

## INTRODUCTION

One hundred years ago, in Iceland, merchants from the island's Southern ports, neighbours with most of the farmers, fishermen and shepherds from the shores and the inland, have returned from the continent with something scandalously unprecedented: silk stockings for ladies. The entire almost millennium-old historical memory was gripped by fear and the image of these mavericks, some of them even ministers' daughters, was anything but suitable to that of the prior traditional woman.

Halldór Laxness, Icelandic novelist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955, tells a story through the eyes of a character from one of his most translated novels centred on the topic of this upheaval manufactured by the neighbours: *„I hear that one girl has bought herself a pair of silk stockings, no less. To top it all off, women nowadays have stopped wearing petticoats purely out vanity and immorality; then come the cotton stockings up to the thigh — and all these together with the rest of their ritzy rags aren't far from equalling the price of a lamb — then they shorten their skirts and, when their shamelessness reaches such a degree, it's naturally a small step away to silk stockings, and in the end, I suppose, to no skirts at all.”*

Could you have put up a good fight against silk stockings in Iceland? You stood no chance; they brought down an entire national remembrance perspective, they anathematized neighbouring merchants and damaged the reputation of girls in their traditional communities. It's hard to tell anymore, while holding on to the historical facts of the images gained over time, which of the two simultaneous events has had a greater influence on the country: was it the silk stockings brought in through the Southern ports or was it Iceland's declaration of full sovereignty? In addition, during the First World War there was a limitless abundance cast over this island, as yet unseen in its history. The country's destitute and reclusive inhabitants have never had it so good, up to that point in time they have never experienced so much prosperity, and the modernization of the island has never seen a faster pace. Politicians, merchants, farmers – everyone witnessed the tale of the European slaughter in a way different than the one perceived by a French, a German, a Romanian, an American, a Polish, a Russian or a Bulgarian. Of course, it concerns the same historic event for which the continent has then built thousands of collective memorial sites.

When are remembrance and its image a good thing and when does falling into oblivion become an absolute curse? In one of his remarkable works from the

turn of the millennia, Tzvetan Todorov expressed doubts whether knowing the past would indeed offer a better understanding of the present and whether it is not this past, from which our Iceland tale on silk stocking trumping in the public fame over gaining national sovereignty forms a part of, which would rather best serve at obscuring everyday events.

Our attempt to launch a dialogue with researchers from 13 countries on 3 different continents and with a widely diverse historical memory is an endeavour to build an image on the basis of case studies. We did not set out to conceptually or chronologically map out a study, but rather we envisaged to discover, starting from its major themes – the image, memory and the neighbourhood, those telling and, one might add, defining examples that can sketch a general and frequently addressed framework. In doing so, we looked at case studies, diversity studies from a geographical and temporal perspective as a source of important insight on the subsequent development. Such a wide-ranging debate rests upon genuine input, which individually represents a step forward on a fairly controversial path.

Keith Hitchins, Professor at the University of Illinois (U.S.A.), has taken upon himself to lead off this study: how has a speech about „Europe” taken shape at such a scintillating time in the continent’s development, as was the period between the two World Wars. This is indeed a subject ripe to define a consistent intellectual movement.

One of the world’s most important historians, Professor Mark Kramer of Harvard University (U.S.A.), has chosen to shed light again on one of the most painful sores of the collective memory: the killing of (Polish) Jews in the Second World War and how this killing is afterwards trailed through various policies and institutions by the Polish historical memory. Professor Vladimir Tismăneanu, one of the world’s leading voices on the scientific analysis of communist regimes, evokes for this study the personality of Leszek Kołakowski, a prominent philosopher of the latter half of the last century.

Gavin Bowd resumes in this study the thread of being the co-mate of his countryman Patrick Leigh Fermor, with whom the Romanian audience has already become accustomed to, in an amazing tale, during a trip to Romania in the first few decades of the last century. Hans-Christian Maner talks us through the image of Galitia, namely of one of the most diverse, ethnic and cultural provinces of the Habsburg’s Empire and it is hardly surprising to have it compared with the regional surroundings. Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis has simply decided on finding the origins of an extremely vigorous ethnic competition in a century of cosmopolitan development in Brăila, one of the most important Danube river ports in the 19th century and in the early decades of the following century.

Joanna Gierowska-Kałamur has hand-picked the most conclusive images of political figures from the short-lived Republic of Belarus after the First World War

and has linked them to the Polish neighbours. Lavinia Stan, one of the most remarkable names in political science from Europe and North America, lends her support to a spatially (Romania) and gender (the woman) circumscribed remembrance with ever more ingenious arguments and methods. Her comparative case study is representative of the post-Communist transition in Europe and greatly helps in understanding the political, social and cultural restructuring in these countries. Mariyana Stamova simply gazes from Bulgaria towards the history of Communism from which she derives an ideological neighbourly relationship – between Todor Zhivkov and Josip Broz Tito – and also a geographical one – the perpetual problem of the Balkans: Macedonia. Cynthia M. Horne, one of the leading American experts on the Southeast and Central Europe area, has raised this challenging and not often (or much too emotional) tackled issue: the vicinity and, moreover, with confidence to boot, the vicinity in the troubled post-Communist era.

From the period of time in which European Communism was on its last legs in the Eastern half of the continent, Agnieszka Kastory has brought to light a piece of remembrance and vicinity which is so old, but yet so new: the Polish and the Lithuanians. What is their story? Česlovas Laurinavičius reports also on the topic of the same Lithuanians, but keeping in tune with their need for protection and, in particular, with their perception of their strong and weak neighbours. Also from the period of Communist totalitarianism, Gabriel Stelian Manea helps us recall the alternative images of the shoal of politicians and the situations (which were not in the least bit amusing) in which tens of millions of people were forced to live their everyday life. Ovidiu Cristea facilitates the mutual image of two of the century-long decision-making powers of Europe, the Venetians and the Ottomans, while Ileana Căzan brings to light some of the adventures of a discovery which left its mark on the life and experience of the Venetian Francesco Grisellini, who came to Banat, and then to Timișoara during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Georgiana Țăranu tackles the ever-lasting theme of „the other”, this time through the eyes of the scholar N. Iorga, who decided for a while to go down the road of politics. Political life, namely the relationship between the figures from the Western and Eastern parts of Europe and the manner in which these occasional loans have affected our life and historical memory, is the subject chosen by Adrian Alexandru Herța. Adriana Cîteia invites us to take a stroll through the philosophy of the image in the mirror - cannibal and innocence - from the essays of Michel de Montaigne. Sergiu Musteață has an even more interesting incentive to write about: he will tell us how to look at the differences, if any, from within a single nation disassociated from history (and already from its remembrance) as two neighbouring spaces, Romania and the Republic of Moldova, through the eyes of the teaching material (school textbooks).

Emanuel Plopeanu describes an European province, Dobruja, on the shores of the Black Sea and from the mouths of the Danube, as it was perceived by a few US press headlines in the second half of the First World War, while Daniel Citirigă, referring to at the same period of time and province, has decided on telling us what kind of image has emerged among local Romanian communities and local authorities regarding the Bulgarian soldier who conquered Constanța and Tulcea between 1916-1918. Cosmin Popa deals with a challenging topic related to the relationship (be it gallantry or not) between the so-called intellectual elite in communist Romania and the leader of the Communist Party and of the country, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

A novelty without parallel in the history of any cultural publishing project of the past few decades in Romania is marked by the participation in our endeavour of an elite member of the academic staff in Afghanistan. Bahar Jalali, from the American University in Kabul, chose to talk about one of the most electrifying topics that can arise when debating the image, remembrance and surroundings, namely „the other” in the history and society of Afghanistan. It marks the very first time in the field of research on social sciences and humanities in Romania when a scientific study from Afghanistan is being published. We would like to salute not only the quality of her research, but also her presence and to rejoice in the participation of our colleague, Bahar Jalali.

Dalia Bukelevičiute is linked the topic of neighbourhood perceived through the perpetual dilemma: security or war? Since Lithuania was not one of those states that could militarily manage on its own in the inter-war period, it goes without saying that the topic of alliances is still one of critical importance. Metin Omer tells us that the decision makers in Ankara from the new Republic of Turkey (1923) have carefully assessed the situation at hand and have taken a stance in one of the most controversial and still not well-known population movements: the departure of Turks and Tatars from Dobruja in the inter-war period. The image of an abandoned Romania and of the communities of exiles is a major challenge facing the debate on this matter.

Andreea Pavel addresses a century old trauma which has plagued the Turkish–Armenian relations with the help of several clearly subjective images, as subjective as any perception is. How are old customs and also historical facts regarded through the eyes and traditions of neighbouring communities – this is a topic that will never get old.

Cristian Andrei Leonte argues that it is not just the people or the communities that benefit from an image, but also the provinces, the regions. A region almost deserted and devastated by wars and the ineffective administrative management of the Ottoman Empire up to the year 1878, Dobruja has become, right in those very

moments of transition to the Romanian state, a topic of great importance in the public debate. And, in order for this to occur, an image was of course required.

Florin Anghel, through the eyes of the head of the Romanian diplomatic mission in Warsaw, tells a story of the way in which a *coup d'état* and a change of political regime are planned and executed. The classical democracy from Poland established at the end of the First World War is replaced by something that pledges „a return to good health” (*Sanacja*) and the events that took place in the days and nights of May 1926, as seen from above from a window, can help outline a more concrete opinion.

The study before you wishes to introduce each reader to an image of different worlds, epochs and historical memories. The hard work of all of our authors is one of substance, not only through its originality, but also through their contribution to the in-depth study of certain research areas which have been given great consideration in recent decades. Its success is all the more welcomed.

Thank you to all those who believed in this project. We would also like to express our gratitude to all those who have helped and encouraged us. We stand by our belief that this is indeed a job well done.

*Florin Anghel*  
*Andreea Pavel*  
*Cristian Andrei Leonte*