

Introduction

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The concept of East-Central Europe encompasses a wealth of identities, paradoxes, remembrances, hopes, challenges, downfalls and resurrections, forms of hatred and bursts of love. It has been subject of academic debates and stirred the imagination of geographers, historians, ethnographers and not the least cartographers. Milan Kundera argued back in 1980s that „Central Europe is not a state. Central Europe is a culture or faith. Its border is imaginary and it is to be defined in every historical epoch again and again”, while Larry Wolff aptly described the way the notion of Eastern Europe was invented at the time of the Enlightenment.²

We are not going to provide new definitions or oxymora to a region already disfigured by the flimsiness of the so many classifications ascribed to it. Instead, we are going to contribute to a better knowledge of the region and its historical, cultural and social characteristics with a collection of articles which were first published in Romania-based biannual peer-reviewed magazine entitled *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies* (VJHS). The review is the mouthpiece of „„Grigore Gafencu” Research Center for the History of International Relations and Cultural Studies and is published under the aegis of Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House. This is to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of VJHS and the release of its 20th issue. The volume will also serve as a learning source for the MA programme East Central Europe Region Studies which is going to be taught at Valahia University, Romania, starting with the academic year 2014/2015 (<http://dsls.valahia.ro/foreign-language-courses.htm>). The programme was created as an offspring of the ongoing cooperation and signed agreements between Valahia University and the universities of Helsinki and Oulu (Finland), Tartu (Estonia) and Izmir University of Economics. Five of the professors teaching in this study programme have contributed to this volume.

We selected articles exploring from various angles the dynamics of international relations and history of the region, and focusing on certain topics which stood at the core of attention of our editorial policy during the past decade. Most of the selected articles bear the signature of authors from or originating from the region (Romania, Poland, Serbia, Bulgaria) or the margins of the area (Finland, Turkey) and most of them are grounded on recent investigations, especially in the archives.

Several themes are privileged in this volume. Such are, for instance, the relations between the small and mid-sized countries located in East-Central Europe, especially between those states which were not immediate neighbors. One of the most insightful investigations of this theme approaches from a methodological point of view the relations between distant small countries. The author, Vesa Vares, underlines the difficulty of studying this subject in circumstances in which no significant common

¹ Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” *The New York Review of Books*, April 26, 1984

² Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994). New interpretations of the process at: G. Franzinetti, “The Idea and the Reality of Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth-Century”, *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008): 361-368.

interests, concerns or threats could be found to link the respective countries. In spite of this, Vares suggests that the research of this theme „does not necessarily differ qualitatively or methodically from the study of countries and cultures which are much closer to each other”. In contrast with other scholars which display suspicions with respect to the result of such researches, Vares finds them useful at least insofar as they offer the researcher the prospect of digging into a new research topic. It also provides clues to the question of how certain „narratives, which we already know, been seen on a smaller scale and in unusual arenas – and how have these smaller nations themselves influenced the larger narrative?” Kalervo Hovi looks not only at the relations between two distant countries, but he also describes the role of Poland as facilitator of the Finnish-Romanian relations. He approaches in the first part of the article the relations between the three countries and draws some historical parallels between the consequences of 19th century’s developments on the three nations: the Napoleonic wars, the role Russia played when entered into the picture, the situation of Polish provinces, Bessarabia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania within the Russian Empire etc. Eventually, K. Hovi moves to scrutinize the role of Józef Piłsudski and Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim in the new course of relations between Finland, Poland and Romania during the World War I and its aftermath and especially after the independence of the former countries and the unification of the latter were proclaimed between December 1917 and December 1918. However, as the author observes, “the foreign policy needs and possibilities of their respective countries differed too much”. Besides, Poland’s elder brother attitude towards the two states and its desire to regulate the development of Finnish-Romanian relations also impeded on the trilateral cooperation between these states. We can add to this the fact that Finland gradually drew closer to Scandinavia and Romania to East-Central Europe, and projects such as a water channel to connect the Baltic and Black seas were abandoned. This called off the partnership projects imagined at the beginning of the 1920s. Kari Alenius takes the analysis of the Finnish perception of foreign countries and Finland’s foreign policy decisions in respect to East-Central European nations a step forward in his study of the image of Romania conveyed to Helsinki by the Finnish Legation in Romania. Because of the Finnish relatively limited knowledge of Romania, the reports of the Finnish envoys during World War II played a pivotal role in influencing the way Finnish leading groups looked at yet another country squeezed between Nazi Germany and Soviet Union. The author discovers that „the image of Romania was created not only on the basis of domestic features and bilateral factors but also on the basis of larger cultural and political views and aims.” Marco Pribilla approaches the image of Hungary particularly in the Finnish interwar literature. He discovers that the kinship of the two countries, particularly as constructed during the 19th century, played a crucial role in the way Hungary was seen among Finnish elites. Furthermore, the territorial losses which Hungary experienced after World War I have inspired many Finnish authors writing about Hungary and expressing their sympathy to the kindred nation and hope that the wrongdoings against Hungary will eventually be healed.

East-Central Europe could be both an opportunity and a nuisance to Great Powers. The United Kingdom, which enjoyed enormous credibility and respect in the region, is

a case in point. Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor discusses the British change of priorities at the start of World War II. The Indian saying that „Any king, whose kingdom shares a common border with that of the conqueror is an antagonist” guided the British actions which searched for enlarging the anti-German coalition. Notwithstanding the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Great Britain avoided „the transformation of the Soviet Union into a new opponent and obviously into an outspoken ally of Hitler’s Germany, even at the risk of sacrificing Romania and Finland”, as Schipor argues. Along the same line of argumentation, Silviu Miloiu traces the seeds of the recreation of Eastern Europe at the end of WWII back to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1939. The author is also focusing on the constraints the small states were facing in a world dominated by hard security facts. The examples of Finland and Romania are particularly emphasized.

Even though the United Nations were able to maintain their alliance throughout the most difficult crossroads of WWII, the end of the conflagration brought the coalition to a standstill. Mioara Anton argues that the Black Sea region, the Straits and the Balkans numbered among the contentious issues among the winning Great Powers. The author reaches the conclusion that „the outbreak of the Cold War and Turkey’s adherence to the Marshall Plan left the Straits out of Soviet control and announced the beginning of new stages in the shaping of centres of power and domination in the Balkans and the Black Sea region.”

Transylvania stood at the core of disputes between competing Romanian and Hungarian nationalisms. Ion Calafeteanu discusses the interwar disputes between Hungary and Romania and argues that „after the Paris Peace Conference sanctioned the new political and state realities in Central Europe, Hungary embarked upon a perilous program aimed to “revise” the provisions laid down by the Trianon Peace Treaty (4 June 1920) and to restore the medieval borders of the “St. Stephen’s Crown”.” Furthermore, he lays emphasis on the fact that „revisionism came out not only as a foreign policy objective but also as a keynote of the social-political system in inter-war Hungary, active in all state activities, embraced by the quasi-totality of the Hungarian society and which gained precedence over any other commandments or principles”. Cezar Stanciu and Katalin Miklóssy tackle the rather atypical, in the context of Soviet bloc, Hungarian-Romanian polemics during the Cold War. Stanciu reveals how the conflict over Transylvania resurfaced after 1947 in the light of a minute taken in 1949 at a secret meeting between the party leadership in Romania and Hungary. He concludes that „the Hungarians used internationalist arguments in order to justify their interest in the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania”, while, on the other hand, „the Romanian communists used the anti-cosmopolitan rhetoric of the time in order to reject any interference from Budapest.” Miklóssy approaches her subject from the perspective of history-politics, an area of research to which Finnish research has brought substantial contributions lately. Of course, as other powers had done before it, the Soviet Union would not miss the opportunity to mingle in the Hungarian-Romanian disputes and use it to boost its policy aims.

Torn between East and West, four times divided between its neighbours, pushed to the East or to the West according to circumstances, the fate of Poland and Polish people constitutes the subject of two articles included in this volume. Bartłomiej

Międzybrodzki discusses the ideological basis of this shifting of Polish borders following WWII when Poland lost the Eastern Borderlands incorporated into Byelorussian SSR and Ukrainian SSR and received instead the so-called “Recovered Territories”. Alexandra Tieanu surveys the events of 1980-1981 and argues that they again positioned Poland between East and West „considering the unfolding of the events (not a free protest, but not an immediate violent repression either), the emergence of an organized civil society based on the alliance between intellectuals, workers, and the church (far from the meaning of Western Europe, but unlike the homogenous, controlled society of Eastern Socialism), or the outcome (not a democratic regime, but not a Communist one-party system either).”

Another batch of articles focus on current developments in the region, from the role Turkey is trying to assert in Europe following the collapse of the Berlin Wall to the post-communist transformations as regards identity, tourism and even to wide-spread nostalgia to be found in the region. As already mentioned, Turkey and the Black Sea region played their part when the Cold War and the Iron Curtain descended over Europe. Cigdem Ustun approaches the Turkish foreign policy narrative which emphasized the strategic location of the country in order to achieve certain national goals, and then moves to assess the Turkish libratory policies with regard to Western integration and Turkey’s views of her role at the Black Sea. The author guides us through the globalization process of Turkish foreign policy, while, at the same time, Ustun argues that “instead of building the Black Sea politics solely in relation to the EU, Turkey needs to emphasize the commonalities, cultural similarities, and regional identity in order to have a stable and reliable foreign policy towards the region and littoral states.” Irena Ristić calls attention to the process of otherness and its peculiarities in former Yugoslavia and the myths on which it is rooted. Elena Dragomir ascertains that feeling that after the fall of Communism, the new governments failed to provide appropriate social welfare to their population is the main reason behind the communist nostalgia. Rossen Vassiliev approaches the post-communism in terms of rhetoric and manipulative phraseology and gathers that the old Communist lingo is now put into use in order to “persuade a distrustful and skeptical public of the advantages of Western-style democracy and “free-market” capitalism”. Finally, Tuomas Hovi explores the way tradition and history are being used in the tourism industry and how the Middle Ages have started to attract incredibly larger interest in the preferences of the public. The Finnish city of Turku and the Dracula tourism in Romania are taken as examples of the use of Middle Ages in tourism.

The chapters included in this collective book have suffered only minuscule editorial interventions and alterations. We tried to offer them as they were originally written in order to reflect adequately the contribution which VJHS has brought to knowledge in this field and allow the readers decide whether the surveys integrated in our review were able to capture the longterm developments in the area.

We finish this book at a time when for two weeks already manifestations in Ukraine call for European integration of their country and Republic of Moldova starts the process of European integration. This only proves how appealing developments in the area continue to be and how research is called to bring further insights in this respect.