

Bulgaria

Petya Burneva interviewed **Axinia Dzurova**

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Burneva: Hello from Sofia, Bulgaria, today is 8 August 2019, and this is the first Bulgarian interview for the European Archive of Voices. My name is Petya Burneva. My guest today will be Axinia Dzurova – a Doctor of Sciences, professor and public figure. Axinia is a philologist, an art expert, and a scholar of contemporary and medieval art. She has many titles and positions, having had a long and fruitful academic career that we're going to discuss in detail. But first, let us go a little further back. Tell me something about your childhood, please.

Dzurova: My childhood was a never-ending journey; I kept moving to new houses, new towns, and new schools. A childhood full of dodgeball, hopscotch, hide-and-seek, hot or cold – games that have probably been forgotten today. It was all very dynamic. A childhood that taught me to adapt to my environment really fast as I was a military man's daughter and I sometimes had to move schools three times a year. All in all, it was a lovely childhood full of friendships I've kept to this day.

Burneva: Looking back, what has this state of flux given you?

Dzurova: The ability to adapt. This was really important as my life was very dynamic. I was going through some old calendars a few days ago and I realized that I'd spent 4-5 months a year traveling around the country or abroad. So if I didn't have this character and, to some extent, this lack of daily routine... because, if I had a fixed routine, I wouldn't be able to do my job. I know how to make do with what I have, as old folks say. I can live in real luxury, but I can also lead an absolutely primitive life, as I've had to when I worked at monasteries, churches, etc. – living in unheated rooms so I can find something unpublished or save a manuscript, an archive, etc. So I'm really thankful for my childhood.

Burneva: And how about a favourite childhood place?

Dzurova: It's very hard to say, but maybe Sliven, because this is where I have lived the longest. This is where I went to middle school, this is where I started to do sports – first, of course, I took some ballet classes, and then I moved to gymnastics which I kept practicing for as long as I could keep an active lifestyle. This is the town I love most – the town of old-time voevodas [eastern European term for a military commander in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe during the Early Middle Ages, or a non-military governor or official of a territorial voivodeship], the town of Karandilla [mountain near Sliven], a town full of all kinds of ethnicities and religions. Besides Orthodox

Christians, there were Muslims, Armenians, there were even some Seventh-day Adventists. I went to school with Bisser Kirov [Bulgarian pop-singer, composer and diplomat, 1942-2016]. His father was a pastor at the Adventist church, which was actually located on the ground floor of their own house. Their family had three kids, just as mine did – with exactly the same age gaps, so we all became friends, as did our parents, no matter how strange it might seem – an Adventist pastor and an army general. After November 10th 1989 [internal coup in the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) led to the ousting of long-time dictator Todor Zhivkov, today the date symbolizes the post-communist transition in Bulgaria] the times were really hard for us, and these were the people who remained firmly at our side.

And yet, I was born in Sofia. I was born in Sofia on September 18th 1942, in the midst of WWII. The story of my birth is pretty strange as my mother was a witness for the prosecution in a lawsuit against an illegal military organization led by my father, and the lawsuit ended with 12 death sentences. Most of the people being sued, however, had already run away, they were not in court. My father was up in the mountains, creating, with two of his friends, the Chavdar guerilla band which later grew into a brigade. That was in 1944. I was born prematurely on the day after the sentences had been passed. And all in all, despite being a Sofia girl, I love the countryside. I am used to living there, I am used to adapting to everything, and that has helped me make a real web of friendships all around Bulgaria.

Burneva: Do you have any memories of the postwar years? You wouldn't have any wartime memories, would you?

Dzurova: My wartime and early postwar memories are all mixed up, because people in our household talked a lot about what we had to endure during the war. We have been interned, we have been into hiding. I have even been in detention with my mother. There has been a prize of 200 000 leva for my mother's head and my own, as the daughter of a guerilla commander – it was considered normal at the time. We've talked about this stuff so much that I have the feeling I have witnessed all the events that were taking place around us.

My perception of the war, which, of course, comes from what I've lived through, is first and foremost a hunger pang, because when we were arrested in 1944, and then temporarily released, we went to a village without telling anyone, and we went into hiding there, so I spent a few days without even a crumb of bread. I remember that after the war, whenever I saw some bread, a sugar cube or a piece of lard, I would faint if I wasn't given some of it, which is a consequence of these days of starving that we've been through. And the other physical memory that seems to have never left me is feeling cold, as we have lived in a lot of unheated rooms, always moving from one place to another. On May 3rd 1944, when we were arrested, we were getting ready to join the guerilla brigade in the mountains. The arrest itself was also freezing cold. In the village of Babitza, where we ended up, we stayed in a house without any heating

whatsoever, without bread, without anything. We were lucky to find people around us who were really kind and gave my mother and grandmother some jobs.

There's one more really nice thing I remember. After September 9th 1944 [the coup, when the Red Army overthrew the Bulgarian government] I was sent to the countryside to get a little "plumped up", as they say. And that's when I got a taste for the best scent in the world, one I would always choose over any French perfume – the fragrant aroma of warm bread. This is how the things we have lived through in WWII have conditioned me. Otherwise there's no way I could remember.

But I do remember, weird as it is, because I was only 2 years and 9 months old, I remember the fall of Berlin. After September 9th 1944 we lived with four other guerilla families in the same house, on the same floor, in a four-bedroom apartment. It was lots of fun for us kids, maybe not so much for our mothers and grandmothers who used to slap us sometimes as we were really wild. But I do remember how, on May 9th 1945 [V-E Day, the end of WWII], our fathers took their guns out, went out on the balcony and fired shots into the sky to celebrate the fall of Berlin. And this is a personal memory, not something that was told to me later. By the end of May there were five new babies in the house. These are my earliest memories.

This is my story. I had a brother, Chavdar, who was born in May 1945, with the other four babies. We were extremely close. We didn't have much of an age difference. Yes, we had a great bond. He was brave, he was reckless, he got several national records and two world records.

Burneva: He was a pilot, right?

Dzurova: He was a graduate of two military academies – the Military School in Dolna Mitropolia [Georgi Benkovski Higher People's Air Forces School, now renamed Georgi Benkovski Higher Air Force School] and the Zhukovsky [Air Force] Academy in Moscow. He was training to be an astronaut. He set two world records, one of which – the over 15 000 metres jump – was later banned because it was considered too risky, beyond human capacity. And back then he didn't have the equipment he would have had now. It was a stratosphere jump [15 413 metres, made on August 13th 1966]. He died on duty when he was 27 years old [June 14th 1972].

I have another brother, Spartak Dzurov, who was born in 1950. He'd wanted to be a marine officer since he was a kid. He graduated from the Marine Academy in Leningrad.

Our upbringing was strict, even rigorous. We were given freedom, and yet we were raised in a rather Spartan way. Of course, we idolized our father, although, to be honest, I only started to perceive him as a father in the late 1940s as I did not know him much. First, he was a guerilla, then he went to study in Moscow, then we started going from one garrison to another and I saw him so rarely that my uncle was more of a father figure to me.

Burneva: Did your father talk about his guerilla years, about the war, about politics?

Dzurova: Politics was not discussed in our household. There was a taboo on that; one should not discuss people or politics. I don't know where it came from. My father was a very discreet person. He had studied in the Seminary; he had graduated in Theology although he didn't have a diploma, so there was a special atmosphere in our home that affected everything. He didn't like to discuss people. Apart from that, he shared his memories about guerilla fights, about the heroism of their supporters who risked their lives to help them.

My father was wounded in 1944, on May 3rd, just as we were supposed to join him in the mountains. This was the great battle of the Chavdar guerrilla brigade against army and gendarmery units at the Elenshnitza monastery near Sofia. It was the biggest brigade in Bulgaria – over 500 people, operating in the immediate vicinity of Sofia. Their mission was very important and really hard – unlike other brigades, they could not live in dugouts, they had to be on the move all the time. My father was wounded, so he handed over the leadership to Todor Zhivkov until his arm got better. But he always told us how he spent 40 days looking for someone to help him with the arm that had already started to get gangrenous. And then there was this shepherd in Kurnare, bai Vassil, who later became like family to us, who found him when he had already fainted in a clearing in the woods, so he took him home for 10 days. You know what they do in such cases – you skin a rabbit and you use the hide to cover the wounded arm. This is what saved my father.

Burneva: Oh well, I didn't know that, I don't have that kind of skills. [laughter]

Dzurova: Well, these are the old skills. You might not have that [knowledge], we don't have it already, either, but our parents and especially the old folk did know how to save lives. Those were the kind of stories that we were told.

There were battle stories. My father did not take part in WWII, precisely because his right arm was wounded. I have heard about the war from people who had fought in it – guerrillas, soldiers who survived the battles. Officers, too, because part of the royal officers [military officers who had served in the Bulgarian army before September 9th 1944] were recruited again and they often came to visit. They spurred our curiosity.

The times when we talked about the war were when my father was studying in Moscow. He went to two military academies – the Frunze Military Academy and then the Voroshilov Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces. Then he had two PhDs in military studies. I had the great chance, the great opportunity to meet marshals who had taken part in WWII. These were Marshal [Andrey Antonovich] Grechko, [Ivan Ignatovich] Yakubovskii, [Victor Georgievich] Kulikov, [Ivan Nikitovich] Kozhedub who was made a Hero of the Soviet Union on three different occasions; they all seemed great people, really interesting. So these are the kind of things that were discussed in our household – but we never discussed people. And no talking politics with the kids. When I got older, I liked debating things with my Dad, though.

Burneva: What did you disagree upon?

Dzurova: Our family had a lot of rituals, a lot of traditions that were strictly followed because my mother's mother from Greek Macedonia - or rather my grandmother who was born in Kukush [now Κιλκίς], a refugee of the Balkan war of 1913. It's the woman who makes the home, so we followed a lot of those traditions – showing respect to the person who earns the money, to parents and older people. For example, we would always kiss the hand of an elderly person, of a guerrilla supporter; we respected the Church, and we visited monasteries whenever we could, on weekends mostly, and then we'd kiss the priest's hand as well – that was a must in our family. We always had these Christian values in our home. We talked about that and somehow the ethical rules in our family were set by my mother, on one hand, and by my father on the other.

All in all, however, my parents were on the same page. They never showed their disagreements in front of us, even if they had them. So, back to my debates with my father... My mother was the person who tried to keep my father down-to-earth. She thought that power had its own beaten paths and it could easily corrupt a man. After all, my father spent 29 years as a minister of defense [army general Dobri Dzurov, minister of defense from 1962 to September 23 1990]. This was a very risky thing, staying in power for so long. It could mean isolation; it could mean losing touch with life – my mother was trying her best not to let that happen. We [the members of the family] did not use any special privileges – like ministry cars, etc. It was not allowed in our household.

So when me and my Dad were debating something... not that we had any huge disagreements, I was just trying to do the same thing, to keep him down to earth and keep him aware of all those processes that were taking place in society, especially at the University [University of Sofia]. Before November 10th the University was where most of the alternative clubs were created, the place where most of the changes were taking place. I was vice-rector at the time, so I was very much aware of that. The first happening in Bulgaria took place in the Sofia University courtyard, the first samizdat magazines [underground self-published literary or non-literary works, mostly in the Eastern Bloc] were also created there, and I took part in the first alternative artist group, *Gradut*, created by Phillip Zidarov.

So me and my father have argued about various processes that were taking place. I think most of these discussions happened when some ex-guerrillas dropped by, like Vesselin Andreev, for example. You know who Vesselin Andreev is, right – the great guerrilla poet. Hristo Ganev – Kolkata [a screenwriter] came, too, and so did his wife Binka Zhelyazkova, who was a director. These were the most interesting dinner guests, the most interesting debates, as those people did not take the status quo for granted, they were always trying to show the discrepancies between the guerrilla dream and this life where a big part of those dreams was not coming true. In 1957, for example, Binka Zhelyazkova made a film that was called “Guerrillas” but was renamed as “Life Flows Quietly By...”. We saw it after November 10th, but it was actually made back

then. We talked a lot about those discrepancies at home. I have, for example, often asked Vesselin Andreev “Why have you stopped writing like you used to?” and my father was displeased that I was so blunt, he thought I was being impolite. But I’m like that, basically – straightforward and obstinate. Me and Hristo Radevsky used to argue a lot; I often asked him how come that some comply with a certain line of development while others are critical. People like Dobri Zhotev, like the poet in my university course, Nikolay Kantchev, or Konstantin Pavlov – they were great poets. The motto I have had throughout my life, for example, was written by Nikolay Kantchev [in 1957]. He had a poem that went like this:

When things are going rough

I never twist the truth

Though God may need it for a walking cane!

This has actually always been my motto. My father never changed his motto, either. In 1960 Castro invited my parents to visit Cuba, and one thing they saw was Ernest Hemingway’s house. When Dad came back, we would all listen to his stories, first about Fidel, this walking legend – I was lucky enough to meet him in person, then have an interview with him [in 1987]. And then my father said: A man’s life is measured by the risk he can take. Hemingway said it, actually, and Dad brought it back with him. And now, after all those years, I can say that it’s true. Nothing has changed. He also loved to say: The bottom of the cauldron is not the dome of the sky – which is really, really beautiful.

Burneva: And what did all those friends say when you asked them those questions?

Dzurova: It’s the discrepancies. It’s the discrepancies. You know how Vesselin Andreev ended up – he took his own life, writing a letter where he talked about his disappointment with the actual practice. I always get very angry when somebody says that our countries were communist. This was never the case. There was no communism anywhere. Communism was a society for angels; it was too hard to build. It was an utopia, something very beautiful based on early Christian ideals, but it takes tremendous effort to make it happen. We had [only taken] the first steps towards the social equality we were trying to achieve and falsely believed we could. It didn’t work out, unfortunately, although this social system managed to build a very substantial middle class that has almost disappeared now, it’s almost destroyed. And this rift that we see at the moment, this rift between extreme wealth and extreme poverty and squalor is something nobody thought would come.

Burneva: You have obviously also thought about this discrepancy, as you called it. How did you experience it?

Dzurova: I was basically born to doubt everything. I can’t just take things as a priori. You can’t just tell me “it’s like this” and expect me to accept it. Luckily, my mother had

the same attitude. I have heard my parents argue about something that I didn't understand at the time. My mother did not like the idea of revolution, although she had joined the trade union movement and the labour movement much earlier than my father did. And yet she thought revolution was a process that razes everything to the ground and you have to start over from scratch. She did know that there would always be such revolutionary processes but she would rather have continuity, some sort of cohesion between the past, the present and the future. When I was a little girl, I couldn't understand what she was saying, what she and my Dad were arguing about. Now I can see how wise she had been – and how right.

What's more, let's not forget that for my second degree... I graduated in Bulgarian Philology at the University of Sofia, but I took my second degree, in Art History and Theory, at the Philosophical Faculty in Moscow. It was a great school for me. My father supported me at both universities; I never had a state scholarship. We never lived in apartments as other children of my background did; I lived on campus with all the other students, although I was already married. Me and my husband lived [on the Moscow State University campus] in a 7x10 feet room. It was very nice, I'm not saying it in a negative way. It gave me a chance to see life for what it was. My neighbour Rita, for example, had been to the GuLAG with her parents. I had the opportunity to learn about what happened in the USSR directly from eyewitnesses, I could read samizdat, which was very widespread in Russia. I don't know why, but my teacher Dmitri Sarabyanov, who taught West European art, corralled me into his group of Russian students he regularly took to the house of [Georgii] Kostakis – one of the biggest collectioners, of Greek origin, a collectioner of Russian avant-garde art. So, our lessons in West European art and Russian avant-garde took place in his house. Can you imagine what it was like to see original paintings by Chagal, Kandinsky, Malevich in those years? These lessons helped me get into the underground circles, too, i.e. those Russian artists whose works were bulldozed from the Izmaylovsky Park in 1972. I was also part of the fist groups who was allowed to leave the USSR as early as 1972-73. My book series *The Disappearing Memory. Encounters Along the Road* [seven volumes, Klasika i stil, Sofia: 2018-2020] describes these years when I saw the most avant-garde Soviet art. Not to mention that I was taught by the last Mohicans of the Russian school that had been established in the interwar period. I was lucky enough to be taught philosophy by Matza [Ivan Lyudovigovich], a founding member of the *Bauhaus* in Germany, who introduced us to the Russian VKHUTEMAS ["Higher Art and Technical Studios"]. These are incredible things.

And then, when I came back, me and my colleague Kostadinka Paskaleva were the first students to specialize at the University of Belgrade. In 1972 the University of Belgrade was brimming with life. You can't imagine the strikes, the emotions, the whole atmosphere, the avant-garde theatre. This was a reverberation of the 1968 events in Paris.

In other words, the kind of turns my life had taken allowed me to see the higher level without losing sight of the other one that was like an underground current, something

they were not really trying to hide because it did exist. It existed in things like the Taganka theatre. As my brother [Chavdar] was more involved in these circles, I had the pleasure, after all, to be in the company of Visotzky, to meet Nikita Mikhalkov. And, later, Umberto Eco, Milorad Pavić, Kisho Kurokawa – these are all individuals who have shaped the world. Me and Jean-Marie Drot, a counselor to André Malraux, made a couple of films for [Antene 2 in] Paris. In other words, whenever I travelled in the West, people could feel that I have a certain critical attitude. I thought we had to change the system, but we were naïve, terribly naïve, because even I, who had the opportunity to explore both worlds, believed in the benevolence of the Western countries. I thought there would be some sort of convergence between what was good in their system and what was good in ours. It did not turn out that way, unfortunately.

I am best friends with the director Beppe Chino [an Italian director, a disciple of Roberto Rossellini] who shot *Il viaggio verso est* right after the fall of the Berlin wall; we wanted to make a film together but it didn't work out because Andrey Lukanov was shot [a Bulgarian politician who served as prime minister in 1990 and was shot on 2/10/1996]. The film would be called *Once Upon a Dream of Communism* – we wanted to do interviews with the people who made the changes, the ones who were still alive. But Chino told me something very hurtful. Can you guess what it was? I didn't speak to him for months. He said that Europe could not survive if it didn't expand [to the East], that it needed new territories and new markets. Back then nobody expected that shock privatization will lead to such levels of corruption; nobody could envisage that globalization will lead to such nationalism.

So I did have a critical attitude but I also had the chance to move in circles where people were beginning to doubt. Binka Zhelyazkova, Hristo Ganev (his guerrilla name was Kolkata), Valeri Petrov, Prof. Gocho Gochev from the Institute of Art Studies where I worked at the time. These are the people who didn't sign the telegram against the [Nobel] Prize awarded to Alexander Solzhenitsyn when Georgi Dzhagarov asked them to [as the chairman of the Writers' Union]. I was hanging out with the ones who disagreed. I was in the company of this real intelligentsia that emerged in the interwar period – polyglots with great erudition and a critical stance. I was quite young when I met the people around Dechko Uzunov [an eminent Bulgarian painter, Chair of UNESCO's International Association of Art], of Hristo Neykov and his wife Zlatka Dubova, of Atanas Neykov [renowned Bulgarian artists], of Konstantin Kissimov [eminent Bulgarian actor]. As a student I was involved in the activities of the Student Centre that we created with Stefan Enchev and the composer [Alexander] Bruzitsov; we often invited Konstantin Kissimov, who, by the way, became a lifetime friend, we would tour around the country... I was even at his side in the hospital when he died. I was close to Olga Kircheva, to the Budevski family – not only Adriana Budevskia [a famous Bulgarian actress] but her nephews as well, one of them is still alive, thank goodness. In other words, these circles had a very good impact on me. It was a stroke of luck to meet these incredible people, this incredible crew.

I have often been asked how come my father is a military and I am a Medieval art scholar. I will never forget the first time I entered the Alexander Nevsky cathedral [St Alexander Nevsky, the cathedral church of the Bulgarian patriarch]. I was four years old. I must say that I was not simply lost for words, I was not only enthralled for life – for me it was a piece of the artistry of this world. The mysticism! The magic! Besides, after that I ran away from home a couple of times and whenever my parents called the police, they found me inside the cathedral as we used to live nearby. I was just really enamoured of that world, it was so different from everything else. I was also lucky to meet my father's classmates [from the Seminary] at various churches and monasteries. Dad and father Maxim, His Holiness Patriarch Maxim [Maxim I, Bulgarian Patriarch and Mitropolite of Sofia from 1971 to 2016] came from the same part of the country so we saw him quite often. I was really enchanted by all of this. I believe any person's faith is worthy of respect. And I consider this to be my turning point. But it wasn't just that.

While my father was studying in Moscow, at his second academy, we spent every summer there. He bought us a guide and every day he would draw us a route to follow. The Hermitage was also something I can never forget. I remember how it blew me over with its mysticism and its beauty, just as Alexander Nevsky did... you know what I remember? Can you imagine – the hands of the father holding the prodigal son in Rembrandt's painting. This has stuck into my mind to this day, and also, from the Tretyakov Gallery, *The Appearance of Christ before the People* [by Alexander Ivanov], *Christ in the Desert* [by Ivan Kramskoy], *Moonlit Night over the Dnieper* by Kuindzhi, the paintings of Petrov-Vodkin... These things really blew my mind.

My father really wanted me to study engineering, but I had no talent for that, I was absolutely mortified by physics, chemistry, and math. Those teachers still come to haunt my dreams. I went on to study literature, which was my mother's choice, but then my professor in Old Bulgarian, Petar Ilchev, came to me one day and asked: "Axinia, what are you doing?" I had covered all my notebook margins with drawings of letters, illuminated letters from the old manuscripts. And then he told me: "Take it up. Nobody has worked in that field except for Nikolay Raynov". And so I went on to study Art History – for which I have to thank the sharp eye of Ass. Prof. Petar Ilchev, an incredible teacher, and Prof. Petar Dinekov who suggested that I study the Boyana Church murals [the murals from the Sts Nikola and Panteleymon Church in Boyana, made in 1359, a world monument of huge cultural and historical significance] and said: "You have to study Art History". And so I did. My husband left for Moscow – he was the first doctoral student in Sports Management there, and I went with him. I did a crazy thing I still regret – I graduated from the University of Moscow in three years only.

Burneva: You talk so lovingly about these works of Christian art. Are you religious or is religion more like an academic interest for you?

Dzurova: Look, I do believe in God. There's no person without faith. But I am definitely not into religious practice, first because I have a very wilful personality, and a real

Christian should be meek. Second, because it took me a while to learn tolerance. This is something I learnt from my meeting with Daisaku Ikeda – a famous Eastern philosopher [also writer and nuclear disarmament activist], president of the biggest pacifist organization in Japan [Soka Gakkai, a Society for the creation of spiritual values]. Me and him had a 17-year dialogue on how small nations manage to survive alongside great empires – Japan and China, Bulgaria and the Byzantine, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian empires, then Russia, the USSR and America, etc. [*The Beauty of a Lion's Heart. A Dialog between Daisaku Ikeda and Axinia Dzurova*, 1999; Духът на лъва, София, 2000]. This was one of our main topics, along with, of course, issues like the Japanese belief system, Buddhism, and, respectively, Christianity in its two versions of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Only then did I realize what it meant to take into account the other person's point of view, only then was I brought down to earth. He showed me that there's another perspective which is not like the aggressive, self-centered, self-absorbed European perspective, because here in Europe we are absolute narcissists. Daisaku Ikeda showed me that a person can go much deeper into the culture of another country, or really his own, if he uses that method. So I don't really have the personality traits to be a practicing follower of any religion.

Besides, what struck me upon entering the Alexander Nevsky cathedral was the art produced by that medieval culture, and that's my professional focus. Although somebody could say "Well, you are always going to some church or monastery, you are always rubbing shoulders with the clergy..." Yes, they even call me "sister Axinia" when I go to a church or monastery, but I can't afford to say I am a religious person, because a religious person is meek, he follows a certain set of rules, he's a regular churchgoer, etc. But I am a believer. I believe there is one God for absolutely everyone. This notion came from my beloved professor Ivan Dujčev. Prof. Dujčev was Orthodox Christian. He was one of the first post-doc students to graduate from the School of Paleography and Diplomatics at the Vatican Library and the Vatican Secret Archive, having already graduated from the Sapienza University of Rome. He taught me to respect Catholics and Orthodox Christians alike, along with Muslims, Buddhists, etc.

I believe there is one Creator, one Supreme Being – call it as you like. A Creator that is one for all, though he may be called differently in different parts of the world. Man would be terribly lonely if he didn't believe in God. And then there is this internet world that we inhabit, a world where everything is disembodied, everything is demythologized, everything is demoralized, and everything seems uncertain: truth and untruth, good and evil, everything is so relative, so provisional... So, I think that all confessions have a really important role to play. The Church can use the new means of communication to fill in a moral, ethical, spiritual vacuum, while naturally undergoing some sort of reform.

Prof. Dujčev – this is the person who taught me how to build my academic methodology. That I must always base my work on the source, on the original document, to get rid of all that romanticism – because there was a lot of historical romanticism in my field, and I believe some historians are still inclined to think that

everything starts with us. This leads us to ignore the real role of Bulgaria in the treasure-house of European culture.

Burneva: So what *is* the role of Bulgaria, then?

Dzurova: The ninth century is a crucial point in the history of Europe. It was a time of bitter rivalry between the Constantinople Church and the Papacy, the Roman Catholic Church, over who would get to convert the Slavs who had swept over Europe. There was this idea of creating a special alphabet for them. Cyril and Methodius were Byzantine missionaries – they were born in Thessaloniki, a city partially populated with Slavs, they were chosen for speaking the Slavic language and for being best suited, as erudite and educated persons, to create this alphabet. But their mission was not accomplished; it failed [in Great Moravia]. Then we saved [their legacy by welcoming] their disciples in Bulgaria. The greatest Bulgarian politician Boris [St Knyaz Boris Mikhail I, ruler of Bulgaria 852-889, who converted his people to Christianity and introduced the Slavonic alphabet] welcomed the disciples of Cyril and Methodius [in 886], thus saving this grandiose project born in the heart of the Byzantine empire. And so, in the 9th century, we were already part of the cultural history of Europe. What is our old continent, anyway? It's the Greco-Roman civilization, it's Christianity and the three alphabets [Latin, Greek and Cyrillic – the second Slavic alphabet created by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius in Bulgaria]. This is 9th century Bulgaria.

Burneva: And what is the role of religion in Europe today?

Dzurova: I believe that with the last few Popes in the Vatican [John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis] the Catholic Church is making a serious effort to fill the spiritual vacuum that has opened up. Europe is not just an economic project. It's not only Europe of the money. Europe is a certain spiritual aura and we have to care about it, too. The choice of Pope Francis is something incredibly important – it's the first time a Jesuit has been elected to the Holy See. This is not by chance, as Latin America has a huge population that must be made welcome. The Catholic Church gives these matters a lot of thought. I would be very happy if our Church was more flexible and started thinking about something that Pope Francis managed to pinpoint and our clergy is also starting to consider – the role of the Church is not confined to charity, to visiting the poor or providing a shelter to the children. The role of the Church is also in its spiritual sphere.

Burneva: You mentioned that the roots of Europe are Christian. Do you think its present and its future are Christian, too, or is there a place for other religions in Europe?

Dzurova: Europe has always been made up of different ethnicities and different confessions. What is happening now is not unprecedented. They've been trying to do something in Europe without taking into account the adaptive capacities of the people living here. Europe is still trying to create a community on the basis of ethnicity, which is not the best option. It's not like in America, where people are unified by their ideological identity. Ethnicity continues to be something very important here. This is

what Merkel, for example, was trying to say, and she did say it out loud, but the consequences were dire: we have to accept those refugees, it is our duty to accept them.

Europe is currently dominated by Christianity. I can't say what the future will bring. This is the role of Europe – to find a way to make these people part of its great idea, which is not simply the free movement of capital. This is not what *Europe without borders* is about. The idea of the European community is also a certain cultural aura, which is like a colourful mosaic of ethnicities, confessions and cultures. These are all going to be mixed together, as they have been repeatedly mixed in the history of Europe.

In this line of thought I believe, for example, that Europe cannot become a community if this terrible disparity between the extremely rich and the extremely poor is not addressed.

I am not talking about social strata alone but also about rich countries and poor countries. Europe is only as rich as we are. Every little bit of Europe – no matter whether rich or poor – is part and parcel of the whole. And if the rich ones do not stop looking upon our region with a certain air of haughtiness, I don't see a chance for becoming an European community that's ready to overcome certain challenges. Because, I'm sorry, but if there used to be no alternative to the European project or liberal democracy, now we do have one – we have China. We do have an alternative and it is a very serious one indeed. Europe can survive, but it will also need to take a less haughty course vis-à-vis Russia. Russia must be drawn in. Europe will expand, but it has to consider how and with whom it is going to do so.

As the ex-Soviet bloc was changing, the West pulled the East into its orbit. Now the process has been reversed – the East has started to pull the West in. Both tendencies are disturbing. I think that there needs to be some kind of convergence, some sort of teamwork. Europe has always been wise. Europe has still preserved its sense of aesthetics, its sense of tradition, it knows that you must go forward by making use of memory and tradition, not by obliterating them – these are very serious values.

Europe is strong enough to manage, but only if it becomes more flexible. And I don't know how this is going to happen when I look at the new and rather diverse parliament – there are 70 nationalists there, which is a disturbing tendency. It means that there are very serious symptoms that we have to consider.

The wave of migration cannot be stopped. But the former colonial centres of Europe are also at fault here, at a great fault. And since migration is a fact and you cannot put a stop to it, you have to find a way to take these people out of the ghetto, out of the enclave, they must be part of us because this is a human resource, an intellectual resource, it has all kinds of potential.

I am an optimist in this respect because I believe that the new generations that are coming, those of our grandchildren, are no longer bothered by the same problems that have been bothering us. These children live in a world very different from ours, there is no past, future and present for them, everything is blended together. They don't need the idea of the time machine as we did in order to go backwards and forwards. They also don't make a big difference between life and death. They speak about the universe. There's one of my grandchildren, for example, a 12-year-old currently writing a film script about the end of the Universe and its restart, how the planet is going to restart, can you imagine? He's also writing the soundtrack to that film. These are children who care about that sort of thing.

I have an idea because I have four grandchildren – two girls and two boys. They keep asking me how I imagine the world in 50 years. They want to know whether I believe they will be able to fly across the Universe, whether there would be flying cars, or will people be able to control everything from their homes. And I tell them: "Can you imagine how good it is to go to the countryside and dip your feet into the river..." Do you know what they say to that? "You have a highly developed sense of touch and when you see a picture, you need to bring your hand to it, you need to stroke it or you can't experience it. We are a virtual generation that feels the world in a different way. We're sorry but that's the way it is."

I can't tell you what this future world will be but I do remember what Umberto Eco wrote in a letter to his son: "This is not my world and I wouldn't want to live in it."

Burneva: This sounded a bit on the pessimistic side.

Dzurova: There's a shortage of fathers in the new era. When I was interviewing my friend Dora Vallier [prominent French art critic of Bulgarian origin], she said: "Today's children are growing up fatherless", i.e. without spiritual fathers. You see, we used to live at a time when myths were still functioning. We believed that genius existed and you could get to see him, touch him, feel him. This was our time – it was not yet disenchanted, disembodied, demythologized. The times are totally different now. We are living at a time that revels in terror, in tragedy, in who made more money and how. You are asking me how I feel about Bulgaria joining Europe. Well, I never made a difference between Bulgaria and Europe. This movement they came up with, "The Road to Europe", and so on... We've been in Europe since the 9th century.

Look, I was born in the East, after all. I adore Dostoyevski. I wish we'd go back to the idea that "beauty will save the world". After all, as you know, "Ex Oriente Lux"- light comes from the East. I keep thinking that future generations are going to need spirituality, you can't go without that. Besides, you see that one can never catch up with the development of technologies. You just can't, you get tired. There's a magnificent Eastern saying – "Stop and let your soul catch up with you".

Burneva: When did you feel that you should let your soul catch up with you?

Dzurova: All my life, because I've been in such a rush that I keep telling myself from time to time, "stop and concentrate a little". I have my oases to do that. One is in Samokov. It was exactly 40 years ago when me and my husband bought an old house, a cultural monument that had two external walls missing, they had been destroyed. I rebuilt them. This is my temple, the place where I get together with my friends, with artists, writers, poets, musicians and so on. I do that from time to time. I do it at the Institute, at the Dujčev Centre [The Prof. Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies at the University of Sofia], it's another oasis of science. I like doing field work, I love doing field work.

You know, to live in the Balkans is a blessing for scholars like me, it's a privilege. I have worked in many libraries around the world – since 1976. For more than 40 years my life involved working at the Vatican library, the Secret Archive of the Vatican, the Pontifical Oriental Institute, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan. I spent my life looking for the cultural heritage scattered around the world, bringing it together. I even found a Slavic manuscript in Japan – a magnificent one, at the University of Waseda. When I started working at the Vatican, there were 66 known [Slavic] manuscripts, then we found more and now they are 101. The rest were brought by White Guard immigrants after the October Revolution and soaked with DDT for disinfection. There were 12 known Slavic manuscripts at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, we found over 40 more and they became 56. There was no record of any Slavic manuscripts at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana – we found both manuscripts and early printed books. But it's easier to work there.

And here, in the 21st century Balkans, you can stumble upon unpublished collections – in monasteries, in churches, to this very day. Can you imagine the thrill? This is the privilege of being poor, because there are still things to be discovered. There's still scholarly work to be done. And that's besides digitalization, because before you start digitalizing something, you have to describe it, you have to find the source, you have to estimate a date.

Our region is extremely interesting, but it is also very dangerous. If there is something I would blame Europe for, it is for its occasional propensity for cynicism, as demonstrated in the war in former Yugoslavia. It was horrible to watch your neighbour being bombarded, to accept the operation being called "Merciful Angel" and do nothing about it. The 20th century distorted the meaning of words like no other. What does "Merciful Angel" mean when you're bombing people?! I was there when it happened, I was among my colleagues from Belgrade. I saw their solidarity, I saw them holding hands on the bridges. This was terrible! Europe was quite improvident in that war.

I think that the wisdom of Europe lies in finding the strength to approach our countries with understanding, to realize that our history is very difficult to surmount and you cannot force matters, you cannot pre-fabricate models then impose them and expect people to follow them. It cannot be. You saw what happened... 30 years after the changes the same embers are still smouldering.

Burneva: Did you feel like an European citizen at the time, or was Europe something external?

Dzurova: It was external. At the time of the bombings me and Ivo Hadzhimishev – one of our big photographers – managed to find the means to go through all the ex-Yugoslav countries. We managed to photograph the churches that were destroyed – a huge archive, that we partially displayed in two consecutive exhibitions: *The Traditions on the Balkans* and *The Balkans – a Shared Heritage*. We showed one of them three years ago at UNESCO. But the material we had gathered is much vaster than what we included.

Anyway, I believe that there will be some reverse processes as well. I wouldn't want to be a pessimist, no way.

Burneva: And how did your idea of Europe change over the years?

Dzurova: At the moment there's a return to the Enlightenment project for Europe, i.e. Europe of the nations, the homelands – there's a long-forgotten word – to replace the modern project of globalization. De Gaulle was a champion of this Europe of the homelands, Marx championed internationalism, interculturalism, what is now globalization. The return to the project of nations and homelands was provoked by the nostalgia for one's own, for each country's traditional cultural specificities, for the customs that have not been forgotten. The overexposure of globalism and liberal ideology provoked a return to the cultural identity model. Even Donald Tusk acknowledged that the European Union is a utopia of a Europe without nation states. I personally think that in the future the EU will take baby steps towards uniting these two tendencies – or it will be doomed to fail.

Burneva: What was de Gaulle-era Europe like for you?

Dzurova: I associate the era of general de Gaulle with the events of 1968. I went to Paris much later, in 1975, but as I told you I saw a reverberation of these events in Belgrade and other countries that I had visited. Back then I couldn't say whether his politics was reasonable or not, I was simply not politically mature enough for that, I hadn't met Ikeda to discuss almost the same issues you are asking me about. Now, in retrospect, I can see how right he had been and how the overexposure of liberal democracy, the overexposure of globalism is currently backfiring.

When we wanted change in the late 1980s, do you know what Europe meant to us, what "going to Europe" meant? It meant living like the people in [Western] Germany, for example. The way Germany was until the 1990s. It was a model to us – so orderly and so clean, even if a bit boring... OK, it wasn't Italy, it wasn't France, it was not artistic like Italy and France. And yet, this orderliness... - that's what Germany meant to us.

[What happened here?] I don't count myself here, but those who were, let's say, afflicted by the previous regime, those who wanted the changes the most – they took

the hardest blow. They are now disappointed. Disappointment is currently a big problem for Europe. Because you know Europe the way it is now – and it's not prosperous. And we knew the prosperous version and we longed to be like it. It didn't work out. But this was just a small experiment. Socialism should have worked out, too, but it didn't. It just needs time. We need to build experience. The challenges need to bring forth the leaders to manage the processes. Those leaders will appear, it's inevitable. They will be a different kind of leaders, unlike those we had been accustomed to – like Margaret Thatcher, like Helmut Kohl, Charles de Gaulle, Andriotti... It won't be them. But I'm telling you – this was what Germany was to us. Although I must tell you something.

I travelled a lot around [Western] Germany – the Dujčev Centre had various agreements with [the University of] Cologne. Mind you, I had been vice-rector of Sofia University since 1986, though I was already travelling a lot before that, with the exhibitions. As Bulgaria was celebrating its 1300th anniversary, the country had a policy of showcasing its best features. We made some large-scale exhibitions back then and we travelled almost everywhere.

I was, for example, in West Germany in October 1989. Me and Vulo Radev were showing *Bulgarian Art – Sources, Traditions and Contemporaneity* – an exhibition hosted at Urania, an emblematic building where Hitler used to make his speeches. It was very interesting because I chanced upon the huge manifestations in East Berlin [where my hotel was]. It was incredible! Millions of people stood at the Brandenburg Gate. And, besides, after the lecture I had at Urania, which lasted for an hour and 15 minutes, there was a two-hour discussion where people tried to tell me that what I was showing as contemporary art, besides the old stuff, could not be made in Bulgaria. It means that the propaganda had been so powerful these people could not imagine that we could have an art like that. I tried to stand my ground. I made many acquaintances there. A few days later the Berlin wall fell down and I got a piece of it in a bag, a present from my Berliner colleague Adalto van den Kolk who thought I deserved it for keeping to my guns through the discussion.

So for us Germany was the ideal, especially for us scholars, because these exhibitions allowed us to travel both East and West. We opened an academic course in German Culture and Civilization – and that was before the changes. The vice-rector of the University of Saarbrücken was Prof. Gerhard Hummel, one of the greatest benefactors of the University. We signed a contract with him and established this discipline at the University of Sofia even before the changes.

Burneva: Was there any particularly country that you personally admired?

Dzurova: Yes, Italy. Italy and Greece.

I really love Greece. On one hand, Greece was the first neighboring country that we discussed at home. My grandmother, after all, is from Greek Macedonia, from Κιλκίς,

Kukush. I've always adored Greek mythology and Byzantine art. I like the mentality of Northern Greek people.

But the country I like best, and where most of my foreign friends live, is Italy. I was lucky to have Dechko Uzunov's nephews Atanas Neykov and Hristo Neykov, who were educated in Italy, introduce me to the likes of Fellini, Umberto Eco, and Marcelo Mastroiani, to the galleries on Via Margutta, to Enrico Toddi – that was later, after the regime had changed. So I had the opportunity to meet the elite of our times outside the Vatican where I spent so much time working.

The first time I went to Italy was in 1972 – I took the courses in Italian culture in Ravenna. One year later there were Italian courses in Sienna. It was a colourful mix of students from over 70 nationalities. It was there that I forged some very serious friendships with Italian artists, with a great connoisseur of Bulgarian cinematography like Sergio Mikelli – the guy who had already written a book on Bulgarian cinema, who was writing a book on the mass media - and also with the Sienna artist Enzo Santini.

So my first contacts were made in Sienna, and also Modena – or the Red Emilia, as they call it in Italy, the region of one of the guerrilla brigades that captured Mussolini. I knew the commander of this brigade – Norma Barbolini, who had a Gold Medal of Courage in Italy. These guerrillas had been wounded at the time of the resistance and they came to Bulgaria for their recovery; they were at the house of Atanas and Hristo Neykovi all the time, so that's how I made my big contacts with Rome and the Italian elite. Also through Iliya Peykov, a Bulgarian artist who lived in Italy.

So Italy was for me the best thing I could imagine – with all that lifestyle which was very liberal. It was so nice in Italy, right up to the assault on Aldo Moro. I remember Rome in those Dolce Vita times. I was also in the same crowd with the Taviani brothers, and my friend Beppe Chino introduced me to the family of Roberto Rossellini.

I will tell you why I am a bit of an optimist about Europe. I just thought of Paolo Sorrentino. His film *La Grande Bellezza* harks back to the spiritual roots of Europe – he puts an emphasis on that, even though he can see that it's fading away.

Burneva: You mentioned many great and interesting people, but can you single out one or two who have really played a very important role in your life?

Dzurova: Yes, besides Daisaku Ikeda, whom I already told you about, I would say Nikita Mihalkov. I had a very interesting meeting with him in Cyprus. There was an [international] congress on what was going to happen with the world in the spiritual sphere; all kinds of religions were taking part. They wanted to interview Nikita Mihalkov. Nikita asked me to translate for him. His films, and my personal contact with him, have played a major part in my life.

Maybe I should mention two more people, and one of them is Umberto Eco. This was a really peculiar story. Bulgaria was one of the first countries where *The Name of the*

Rose was published in translation. The academic editor, Ivaylo Znepolski, gave me the translation so I could proofread the medieval terms. I took this translation with me to the archaeological site [in Ravna, near Provadia]. We would read parts of Umberto Eco's book after dinner. The monastery he recreates in his book is very similar to the one we were digging up in Ravna. We wrote him a letter, inviting him to come to the archaeological site in Ravna and see a 9th century monastery very similar to the one he was describing. In 1988, when I was already vice-rector, the University of Bologna was celebrating its 800th anniversary. I was a representative of Bulgaria, and before I left, I wrote to Umberto Eco that I would be there. So we met and I gave him a facsimile edition of the best preserved Glagolitic manuscript, the 10th/11th century Assemaniev Gospel which is kept at the Vatican. When I came back, I suggested him as a doctor honoris cause of the University of Sofia and we sent him a letter, inviting him to come in 1989 for the ceremony. But the secretary of the international department messed something up so he thought he was supposed to come in 1990.

And so, Umberto Eco arrived in October 1990, when things were at their worst. There was no petrol – it was rationed at 3 litres per person, and Umberto Eco was coming from Japan where he had just become Doctor Honoris Causa. I am georgi myself, so I know what that means, I know the ritual. And so, he was coming to Bulgaria. The Sofia University rector at the time was Prof. Nikola Popov, a magnificent person of great integrity. He was one of the three professors to be dismissed in 1986 and reinstated while Prof. Semov was in London and I had the rights to act as rector in his stead. So Nikola Popov was the first rector after the changes, an incredible person, an economist. When I told him Umberto Eco was coming, he said: "I don't care that Umberto Eco is coming, we've shortened the ritual and we'll do the short version". And the ritual used to take place in the Academic aula of the Sofia University, in front of the whole Rector council. The one who was about to be honoured would step forward, and the whole academic council would fall into step behind him and go up that grand staircase. Now this is no longer done.

I met Umberto Eco at the airport. There were just three people to meet him – a Duma reporter, myself and an interpreter. Afterwards we went to his hotel to compare the speech he had sent me to what I had received. And as we were comparing page by page, I reached page 10 and the speech ended. How come, he says. Well, I say, that's all I got. No way, the whole wordplay on "the rose" starts here. Well, Umberto, I got 10 pages, you didn't say in your letter that there were 16 pages in your speech. Look at the timing – it was sent at 5 p.m. We had rolling blackouts [that started at 5 p.m.] so I couldn't get the remaining pages. So he said: "I can't go to the University!" "You can't do that! They're waiting for you!" It was packed. "No! I won't go! What shall we do?" "Simple", I say. "You will read it in English. Nobody can translate 6 pages of your heavy, complex style on the spot." He was furious.

So we go to the University, and it's dark there because of the rolling blackouts. It was October – cold and terrible. [We go down the hall] – the mace-bearer, the Rector, Umberto Eco and me. Just the four of us. With nobody in tow. We go up the stairs, this

beautiful staircase, with the Cyril and Methodius stained glass window at the back. So gorgeous. But the carpet in front of us is rolled up, we're going to trip over. And I see an elderly man straightening the carpet. It turned out to be Fischer-Appelt, the president of the Association of European Universities and foreign chairman of the Cyril and Methodius Foundation. So I say: "Umberto, Fischer himself is at your feet... Smile!"

The lecture went very well. Afterwards there was a reception at the National Palace of Culture, but Blaga Dimitrova and many of the writers did not come. The leftwing writers did. Valeri Petrov came. A lot of people came but there was already this terrible rupture which Umberto Eco did not feel, of course, because there was no need to tell him.

The most interesting part was... when he came to the Dujčev Centre. He wrote that this was the manuscript heaven on earth. Because we have a huge collection of Slavic, Greek and Oriental manuscripts – around 800.

Umberto Eco stood firmly by my side when I was banned from teaching at the University for a few years until I was rehabilitated. He was one of the people who really defended me from abroad. I was working in Jerusalem back then for a few months, I was also teaching at the Sorbonne. But I didn't leave the country. [Before that] I had the option of moving to the USA. I had taught at Yale in 1989 – two courses, The Cyril-Methodius Traditions among the Slavs and Issues in Byzantine Art. Three months into it I got an invitation to take the chair of Ricardo Picchio [a prominent specialist in Slavonic literature] for 17 years and stay there. I refused because the Dujčev Centre had already been created and it was unthinkable for me to stay abroad. Besides, I couldn't leave my parents and my children, although they offered my daughter a full scholarship and found a teaching position for my husband.

I met an incredible person there – Prof. Edward Stankiewicz, who was a one-time student of the great structuralist Roman Jakobson and had spent a few years in Buchenwald as a Polish Jew. While in Buchenwald, he wrote plays and staged them, and he also took part in the postwar negotiations – and that's how he ended up in the United States. This is one of the most interesting friendships I've made in my life.

The other very interesting person I met was Milorad Pavić – the great Serbian writer, author of *Dictionary of the Khazars*, and a professor of European baroque. Me and my husband had a great discussion with him as it turned out that Milorad Pavić had been to Bulgaria in 1945. He spent a whole year in Russe, my husband's hometown – he was studying at the French College in the Bishop Garden, and he'd also spent time in Varna. He had incredibly interesting stories to tell. He and my husband would share memories of the city.

I was lucky to have these people in my life. As well as Jean-Marie Drot, with whom I made several films about Bulgarian artists. The one about Neron [Dimitar Kazakov-Neron, one of the most famous Bulgarian artists of the second half of the 20th century] was included in the cinema collection of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, it was broadcasted twice on Antene 2 – a film that I first saw at the Vatican.

When I started working at the Vatican, it was a different regime altogether, it was terribly interesting. There were just a few of us working there [with recommendations]. We all had to wear long special long-sleeved clothing. You couldn't just go. Men couldn't go in without a blazer. There were just a couple of us in the afternoons. And as there was a rather big lunch break, we used to have lunch with Msgr. Ruyschaert, or we'd sometimes get invited by Cardinal Stickler, the prefect of the library. So one day, as we were having lunch with Msgr. Ruyschaert, he said: "'Signora! Signora! Guardate! [Siete voi!]" And, indeed, I saw my film about Neron. But Jean-Marie Drot was the one who made several films with André Malraux on primitive art, and a whole series on the "artists-enchanters". For him, artists like Neron, like Hristo Hristov, where you only need to glance at their work and you'll know where they come from, were enchanters, artists who had a connection with the land, with the traditions, with the spiritual character of their region.

I was lucky to meet people who enriched me and invigorated me. But I never expected to be giving a lecture and have the Pope in the audience. That was on 22nd May 1979. I was lecturing at the School of Paleography and Diplomatics at the Secret Archive of the Vatican. We had just opened the exhibition on Slavic Manuscripts, Documents and Maps Concerning Bulgarian History, in the Vatican Apostolic Library and the Vatican Secret Archives [Manuscritti slavi, documenti e carte riguardanti la storia bulgara della biblioteca apostolica vaticana e dell'archivio segreto vaticano (9-17 secolo), Sofia, 1979], an exhibition that was opened in the Sistine Salon of the Vatican – not the Sistine Chapel, the Salon. And then there was my lecture.

Somewhere in the middle of the lecture I was interrupted and asked to come outside to meet His Holiness Pope John Paul II. He had just taken office at the Holy See; he had been elected just a few months ago. I will never forget how nervous I was when he came there – so nervous that now, when I look at the photos, I can see that I buttoned my blazer all the way up – I was supposed to leave the top button out. When I finished speaking and got off the stage he asked me: "Why is your lecture called "Old Bulgarian, Glagolitic and Cyrillic Manuscripts"? Why is it not "old Slavonic"?" And I said, "It's a matter of school and methodology. The manuscripts in the period I am referring to were Old Bulgarian because we made the first translations of Slavonic manuscripts, and then they were passed on to other countries". And he said, "Why are you talking to me in Russian, I am planning to speak Bulgarian with you in a year." And I said, "Then why should I study Polish?" It was a very informal conversation. I also said: "If you'd like to speak perfect Polish, here's Prof. Petar Dinekov who speaks marvelous Polish, you studied together at the University of Krakow, and there's my other professor, Ivan Dujčev, who speaks brilliant Italian – as a graduate of the same school."

And then I got an invitation to make the first ever inventory of Slavonic manuscripts. He asked me if I was going to continue my work. I told him it was up to them – if I got an invitation, I would form a team. And I did. Two days later I had a meeting with him and the delegation in the official reception room where he received his visitors, and then I got the invitation and I invited padre Marko Japundžič from Croatia and my

colleague Krassimir Stanchev [from the University of Sofia]. And so, in 1985, the first inventory of Slavonic manuscripts at the Vatican [A. Džurova, Kr. Stancev, M. Japundžić, *Catalogo dei Manoscritti slavi della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Sofia, 1985] had already been created.

I can't forget Pope John Paul II. He was at the very start of his career, before the assassination attempt. He was very handsome, an athlete. He had people build pools in the Vatican courtyard. He was criticized for that. He went skiing. And he said in one of the interviews, "A healthy pope is better than a sick one".

Burneva: Can you also point out certain works of art that have changed you?

Dzurov: Italian music. We grew up with the music of Domenico Modugno and his song "Volare" [Nel blu dipinto di blu]. Do you know how it was written? He saw an exhibition of Chagall. He saw the flying figures – the flying couple.

The big change in me came when I befriended two of the great names in the artistic world of Italy. One was Nunzio Bibbo, a sculptor. The other was Ennio Calabria – the wunderkind in oil painting. [In the early 1960s] Ennio Calabria was the most socially engaged artist I have seen. He was a member of the Biennale in Venice, even at the time. It was something incredible to be in contact with such people as early as 1974-1975-1976. Who was talking about the Viennese Biennale back then? Ennio Calabria spent his whole life searching for the father of the New Era – the same era I was telling you about.

I brought the songs of Lucio Dalla [from Italy]. These were songs of a peculiar metaphysics and apocalyptic messages, existential songs about the poor man living in the projects. His songs were practically a continuation of the wave that came with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones [Street Fighting Man], the Pink Floyd – the whole generational wave of drugs, opiates and so forth. There was a very powerful existential wave. So, I always brought back vinyls from my travels. We would all get together at home – children, artists – and listen to those records. Whenever someone would travel, he would bring something back and we'd get together.

You see, this music, in fact, was the first clash between the model we had built, with beauty saving the world, and the new world we saw in these songs, in the art we brought back. My generation was raised in the utopian model of Modernism, not in the sceptical attitude of Postmodernism. The scepticism came afterwards. And it came with this very music I just told you about.

Besides, we were jazz aficionados. This was our philosophy of loneliness. The National radio would give us some recordings – of Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, B. B. King, Bobby Bland – it was incredible! And we listened to them; don't think that this was a life with nothing in it but interdictions. It wasn't like that. Those who wanted to go to church, did so – if they were ready to take the risk. I told you about that motto. Those who wanted to listen to that kind of music would find a way. Those who wanted

to listen to Radio Free Europe, did – secretly, maybe, but they did. So, things are not exactly as they seem.

I told you about the directors and their exceptional role. About Pasolini, about Rossellini, Antonioni, Fellini, Ingmar Bergman – these people were part of the enlightened world of Europe we were dreaming of. Enlightened! Not the profane world we have now. This was the elite that shaped the European community. These people were delighted by beauty – not by misery, not by ugliness, not by money. These are the things that have made me the way I am.

Burneva: And what were you afraid of?

Dzurova: I really loved Svetoslav Minkov [early 20th century Bulgarian writer]. Some time after WWI he wrote *The Lady with the X-Ray Eyes*. I was so scared that this might come true – I was a rather unruly child and I more or less did what I wanted – so I was scared that there might come a day when somebody could see me and read my thoughts. And then, one day, as I was doing a course in Cultural Studies, I happened to read George Orwell's *1984*. And I panicked that this might really happen. And it did. If Orwell was to wake up now, he wouldn't believe that his prognoses have been surpassed. This overexposed world that disembodied everything, demystified everything, this world which gets into your intimate life and doesn't leave you even the tiniest secret place. This is terrifying! How can you live in such loneliness?! Now you have no empathy, either, you are in contact with those smartphones – one of Ennio Calabria's big series tackles these issues precisely. I think that there will be a return to authenticity. At least I wish there will be.

Burneva: And how about Bulgaria? Is there something in our traditions and rituals that you respect and observe, something that makes you feel spiritually connected with the land?

Dzurova: Catholics usually find it very hard to understand our relationship with the Church and with the clergy. I have an Italian son-in-law who says: "I am vero romano – I was born on via Tomba di Nerone – a true citizen of Rome." He was dumbstruck when he first visited Bulgaria and saw how a bishop could call me at any time of the day – or how I could call him to ask a work-related question. He couldn't get his head around it. We went to Samokov – my house is right next to the convent [Shroud of God's Mother]. When he saw me dropping by to see the nuns, when he saw the nuns borrowing books from me or vice versa – when he saw me taking some liturgical books with me to do my job – he couldn't believe it. He couldn't comprehend how my father would go drink coffee with the nuns, and before that... he hasn't seen that part, but my father used to take Warsaw Pact generals and marshals to the convent to have their rakia there...

He was so struck by this normal human communication between us that I had to tell him the story of our Church – how it had to play every role in the book for 7 out of 13 centuries – to be the state, the ruler, i.e. patron and protector, the spiritual leader, the

teacher, everything. The Church is where you go for consolation and support. And that's why our relationships are like that.

He couldn't believe that in the 20th century I, having bought the house in Samokov, got told which nun was responsible for it. Yes, 99-year-old sister Heruvima, she's still alive, she was only 4 when she came to the convent. Every Kostenets family used to send the older girls to the convent – to look after the old nuns and stay there. She was one of these real nuns. She was attached to me – and I'm so thankful that it was her, a really intelligent woman - she plays the piano, she used to be direct the church choir, if you go to her chamber, you'll see all the classics there.

In other words, once you understand what the Church means to us, you can comprehend this type of relationship. I like this side of it. If there's anything I would change about our church, I wish it would try to attract more people, that it would step outside its charitable role and take up the other position – that of the helper, the councilor, the bringer of hope. This is the role a church should play.

Burneva: At the beginning of our conversation you mentioned being equally attracted to the mysticism of church rituals. Are these rituals important to you?

Dzurova: Yes, they are important. They were observed in my household. I was engaged for a year. And this was done by the book. You go to see your mother-in-law – you kiss her hand. Afterwards, when my husband, whom everybody called Goshmi, had to ask for my hand in marriage, my brothers turned him down. So, he came again - with a copper pot and a bunch of wild geranium. All these rituals were closely observed in our household.

There were even stricter things that I cannot forget to this day. For example, the day after the wedding my father handed me a suitcase and said: "Goodbye". He had booked a room for us at the Rila hotel – so we could spend our first wedding night there. I cried so hard! I couldn't imagine that he'd tell me: "You no longer have a place at home". That's how it was with us, anybody who got married had to leave the household to build a life on his or her own. Before we left to sign the marriage contract, my father just summoned me and my husband and said: "Marriage is the biggest compromise one can make in his lifetime. It's built on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect. Goshho, I know my daughter too well so I'm counting on you" [laughing].

I had an incredible husband [Prof. Georgi Hristov]. I lost him. He was a great source of strength for me.

We met at the stadium, I was a gymnast and so was he. But he was an elite sportsman – the first in the world to do a double somersault, before the Japanese, in 1962 at the World Championship in Prague. He came 6th in the world in floor gymnastics. He was the first doctoral student in Sports Management, he created the CSKA [abbreviation for Central Sports Club of the Army, a leading Bulgarian football club] research centre, he was a long-time chairman of CSKA, e.g. at the time of the big olympiads in Moscow

and Seoul, when our athletes won a lot of medals. He was a professor, a doctor of sciences. He got his first doctorate in Moscow [at the Institute of Physical Culture and Sports].

He was a very moderate person, so he kept me balanced. I tend to take the all-or-nothing approach, and he didn't. He had a much more accurate perception of people than I do. I was raised to be too much of an idealist, until reality hit. And then I started to understand that life is not this perfect world populated exclusively by good and benevolent people. Not that I am not a bit too gullible...

But I have to tell you that this trait has also done me a lot of good - it was good for my work, especially for the Institute that I managed, because it is a give-and-take thing. My tendency to trust people has made some trust me in return, so I think it had its advantages. Life didn't spare me anything... It was very colourful – with a lot of good things and a lot of bad things. But life's a fight, a competition.

I'm an optimist for the generation growing up now. If there is something I can tell those kids, it's this – be yourself, fight for the chance to be yourself. This is your freedom.

Burneva: And my last question – how do you think, what role will your generation play in the future?

Dzurova: To cast bridges between the generations, the bridges of memory. It's not by accident that I have spent the last 10 years working on a 7-volume book series, *The Disappearing Memory. Encounters Along the Road*, without wondering whether people will need it or not. It is, quite simply, my interpretation of the times. It's a history of my era, of the people I met – those who have left a mark on me. Because, after all, life is not what you experienced but what you remember about it, about the people you met – regardless of who they were, whether they were great or small. Anyone can have played a role in your life.

Maybe I'm just too naïve or too much of an optimist to hope that sooner or later [the next generations] will need to get a glimpse of our world, too. I think those who didn't live in my time will understand what I'm telling them: "Be yourself and fight for your freedom!".

That's it.