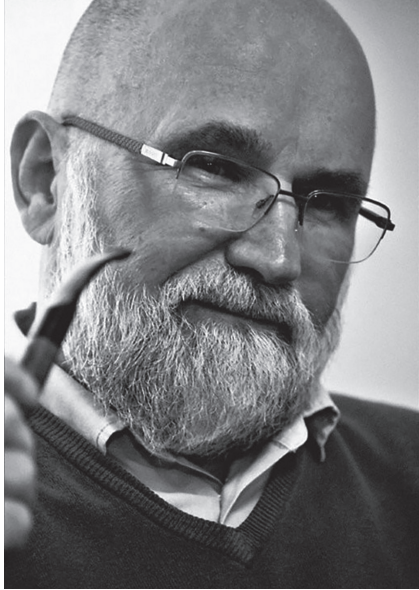


In Memoriam: Rimantas Antanas Kočiūnas

1953-2026

Photo credit: Ignas Dilys



Elita Kreislere

Good Friday brought extremely sad news that Professor Rimantas Kočiūnas, or Rimas as most people called him, had passed away. Although this news was expected, due to the serious illness with which Rimas had been struggling in recent times, this loss opened the floodgates of grief and sorrow, while at the same time allowing many of us to express how close and important Rimas was in our lives.

Indeed, Rimas was one of the most important people in my life – and, I suppose, in the lives of hundreds and hundreds of others. That’s why I see this opportunity to contribute some words about him to people who didn’t know him so well as an honour, but I

also vividly imagine Rimas reading my text, shrugging his shoulders in his unique way, chuckle softly and just calmly saying: “A text. A lot of words.” Because for him, it was not important to speak about truth, but to live your truth. And he did that fully. To the last moment.

Rimas was a true Teacher who never wanted to be in the spotlight, nor wished to be called a Master, although he was a Professor and an internationally acclaimed existential therapist and tutor. He never called his seminars masterclasses and would say: “If I am giving a masterclass, then who are you?”

Nevertheless, Rimas Kočiūnas was a Doctor of Psychology, a professor at Vilnius University, and the author of dozens of works in three languages. He was a pioneer of existential psychotherapy in the post-Soviet space and a mentor who spread this approach across Europe and Central Asia.

Rimas’s active life started very early, not only in terms of his years – he began his university studies at the age of sixteen – but also in the way he lived each day; every morning he was up long before the world woke. Sometimes he said that he already felt rested at two or three in the morning and wanted to go for a walk, but the dog was not happy about it, as it was

not yet rested. Rimas also said he always wanted to start therapy sessions at 6am, but never found such clients.

One of my colleagues, Prof. Paulius Skruibis, wrote recently about Rimas Kočiūnas:

He had the ability to accept very different people. Not necessarily to agree with them, but to accept them. It was never about trying to change other people, to correct their behaviour, or to fix their 'wrong thinking', but to accept them as they are. And this was not only about psychotherapy clients. In my view, this is one of the reasons why Rimas was so deeply loved by his students and colleagues. Many people felt as if they were truly accepted by him.

Rimas Kočiūnas was the founder and the soul of one of the largest and most remarkable communities of existential therapists in the world. In 1995, together with some of his close colleagues, he founded HEPI (The Institute of Humanistic and Existential Psychotherapy) in Birštonas, Lithuania. HEPI is not only awarded the status of an European Accredited Psychotherapy Training Institution and approved by other professional instances, but also is a very special place where students come to live and study in the same house in a little town Birštonas, for two weeks at a time. That creates an experience where learning and real relationships are intermingled to the level that you can't put on a role of a student, or a role of a teacher, or supervisor to hide.

Rimantas Kočiūnas created a studying system in HEPI where you had to be you to be admitted to studying in the institute, and you had to be you to receive a Diploma of Existential Therapist. Students are never told what is the right way to understand existential philosophy or to practice existential therapy. You have to figure it out for yourself and embody that. Rimas always said that the main thing is the integration of theory, practice, philosophy and life itself into a wholeness, and that the most significant feature is the deep connection in the therapist's practice of his life, his worldview and theory: "The main question for me is not 'What the therapist can do' but 'Who he is'."

In 2000, Rimas and colleagues founded the East European Association for Existential Therapy, which unites existential therapists from more than ten countries and since 2003 has been an organisational member of the European Association for Existential Therapy.

During one of the last deep conversations we had, Rimas said: "People always want to see the results of their work. But very often, you never see them." Rimas sowed so many seeds that it will take years and years to see them all come to life. Now, as he is gone, a question arises: "What remains that is valid?" And besides memories, besides his writings, the existential

therapy institute, the association, and many other things he accomplished in his life, what remains is his way of thinking, his way of looking at life as a treasure in itself, his respect for other people's choices, and his quiet, unspoken acceptance of life's flow, while at the same time maintaining a firm structure and clarity in every process and all relationships. That's what is deeply rooted in the hearts of many people who worked or lived with him: his students, colleagues, clients, friends and family.

Rimas is one of the most authentic people I have ever met, and I will be forever grateful to him for every bit of peace, humour, wisdom, truthfulness and energy that always flowed from him. And I know there are a lot of us who feel the same.

Elita Kreislere (Latvia)