak, one of the very few Serbs who defended Sarajevo. His resources are a profound joy of life, stimulated by poetry, literature, music and sports, or just the sunlight and the beauty of the mornings.



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Fragile entity

The very last portrait leads Jendreyko to Norway, to a simple fisherman who never left his place of origin. Also a victim of economics lost through industrial fishing on the Norwegian coasts, he never thought about losing his surroundings, where he

discovers unknown aspects and surprises every day. Near his town, the filmmaker finds 4,000-year-old wall paintings in a cave, representing a culture without fear, weapons, and aggressions, a dancing culture celebrating life.

To resume, historians forget traces of alternative lifestyles, from the Greek Minos culture to the peaceful high Nordic clans. Not integrated into common knowledge, nationalisms and phantasms of homogeneity seem to be the unavailable patterns dominating history.

Europe rests as a very fragile entity, particularly if it is only based on economic interest and the profit of collaboration, but not on the concept of a simple and peaceful life. Economic interest can easily be disturbed and transformed, as the currently omnipresent right-wing movements clearly show, reclaiming better profit in a system that refuses diversity. People in Europe will continue to be expelled by economic pressure, as Jendreyko demonstrates for Greece, the Balkans, and Norway, where inhabitants are pressured to give up their grounds of origin.

The nightmare will continue.

◀ See also the editor's blog at Telegram