

In 2002, she returned to Prague and joined the State Environment Fund to manage European Union-financed projects. She enjoyed the work but hated the office politics. "After 20 years, we still don't have a civil service act. There are political appointments everywhere." Meanwhile, she prepared for the examinations for would-be Eurocrats, knowing Czechs would be eligible once the country joined the EU in 2004, but she failed them. "It was a big blow-up in my life," she says.

Leaving the public sector she joined PwC, the consultancy firm. She resigned in 2007, but not before she had met Mattijs Maussen, a fellow PwC executive and the man who would become her second husband.

Meanwhile, she did a stint at the Prague office of UniCredit, the Italian bank. Now she wants to be with her son, but she has recently agreed to help a Danish entrepreneur start a Czech money auction company. Maussen believes the ability to respond to change is a key element in the post-communist transformation. "I change jobs every two and a half years. Of course it is stressful. It's the price we pay for a free market."

Two years ago, Mattijs Maussen proposed to her in the Atomium - the high-tech Expo building in Brussels - and they were married in a fairytale Czech castle early last year. Maussen shows me the pictures. "Everybody is in furs," she says. "Because I asked them."



## The Hungarian therapist

ON THE SURFACE, KATALIN LAKATOS APPEARS CONTENT.

She is a successful therapist running two centres in her native Budapest for the treatment of mentally and physically disabled children, using methods that she has pioneered. She plans to expand abroad, including to the US. She and her husband and their three children have a house in Buda, the smart side of the city. In summer, they go sailing on Lake Balaton. In winter, it's skiing in Austria.

Yet Lakatos is worried - worried about Hungary's politics, especially the rise of far-right extremism and the polarisation of society between the ex-communist Socialist party and the conservative Fidesz bloc.

As she speaks she walks around her principal therapy centre at Budapest's Olympic swimming pool complex. Around her is her equipment - big red balls, hoops, trucks and climbing frames. It seems so calm. Yet politics intrudes even into this oasis. Lakatos, aged 45, says she was recently



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN FEIER/EST&OST; PETRUT CALINESCU/PANOS

**Radu Filipescu,**  
a former dissident,  
with his invention,  
the parrot clip



## The Romanian inventor

ONCE JAILED FOR DARING TO CHALLENGE THE REGIME OF NICOLAE CEAUSESCU, RADU FILIPESCU TODAY still finds time for political campaigning. But instead of fighting a dictatorship, he is protesting about the closure of an outdoor swimming venue.

"You have to find satisfaction in normal things," he says. One of a beautiful set of lakes, nestled in the leafy northern suburbs of Bucharest, the bathing spot was closed in 2007 when the city authorities leased the site for hotel development. After protests, the government overruled the city. But while work has stopped, the lake remains out of bounds.

This is a far cry from the grim Ceausescu years, when Filipescu served three years in jail for political activities. He was imprisoned in 1983 for distributing anti-Ceausescu leaflets and briefly detained again in 1987 for attempting to hold public debates on Ceausescu's rule.

After a brief period of involvement in mainstream post-communist politics, Filipescu left the limelight and formed the non-governmental Group for Social Dialogue, which publishes a newspaper, participates in debates and leads occasional campaigns, such as the lake protest.

When I met Filipescu 10 years ago, Romania was still a fragile democracy, struggling to cope with poverty, unemployment and corruption. He was busy organising a Ceausescu-era exhibition, concerned that Romanians were so bitter about the failures of post-communist life that they had forgotten the grim dictatorship. Today, the 53-year-old is more relaxed, and confident about the future. "Romania is more open and more democratic than five years ago and far more than 10 years ago."

A trained electrician, Filipescu is still trying to make a success of his invention, the "parrot clip". It is, he says, superior to the alligator clip but so far he has failed to secure big orders. In the meantime, he runs an electrical installation business with six employees.

Filipescu's wife, Daniela, an anaesthetist, has had greater professional success. The couple are not rich but live comfortably and, with their 11-year-old son, are moving this year from a two-room flat into one with four rooms.

He says he recently went to see the acclaimed Romanian film *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days*, about a woman's desperate effort to procure an abortion during the Ceausescu years. It was a grim reminder of a grim time. "After the film we went to the Hilton hotel so we could escape that period. It is good to remember that we have escaped that life." ■

*Stefan Wagstyl is the FT's eastern Europe editor.*

dismayed to learn that one of her staff belongs to the Magyar Garda, the uniformed wing of the far-right anti-gypsy and anti-Semitic Jobbik party. "I could not believe it."

Hungary was in financial trouble even before the global crisis and is now suffering a deeper recession than its neighbours. The ruling Socialist party was thrashed in this year's European Parliament elections by Fidesz. Fourteen per cent of the vote went to Jobbik. As a member of Hungary's small Jewish community, Lakatos worries that ghosts of the past may be slinking back. "I have a feeling of fear every Friday when I visit the synagogue," she says.

Indeed, last autumn, when her congregation was celebrating the Jewish New Year, a policeman guarding the synagogue warned the 20-30 worshippers not to go outside after the service because the Magyar Garda was holding a march. The day passed without incident but for Lakatos it was a shock. "The policeman said the five police on duty might not be sufficient to protect us. Protect us? My God." Nor is Lakatos easily scared: in communist times, she helped dissidents distribute banned *samizdat* newspapers; after 1990, she was among the first to see the horrors of Ceausescu's Romania, delivering aid to poor families.

The divisive and hostile nature of Hungarian politics also troubles her. "We have stopped talking about politics at home in front of the kids because my eight-year-old daughter said that at school they had asked who their parents had voted for... It's the same feeling as in 1984 or in *Animal Farm*."

At least her therapy centres are going well. "Always in the world there are problems," Lakatos says. "But at work I am allowed to be myself."

**"Romania is more democratic than five years ago and far more than 10 years ago"**