

MY HERO, YOUR ENEMY

TEACHING HISTORY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Oldřich Tůma
Mária Schmidt
Juraj Marušiak
Gábor Gyáni
Paweł Ukielski

NEIGHBORS AND SHADOWS

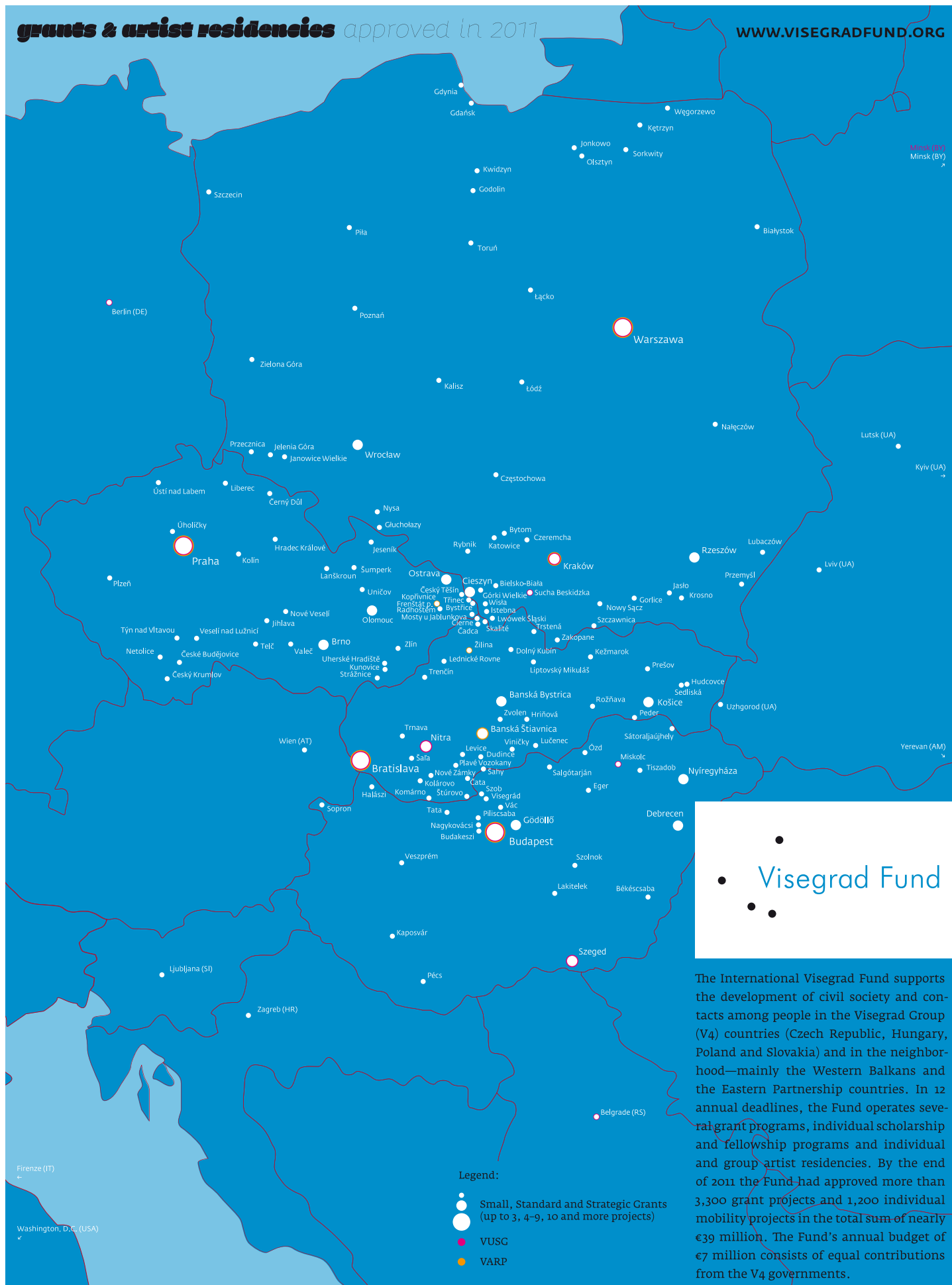
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*Memory
Beyond Nations*
INTERVIEW WITH Péter Balázs

grants & artist residencies approved in 2011

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Memory *Beyond* the Heroic



Marta Mieszanek

WOJCIECH PRZYBYLSKI
Editor-in-chief

THE HERO-ENEMY NARRATIVE HAS PROVEN PARTICULARLY TENACIOUS IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

While it previously strengthened national identity based on unjustified prejudice, today it is an aging relic of compromised ideology. Recent interest in post-war history has only made this simplistic division more obsolescent. If anything, records and archives only intensify the ambiguity of the past. The same holds true for shifts in perspective — glances from the other side of borders. Regionally, the first generation capable of sustaining such perspectives was the generation born in the 1980s.

It is remarkable that Agnieszka Holland, a director from Poland, was the first to make a non-documentary film based on the story of Jan Palach, the Czech student who committed suicide by self-immolation in a protest after the Prague Spring (the HBO mini-series *Burning Bush*, 2013). Tellingly, the script writer and producer of the film were very young, not yet thirty. They and their audience seem to be mouthing the same question, “What was it really like?” In this volume of *Visegrad Insight* we look at how this new generation seeks out such knowledge.

Memories of Cold War imprisonment are already beginning to show signs of wear. Until recently, contemporary graduates in the region were deprived of access to unbiased history teaching about this past. History curricula usually ended with the trauma of the Holocaust. Teachers were thereby absolved of the difficult task of explaining the world of their own youth, leaving politicians to fight over the meaning of the recent past. But new education reforms have brought further challenges. How should we teach about friends and enemies in a shared Europe?

History textbooks are controlled by the state everywhere in the world. History is an extension of official ideology (democratic or authoritarian) designed to shape common memory about the past and serve as the root of collective identification. Whether we speak of the memory of speeches by Martin Luther that demanded social equality or Jan Palach’s act in the name of freedom, all such events are inscribed in history textbooks to define who we are. Hardly anyone questions the political significance of history, but few are interested in its significance in light of Visegrad cooperation.

We therefore endeavor to look beyond hero-enemy narratives to draw attention to how neighboring nations make use of history for their co-existence. We report on changes in history education, on the politics of memory, and on the economies behind it all. The problems and promises associated with common history textbooks are also explored. Can we expect a common Visegrad history textbook in the future? This issue of *Visegrad Insight* asks what possibilities rest on the as-yet-unseen horizon.

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ON THE COVER

Soviet military painting (Kiskunlachaza, Hungary 2012)
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The author is a documentary fine art photographer working on long-term projects focusing on the margins of society in Hungary, Romania, and in other parts of Eastern Europe. His work has been exhibited worldwide and has been published in TIME, The New York Times, National Geographic and Le Monde Magazine, among others.

T e a c h i n g

H I S T O R Y

i n C e n t r a l E u r o p e

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[SURVEY]

We asked prominent historians with different professional backgrounds from four countries about the role that teaching history and the politics of memory play in the region.

- *What do you think is specific to the teaching of history in Central Europe?*
- *What use (or abuse) do we make of history?*
- *Can we transform enemies into friends by changing historical narratives?*



OLDŘICH TŮMA

is a Czech historian and director of the Institute of Contemporary History at the Academy of Science in the Czech Republic. His recent work is an analysis of totalitarian regimes and their mechanisms. Various oral history projects developed under his direction are aimed at reconstructing the historical memory of Czechoslovakia after 1948.

Teaching history – and also exploring it and publishing articles about it – is not easy anywhere in the world. The old model of one big (and usually national) story that describes the past in order to explain and justify the present and future only rarely remains valid. Not only historians, but also journalists, Internet broadcasters, and many other so called “amateurs” consider and analyze history more critically than before. It is easy to teach history where freedom of the press, speech and/or education is limited. However, this approach only postpones challenges.

A binding perspective on past claims breaks down into many partial and subjective outlooks. It is therefore more chaotic and polemical, as it offers different competing views. Also, the attitude toward historical documents and sources of all kinds has changed considerably in the past decade. Materials that were previously restricted and accessible only to erudite experts are now available to the broader public. Just a few clicks on the Internet grants access to documents, pictures, newspaper articles, sound recordings, and research papers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of people who interpret and masterfully comment on the past has risen exponentially.

The situation in Central Europe is more complicated. Two devastating wars were started and ended here, and two of the worst species of non-democratic regimes that humanity has devised performed their experiments on Central European societies, resulting in millions dead and forcibly resettled. Frontiers were moved along with regimes, and the interpretation of history was likewise repeatedly shifted. The victims and their unimaginable suffering are a painful impetus for the search into causes, villains, and judgment. The public role that history performs is perhaps more integrated in such societies than in the countries which do not have such a tragic past.

Historians, therefore, have more responsibility and a more important role to play: to understand past actions and to interpret them, without passing judgment thereby allowing for new claims and immediate actions.

Attempts to use or rather misuse history are relatively frequent, although probably much less successful than one hundred or seventy years ago. Attempts to reach some generally accepted and binding historical interpretations, and to create relevant institutional, economic, and political

circumstances for the given situation, are repeated. Today, at least in the Czech context, this applies to national history rather than to the history of relations with our neighbors. There were substantial efforts to create a specialized institute of “national remembrance” to narrate history (particularly the communist past) in a clear way and in the public interest. But the “national remembrance” institution has achieved nothing, at least with respect to how citizens vote. It is curious how deeply rooted the idea is that a specific narration of the past would be rewarded by the favor of voters. Also, it is interesting that some politicians and media try to refer to historical arguments. They are helpless because voters relate their choices to the present and the future. Despite these failures, the strategy has not changed. Each election in the Czech Republic has proven that.

Even though we live in a more and more unstable world, these are somehow fortunate times for us: our old enemies, especially our neighbors, have become our friends. This became possible because of a change in historical narratives and the replacement of egotism and exclusiveness with multiple perspectives. It is also possible because we are now capable on reflecting on our own failures, mistakes, and crimes.

The question is how to distinguish the causes from the consequences. It is true that we are increasingly able (or we are at least increasingly willing) to perceive that “the others” are considering the same things but from a different point of view and therefore cannot agree with our explanation. Can this make them our foes and cause a change in relations between European societies? Or is this rather a consequence of the growing intensity, interconnection, multi-stratification, and variety of our relations? In any case, it is good that the varied flux of different national historiographies is not an obstacle to such development. On the contrary, it is its constituent part. /



MÁRIA SCHMIDT

is a Hungarian historian. She graduated from Budapest Eötvös Loránd University with a specialization in History and German literature. She served as chief advisor to the prime minister of Hungary from 1998 to 2002. She is the general director of both the Twentieth Century Institute and the House of Terror Museum. She has been a board member of the Stiftung Ettersberg since 2002.

Prior to the changes in the political regime the teaching of history used to be a monopoly. It was the one-party system and the interests of its propaganda that dictated what and how to teach. The methodology and textbooks were designed

through concealment and by falsifying history. For example, in teaching history in secondary schools, disproportionately large emphasis was placed on antiquity, while the post-1945 period was given less attention. It is an unfortunate fact that Marxist ideology remained, even though its terminology was weeded out of textbooks. Considerable efforts are still needed in order to introduce a method of teaching history that is truly focused on values and interests, one that does not start with a “black-and-white” approach. In my capacity as a university professor and the founding director of a museum, I have worked out and managed concepts for numerous projects that can help history teachers pick up new approaches (applying an “oral history” method in teaching history, educating the general public about the concealed or falsified past in the form of extraordinary history classes, etc.). Within the framework of a pilot project, for instance, we have developed a multimedia course book module to be used on modern tablets that represents an up-to-date approach and speaks a new language. I hope there will be demand for its further enhancement, as this was the very approach and vision, together with the knowledge of young people’s language and audiovisual culture, which resulted in the historical concept and success of the House of Terror Museum.

Due to the nature of education under a dictatorship, history is taught to serve propaganda purposes. Since history in this region was taught according to Russian interests for a long time, it is high time to switch to a kind of teaching that places our national interests in focus. Obviously, we need to indicate, in all instances, that other people’s interests justify different viewpoints. It is our tremendous responsibility that those generations for whom freedom is so natural now learn what a great price their predecessors paid for it. On this continent, the identity of nations can only be strengthened through a profound knowledge of their national and collective European past, all the while attempting to create a stable European identity. Of course, all this requires another important factor: a solid moral foundation must be given to future generations.

We, the nations of Central Europe, must learn from our common history. No matter how much great powers liked/ would like to pit neighboring countries against each other, we must realize that we are each other’s allies. We share much more than divides us. I would be happy if we could take advantage of the Soviet occupation and our forced participation in the communist experiment, and if we could use it as a common foundational historical experience. We must remember that we can understand each other’s problems by relying on this experience, and this is how we can pinpoint the common challenges that we face. All in all, our region must join forces to win the 21st century. If we fail, Europe cannot succeed. For instance, our international conferences are of great help in changing old narratives. At the same time, we also need to present the sacrifice that has been made. We have common heroes, who are tangible proof of the fact that we belong together. This is why our public foundation established the Petöfi Prize in 2009, on the 20th anniversary of the political turnaround, as recognition of the sacrifice made and the achievements won for the freedom of Central European nations. There are many to whom we must give thanks. We must not be ungrateful. /



GÁBOR GYÁNI

is a Hungarian historian and research professor at the Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, and Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is the author of numerous books on social history, e.g. *Women as Domestic Servants: The Case of Budapest, 1890–1940* (1989), *Parlor and Kitchen. Housing and Domestic Culture in Budapest, 1870–1940* (2002), and co-author of *A Social History of Hungary, 1850–1999* (forthcoming).



PAWEŁ UKIELSKI

is a Polish political scientist and historian, and currently a fellow at the Institute of Political Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He is the deputy director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum. He is the author of several books, including: *Aksamitny rozwód. Rola elit politycznych w procesie podziału Czechosłowacji* [*The velvet divorce. The role of political elites in the division of Czechoslovakia*, 2007].

The unique quality of researching and teaching the history of Central Europe is the challenge of contrasting national images and canons with the many pasts to be found here. The ethnic, confessional, and structural diversity of the region, represented primarily by the Habsburg Empire (the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following 1867), necessitates a transnational historical approach. It is not an exaggeration to argue that the historical past of Central Europe is or may be the true laboratory for transnational historical scholarship. This scholarly endeavor already exists, but is practiced more in the United States than regionally. However, I strongly hope that this will be a future option for all of us who have some concerns about the past of Central Europe.

The uses and abuses of history (à la Nietzsche) usually take more than one form. One of the more pragmatic functions of modern historical consciousness is to create and sustain national identity. I would not deny, at least not altogether, the positive role attached to the identity-sustaining function of historical scholarship. Still, it is obvious that many distortions or abuses of history committed, even within the framework of rational recognition (history writing), derive from that particular social function of modern historiography. Multiplying viewpoints applied to the (national) past may contribute to a far more satisfying image of history. This, however, leads to a lessening of the relevance of the category of the “national” as such, and paves the way for to sub-national and/or supranational historical perspectives.

The creation and maintenance of the *Feindbild*, the image of the enemy, is basic to the effort to nationalize the historical past. Enemies thus created may only be changed into friends by leaving behind, to the extent that it is possible, any rigid nationalist ethos. This, however, requires turning away from the practice of the traditional form of history writing, in which focus on the past of state politics (statehood in historical perspective) is dominant. It may or should be replaced by adopting either a structural historical approach or an anthropological view of the past. Inquiry in the latter case is more at the level of historical experience than any other objectified “fact” of history. Historians pursuing the latter kinds of historical scholarship, it seems to me, are much less inclined to be nationalists than their colleagues, who are closely concerned with the politics of history. /

The specificity of teaching the history of Central Europe stems from the specificity of the region itself. Every discussion about Central Europe begins with a question about the actual existence of Central Europe. Before trying to describe what is so distinctive about teaching Central European history, I feel obliged to clarify what kind of Central Europe I have in mind.

Central Europe was always a transitional region, a border between two cultural circles – Eastern and Western. However, it often didn’t exist as such, for example when Eastern and Western Europe had a clear border. Such a state of affairs existed in the 19th century, when Central Europe was divided between four world powers (the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire), as well as in the bipolar world after the Second World War in which East and West were divided by the “Iron Curtain”. Consequently, during his visit to Warsaw in 1990, Henry Kissinger recognized that Central Europe was back in the geopolitical arena by saying: “I’m delighted to be here in Eastern, I mean Central Europe.”

There is no doubt that such moments of discontinuity, the absence of Central Europe, influenced the region, but they also provided a certain kind of bond, as common historical experience is the most important element uniting Central European nations. These nations were not sovereign when European countries began to take their modern shape, and then were suppressed under Soviet totalitarian rule. To sum up, I am in favor of the theory developed by the prominent Polish historian Oskar Halecki: in order to describe Europe as precisely as possible, he defined two Central Europes – West Central Europe (i.e. German) and East Central Europe (similar to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s concept; i.e. consisting of the countries lying east of Germany and west of Russia). Of course, I will focus on “our” East Central Europe.

This very brief outline of the individual character of the region shows how different the teaching of Central European history ought to be. First of all, it is important to remember that in the counties and nations of our region, freedom of discourse – speaking about our own history, developing a narration that won’t be restricted by censorship – has only

come into existence during the past two decades. This situation is similar to that which exists in the other fields of social and economic life, i.e. great suppression in comparison with Western Europe. In the case of historical experience this is particularly problematic; this is principally difficult because it is not possible to talk about “reducing the gap.” As if we could recapture our own place in that bright, “Western-centric” lecture of 20th century history in the West, which has already put down strong roots in social consciousness. In this narrative, there is no space left for the experience of Central Europe, as the countries of the region, at that time, had no capacity to influence its formation. Hence, with so many problems today in the historical sphere, the West is outraged that Central Europe is trying to destroy an established vision of history, while Central Europeans, with their specific and distinct historical experience, feel ignored.

This issue seems crucial from a pan-European perspective: the debate about historical narrative (mainly regarding the place of Communism and its crimes in 20th century history) between the West and Central Europe is one of the key discourses that affect the future of the European integration project. From the moment Central Europe was admitted into the European Union (even if it is not treated on equal footing with the “old” member states), its experience had to be taken into account in the process of constructing a European identity. It can no longer be exclusively Western European, as – with the current design of integration – as it would simply be incomplete.

This challenge is faced by two sides, both by Central European countries, which have to do tremendous work in order to introduce their experience and the specificity of their region’s history into the mass consciousness of Western societies, and by Western European countries, which have to do the difficult work of changing a well-rooted historical narrative. This task is even more difficult because there is a powerful and exceptionally influential entity that is interested in the failure of this reconstruction, namely Russia.

Naturally, I am aware that for hundreds of years many conflicts have arisen among Central European nations, conflicts which still burden bilateral relations. However, I would argue that these are minor issues in comparison to the regional problems outlined above. And if those aspects of history that divide nations prevail over those that can unite them, then all countries of the region will fail together.

This awareness is finally emerging among those involved in the politics of memory in Central Europe. In most countries, major institutions that study the recent past have already been created. These institutions have managed to gain recognition, to establish themselves firmly among others, and have begun to seek out areas for international cooperation. An excellent example of this is the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, which has gathered thirty-seven institutions from several countries primarily in Central Europe. The task of this platform is to maintain the memory of totalitarian crimes, part of our common heritage.

History is important. And it is not only a thing of the past; it has a demonstrable impact on the future. The well-being of the people of Central Europe depends on the process of remembering and reconciling. Moreover, the future fate of European integration may very well depend on it. /



JURAJ MARUŠIAK

is a Slovak political scientist, historian, journalist, and translator. He is the head of the scientific council at the Institute of Political Science at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. He was chairman of the Society for Central and Eastern Europe from 2004 to 2010.

The main feature of historical thought in our countries is that history is primarily taught in national frameworks; it is taught mostly as “National History” and not as the history of Europe or the world. World history is taught, but generally as a separate subject. We therefore know very little about the history of our neighbors. In Slovakia, ideally, we know a little bit more about Czech history, about the existence of Czechoslovakia. But we generally know very little about Poland. I think there was a public opinion poll financed by the International Visegrad Fund about historical knowledge, showing how little we know about others in the Visegrad Group.

Of course, history is part of “civic religion” everywhere in the world. History is simply a part of the state’s ideology. We have already had to deal with the emancipation of history from politics, but generally it is instrumentalized by the politics of fear, as a tool of legitimacy, of particular national ideologies, or other political ideologies. The general purpose of political elites is to instrumentalize history.

It is manifestly possible to transform enemies into friends. It is even desirable. First of all, this requires the will of political elites. If mutual reconciliation is the priority of particular national political elites, anything is possible. Civil dialogue is also one of the very important tools of reconciliation. I would like to mention the bright example of Polish-German dialogue, and, the example of the declaration of the Polish Catholic bishops in the 1960s. We can change historical narratives because our history is not only the history of macro-structures like nations or states, but it is also the history of human communities. We know that in the history of human communities and in the history of local communities, family history is very often quite different from great historical narratives. /

Cooperation and translation: Olga Skórka, Pavla Trůblová, Anna Weksej, and Milan Zubíček.



◆ Illustration by Magdalena Karpińska. The author is a Warsaw-based Polish painter. She graduated from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw.

Commenting on last
year's V4 initiative
My Hero – Your Enemy,
the former director
of the Visegrad Fund,
a Czech historian and
diplomat, explains the
public role of historical
research and debate in
our part of the world.

MY HERO – YOUR ENEMY



Jaroslav Říha

INTERVIEW WITH PETR VÁGNER
former director of the International
Visegrad Fund (2009–2012)

What purpose might it serve to talk about historical enmity in Central Europe, rather than simply friendship?

I think the expression of Cicero, *Historia est Magistra Vitæ*, expresses a commonly held idea or sentiment rather than a useful guide to action. Human beings love to repeat mistakes made by previous generations, but there is a certain hope that examples taken from history could retain some value for the present. This is particularly the case when we speak about historical foes.

The fact that we can organize conferences in which historians from Central European countries discuss various historical sins committed in the region, and do so without prejudice, demonstrates that the situation has changed and is better than several years ago.

We have to catch this momentum and illuminate controversial issues in our common history. We may thus be able to prevent abuses of these very moments by groups of extremists. This is particularly important with respect to younger generations.

Do we have many enemies in Central Europe? What has thus far been the outcome of such meetings?

My own sense is that younger generations in Central Europe tend to live without foes, while a considerable segment of older generations remains haunted by ghosts from the past. This is a pity. The twentieth century was very “fruitful” in this negative sense.

If we want to discuss a recent example, let’s have a look at the recent presidential elections in the Czech Republic. The so-called Beneš decrees are said to be extinct, but they are not. The decrees are still considered a symbol of Czech victory over Nazi Germany and an integral part of the Czech system by many.

Without suffering from nationalism or other similar diseases, historians are generally able to reach a common and evenhanded position that respects various national differences, in both reality and memory. The most recent conference to deal with such matters was called, perhaps a bit provocatively, “My Hero – Your Enemy,” and demonstrating the improved reality very clearly.

At any rate, such events suggest an obvious task: How can we disseminate such evenhanded positions and thereby calm the historical stressors in Central European societies? The situation is not dramatic, but it could be much better.

The decrees of Edvard Beneš, the President of the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile, were a series of laws drafted in the absence of a Czechoslovak parliament during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in World War II.

Among other things, the decrees dealt with the treatment of ethnic Germans and Hungarians in postwar Czechoslovakia.

The decrees laid the groundwork for the forced deportation of approximately three million permanent inhabitants of German and Hungarian origin.

During the presidential elections of 2013, two major contenders argued, among other things, about the contemporary significance of the decrees.

You refer to history as a field that emerges from scientific methods. In Central Europe, the debate we usually have about history is generally not fought on such grounds. History is often used, and sometimes abused, in the struggles of politics and diplomacy. What is your opinion on the use of history in politics or the politics of memory?

The use and misuse of history is at work everywhere and all the time, not simply in politics and diplomacy. What may be different today is that the methods behind such distortions are more sophisticated. In this sense, Central Europe does not constitute an exception.

Things are perhaps much better than several decades ago, when we had a minimum of three parallel histories: one provided by officialdom, the second told at home, and the third discovered through banned books and the “seditious” broadcasting of Radio Free Europe. There were also closed borders with our Western neighbors. This was an important precondition for the development of “the one and only true” history, which was, in point of fact, simply based on prejudice. Even today, some of these prejudices have survived and are reflected in various representations and interpretations of history. The image of a “good Czech and a bad German” might be just one of many myths.

It is not possible to prevent the use and misuse of history in politics. Political argumentation is very often based on various analogies and history is a very reliable supplier of such analogies. Also, you cannot effectively face the politics of memory or selective memory because you cannot change human nature. Selective work with memory is inherently two-faced: it can have either therapeutic or devastating effects.

I think historians and history teachers should aspire to be the mediators of an evenhanded attitude to history and accumulated experience. But how many are able to accomplish that? They are also members of society, and they have their

own experiences and interests that affect the results of their work.

This does not mean that we ought to abandon attempts to improve the current state of affairs, but it is necessary to understand that it is a very demanding and long-term process, always with uncertain results.

What do you think of the potential for civil society to act as such a mediator in the Visegrad Group? As the former Director of the International Visegrad Fund, you must have encountered many NGOs that dealt with history and memory. How would you describe their impact?

The potential of civil society with respect to history, particularly if we are speaking in terms of the effort to overcome historical burdens, is enormous. But I think these capacities have not been sufficiently exploited, at least not yet. In this area, I would characterize the potential role of the third sector as operating on at least two levels. The first would be in supporting everyday contacts amongst people in Central Europe. In this case, they accomplish their task rather effectively. We could cite an ever-growing list of projects focused on cross-border cooperation to substantiate this claim. But the second level of work, which more directly addresses your question, has not been sufficiently attempted.

I would like to mention three activities, all from different spheres, which are each making significant strides. “Memory of Nations” is a project by Post bellum, a Czech NGO, which is focused on the collection and mediation of the memories of witnesses. The project began in the Czech Republic, later targeted other Visegrad countries, and is presently being utilized beyond the V4 borders, in locations where their expertise can be of particular use.

The second also operates within the Visegrad format and was initiated by the Czech NGO Pant. This project works to disseminate knowledge about the 20th

century and to develop new models for effectively teaching history.

The third activity is perhaps not as well known as the preceding two, but I consider it equally interesting and noteworthy. Working with similar centers from the V4 and other countries, the Slovak Club of Military History Beskydy presents the results of research on the history of the Great War, looking for and reconstructing military cemeteries on battle fields in Central Europe.

These kinds of activities, in the so-called “grassroots of civil society,” suggest the potential that NGOs have and the necessity of their involvement.

We might also mention the related activities of KARTA from Poland, involved in the documentation of oral history in Central Europe, as well as the Hungarian Terra Cognita Foundation, which is extending its research and activity far beyond the V4. In what way do you think this experience might be helpful to our neighbors in Europe?

The importance of such activities beyond the Central Europe region is enormous, particularly if we are discussing the question of what to do with historical burdens.

Given the significance of the work of memory for contemporary European states, we could roughly divide the countries in question into three groups. The first group would be composed of countries which do not have substantive problems with their own history and in which history has only a weak influence on their current situation. Generally speaking, older European democracies belong to this group. For experts from these coun-

tries, our activities might be interesting as long as they provide better platforms for understanding our region and contemporary interests.

We belong to the second grouping. These countries, like those of Central Europe, are mostly able to deal with their own history, but the shadow of this history is occasionally overwhelming.

The third group is the most complicated. These are countries that face the overbearing challenge of history. Ukraine may be offered as an example in this case. I am currently preparing a project focused on Ukrainian historical burdens with my Ukrainian colleagues. We have identified more than twenty personalities and historical events that substantially divide Ukrainian society. In this case, our experience of how to deal with history may prove useful.

If not history, what else can help us find reconciliation and the drive to move forward?

The responsible and evenhanded interpretation of history may play the role of an instrument, however incomplete, in the reconciliation of society. But again, history can just as easily play a divisive role.

And how can you move forward? Perhaps the best thing to do would be to just try and not become too cynical or disappointed, and to show a willingness to use all the tools at hand. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first Czechoslovak president, developed the idea of small everyday labor. In this context, it could provide a way to move forward. /

My Hero – Your Enemy: Listening to Understand

The conference took place on 1–3 December 2011 under the auspices of the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia in the Czernin Palace. The event was organized by the Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Science in cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund and other partner organizations from the V4 countries.

Profound reconciliation requires investigation and possible change in historical narratives. A thorough analysis of Central European cases is illustrated by international examples. Written by a Slovak expert on the theory and practice of conflict resolution.

WE ARE THE *stories* WE *tell*

HISTORICAL CONCILIATION OF ETHNIC TENSIONS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

DAGMAR KUSÁ

The Beneš Decrees¹ are a result of World War II and therefore are unchangeable and irrevocable. Those who would like to nullify or change the Beneš Decrees today would have to change the results of World War II, the Treaty of Paris, and other documents. For us, this issue is untouchable and we will not even consider the subject!" (TASR, 2013).

This resolute statement came from Slovak Prime Minister Róbert Fico during a recent popular Sunday TV debate show in direct response to the request of Béla Bugár, the leader of the opposition political party Most-Híd, that the government acknowledge the detrimental effects of the Beneš Decrees on the fate of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia after the war and issue a symbolic apology. These statements were immediately picked up by the Slovak and Hungarian daily press where they stirred the usual minor waves

of commotion. There are a number of such neuralgic hot spots in the Slovak-Hungarian past (as in any past of two neighbors), and this brief heated exchange illustrates a number of interesting points.

Firstly, as Faulkner aptly said: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." History is approached through the lens of current needs, frames of reference, and political agendas. "The past is not was, it is." (again Faulkner). Furthermore, accounts of the past are charged with strong emotions and can, and often do, thereby become effective tools of political mobilization. The exchange also illustrates the importance of history to politics and of politicians to history. Historians, often thinking of their work as an objective science, might hesitate to accept the selectiveness and impressionability of historiography by specific political constellations (though there are important voices devoted to the specificity of historical narratives – such as Connerton, White, or Ankersmit). In societies where ethnic cleavages define the

political scene, history often only serves to further divide communities. However, if history is a tool of political mobilization, could it not also be used to foster cohesion or, at the very least, some grounds for mutual recognition? In what follows, my remarks are generally concerned with efforts to realize this latent potential within historical narratives and historical education in order to provide conciliation between communities burdened by conflicting collective memories.

Narratives form the fibers of our identities. We are the stories we tell. We are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, about others, and about the communities in which we live and develop. By this measure, historical narratives form the very fibers of ethnic and national identities. They provide the fabric that gives shape to an imagined community, its legitimation and purpose, and frames of meaning-making.

We perceive and interpret the world in narrative frames. We select and reselect

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1. The Beneš Decrees were a series of presidential decrees immediately issued after World War II. The decrees had the power of law and regulated various areas of political and social life. Some of the decrees (e.g. No. 5, 12, 33, 88, 108/1945 Coll. or No. 5/1948) remain sensitive topics in current political discourse, as they deprived ethnic Hungarians and Germans of citizenship for three years, confiscated property, limited cultural rights, and served as a basis for "voluntary agricultural labor" in the regions vacated by the transfer of Sudeten Germans, and so on.

information and we process, interpret, and communicate – either internally, to ourselves, or externally, to others. The stories we tell serve concrete purposes. They justify our behavior and thinking, they explain, legitimize and vindicate. They give meaning to our actions. We construct our personal identities in this complex mosaic.

We also believe that we alone tell these stories on our behalf. That we are their sole authors and that we know when we are being influenced by someone else. However, the truth is that we are largely unaware of the significant influence of others. David McRaney (2011) has helpfully synthesized common myths we have about thinking and collects the logical fallacies we commit. Outside of priming – the belief that we are independent rational thinkers who can separate our own ideas from outside influence, we commit a whole range of fallacies on a daily basis. Branding builds on this by giving us the option to create the individuals we think we are through choosing to align ourselves with the mystique of certain products. We proclaim our loyalty in this way and tend to feel an emotional attachment to an object (or entity) of choice. When our stories clash or are incomplete, we try to fill in the gaps. We cannot verify every piece of information that comes our way, and we don't feel the need to; we happily accept an argument on the basis of the authority of someone we hold in esteem. In McRaney's words, we are not so smart.

Dan Sperber (1985) has elaborated the model of communication patterns among people, likening them to an epidemiology of representations. What we transmit are schematic, selective representations of events, which we organize as stories. They spread much the same way as diseases – they are communicated virally. While mutation is an exception in the spread of disease, it is the rule in the spread of cultural representations. The content of each story is slightly changed during its communication.

It is also worthwhile to note that certain types of stories tend to be more successful in the process of communication, having better chances of becoming cultural representation, while others may pass unnoticed. Puzzles and mysteries that we can relate to other cultural representations seem to be especially attractive to our minds. When stumped for interpretation, we rely on sources of authority as guides.

Historical narratives operate within this space of communication networks

and conform to their physical limitations. While observations from cognitive science and psychology cannot be directly applied to the studies of collectivities – the processes of representations on the level of communities being more complex and their anthropomorphic dimensions often out of place – it is still useful to keep these modes of operation in mind when considering how narratives are received and internalized by the individual audiences about which they speak.

Cultural representations that relate to stories about our past – historical narratives – are those that are often among the rare stories with long lifespans. They fill the depository of our longterm cultural memory, which Jan Assmann distinguishes from day-to-day communicative memory (Assmann, 1995). Cultural representations in turn operate within the dynamic mechanism of our ethnic identities, and mediate between our personal, intimate identities and our perceived belonging to larger entities, such as ethnic groups.

In his critique of methodologies used in collective memory literature, Kansteiner laments that most of the studies on memory focus on chronological depiction of events in a specific geographical space, paying little attention to the audience of these representations. Therefore, many of the new approaches to collective memory cannot be connected with specific social collectivities and their historical consciousness (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 179). Kansteiner highlights the dynamic of collective memory: rather than a simple depository of past events, it should be recast “as a complex process of cultural production and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers” (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 179). The memory makers are the authorities that have priority access to the channels of cultural representation. They serve as the carriers of ethnic identities, redefining their content in the context of communicative as well as cultural memory (Smelser, 2004).

Emotions attached to these narratives play a significant role in this process, for they serve as a trigger or a catalyst; they have the ability to stir an individual into action by tapping into his or her reservoir of emotions. Negative emotions in particular – fear, hatred, resentment, and rage – are prone to lead to a specific reaction: fight or flight, a quest for revenge, depres-

sion or seclusion, a call for justice, etc. (see e.g. Petersen, 2002). Those narratives that come packaged with strong emotions will be particularly successful and viable, linking broader cultural representations with the personal identity of the recipient.

Narratives that are presented as representations of a cultural trauma – and most master narratives include some – are among the strongest and most persistent of narratives. Most nations have historical eras or events that are portrayed in the language of trauma, connected with the community's suffering, injustices perpetrated against it, its victories, heroes, and martyrs. The vocabulary used is colored accordingly and speaks of trauma, injury, catastrophe, the yoke of suffering, and so on. The emotional information carried in such narratives also includes the message about who is to blame – someone else, the “other”.

Historical events, as with any communicated events, tend to be interpreted through a number of available narratives, which are sometimes diametrically opposed. Narratives of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the status of the Trianon Treaty in history textbooks in Hungary and Slovakia could serve as prime examples of such divergent narratives. For Hungarians, they represent the crippling of historical Hungary, a disaster that has lessened the geopolitical status of Hungary in the region, and has also physically divided many families. For the Slovaks, Trianon does not mean much more than the organic start of independent statehood, interpreted as a logical and inevitable outcome of World War I. On its own, Trianon simply does not receive much attention.

Divergent narratives have a direct impact on inter-ethnic relations. Just as some topics from the Slovak-Hungarian past prove explosive in contemporary politics, the shared past of the Czechs and Slovaks played a role in the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Igor Lukes (1995) aptly pointed out that divergent perceptions of the key events of the twentieth century in the master narratives of the Czechs and Slovaks – a number of events and eras that represented a dark age for one nation and, at the same time, a period of relative stability and growth for the other – led to a “failure to find a decent common past,” and thereby a failure to find a common platform for the future.

Successful historical narratives of cultural trauma tend to have an impact on the narratives of other communities

as well. They achieve the status of sacred events, authentic and untouchable, and the aura of suffering elevates cultural trauma above other narratives. This can lead to a phenomenon of “trauma envy” (Mowitt, 2000), whereby the other community searches for an equally strong narrative that involves an even greater share of loss and suffering. For example, the Slovak master narrative tends to elevate the era of Magyarization, consciously or unconsciously, to such a role in historiography, history lessons, literature, and film. Historical narratives thus tend to operate in context, reflecting current political realities and reacting to other historical narratives in turn. In the case of narratives charged with strong negative emotions, they tend to reinforce each other and enforce which positions and interpretations are considered divergent.

How can this centrifugal trend be overcome by historians, teachers, and communities at large? Is it possible to rewrite history with some collective effort or is this a futile battle against windmills?

Places that are burdened with the memory of violent and protracted ethnic conflicts – Rwanda, Israel and Palestine, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and so on – share the kind of social cleavages that are deeply imbedded in the ethnic, religious, and cultural identities of history that are particularly challenging, and sometimes explosive. In such regions, it is therefore all the more important that the master narratives of history that shape public discourse and history curricula in schools be given particular attention. The approach which is so often adopted – to purposely ignore the painful parts of history – does not tend to result in a society moving forward towards conciliation. But these transitions provide us with important lessons learned and models and methods of successful (and warnings against unsuccessful) historical conciliation.

In Cambodia, almost thirty-five years passed before the history of the Pol Pot regime was even introduced in historical textbooks, and it was a taboo topic for the media, schools, and public discourse as well. This has resulted in an entire generation growing up without any knowledge of the genocide and many of these same young people not believing the stories their parents and grandparents told them. This has caused a fascinating, yet grave, social problem in many villages, separating the younger and older

generations from each other, and thereby causing rifts in communities and families. Since remnants of the regime operated in various parts of the country for three and a half decades, the memory of genocide was too violent and recent for conciliation to be possible earlier. When the country was finally preparing for the start of the trials of the top leaders of the Pol Pot regime in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, society was increasingly ready to address the past, and to use history as a healing mechanism. Successful efforts were initiated at the local community level. The International Center for Conciliation (ICFC) and other NGOs led sustained community dialogues in individual, often remote, villages that addressed the topic of life under the Pol Pot regime for the first time. These dialogues often took months or years and brought the whole community through a process of grieving, acknowledgment, and symbolic acts of memorialization. These dialogues also served as an important source for court trials and provided materials for the Documentation Center of Cambodia, a non-profit organization devoted to the establishment of a thorough historical record of the era. Together, these processes prepared the ground for the first careful introduction of the topic into history textbooks. Without them, the topic would still be closed.

Rwanda’s government has tried a more direct approach to foster historical conciliation, only some ten years after the genocide. The results have been mixed. The attempt to prescribe a common identity, forbidding reference to Hutu and Tutsi identities, except when referring to the events of the genocide itself, has not been very successful. However, the more participatory models introduced into public education, and especially, again, in local community dialogues and trials, which allowed communities to address grievances together, and to give voice to individual narratives and acknowledge them, thus establishing empathy and trust, seem to be paying off at local levels.

Successful historical conciliation works on multiple levels, from the individual, to the community, and up to national levels. The level on which they operate naturally influences the working methods utilized, but methodologically, they tend to have several factors in common: self-determination of the participants, different perspectives, acknowledgment and empathy. For the process to be fully

successful, it needs to go hand in hand with the symbolic support of political and opinion leaders. As this field and approach evolves, more and more organizations and academic institutions are taking part in it and discovering the importance of these elements to their work.

We can distill the key elements of a successful process of historical conciliation from these experiences, as well as the growing amount of literature on participatory education that stresses a learner-based approach with the development of competencies rather than rote memorization.

The self-determination of the participants in the process tends to be of crucial importance. Direct participation, choice, and ownership of the process in studying history provide for a far more authentic experience than memorizing dates, names, and places.

Multiperspectivity goes along with self-determination. For a meaningful process of learning, it is important to encounter various perspectives and interpretations of events and especially questions regarding diverging interpretations. Problem-solving is didactically among the most successful approaches. EUROCLIO, the European Association of History Educators, has been devoted to promoting history education in primary and secondary schools that have been built on these principles since 1993. Their efforts have primarily focused on the development of teaching materials and the training of teachers. All of the projects bring together educators from various countries (e.g. from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina), who then work together on educational material and train together in its implementation. Their current project, “Sharing History: Cultural Dialogues”, is working toward the implementation of dialogues and training in the Black Sea region, bringing together history educators from five countries (Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine) to develop common approaches to history education.

Empathy: To deal with historical narratives in regions divided by ethnic tensions likewise requires dealing with people’s identities, and with stereotypes and preconceptions of the “other” that have emerged from prior socialization. Teaching history that connects others therefore requires shifting attitudes, addressing myths, and establishing empathy. Positive emotional connections cannot

be fostered without direct encounters. Dominant and negative mainstream narratives tend to dehumanize and the work of re-humanization requires direct contact and relationships. Therefore, emphasis has to be on local levels and models of engagement that allow for such interactions.

The Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation conducts difficult and sustained dialogues that revolve around historical narratives between Armenians and Turks and Armenians and Azerbaijanis. An approximately two-week process facilitates a dialogue that addresses initial stereotypes that the two groups hold against each other and moves through the process of sharing fears, needs, hopes, and concerns that participants have about the future. At the end of this group process, people who would initially refuse to shake hands are able to provide a small but viable platform for other projects of cooperation in the future, something that would otherwise be unimaginable.

There are several examples of excellent academic endeavors that have all of the components of a great historical conciliation project, but which fail in practice due to several obstacles. Professor Eyal Naveh of Tel Aviv University has developed an exemplary textbook of Israeli and Palestinian history based on a shared narrative (Naveh, et al., 2003). Each page has two columns – one recounting the Israeli, the other the Palestinian narrative, with a space for notes in the middle. Although

one might object to the static juxtaposition of the narratives, the textbook received accolades from conflict resolution experts. It has been pilot tested in a few schools with great success. Yet the textbook has not been implemented since political will appears to be lacking on both sides.

In such processes, it is important to emphasize the role of acknowledgment of wrongdoings in one's own past rather than that of apology and forgiveness. Apology is outward-oriented and implicitly demands a reaction of some kind (ideally forgiveness). It may however be perceived as calculation or arrogance (such as the attempt of British scholars and activists traveling to China to apologize officially for the Opium War, or the request of Chinese officials that Japan issue a written apology for the occupation of China) and result in the escalation of conflict. We do not have to travel so far. When František Mikloško, then a member of parliament, initiated attempts at symbolically making an official apology by Slovaks to the Hungarians, and vice versa, in the early 1990s, things failed on both sides. Slovaks would not budge on the issue of the Beneš Decrees, and Hungarians were not willing to apologize for the Vienna Arbitrary Award and its consequences, etc. A far more successful symbolic measure that is still remembered by some (especially by the representatives of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia) was the New Year's address of the speaker of the parliament in January 2003, critically re-

flecting on the history of the Slovaks and Slovakia, including acknowledgment of wrongdoings against others – as “scars on the face of the country” (Hrušovský, 1 January 2003). Meetings of Slovak and Hungarian historians, which do take place regularly and do not leave out difficult subjects, reflect much the same dynamic.

How do we know that a process of historical conciliation is successful? When can we say it has definitely worked and when have the efforts at shared narratives fallen flat? Is it necessary for historical conciliation to take place at a national level or does it require a face-to-face interaction?

Unfortunately, history is such a live subject, intimately connected to the concrete political, social, cultural realities of ethnic communities and, sometimes, dependent on the emotional readiness or political agenda of the leaders of the community, that it is impossible to provide a definite verdict. But certainly, if the process is to mark a shift in attitudes and sensitivities in an entire community, it will necessarily require both symbolic political support and individual engagement. /

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EXPERIENCES OF WRITING

Common History Textbooks in Europe

ANTONI WALKOWSKI



1 Histoire/Geschichte – a series of Franco-German history textbooks published since 2006, written by a joint team of ten historians (five from each country). “You always have two views, at least two views, and that allows pupils to develop their own standpoint, their own image of history. That’s very useful within democratic and liberal teaching of history”;

said Peter Geiss, one of the book’s two publishers.¹

2 The book is considered a landmark in Franco-German relations and has great psychological significance for a younger generation of French and German students. It is the only textbook that has been approved for use in all sixteen German federal states. The project was started at a French-German Youth Parliament meeting on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Franco-German Élysée Treaty on January 21, 2003. According to the German Department for Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry of Education under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and President Jacques Chirac respectively, it is not only a result of better understanding, but also a tool for even better Franco-German relations in the future.

3 In Germany, textbooks usually give pupils some space to find their own sources of information.

4 Many aspects of the countries’ past are looked upon differently. For example, the United States is typically considered a rival to French interests, while in Germany, post-1945 America has always been looked upon as a helping hand in the post-war reconstruction in Germany (Marshall Plan, Berlin Airlift, etc.). Instead of hiding or manipulating the information, the teams tried to explain the differences in the ways it is presented. A similar problem occurred when the team took on the history of communism, traditionally regarded as an important ideology in shaping the French political scene (especially in the 1950s and 1960s), but often associated with terror and dictatorship in Germany (Soviet occupation, GDR, Berlin Wall, etc.).

5 The topic of World War II has been carefully avoided in the first book, but was included in the second volume, which was heavily criticized by authors including the Polish historian Wojciech Roszkowski.^{2, 3}

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1 Slovak Prime Minister Róbert Fico and his Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Gyurcsány announced plans for a joint textbook after a summit in Hungary at which the issue came up on 19 June

2007. It was supposed to be supplementary material to traditional textbooks, but the matter was sidelined in 2008 by the Slovak educational minister because of tensions between Slovakia and Hungary over a large Hungarian population living in southern Slovakia and unresolved territorial disputes. The relations between the two countries have sharply deteriorated since 2006.

2 The current Slovak territory was part of Hungary from the 11th to the 20th centuries, with modern-day Bratislava even becoming the capital of Royal Hungary until the 19th century. After World War I, Slovakia became part of the sovereign state of Czechoslovakia based on the agreements of the TREATY of Trianon. Since then, Hungarians have viewed Slo-

vakia as an integral part of their northern territories that was from them, while the Slovaks have reinforced their view of national sovereignty and independence, causing both countries to clash over history on numerous occasions. This prevented any agreement over a history textbook from happening, despite the fact that both countries joined the EU in May 2004.

3 On 13 May 2009 the Slovak news agency TASR published a report that a joint Slovak-Hungarian history textbook was due to be released by the end of the year. None of this came to fruition.



1 In the Fall of 2006 German Foreign Affairs Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier presented the idea of a joint Polish-German history textbook. The matter was taken up by the foreign affairs ministers of Poland and Germany in January 2008, who asked the Joint Polish-German Textbook Commission to work on a suitable concept. The project officially began in May 2008, whereupon a project

team was established, which was joined by politicians and scientists from both countries.

2 The project aims to create identical books for both German and Polish students differing only in the language of instruction. It is supposed to become a history textbook approved by the education ministries of both countries and it will be fully integrated into the school curriculum not as supplementary learning material, but as the basis from which all students will learn. The textbook, published in Germany by Universum and in Poland by WSiP, will comprise four volumes covering the history of the world and Europe spanning from ancient history to the 21st century from a joint Polish-German perspective. The first volume was supposed to have been published in 2013, but no publishing houses were willing to take up the project. In order to overcome the problem, both the German and Polish governments decided to procure financial guarantees for the publish-

ers, with the German side contributing about EUR 2.4 million. The first volume will be published in the fall of 2014, with the other volumes being released over the following three years.

3 According to the Joint Polish-German Textbook Commission, in the spring of 2012 work with the chosen authors had started on the first volume. The textbook will be used by 7th to 10th grade students.

4 From the perspective of the educational and scientific policy of both countries the project is of great importance. By participating in the project both sides have shown willingness to include their neighbor's experiences in the process of learning history and to intensify scientific dialogue about common history.



PIOTR BAJDA

Political history has never been strong on the Visegrad agenda. Besides political and economic cooperation, common V4 initiatives have mostly focused on culture, cultural heritage, and education. And yet, we should not forget that historical experience was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Visegrad Group – it was not only shared aspirations, but also the sense of a common, interlinked history that brought the member countries together, as well as a determination to overcome historically rooted animosities still haunting the region. A better understanding of history continues to be a goal for us. Obvious though it may seem, the Visegrad Group can only become politically stronger if it manages to create a regional identity. That needs to be based upon a common understanding of the region's past, which has so strongly shaped its current geopolitical status.

Moreover, many Visegrad citizens have all too often had the feeling that the historical image of both their country and region is seriously misrepresented in Western discourse. We also tend to have the impression that when it comes to picturing the region's past, our own vision is neither voiced nor heard enough. At the same time, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, and Slovaks often fall prey to their own national prejudices, which damage historical narratives in their own way. Shifting historical debate to a wider, Visegrad level might help to remedy both problems – by simultaneously strengthening the region's historical self-consciousness and curbing national overindulgence.

It's about time political history in the region received more attention and long-

term, strategic thinking. As members of the Visegrad Group we have benefitted from political and economic cooperation. Why not join forces in an effort to build a reliable historical image of the region, or at least spotlight the major differences, controversies, and mutual injuries in order to cool underlying emotions and make room for more rational conversation? When it comes to the history of our region, the West can learn a lot from us. If we conduct research, debate and disseminate results in a common, Visegrad framework, they will resonate better and attract a wider audience. Not only can this put an end to distortions and blunders in the Western media, but it may also transform the Visegrad Group into a reliable partner in historical debates with the West, one able to tell its own story and provide sound arguments in its support.

In what follows, an attempt is made to highlight the problems of political history in the region and describe a unique historical project that could serve as a model for other common history-oriented initiatives within the Visegrad region.

The website of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs contains the special bookmark "Against Polish concentration camps". It was created in reaction to a growing number of mentions in foreign media of "Polish death camps" or "Polish concentration camps" in the context of World War II. These phrases, referring to Nazi camps built on the German-occupied territory of Poland, which were administered and operated by the occupiers, are considered insulting and untrue by the Polish diplomatic service. Interventions by Polish diplomatic missions and Poles living in given countries have,

in most cases, provoked quick reactions intended to correct the phrasing and express regret for its use. Even the Slovak SME daily wrote of a "Polish death camp" in August 2012, in the context of Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorated on 2 August. It was not until the intervention of the Polish embassy that the content of the article was modified in its on-line version. Of course, the most notorious use of the "Polish death camps" phrase was by President Barack Obama when he posthumously bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Jan Karski. Working on behalf of the Polish government in exile and the Polish Underground State, Karski reported to the Western Allies about the extermination of the Jews in the occupied Polish territory; in July 1943 he presented his report to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate occasion for the mistake to have been made.

It therefore needs to be asked why the "Polish death camps" phrase so often appears, why something so obvious to us remains for others an inexplicable enigma? Of course, in many cases it is merely a clumsy abbreviation, in others a matter of ignorance, but it may also be considered an attempt to redefine history and place blame for the tragedy of the war on other nations. This is why reports of the occurrences of the phrase are particularly astonishing and outrageous when it involves the German or Austrian media.

And yet, this distorted image of World War II has not only been a problem for the Poles, although the scale of atrocities perpetrated by the Germans on Polish territory during the war was unprecedented. Indeed, the media have also spread falsehoods, simplifications and stereotypes about Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians. The "Polish death camps" >

may be the most outrageous lie, but it is not the only one repeatedly publicized in texts about the Visegrad countries. It is related to a broader phenomenon and points to a serious problem that we have with constructing a convincing image of our region, which was falsified in communist times and has not been set straight until the present. Contrary to all appearances, we cannot escape history, it will always shape our identities and sensitivities. It does make a difference whether, according to common knowledge, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians are treated as victims or perpetrators in the tragedy of the war. This does not mean that we ought to embellish facts, for this would simply mean putting one lie in place of another. But our own image and the prestige of each of the Visegrad Group countries depends solely on our own actions, and no one can relieve us of this responsibility, neither today, nor in the future.

The Visegrad Group was a unique phenomenon at the time of its inception in 1991. Against the background of the USSR falling apart and a war-shaken Yugoslavia, we put forward the image of three states able to cooperate with each other and were ready to make the effort of transformation in order to become a reliable partner for Europe. It may be said that by establishing the Visegrad Group we gained geopolitical independence. As a result of the joint declaration signed in the Hungarian castle of Visegrád, the concept of Central Europe was retrieved by the language of political science, and owing to the initiatives of the V4 it still preserves its significance. The installation of a new European focal point was well described by Karl Schlögel, (professor of the European University of Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)) in his book *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts. Europa im Übergang (The Center Lies to the East)*. In one of the chapters, the author explains how Germany “lost” Central Europe in the early 1990s, when the region became the subject of independent discussions in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest, with Germany remaining an important but external partner to the talks.

The direction taken by the Visegrad Group countries toward cooperation, reform, and transformation or – to put it briefly – toward the future, opened the doors to Western and Atlantic institutions for us, and thereby changed our entire geopolitical position. In historic

terms, 2004 signaled a regional “return to Europe.” And since a common Visegrad image, rooted in the region’s history, proved to be an effective instrument for the construction of Central European identity, it should remain an important way to enhance the international prestige of our region. The need for such a common image is particularly urgent at a time when we are witnessing endeavors to reinterpret history. Poland and the Czech Republic, in particular, have been attentively watching the process of the construction of contemporary German identity. Here, the involvement of the federal government in the creation process of a museum documenting German expellees after World War II can hardly be treated as mere domestic policy. There have been attempts to create a cult of expellees, without making reference to the genesis of the process, thereby falsely equating victims and aggressors. In this context, phrases like “Polish death camps” or “the genocide of Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia” sound less astonishing. It now turns out that not only capital has a nationality, but history too. This is simply one more reason for us to show more concern about the image of the Visegrad region and about our remembrance of things past.

The initiative of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is important and perhaps even deserves some form of emulation by other Visegrad capitals. Fortunately, this is not the only initiative in public and scholarly discourse tackling historical issues out of concern about the media image of our region. In May and June 2012, I had the opportunity to participate in an atypical and extremely thought-provoking conference: “Recovering Forgotten History: The Image of East-Central Europe in American Academic Textbooks”. The author and organizer of the project was Professor Andrzej Kamiński, who taught history at Georgetown University for many years. The main partner on the Polish side is Łazarski University, one of the few private universities in Poland.

Taking place for the tenth time, this conference differs from other events of its kind. It is not divided into sessions with papers presented and time allotted for discussion, and yet it fully preserves the character of a scholarly event. It also requires more advance preparation than any other conference. Underlying the conference is a very unique idea. The

invited Polish experts receive a number of manuscripts, submitted by the most prestigious British and American publishers. Their task is to review them before the conference, focusing on those fragments – sometimes it may be entire texts – that deal with Central Europe, looking into the history of the whole region or a specific country. In addition to historical books, the manuscripts also include analyses of contemporary processes of political transformation. Each text receives two or even three reviews which sometimes focus on very different parts of the planned publication. These reviews are to be sent to the organizers before the conference so that they can pass them on to the authors and publishers for analysis. It is only after this preliminary stage that we are ready to get together and discuss each text, page by page. The conference lasts for two weeks, during which time each manuscript is closely examined for an entire session that can last up to three hours. This whole process creates a unique opportunity for us to confront differing visions and interpretations, and in some cases to correct basic factual errors in the reviewed texts.

Both authors and publishers participate in conference events. In cases of highly critical reviews, confrontations may lead to serious editing and rewriting of the text or even, in some extreme cases, it may persuade the publisher to withdraw the text from publication. It was Professor Kamiński who managed to convince major Western academic publishers that it is worthwhile consulting experts from the region who specialize in a given field. Of course, the authors and publishers can either accept or reject the experts’ opinions, but according to Kamiński they are always willing to listen. Thus, when we reach for books like Jackson J. Spielvogel’s *Western Civilization*, David Painter’s *The Cold War: An International History* or Gale Stokes’ *The Walls Came Tumbling Down. The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* we need to keep in mind that these books have been reviewed by Polish experts and discussed with them, like many others dealing with the history of East-Central Europe that were published in recent years by Cambridge and Oxford University Press, the Longman Publishing Group, Yale University and the University of Pittsburgh Press.

An important element of the project accompanying the conference is an organized tour allowing guests to visit a

selection of sites in Poland. For a significant number of publishers, or even the authors themselves, this is their first opportunity to visit Central Europe. Walks down the streets of Wrocław, Kraków, Lublin, and Sandomierz, accompanied by debates organized at Ossolineum or the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, are not meant as tourist activities, but rather to facilitate discussions about the past and the present. A visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp and the Birkenau mass extermination camp is intended to provide a more adequate vision of the tragic events of the past. Through such activities, the region's history becomes more tangible to participants.

It has not been my only intention to give credit to the organizers of the project for coming up with the idea and executing it. My goal was also to demonstrate the kind of work and commitment that is still ahead of us so that Central Europe can be talked and written about in a more thoughtful manner. In the eyes of many Western commentators and scholars, we are still a vague land between Russia and Germany, too close to be called the East, too far away to be considered the West. This is why initiatives such as Recovering Forgotten History not only need to be promoted, but further publicized. In my opinion, the main idea of the project should be endorsed as follows: authors and publishers need to consult experts before publication. Not only does this ensure better control over the content of the planned publication, but it also allows the

avoidance of overheated debates once the book has been released. Of course, it may often turn out that both sides are determined to enforce their views and defend their judgment, instead of seeking the truth. Still, only the "discussion before publication" formula provides the author with the unique opportunity of meeting his reviewers and opens space for a calm, matter-of-fact discussion.

Possible ways of expanding the project are well worth considering. It would certainly be an advantage if, besides a visit to Kraków or Auschwitz, the American and British guests had the opportunity to visit other places in the Visegrad Group countries. It would be no less important to expand the team of experts reviewing the manuscripts, including specialists from other Central European countries. The invitation of Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak by Ivan Franko of Lviv State University proved very rewarding last year. Of course, in Poland we can find experts or scientists ready to review manuscripts about the history or contemporary politics of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Hungary, but it would obviously be more appropriate for such reviews to be prepared in cooperation with experts from the countries concerned.

Finding additional sources of financing for such an expanded project is likely to be difficult, especially today, at a time of financial crisis that disproportionately affects small countries. There may also be a lack of political will, as it can hardly be expected that all political

leaders in our region are equally interested in historical issues. On the other hand, there are academic and expert groups in every Visegrad country that are likely to get involved in a joint effort to construct a more positive image of the Visegrad Group, based on high scientific standards. The International Visegrad Fund may well be expected to become interested in such a project. Building a positive image, refuting stereotypes, and debunking historical lies is part of the fund's mission, and the results that the "Recovering Forgotten History" project have achieved so far almost guarantee future success. We are left to hope that the organizers decide to expand the conference formula and obtain support from the relevant institutions. We should also look forward to other Visegrad-oriented projects, focusing on the history of the region and carried out to strengthen our common Visegrad image. For when it comes to dealing with the past, it is always the future that is at stake. /

Translated by Samanta Stecko

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RESPONSE OF THINK TANKS TO VISEGRAD CHALLENGES

Regional policy-making has been supported by the think tank platform *Think Visegrad* since 2012. Its coordinator presents his views on the challenges and constraints that analytical groups have to face today.

TOMÁŠ STRÁŽAY

Undoubtedly, the accession of the Visegrad countries to the European Union represents an important milestone in regional cooperation. For a long time, integration into the EU was the principal priority. This accession can be considered an achievement of individual countries as well the Visegrad Group. Membership in the European Union provided the V4 with an enhanced ability to push for national and regional priorities, precisely through the shaping of different EU policies.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

The V4 has principally resulted in more intensified cooperation, regionally and on the European stage. This cooperation is most noteworthy in negotiations with neighboring regions of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. By tradition, the foreign ministers of the V4 devote one summit yearly to the Western Balkans and another to the Eastern Partnership.

As individual member states and under the auspices of the V4, particular priority has been placed on providing a European perspective for the Western Balkans. Progress in this area is most apparent in the case of Croatia, although much remains to be done. The V4 can therefore continue to play an important role as an advocate at the EU level and a source of inspiration – in terms of regional cooperation and integration “know-how.”

With respect to the Eastern Partnership and related issues in the “neighborhood,” much remains to be done. In this case, the main role of the V4 seems to reside in pressing for reform, harmonization of legislation, and simply raising the profile of Eastern Partnership countries, given that they are not considered potential candidates for membership in the EU – at least for the foreseeable future.

This regional cooperation has also been noteworthy in the area of energy security. Beginning in 2009, the gas crisis intensified an existing desire for secure energy supplies and infrastructure. The organization of Visegrad energy summits and appointment of high-level expert working groups is certainly a step in the right direction and tangible proof of the importance of the issue for the V4. The most important priorities include the development of the North-South gas corridor, the development of the regional gas market, as well as cooperation in the field of nuclear power.

There are a number of additional areas in which the V4 countries have only begun to enhance cooperation – including infrastructure and spatial planning, as well as security. Nevertheless, there is still space for intensified coordination. In the future, it seems likely that security cooperation will play an increasingly important role in the V4. The intention to create a V4 EU Battle Group by 2016 is a very concrete goal that has the backing of political elites, and would represent a significant achievement.

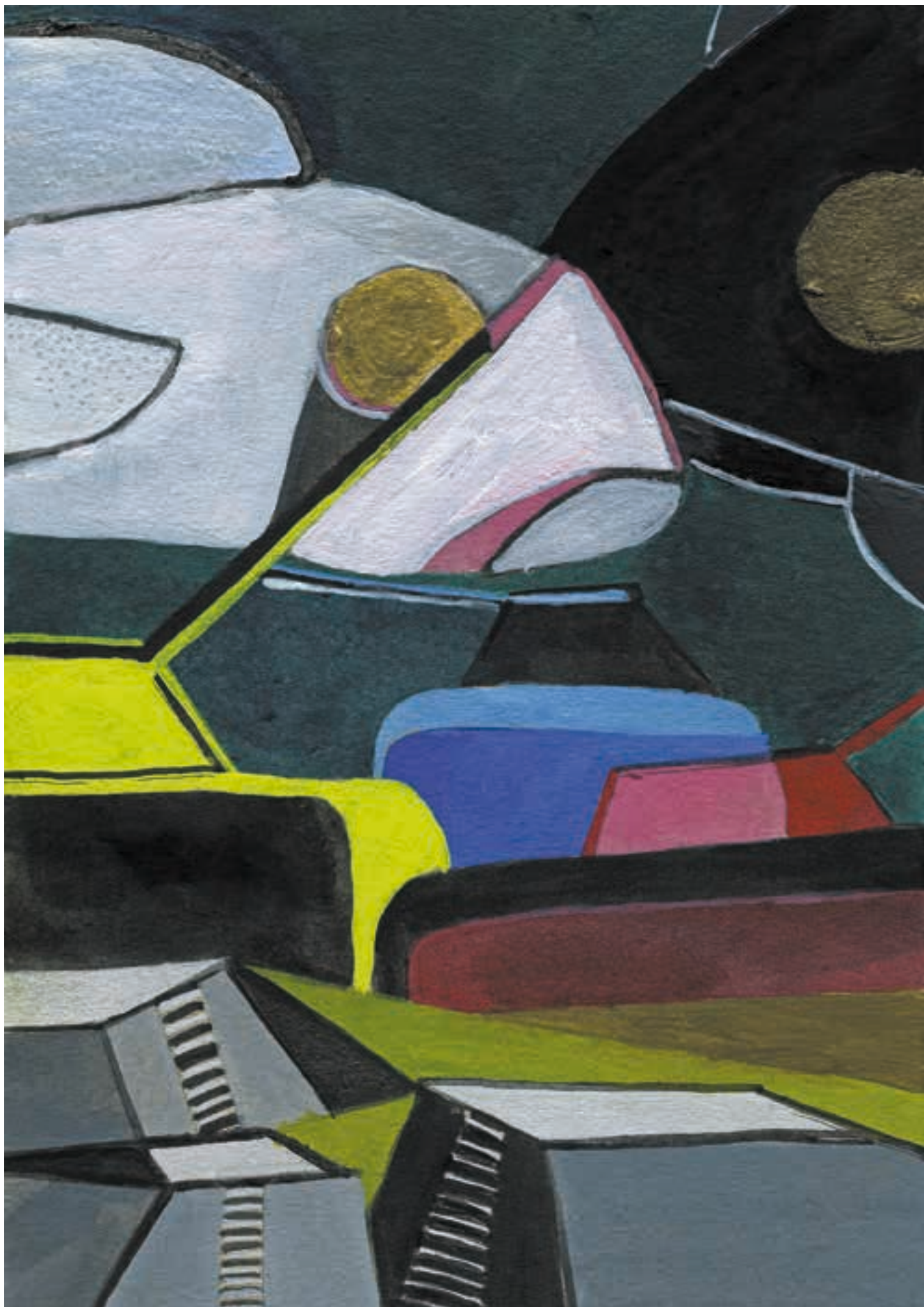
It would likewise be necessary to mention coordination at the EU level. Representatives of the V4 work to develop common positions before important EU meetings and summits. And although these special consultations have not resulted in the emergence of a single voice, they have produced a set of mutual priorities – particularly concerning fiscal goals for the EU in the coming years.

THE V4 THINK TANK PLATFORM – WHY?

The aforementioned areas of cooperation and related challenges require adequate responses. Solid bases of research and analysis exist in all four V4 countries, but past cooperation between research centers and other types of think tanks was based on ad hoc projects, rather than structured and regular activities. This was one of the reasons why the V4 think tank platform was established. Another reason for the establishment of this platform was for the strengthening of the non-governmental sphere in Visegrad cooperation. Since analyses of independent researchers are considered of added value for state institutions; the think tank platform counts on their potential.

Under the name Think Visegrad, this grouping intends to become a platform for a structured dialogue among Visegrad

► Illustration by Olga Micińska (1987), who is a Polish visual artist and woodworker. Graduated from Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.



experts on issues of strategic importance. Similarly important is the goal of becoming the source of recommendation to the governments of the V4, the Visegrad Group presidencies and the International Visegrad Fund. Think Visegrad aspires to cover the most important thematic priorities of the V4, including energy security, internal cohesion of the V4, EU institutions and policies, the Western Balkans, relations with Eastern neighbors, development assistance, hard security, environmental protection, Roma-related issues, migration, transport, etc.

The platform builds on the existing network of think tanks in V4 countries, as well as on their long-term cooperation in the framework of the Visegrad Strategic Program. Each project partner enjoys a considerable reputation, and most have already successfully cooperated with the governments of their respective countries. It is also worth mentioning that applicants and partners are already members of well established networks (EPIN, PASOS, etc.) and thus have an outreach to many other think tanks in the region and beyond.

The network of think tanks participating in this work consists of a so-called “core network” of think tanks, including the eight partner organizations (two per country) with coordinating abilities – and a “general network,” encompassing all think tanks participating in the work of the platform. The general network is open to cooperation with any interested think-tank from any V4 country.

The project envisages the development of a pre-agreed upon number of long-term analyses on topics of strategic importance to the V4. All the V4 countries will be equally represented by one author. In addition to long term analyses, Think Visegrad is also working to develop short term analyses. In contrast with long term analyses, short term analyses are expected to be developed in the course of seven working days, with a length of approximately two pages. In addition, Think Visegrad will also enable eight visiting fellows from non-V4 countries to spend up to six weeks in various Visegrad think tanks. Besides giving visiting fellows an opportunity to take part in the institute’s activities, each of them will

also be expected to develop a policy paper on an agreed-upon topic.

SUSTAINABILITY

As mentioned above, the substance of the Think Visegrad project is the creation of a network of cooperating think tanks from all Visegrad countries and the development of expert analyses with recommendations. This aim can only be achieved if the project maintains long term sustainability – the continuous support of the International Visegrad Fund therefore remains a crucial precondition for successful implementation of the project. If this condition is met, Think Visegrad can contribute to the internal cohesion of the Visegrad Group and become an important instrument of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sectors in the region. /

For more information please visit
www.visegradfund.org/think.

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In July 2012, the Aspen Institute global network opened its 9th branch in Prague, operating in Central Europe. The Aspen Institute Prague is a non-ideological educational and policy institution.

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THE RISE OF THE TYCOONS

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND **CHANGING** **MEDIA OWNERSHIP** IN CENTRAL EUROPE

VÁCLAV ŠTĚTKA

The beginning of last year took many observers of the Czech media scene by surprise, when the owner of the largest agricultural and food processing conglomerate in the country, Andrej Babiš (whose wealth is estimated by Forbes magazine at some 1.4 billion dollars), announced a rather ambitious plan to launch the regional news weekly *5+2 Days*, which would be distributed freely in over seventy local variations. What stirred debate more than the generous scope of this publishing project, which currently employs around 160 journalists and has a combined circulation of one million copies, is the fact that Babiš also heads the newly established political movement “ANO 2011” (Yes 2011), which aims to compete in the 2014 general elections. Although the movement is fueled by a strong anti-corruption rhetoric and a promise to improve political culture, the recent activities of its leader on the news media market – including a plan to buy the Internet news portal Aktualne.cz and to launch his own television channel – have sparked criticism, suggesting there is more to the business tycoon’s motives than pure “business interest,” as he has himself called it. After all, virtually the only advertisers in the new weekly have been his own companies. >

BUSINESSMEN INTO MEDIA OWNERS

Andrej Babiš is not the only entrepreneur in the Visegrad region to have recently developed a taste for media. In fact, the last several years have witnessed a significant increase in this new type of media proprietor, with multiple business interests and profits largely made outside of the news media market. In the Czech Republic alone, about a dozen news media outlets are currently in the hands of local businessmen. The financial daily *Hospodářské noviny* and the weeklies *Respekt* and *Ekonom* are all in the hands of the “coal baron” Zdeněk Bakala. In addition, the owner of the largest media buying agency in the country, Jaromír Soukup, controls a media empire which includes several news and lifestyle magazines as well as the fourth largest television channel, TV Barrandov, recently purchased from another Czech industrial tycoon, Tomáš Chrenek. In Slovakia, the investment giant J&T Group, co-founded by two of the richest Slovak financiers, Patrik Tkáč and Ivan Jakabovič, controls the second largest commercial network TV JOJ and since 2009 – through one of their clients – allegedly runs the daily *Pravda*. The portfolio of Ivan Kmotrik, the owner of the largest printing press and distribution company in Slovakia, includes the influential television news channel TA3. In Hungary, such a list would have to include the owner of the construction company Közgép, Lajos Simicska, who bought the street daily *Metropol* in 2011 from the Swedish-based Metro International. Another Hungarian business tycoon-become-media-proprietor, Gábor Széles, CEO of the Ikarus business group, owns the daily *Magyar Hírlap* and the cable television station Echo TV. Apart from the towering figure of Zygmunt Solorz-Żak, the second richest Pole, whose broadcasting and telecommunications empire Cyfrowy Polsat is still at the center of his multiple business interests, Poland has been relatively immune to this particular type of media ownership, at least at the national level. However, this situation changed somewhat when 51% of shares in Presspublica, the publisher of *Rzeczpospolita*, one of the leading national dailies, and other titles, were purchased in 2011 from the UK-based investment fund Mecom by Grzegorz Hajdarowicz, an entrepreneur with a history of investments in various branches of industry, including pharmaceuticals and film production.

COUPLING OF BUSINESS, MEDIA AND POLITICS

THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS: THE DEPARTURE OF FOREIGN INVESTORS

The aforementioned cases of local business elites buying stakes in news media outlets are part of broader changes on the map of media ownership in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which is generally characterized by a gradual exit of a number of Western investors from the region. While the first signs of this departure could already be seen in 2006–2007 (especially with the withdrawal of Mecom from Lithuania and the exit of the Verlagsgruppe Handelsblatt from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria), the process has considerably intensified in response to the global economic crisis from 2008 onward. Apart from Poland, the only country in the EU to have avoided recession, all other CEE countries have experienced a considerable growth reversal (8% on average in 2009), which has had a direct impact on the advertising sector, particularly in print media, which was already coping with a long-term



Patrik Tkáč, Ivan Jakabovič

BUSINESS

- construction of Gazela pipeline, connecting the Czech Republic with the Nord Stream – start-up: late 2012
- development of reverse flow system at Lanžhot and Hora Sv. Kateřiny – Olbernhau

MEDIA

- TV JOJ
- Pravda

POLITICS

- links to SMER party

decline in circulation. Among the V4 countries, Slovakia was most negatively affected, as the advertising expenditures in newspapers fell by 27% in 2009, twice as much as in the Czech Republic. However, this was still not as dramatic as in the Baltic countries, where advertisers cut their newspaper expenditures by 44% in Estonia and 58% in Latvia. The dwindling revenues have had consequences not just for the operating budgets of news media organizations, resulting in staff redundancies and salary cuts, but often for their ownership structures as well. Seeing their profits fall with little prospect for change, several publishers decided to sell either some or all their assets in the Central and Eastern European markets, including: Swedish Bonnier (former owner of the Latvian daily *Diena*, which lost 75% of its advertising revenues in 2009); German WAZ (which pulled out of Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia); Swiss Ringier (selling its papers in Romania); British Northcliffe International (owner of the



BUSINESS

- Médea agency (media acquisition, PR, communication)

MEDIA

- Instinkt
- Týden
- Sedmička
- TV Barrandov

POLITICS

- Former Deputy Minister of Education (2007), sponsor of Green Party



BUSINESS

- Videoton
- Ikarus

MEDIA

- Magyar Hírlap
- Echo TV

POLITICS

- Fidesz (sponsor, supporter)



BUSINESS

- Agrofert

MEDIA

- 5+2 Days

POLITICS

- ANO 2011 (leader)

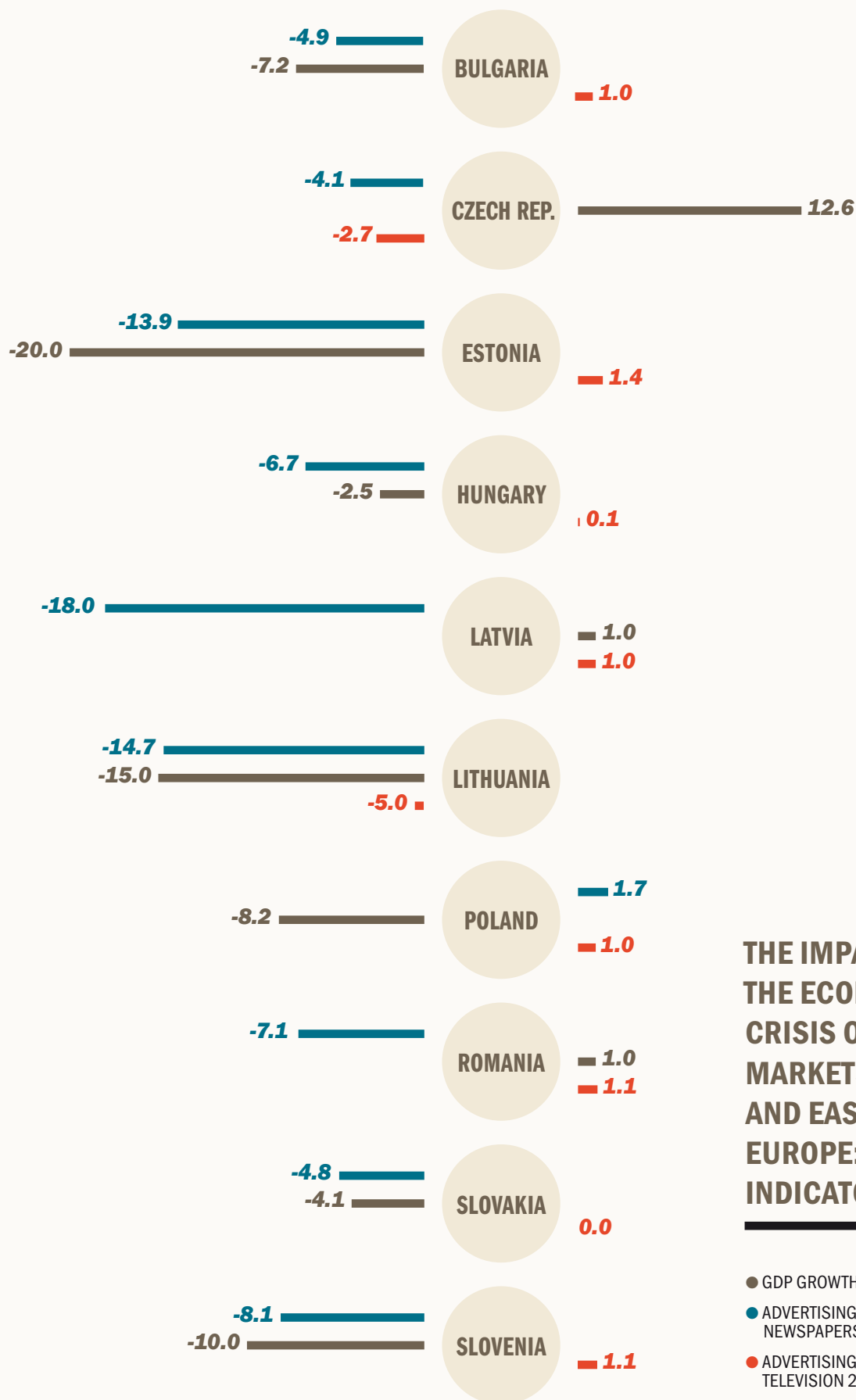
Slovak daily *Pravda* until 2010); and Mecom (which left the Polish national daily market in 2011 with the aforementioned selling of Presspublica, although it continues to publish regional titles in Poland). Unlike in the past, the buyers in all these cases were not other international companies, they were local businessmen willing to risk investing in a profit-losing market segment. All this means that while international players are still very visible in much of the Central and Eastern European media landscape, particularly in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Hungary, where they control up to 85% of daily newspaper circulation and the majority of television audience shares, their regional presence has notably diminished over the course of the last four or five years. The outbreak of economic recession seems to have put an end to the long period of media internationalization, which had continued uninterrupted since the privatization of media markets in the early 1990s. We therefore may be observing a new phase in the develop-

ment of CEE media systems, in which local ownership, particularly by local business elites, plays a much greater role.

CHANGING BUSINESS MODELS? FROM SEEKING PROFIT TO GAINING INFLUENCE

What are the consequences of this new model of proprietor for journalism and its ability to fulfill democratic functions, especially in the context of changing economic conditions? Acknowledging differences between individual media owners, evidence from across the region suggests that news media are often not purchased by local entrepreneurs in order to bring profit, but rather to gain influence and advance business and/or political goals. After numerous examples in Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia, it is regrettably the case that such instrumentalization of media by powerful oligarchs may no longer raise many eyebrows. However, it is perhaps more surprising that similar strategies of promoting and protecting political and business allies, while suppressing opponents or competitors, are used by media owners in Central Europe. And this seems particularly true when such cases involve those closely affiliated with po-

litical parties or even those personally involved in politics. Shortly before the 2010 general elections in Slovakia, a reporter of the J&T-owned TV JOJ was suspended for preparing a critical report which revealed controversial financing behind the ruling party SMER. The editor of TV JOJ later admitted that he was given a direct order not to air the report by one of the J&T owners. At another private television station in Slovakia, the news channel TA3, belonging to the advertising mogul Ivan Kmotřík, journalists were instructed on which particular people and companies to accommodate or block in the news, depending on their personal and political alignments or whether they were advertising on the channel. The richest Central European businessman, Petr Kellner of the Czech Republic, and owner of the investment company PPF, reportedly interfered on several occasions with the editorial policy of the business weekly *Euro* (before he sold it to his business partner Milan Procházka in 2011), ultimately leading to the departure of the editor-in-chief and a few other journalists, who later established their own online daily. Abrupt shifts in the editorial line are also not an unheard of consequence of newspaper buyouts in the region, as the case of *Magyar Hírlap* demonstrates, with



THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON MEDIA MARKETS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: SELECTED INDICATORS (IN %)

- GDP GROWTH 2009/2008
- ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES - NEWSPAPERS 2010/2009
- ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES - TELEVISION 2010/2009



Jędrzej Sokółowski

its transformation from liberal to right-wing newspaper under its owner Gábor Széles, known himself to be a long-time supporter and sponsor of the governing Fidesz party. An attempt to shift the editorial line – albeit in the opposite direction – has also been attributed to the new owner of *Rzeczpospolita*, Grzegorz Hajdarowicz. This issue came to particular prominence in his recent conflict with the editorial staff over a report about the alleged presence of TNT on board the presidential plane which crashed in Smolensk in 2010. The publication of this controversial story was followed by the firing of three journalists, including the deputy editor-in-chief.

However, even news media in the hands of businessmen who reportedly show more respect for editorial independence are not completely exempt from the negative effects of such ownership, as they might be prone to self-censorship when facing the challenge of writing about matters concerning their proprietor's other interests. This problem is exemplified by the Czech weekly *Respekt*, an otherwise highly regarded investigative journal responsible for revealing many corruption scandals related

to high politics and big business, which, according to one of its editors, has nevertheless taken a decision to keep away from the business affairs of its owner, the billionaire Zdeněk Bakala. Their decision was made out of fear of not being trusted by their readers on this topic, regardless of the outcome of the investigations.

SEARCHING FOR AUTONOMY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

There is no doubt that news media organizations in Central Europe, print media in particular, are currently experiencing difficult times. Coping with the “double crisis” of declining circulation and economic recession, the impact of which still haunts most of the region, they are even less at liberty to choose their owners, and are therefore more likely to succumb to economic and political pressures (the two often going hand-in-hand in this region, especially through the distribution of state advertising). In the struggle for survival, structural autonomy from the domains of big business and politics – traditionally hailed as the normative prerequisites for free and independent journalism – appears to be too luxurious a commodity, and the media are increasingly facing the

risk of involvement in the local political-economic networks and power structures to which their owners belong. It goes without saying that under such circumstances, their ability to perform the role of “watchdog” is constrained. In a pluralistic media environment, this might be less of a problem, providing there are still outlets which supply the public with unbiased information and conduct investigations independent from the interests of owners. However, we don't have to go far to illustrate the consequences of a situation in which a large portion of the media market is concentrated in the hands of a businessman-turned-politician. The shadow of the former Italian prime minister is still very visible even from Central Europe, where he is certainly not short of eager apprentices. /

The author is a senior research fellow at the Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford University. He leads research on media ownership and market structures in the project “Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.”

EXHIBITIONS ARE NOT SPECTATOR SPORTS

History is usually considered grim stuff that is better left to older generations. Especially in Central Europe, it is considered more of a burden than anything else. Getting the attention of younger generations is harder and harder. That said, there is group of young professionals in Poland who have decided to look at history (especially museums and exhibitons) from a different perspective – not as a burden, but as an opportunity. This is not simply for philosophical or social reflection, but as a business opportunity by means of which they can make a living and contribute to public debate. “History is the reality in which we live,” says Lukasz Wróbel (b. 1979) who teaches literary theory at the University of Warsaw and, at the same time, prepares scenarios, scripts, and concepts for different exhibitions and multimedia presentations in this new niche of business we might call “museum outsourcing.”



Jędrzej Sokolowski

ŁUKASZ WRÓBEL

 Interview conducted by Martin Ehl

Can history be good business?

History is not a neutral medium. As I understand it, history is a way of problematizing various (social, political, literary, etc.) ways of constructing and reconstructing individual or social identity patterns. If that is the case, it is an active tool that often problematizes its own rhetoric and semantics, along with the very grammar of historical narratives. In these terms, history encompasses the main fields of an individual's personal interest by means of defining links to national and European narratives of multinational and multicultural solidarity, for example. I would say that history is sometimes a field of purely emotional policy, but it can also be outlined and described as a space for rational work within the field of social and political myths. Since this is the basis for various paradigms and individual or collective decisions and choices (we simply cannot exist outside history), it is one of the primary realities in which we live. In summary, I would say that in a way history has to be a good business insofar as it concerns everyone.

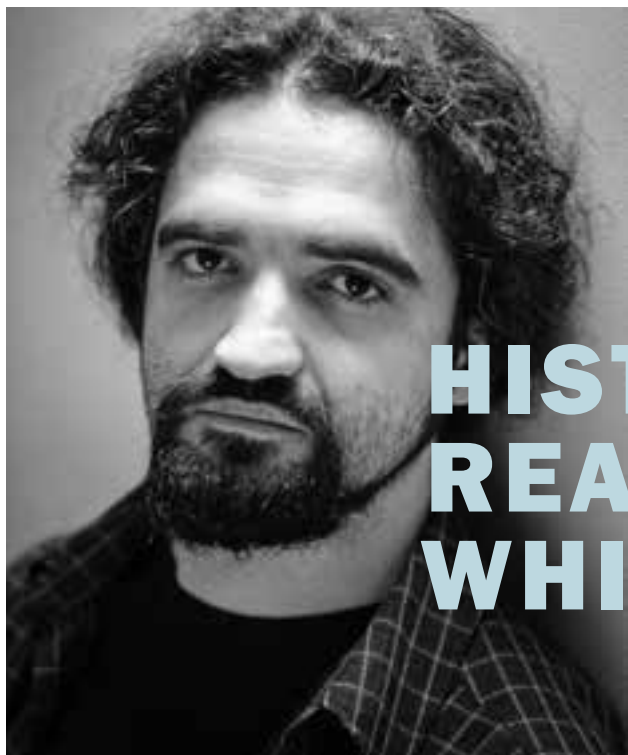
How would you describe the work of your company Maksa? Is it “museum outsourcing”? What was your inspiration?

The main goal of the company is to provide various museums with up-to-date ways of creating highly inventive and modern exhibitions. I author what are called arrangement concepts, exhibit content-related scenarios, and multimedia scripts. Likewise, I participate in a team consisting of architects, sound and lighting directors, graphic artists, multimedia designers, and experts that provide us with their knowledge related to the particular subject or theme of an exhibition or museum. As you have called it, it is a kind of “museum outsourcing.” Maksa specializes in creating exhibitions and expositions at all levels, creating not

only full arrangement concepts and content-related scenarios but also building museums and exhibitions. That means that the scope of products we sell is rather wide. The company also participates in projects that belong to the educational and touristic markets, such as creating cultural parks or sightseeing paths.

I would say that the main inspiration comes from within the field of modern scenography. It was the founder of the company, Krzysztof Lang, who came up with the idea and still is the source of new solutions, pushing us to search for new inspirations. We are concerned with elements of visibility, spatiality, sound and light properties in order to design an exhibition as a sort of performance and to provide visitors with a cognitive, intellectual, and emotional experience. Our practice is therefore holistic and is concerned with the reception and engagement of visitors. What we do is try to create exhibitions and museums outside of conventional perspectives. We do not want visitors to watch an exhibition. They ought to involve themselves with the museum space.

The very basis of the concepts we create is always a particular narrative. In point of fact, visiting a museum is participating in a sort of plot. The narrative around which the exhibition revolves enables us to unify thematic units (corresponding with spatial divisions of an exhibition or museum interiors) along with directions for moving about. Everything is coherent with soundscape, lighting, materials, and fabrics. The exhibition is designed with a number of associations and several meanings in mind, all of which visitors have the opportunity to discover. The narrative is usually derived from the theme of an exhibition and is based on research that I do. This means that every exhibition concept is rooted in a subject; its motivation is always essential.



HISTORY IS THE REALITY IN WHICH WE LIVE

How large is the company?

We have several permanent staff members, but it is the specific character of each project that determines the number of people at work. The same goes for successive subcontractors, such as various companies operating in the new technologies market, for instance. Creating a single exhibition does not necessarily involve a multi-person team. But we are also engaged in designing museum buildings along with permanent and temporal exhibitions. The number of people employed in such projects obviously increases.

How successful is the work, in terms of revenue or other measurable features?

The success of the company should be measured with reference to current and previously realized projects. Maksa created the concept for The Katyn Museum, now being built in Warsaw. A few years ago, the company was also awarded the Sybilla Award for its "Central Industrial Region for the Future" exhibition. This is by far the most prestigious award in the museum market in Poland. The competition is organized by The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in Poland. It is also worth mentioning that it was Maksa that created and built The European Tale Centre (Pacanow, Poland), where a vast range of multimedia technologies have been combined with traditional elements in order to create a highly interactive exposition. At present, Poland is the only country in which Maksa operates.

Is there anything comparable within Poland or elsewhere in Europe?

There are few companies in Poland that share the same field of interest. The same applies to Poland's neighbors, such as Germany. I would say that these shared interests are defined by the conviction that a museum is not simply about exhibits on display, and that modern technology needs to be placed in the service of the museum – not the other way around.

How is your work affected by the traditional Polish passion for historical policy, which is not so strong, for example, in the Czech Republic?

First of all, the museums that employ us are not only historical, although we often work for municipal history museums across the country. But the presence of historical thinking in everyday politics enables me to abstract a number of various narra-

tive patterns, along with symbolical complexes, that are widely shared by society or within particular communities. Such patterns, usually of the literary type, can be used as the basis for an exhibition experience of that which is different, in both historical and political terms. So it is not the passion for historical policy or its absence that creates the basis for my work. It is the need for narrative, plot patterns, historical, social, political, and literary tales that hold and structure our identities, our ways of perceiving various issues. These narrative patterns are what I usually look for, and what I try to distill and position within particular scenarios.

Why do you take that approach?

The reasons are numerous. First of all, it is a genuinely interesting and demanding job. Every project I participate in requires different knowledge. So I always have to read a new set of books and gain new knowledge. Apart from the creative gradient of my work, I think this could be listed as the most important reason for working in this market.

Does occasionally employing your company mean that museums (and the state) do not have enough money to pay employees?

Creating a museum or an exposition is not simply putting the exhibits on display in cases. Or at least, it is not anymore. Modern exhibitions require soundscapes, lighting systems and a coherent concept of the whole. Museum councils and executive branches are representative, but creating everything from the concept to the moment of displayed exhibits is usually beyond their professional reach. So actually, it is not finances that drive museums to employ companies such as Maksa. Museum employees usually use cases, and they sometimes arrange a space for the exposition. We come up with a coherent story, with an exhibition that is also a narrative employing various technologies, which enables us to provide a better product. And that is what it all is about: the marketability of an exhibition, and the number of visitors that will be willing to come, is it not? We provide museums with the newest ideas and solutions. And the people who work on such projects have expert knowledge of various components of the exposition. Of course, there is also

the issue of European subsidies, usually the very core of funding. But usually everything ultimately comes from the demands of creativity and the need for professionally designed museum products.

Did we already pay all our historical debts in post-communist countries, in the sense that we have now discussed and described all the forgotten or hidden events from our past?

I would not agree with the description of society as a community that is able to reach a sort of static level of overcoming all historical debts, dark memories, etc. Working on our own mistakes, processing our own identity, our own prejudices, of the past and present, is at the very core of modern society, is it not? I would say that the modes of working on what we call "the past" can either define us as a free society or quite the opposite. It is not the position we have gained but the ways in which we employ various modes of interpreting ourselves and our neighbors. To be free, a modern society has to be able to think about itself and its our neighbors using different styles, rhetoric, literary genres, and with the imperative of their equivalence, with the strong conviction that none of our identity narratives is exceptional.

If you were given 100,000 euros and asked to prepare a historical exhibition that would be important to all four Visegrad countries, what would you chose to do?

Milan Kundera once said that the small nations of Central Europe constitute the arch-Europe: "the greatest variety within the smallest space." He also held that while multilingualism structures the truth of Central Europe, our particular languages are the fated

cages from which we cannot escape (unlike Kundera himself, who in fact did). I would like to focus on this issue in relation to various historical perspectives. The Visegrad Group is an alliance for integration and cooperation, but it is also a highly multilingual area. Most of us can understand each other (maybe with the exception of Hungarian – speaking people), at least aside from a historical, political basis. But at the very core of the Central-European area, this multilinguality sustains the danger of incomprehension and failures in understanding. What we share actually divides us. At the same time, we are deeply marked by the possibility and impossibility of understanding. What is more: history is a painful baseline for our identities. I would like to combine experiences of various ways of naming and telling our own history, creating identities with historical events and literary traditions of each of the four countries. I would like to draw upon the distinctions between the factual, linguistic and literary. Do we all use the same rhetorical patterns? Are the figures of comedy or tragedy the only ones that we impose on our historical narratives? Which linguistic inventions are we are trying to escape in our particular modes of expression, and how do we communicate with others outside the V4? Given 100,000 euro, I would research the subjects of literary, linguistic, and factual conjunction that have determined the invention of the Visegrad Group. /

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MUSEUM MATH IN THE V4

THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

Although first place on the list of the fifteen most visited museums in the Czech Republic is held by the Jewish Museum in Prague and second place by the National Museum, institutions that attract the most attention deal with the history of the military and technology.

15 MOST VISITED MUSEUMS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN 2011

Military and technical museums (Military History Institute Prague, Museum of Agriculture, Mining Museum, Museum of Silver, Technical Museum in Brno)	1 115 029
Regional history museums (Wallachian Open-air Museum, Museum of Southeastern Moravia, Museum of Valassko Region, Brno City Museum, Ethnographic Museum dr. Hostase)	786 868
Political history (National Museum, Terezin Memorial, Hussite Museum)	730 350
Social history (Jewish Museum in Prague)	560 733

Source: The National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS)

CZ

COMMEMORATING THE VICTIMS

The Recsk National Memory Park *Recski Nemzeti Emlékpark*, located in the biggest forced labor camp of the 1950s, was opened in 1996. In the early 2000s, two other museums contributed to commemorating and broadening knowledge about victims of Nazi and communist regimes – the Holocaust Memorial Centre and The House of Terror in Budapest. They sparked discussion from the very beginning and quickly attracted vast crowds – over 4 million people have visited The House of Terror since 2002.

Source: Museums' websites

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Historical museum fever started in Poland in 2005 and led to the establishment of at least six institutions dealing with important themes from the country's history. While already assembling collections and organizing events, the majority of them still await exhibition spaces of their own.

MUSEUM	CITY	ESTABLISHED	PLANNED OPENING
Museum of History of Polish Jews	Warsaw	2005	April 19, 2013
Museum of Polish History	Warsaw	2006	Unknown
European Solidarity Centre	Gdańsk	2007	2013/14
Museum of the Second World War	Gdańsk	2008	2014
Józef Piłsudski Museum	Sulejówek	2008	2016
Emigration Museum	Gdynia	2012	2014/15

Source: Museums' websites

CASTLE TREASURES

The most museums visited in Slovakia are situated outside of urban areas. Crowds are drawn by castles and open-air museums, which attract between 50% and 33% of visitors, respectively. The Museum of Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica welcomed 379,705 visitors in 2011, which secured its title as the most popular history museum in the country.

Additionally, there are state funded museums dedicated to all ethnic minorities, such as Carpathian German, Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Jewish, Roma, Ruthenian, and Ukrainian minorities.

15 MOST VISITED MUSEUMS IN SLOVAKIA IN 2011

Castle museums (Orava, Stará Ľubovňa, Spiš, Bojnice, Betliar, Trenčín, Červený Kameň)	1 303 428
Regional history museums and open-air museums (Bratislava City Museum, Liptov, Považie, Kysucké, Považská Bystrica)	713 524
Political history museum (Slovak National Uprising Museum)	379 705
Technical museum (Mining Museum)	111 731

Source: Slovak department of the International Council of Museums



NEW DILEMMAS ABOUT TEXT BOOKS

Digital textbooks mark the beginning of a new age in debates about freedom of expression and equal rights in knowledge and education. Central Europe's specific historical experience with totalitarianism and the manipulation of collective memory should help us understand the real challenges such developments will ultimately pose.

WOJCIECH PRZYBYLSKI

Many economists often claim that freedom can be ranked and measured. With respect to markets, economists such as Guy Sorman have argued that they are only "free" when entry or participation is not blocked. With that in mind, let's consider millions of children and parents who, each year, have to spend a small fortune on school textbooks, often costing more than a fourth of an average monthly salary (minimum wage in Poland is €400, and a single set of textbooks usually costs €100). The market for school textbooks in Poland is valued at €200 million by Biblioteka Analiz – a company spe-

cialized in analyzing the book market – and textbooks are major source of income for many publishers in a country where only about 40% of the population admits to reading at least one book a year. Some publishers base their entire business around textbooks, but their future prosperity may now be endangered by a revolutionary idea that the government has proposed.

Since 2012, the Ministry of Education and the newly created Ministry of Administration and Digitalization have taken up the challenge of providing free electronic textbooks to pupils, thereby limiting the high costs of entry into the global market based on knowledge. This is part of a larger shift in the Polish book market. With a change in the history curriculum, the number of officially approved textbooks has

been dramatically limited at the high school level (ten versions are approved), but the variety of approved books for the junior high curriculum (thirty approved versions of textbooks) suggests the economic potential of this sector.

The usual debates about textbooks have concerned their use as tools of state ideology. According to The Economist, California and Texas, for example, put a great deal of care into liberal or conservative messages respectively conveyed in their textbooks "Textbooks around the world. It ain't necessarily so," October 13, 2012. In the same article, the editor enumerates a number of serious cases of racial and ethnic discrimination found in school textbooks that may influence the judgment of children, especially in regions like the Middle

East or Africa. However, with the increasingly frequent use of additional sources, most coming from the Internet, this kind of practice may have hit its limit. The article therefore examines digital textbooks as tools of progress, precisely in those parts of the world where digital exclusion is greatest. In Nairobi, as the aforementioned article indicates, digital education with digital textbooks in schools has recently become so popular (with sales rising ten times over past year) that companies like Amazon are now considering bringing their tablet readers into the African market. Yet again, this reminds us that traditional paperbacks, let alone hardcover books, might go the way of their predecessors, like clay tablets and scrolls.

What in fact is at stake in this shift is the condition of public debate, which concerns the ability of citizens to critically evaluate information in mass media and to make wise use of the variety, but very often low quality, of Internet content. The idea of universal and free access to information, a basic principle of the Internet, is being continuously challenged on two fronts. The first front relates to the aforementioned onslaught of questionable or unreliable content online. In a related point, the second front concerns the absence of universal access, specifically to high quality resources.

For some time, public libraries in Poland have been in the process of adapting to the future. With a great deal of assistance from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, they are now being redesigned as digital, social hubs for culture and community development, rather than simply book depositories. But one might very well ask: What about access to real, actual books? Have they become obsolete? Decades after totalitarian control over book resources, the libraries of our region have not yet been rebuilt to even half the level that civilized countries would expect or demand. In this sense, the digital age presents Central Europe with a much needed opportunity.

Today, NGOs and government programs in Poland aim to fill this gap by somehow providing free-of-charge access to certain classical works of both Polish and foreign authors by following steps established by the well-known Gutenberg Project online. At the same time, young people, hand-in-hand with the research community, have joined in the global debate about copyright law that restricts access to global culture. The government of Donald Tusk had to change its policy from supporting the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) after mass and quite

unexpected protests against ACTA flooded Polish streets in January 2012. Meanwhile, the academic community in Poland awaits changes like those already introduced in London in 2012, that are to provide free access to government funded research. After all, public access to high quality research and knowledge is a key element of future development.

However, the discussion about digital education, at least at this stage, should not necessarily be about quality. It should rather be described as a necessary tool for adapting to changing patterns of perception. Research by Jakob Nielsen, of the Nielsen and Norman Group, demonstrates that our eyes usually follow the F-shaped pattern online and tend to focus only on the first paragraph and later focus only on the first sentences or even words of subsequent paragraphs. The conclusions are dramatic: 1) online users will not read a text thoroughly; 2) the first two paragraphs must state all of the most important information; 3) the structure of the text must be simpler, putting emphasis on bullet points, other graphics, and information-carrying words. Not long ago, resources like Wikipedia seemed like serious challenges to books, but the above mentioned findings should make us take pause and reconsider. Pupils and students already prefer to use online movie clips and dynamic presentations, quickly accessing and displaying the information they want instead of working through long, exacting books. Surely, print books will not be able to compete with such attractions. But free-of-charge digital textbooks – why not? Skeptics may point to one of basic laws of economy: there is no such thing as a free lunch. In which case, let's consider the possible costs, other than financial, of the upcoming reform.

Companies like Apple and Amazon have already seen a potential for this market and have begun to provide tools and platforms that will enable the digital education market to grow. However, in looking at the power they have over digitalized content, there is a serious issue to be considered. In what almost seemed like a bad joke, George Orwell's dystopian classic, 1984, was remotely deleted by Amazon in July 2009 from all Kindle devices around the world. Although Jeff Bezos, the company's CEO, responded by calling this a stupid decision and human error, the same thing happened nearly three years later. In October 2012, the account and content of a single Norwegian Kindle owner was reportedly deleted (with all purchased content), a decision which Amazon justified in saying that its terms of

service policy had been violated. According to an article in *The Guardian*, this occurred because the Kindle owner in question purchased books from a UK online store while living in Norway (see "Amazon wipes customer's Kindle and deletes account with no explanation," October 22, 2012).

In Central and Eastern Europe, such events sound like high-tech variations of very old themes. History textbooks, especially during Soviet rule, were subject to constant revisions ordered by political elites. Even today, political figures in Russia and Belarus take far too much interest in shaping the common memory of the past by revising history textbooks according to their political goals. It would be too much to suggest that history might yet again repeat itself, or that the Polish ministries have any intention to control and manipulate the minds of pupils. Nevertheless, this remains a weak point of the digital reforms. No democracy is immune to populist government and the temptation to manipulate public opinion at the school level remains a constant threat.

Books have been lost to humanity many times in history. Aristotle's second book of Poetics and some of William Blake's poems have simply disappeared. Emperors, churches, and dictators marked their paths in history by waging war on ideas and burning both books and their authors. During the Second World War, huge collections of books and archives were lost not only during publicly staged bonfires but also in bombings, think of German planes destroying Załuski Library – one of the largest collections in Poland. Digitalization may very well offer protection against such losses. It also provides an opportunity to democratize access to information and education.

No doubt, it will provide additional challenges that have yet to be answered. What is more, digital content is not likely to reside solely in the hands of corporations and governments. Groups like Anonymous may very well target digital content, seamlessly changing part of the content without anyone taking notice. Central Europe is particularly sensitive to such issues and with the first publicly distributed free e-textbooks about to be released in Poland by 2015, other Visegrad countries will soon have to consider similar dilemmas. /

The author is editor-in-chief of *Visegrad Insight* and *Res Publica Nova*.

HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN THE V4

CZECH REP.

AVERAGE SALARY
€970



Books are provided free of charge for primary school students only. There are eight publishing houses which provide secondary school history textbooks, the average cost is around €6.5. Textbooks are expected to meet the educational criteria set by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports. If a textbook meets all expectations, it is included on a list of approved educational publications for primary or secondary schools. This endorsement is given six years, whereupon the textbook needs to be reviewed in order to assess whether it still meets the criteria set by the ministry. However, any book (including those not on the official list) can be used in the school curriculum as long as it does not contradict the law. The person responsible for choosing textbooks is the school principal.

POLAND

AVERAGE SALARY
€860



The majority of the large Polish textbook market has been dominated by seven major publishers, whose share is estimated at 80% of the market turnover, with numerous other institutions competing for the rest. Last year, textbook sales totalled over fifty million with an average price of €6.8. Various estimates put the number of primary and secondary school students at around 5.5 million. Most textbooks are bought privately by families, enabling schools to lower expenses per student and use leftover funds for other purposes. However, depending on their social status, students may apply for free books provided by the state, with €31 million spent last year.

HUNGARY

AVERAGE SALARY
€750



There are around 400,000 students in Hungary and their educational needs are met by between four and six publishing houses. This number depends on whether these institutions manage to obtain permission to publish textbooks from the Ministry of National Resources. In September, a new syllabus for certain classes will come into effect, requiring that publishers obtain new permission to publish, spreading confusion in the schoolbook market. A textbook costs around €8.50 on average. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the state provided free textbooks for every student. Throughout the last decade, primary school students still received free textbooks, while secondary school students were able to get discounts, the size of which size depended on to which of the four social categories (including those for pupils with special needs) each student was assigned. Social support for buying books depends not only on the kind of school a student attends, but also on the involvement of the local government.

SLOVAKIA

AVERAGE SALARY
€874



The creation and purchase of textbooks is administered by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport, therefore each textbook must be approved before publication. Of the three publishing houses, one is devoted solely to providing state-guaranteed textbooks. Secondary school students are provided with their books free of charge, ordering them through a newly launched web portal. In 2012, the budget allocated for new textbooks reached €7.7 million, with each textbook costing on average €4.5. New books have been published since 2008 due to the ongoing reform of education. At the moment, students of the first and second years of secondary education are using the new textbooks, and those for the third year of secondary education are being developed. The reform is not well received by public because distribution problems occurred during the first year of implementation, leaving students without textbooks for several months.



photo: Samuel Kubant/ AFP/ EAST NEWS

HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES

Interview with PÉTER BALÁZS

The geopolitical situation of Central Europe is relatively new and in order to understand it there should be both open debate about national perspectives of the past and a historical analysis of units larger than nations. Professor of Central European University, former EU Commissioner, and former Foreign Minister of Hungary Péter Balázs speaks about research on the subject carried out by his Center for EU Enlargement Studies.

Wojciech Przybylski: Based on your extensive research at the Center for EU Enlargement Studies at the Central European University, how do you understand the relationship between the current process of EU enlargement and collective memory?

Péter Balázs: We are investigating the chances of EU enlargement based on the enlargement reports of the European Commission. It always produces a list of candidates at different stages, some of them already at the negotiating table, like Iceland and Turkey, while others have already been successful in negotiations, like Croatia. And there are still others that have different qualifications, like “candidate” or “potential candidate.” The narrow circle of potential EU members covers exactly thirty-six countries, including Iceland, Turkey, and the whole western Balkans, among others. The EU is in talks with all these countries without a clear plan, timetable or blueprint for enlargement. However, promises are made and conditions are set. In such cases, the European Commission motivates countries like Serbia, Bosnia, and Albania, saying that if they comply with all given requirements they can become members. But, several questions remain. We have set up an international research group which includes The University of California, Berkeley, the Sendai University in Istanbul, the EBRD in London, and several others. Issue by issue we take such questions into consideration, starting with the single market, infrastructure projects, institutions, and the budget, and we try to develop some stimulating ideas.

In the framework of this EU 36 project you make recommendations to the European Commission with respect to the role of history in the political process. But this is not the only research on the politics of memory that your institution is carrying out.

Yes. One of the important issues for the EU Commission is developing historical reconciliation and relations between all potential EU members. But we have parallel projects that deal with that too, including “The Seven Neighbors of Hungary – Questions of Historical Reconciliation and Cooperation in the 21st Century.” We are looking at the state of historical reconciliation, as of today, and we are inviting the ambassadors of neighboring countries like Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, and others to ask them about their relations with Hungary, as seen from the outside. It is very interesting given that the geopolitical situation for Hungary is entirely new, and it has never had seven neighbors. We have to identify key problems in a very specific bilateral context, which also means that we have to deal with history education in seven different cases.

Can you give some examples?

For instance, relations with Slovakia are very different from previous relations with Czechoslovakia. As a single state, it was easier to settle neighborhood problems just between Budapest and Prague. Going to Bratislava to build communication with representatives of the Slovak state is simply more complicated and sensitive. And we need an interpretation and solutions for the Beneš Decrees. It is harder when there are nationalist forces in power.

Serbia is an altogether different case. The setup is very similar, since before it was part of Yugoslavia. Back then, when Hungarian and Yugoslavian officials had a talk, they were speaking about the whole of Yugoslavia, which had a balanc-

ing effect on various parts of that larger country. Now, there has to be a special approach to Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, since all three are direct neighbors of Hungary. And perhaps it goes without saying, but they are very different countries. Hungarians and Serbs committed mutual atrocities during the Second World War. There were massacres committed by the Hungarian army in Novi Sad in 1942, and there was bloody revenge on behalf of the partisans of Tito in 1945. The two countries managed to commemorate both events together by official visits to both sites. So these are very painful and very difficult operations, depending on the partners. There are almost no problems with Slovenia or Austria, but in most neighboring states radicalism and nationalism have re-emerged, so we have more problems with such issues than twenty years ago, right after the transformation.

Do such matters influence national discourse to the point of questioning the current geopolitical position of Central Europe?

The geopolitical context is very good given that Hungary is in NATO and the EU. It is ideal for mutual relations; it can facilitate relations with national minorities on both sides of its borders. At the same time, in all these countries there are abandoned traditions of nationalism. With an economic crisis, extremists are always stronger, and this is currently the case. Their activities and impact depend on their position in the government. If they are in government then they are stronger. They can influence education, diplomacy and many other things. This is the case in Hungary, for the time being, but it is not the case in Poland anymore. It used to be the case in Slovakia, already twice, once with Meciar and for the second time in the first Fico government when Jan Slota was a coalition partner.

What is the usual direction that such things take?

When radical right parties are in power they usually go back to the historical roots of nationalism. In Hungary, but also in Slovakia, there is a very clear connection between the contemporary radical right parties and the fascist parties of the Second World War, for example. The same or very similar uniforms, the same rhetoric but with a less anti-Semitic and more anti-Roma angle.

Have we forgotten the past? Or perhaps we need a more scholarly approach to history that does not simply follow the framework of a nation?

It is extremely important and it can be very useful to restore objectivity in history. There are a dozen fairytales about the origin of Hungarians: how we came to the Carpathian Basin, about a few glorious kings, about our historical revolutions and losses – stories about the glory of the nation. But they are not real; they are somehow too rosy or too dark. This is what average citizens know about history, and this is not real history. Therefore, it would be important to write about the present and the immediate past.

How is this possible while avoiding the trap of fairytales?

First by addressing the immediate past that influenced the present situation. So we need a book about the history of the region in the twentieth century. Maybe in a few cases we can go a bit further but not further than the ninetieth century.

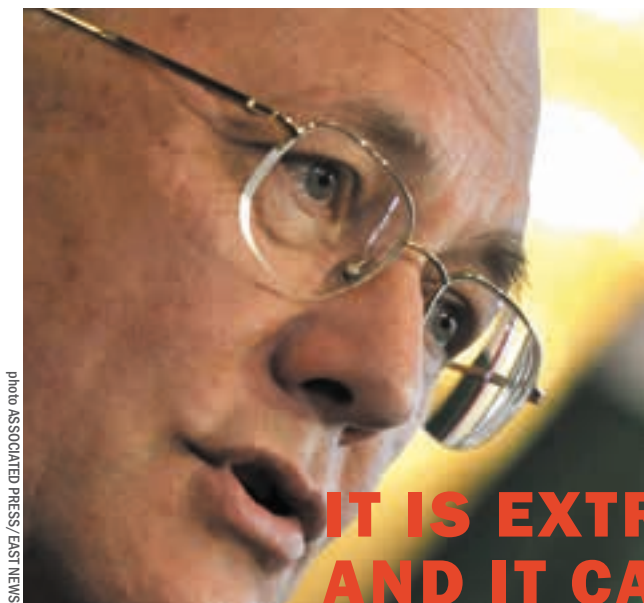


photo ASSOCIATED PRESS/EAST NEWS

**IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT
AND IT CAN BE VERY
USEFUL TO RESTORE
OBJECTIVITY IN HISTORY.**

books were produced on that reconciliation, in serious dramas and funny stories, all pushing the two nations to work with each other. It was also about the exchange of young people between the countries, learning each other's languages, teaching each other's history, geography and literature. It was a huge task which has to be done here, because only the old bad traditions will survive without that kind of work.

There was an effort made in this direction. Slovaks and Hungarians jointly declared the desire to have such a common history textbook. However, nothing has been done to make this a reality.

This should help explain the present situation we are all in. We would then need to apply some historiographical methodology. For instance, we could show the mirror image of any nation in the eyes of its neighbors. How the Czechs have perceived Hungarians, how the Hungarians have looked at Romanians, and so on. We should learn about our prejudices toward each other. Then we could make a comparative study of how relations with neighbors developed. Why did they help each other, why did they have conflicts, etc.?

This is why I very much like American history books about Europe. They treat history from a different perspective. We also should progress toward units larger than nation states, like the Hungarian dualistic empire and the real reasons of its failure and end. Just like the end of the Soviet Union, or the end of Yugoslavia.

That is a research task. But there is also a pedagogical task when history serves as a common point of reference. Do you think it is an important tool in a process of reconciliation?

In my opinion, the best example is German-French reconciliation, given that both nations had this as an objective. Such a reconciliation process can move forward only if both sides are engaged, if they are motivated and are willing to act. If any of the two sides decides to misuse the historical legacy and deliberately introduce false interpretations, then it's very easy to increase nationalist feelings and to act against reconciliation. But what must be present at the outset is will.

The EU has mostly neglected that issue, as did NATO, when new members who have deep traditions of mutual hatred were accepted. So nobody asked them to deal with that issue, putting that to an end. It was just ignored. If you take the German-French example, considering how many films and

Well, something has been done. This was a mutual wish of some historians, but we could not agree with each other on common studies, only parallel studies. But it's already a good thing, a good first step in saying that we are describing the same event from two sides. It's already meaningful to learn about mutual perspectives. However, the whole process is not moving forward, so we could not reach the stage of publishing a book. There are a lot of manuscripts, on both sides, and they should be published.

When it comes to multilateral relations there are hardly any examples of such a process. Nordic Council countries have consulted each other on their textbooks. Do you think it is possible in a group of countries like the V4?

Problems are bilateral, so you can define the problems in a bilateral context. Hungarian and Slovak relationships are far removed from, let's say, Austrian and Slovak relationships. Solutions should be developed in a bilateral context and in larger circles, though not too large. The Visegrad Group, for instance, can inspire people, and they can learn from each other's examples. In this way, they can encourage each other and they can transfer the best practices. So yes, it is meaningful.

Do you think such a process is also possible in relation to larger countries like Russia?

It is not a question of size, but it is a question of political attitude. Germany is a larger partner, but it was possible with Germany. So you can speak openly with the Germans, and they are good partners. Relations with Russia are a very sensitive issue, particularly because there is still a question of self-identification on the Russian side. Hungary was relatively lucky because we managed to settle the 1956 confrontation with the Soviet Army. But I know that for Poland things are much more difficult. Sensitivity on both sides makes the process of reconciliation very emotional. /

conversation



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VIKTOR HORVÁTH

is a Hungarian writer and translator who teaches at the University of Pécs.



KRZYSZTOF VARGA

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Three prominent Central European writers discuss prejudices about neighbors, focusing on traumas from the beginning of the twentieth century.

NEIGHBORS AND SHADOWS

PAVOL RANKOV: The topic of our discussion is how nations relate to their pasts and the pasts of their neighbors. I would like to welcome Viktor Horváth, a Hungarian writer, and Krzysztof Varga, a Polish author, who is half Hungarian by way of his father.

Slovakia shares its longest borders with Poland and Hungary. These countries have frequently run Slovakia over, often through political alliance. We Slovaks often didn't notice this relationship. As an introduction, I'd therefore like to ask you each to describe this interesting friendship between Poles and Hungarians; moments in history when they expressed reciprocal support, solidarity and sympathy, moments that show just how close Hungarians and Poles have been.

VIKTOR HORVÁTH: As far as I can tell, the relationship between the two nations is an ambiguous one, in which facts are mixed with myths, and emotions and projections influence data. It often happens that mythical events are supported by suitable data; collective consciousness shapes events based on its needs, thus rendering the situation abstract. Even the word friendship itself is abstract, let alone the friendship of nations.

Of course, it's easy to be friends when we are not neighbors. Hungary occasionally had Polish kings, and in modern

history there have been several events, based on mutual affection, which brought the two nations together. Likewise, there were times when we were neighbors for centuries and had serious conflicts; conflicts that only historians would know about, since they were affairs of the aristocracy about which 98% of the population has no idea.

KRZYSZTOF VARGA: I am thrilled to be in such great company here, it must mean that the subject is very interesting. Relations with Hungarians are exceptionally important for Poles and operate on two levels: (1) historical and (2) symbolic. The symbolic level starts with a proverb, which is also well-known in Hungary: *"Polak wegier dwa bratanki, tak do szabli tak do szklanki – Lengyel, magyar, két jó barát, együtt emel kardot, kupát!"* [Pole, Hungarian, two good friends, together they battle and drink their wine!] Moreover, Poles feel a strong spiritual connection with Hungarians, one that is much stronger than with other nations. I am living proof of this bond. These close ties are also based on Polish-Hungarian history. Viktor already talked about close connections in the Middle Ages, about Polish kings being Hungarian kings and vice-versa. Báthory István, Voivode of Transylvania, and King of Hungary was perhaps the most successful Polish king. The key to understanding the relations between the two nations is in the 19th century, when

similarities in identities, such as the mutual need to fight off enemies, became evident. For Poles, it was the Russians, Germans or Prussians, while for the Hungarians it was the Germans, the Austrian parts of the empire and, of course, the Ottoman Empire. Numerous Polish soldiers fought in Kossuth's army in the revolution of 1848 and General Józef Bem is a hero in Hungary and Poland. Let's fast forward 100 years! The revolution of 1956 actually began with the monument honoring General Bem. That's going to be it for the historical overview. However, I'd like to point out another fact, one which is not often mentioned. In 1920, as the Poles were fighting against Bolshevik Russia, the majority of Central Europe (mostly leftist and communist) did not support them, as they actually supported the Bolsheviks. Although the very weapons the Poles were using to fight against the Bolsheviks were manufactured in a factory in Csepel. And lastly, I'd like to mention one more point that perhaps provides insight into the origins of the relatively friendly relations in question. Poles and Hungarians have never actually fought against each other.

PAVOL RANKOV: Our meeting today was actually inspired by Krzysztof Varga's book, *Turul Stew*. The book describes Hungary and Hungarians from a Polish perspective. As an author, Krzysztof is concerned with Hungarian melancholy, calling it a national trait. He claims that melancholy comes from nostalgia and has its origins in those glorious days and memories of the past. My question would therefore be: Why is it that Hungarians feel this nostalgia, when the French, the Spanish, or the English, who all had far more glorious pasts and have lost significantly larger territories and political influence, seemingly do not? Why is melancholy and nostalgia so powerful and common amongst Hungarians?

VIKTOR HORVÁTH: First, I would like to add to what Krzysztof said. He mentioned the origins of Hungarian-Polish friendship dating back to the 19th century in the context of struggles for independence. That's when the myth began, when the situation, in the context of the history of ideas, finally changed. This was a period of the birth of nations and nationalism, when the nation as an idea began to function as a kind of religion. It was a great intellectual environment for a nation to find another that seemed to share in its destiny. My point is that I wouldn't necessarily attribute this shift to historical events (battles, rulers, wars, etc.), since those had existed before. I would rather say that we are talking about an ideological shift. The question could therefore be restated: After such a past, why are the Hungarians melancholic? My own answer would be that such melancholy is a stereotype. But then again, stereotypes all have their seeds somewhere, so there's got to be something there in the case of melancholy. However, I'm not affected by it.

KRZYSZTOF VARGA: I'd like to add to this point and emphasize the importance of the 19th century from the perspective of the development of modern nations. Prior to that, it was a history of royal dynasties, so I would definitely agree with what Viktor said. Of course, stereotypes exist, especially as things relate to national mentality. Through these kinds of mechanisms nations are labeled happy, sad,

optimistic, and melancholic. My views on Hungarians originated from these stereotypes, but they also overcame them, or at least they overcame the one believed by the majority of Polish society. There's a certain paradox here. On one hand, as we mentioned, Poles, due to historical events, are highly sympathetic toward Hungarians and think of them as a nation with very close ties, but they actually know very little about Hungarians in general. Undoubtedly there are stereotypes; however, I believe Poles are very different from Hungarians when it comes to mentality. Despite being neither a psychologist nor sociologist, I notice the differences. For example, Poles are a typical example of a community that becomes angry quickly, they get really fired up! Just like a flash in the pan! However, it's also in their nature to quickly extinguish that same fire. Let me illustrate this with an example: In the 19th century, the Poles had about four or five revolts, all unsuccessful and insignificant. Hungarians had one in 1848, one which was the most significant in Europe. Similarly in the 20th century, Poland had minor uprisings in 1956, 1968, and 1970, again without major significance. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was heard around the world. These examples show how quickly Poles "light up" and go out just as fast. By contrast, Hungarians can sustain such outbursts, and if they start something, they usually do it right and finish the job.

PAVOL RANKOV: Speaking of Polish and Hungarian uprisings, let's stay in the 20th century. When the Poles fought against the communists in the 1920s, or in 1939 against the Germans, they naively believed that the West would help. In 1956, the Hungarians similarly believed in Western aid. I'd like to ask the following question: What do Poles and Hungarians think about their countries' significance in a Western European context? If such an event were to happen now, do they think the West would rush to help? Or if the 20th century were repeated, how would they imagine the roles of their respective countries, again as viewed from a Western European perspective?

KRZYSZTOF VARGA: At present, the situation is very different, and it's not necessary for Poland to expect help from the West. There are some events of the 20th century, which are rarely discussed within Poland, such as Poland's support for the eradication of Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement and right before the start of World War II. When Poland was subsequently attacked by Germany, the Slovaks attacked Southern Poland. However minor this war actually was, it was still a Polish-Slovak conflict. Notwithstanding all of that, Central Europe remains an extremely interesting area, and that's precisely why these hidden, dark events need to be discussed, even if they are unpleasant for one country or the other. It's a common characteristic of the people of Central Europe to describe themselves as victims of history, talking about their endless suffering. It's very rare to accept the reverse, that sometimes they actually caused suffering for others. Yet another stereotype: it's easier to be the victim of history. Now that describes Central Europe.

VIKTOR HORVÁTH: I've got a question for Krzysztof regarding what he just said. In your opinion, how's the process

of historical reckoning working out in Poland? I spent six months living in Germany, and one of the defining experiences of my life was to hear how fascism and the Holocaust were still, after all these years, discussed on a day-to-day basis on the radio. There were numerous programs on many channels dedicated to the issue, and it seemed like they were constantly working on this notion of facing their past. In Hungary, I don't see this happening. One could say the whole thing is missing. It's replaced by a strange, sick fluctuation, one side blames the other, depending on which party is in charge at the moment, and we're all just victims. Then the pendulum swings again.

KRZYSZTOF VARGA: This is a very significant question. The Germans are the chief culprits. They are responsible for what happened during World War II. And this process of dealing with the past has been going on since the end of the war. As you have mentioned, it's quite a long process, which is a much deeper part of them, than it is of Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks, all of whom have not properly dealt with it. The problems in their respective cases don't have such deep roots, and thus are not so strongly related to traumas as in the case of the Germans. If we look at Austria, for example, we find a country that supposedly became the first victim of fascist Germany after its occupation. In reality, the situation is obviously quite different. Actually, Austria became an organic part of Germany. The SS officers were part of the regime. They awaited Hitler's arrival in Austria. From a Polish perspective, let's look at the case of Jedwabne. It's a small village on the Eastern border, where in 1942, after the Germans had attacked the Soviet Union, it wasn't the Germans who murdered people, but rather the "Polish fascists", who slaughtered their own countrymen. Jews were killed in brutal fashion; several hundred of them were led into sheds that were then set on fire. This case was never talked about. And only when a book came out did some Poles acknowledge the truth. That's when it became clear that they were not just victims, but they actually carried out monstrous acts. This event is so important, because it's as if the Poles were set free. They became aware that nothing is as obvious as it seems. Just like for Hungarians, when Szálasi took over for Horthy in 1944. Terrible things happened to the Jews back then. Yet it still seems as if the Hungarians don't want to talk openly about this issue, and it therefore gets swept under the rug.

VIKTOR HORVÁTH: The point on which Krzysztof and I agree is that in the case of Hungarians and other Central European nations, dealing with the past or reliving the experience just didn't happen. Such mental cleansing starts with coming out and talking about these things, discussing and analyzing them. I don't mean atonement or self-flagellation, but a weighing of the events, facing them, and realizing our responsibility. Right now, it seems as if the issue is between two extremes. During 40 years of socialism, a small nation, especially a loser of WWII, had to atone for its sins. This is also unhealthy, as things do get overlooked. At present, the decades-long suppression of healthy nationalistic feelings is being paid off a hundred times over. This backlash began and has continued since 1990, with unhealthy nationalism becom-

ing much stronger – this is a type of nationalism that prefers to look at Hungarians as victims and only as victims. Actually, Hungarians are victims, just as many other countries and they are just as culpable too. I hope there will come a time when these extremes will offset each other, creating a balance and then finally a common book of history can be written. The French and the Germans also hated each other and fought for centuries. By now, they've got their common history book.

Just for the sake of discussion, I'd like to digress a bit and talk about Hungarians and Serbs. When the Hungarian Army marched on Novi Sad, Serbia in 1942, the streets were filled with Serbian bodies slaughtered at the hands of Hungarians. In return, when the partisans of Tito captured the city, they slaughtered Hungarians as revenge. Only the first incident was talked about prior to 1990, there was even a movie entitled *Hideg napok* (*Cold days*). After 2000, one could only hear about the deeds of the partisans, and that's a similarly unhealthy situation. Always being the victim is very suspicious. No individual or community is always the victim. Perhaps we found the answer to Pavol's question about melancholy.

PAVOL RANKOV: In his book *Turul Stew*, Krzysztof actually sees no prospects for Hungarian efforts to successfully revive that famous Monarchy. He mentions it several times in the novel, stating that it's just never going to happen. Why don't you think it's possible to reacquire even a small part of the territories. Why do you reject the notion of Hungary reclaiming its past status? Can't we bring back the glorious past?

KRZYSZTOF VARGA: I think these questions are a bit provocative, since a Slovak is asking whether it's possible for Hungary to revive itself or not. I happen to like the current situation, being a part of the European Union and able to travel freely without a passport – both of these things seemed like impossible, unattainable dreams just decades ago. I don't know how the future is going to play itself out, but one thing is for sure, the future of Central Europe depends on how small nations can deal with their pasts as well as their national egotism. Will they be able to get along with their next – door neighbors? It's not just a Slovak-Hungarian problem, but a Polish-Lithuanian one. (Lithuania, as a young nation, is trying to solidify its position by using Lithuanian names for everything, which isn't really a great idea and proves the nation's narrow-mindedness rather than its greatness.) It's going to be interesting to see how it will all pan out. Central European history is still in motion, Fukuyama was wrong about the end of history, it's only just beginning! I've got another story: I was working for *Gazeta Wyborcza* on an article. I don't recall the year, but it was the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising. The article was written by a Slovak historian whose name I've forgotten. It talked about the enormous role played by the Slovak National Uprising in ending fascism and thus World War II. President Tiso was never mentioned in the whole article. Yet another example of important and inconvenient issues getting swept under the rug. Clearly it's very difficult to talk about some of these topics; rather than risking provocation they suppress them. /

Translated by Ábel Mészáros

TEACHING HISTORY

IS ONE OF THE NEVER-ENDING PUBLIC DEBATES. A HUNGARIAN JOURNALIST AND A SLOVAK RESEARCHER INVESTIGATE THE NATURE OF HISTORY TEACHING IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. TWO POINTS OF VIEW ARE ACCOMPANIED BY A SHORT REVIEW OF REFORMS IN HISTORY TEACHING IN THE V4 AND SOME OF ITS NEIGHBORS.



HISTORY EDUCATION AND REGIME CHANGE: THE CASE OF SLOVAK TEXTBOOKS

SLÁVKA OTČENÁŠOVÁ

History education in Central Europe, from the very outset of its institutionalization in the 19th century, has been tasked with developing the loyalty of citizens toward their respective states and advancing the values of governing elites. In this way, history education has been instrumentalized by the state to impart a collective identity and memory to the citizenry. This was achieved by the selection of topics from the national past for textbooks which were effective in creating and identifying friends and enemies, thereby yielding images of “self” and the “other.” Next to the family, media, and public ceremonies, history served in the perception formation of students, by means of which they would come to understand themselves and the wider world.

As political regimes have changed, so have narrations of national history. History has been shaped, in various different ways, so as to make the political programs of governing elites (whoever they may be at a given moment) appear natural, legitimate, and most desirable in light of historical development. The history textbooks of Slovak schools in the 20th century are a perfect case in point.

Czechoslovakia was established as a new state in 1918. History education was supposed to justify the existence of this newly-formed state by searching for its tradition in the past, thereby creating a common collective identity and mode of internal relations for the so-called Czechoslovak nation. These history books generally took three forms. There were simply textbooks written by Slovak au-

thors. But often, the textbooks were either Czech textbooks translated into Slovak or they were “Slovakized” textbooks, meaning translated Czech textbooks that had additional material referring to Slovak national history. Interwar textbooks described the 9th century Principality of Great Moravia as the first common state of the Czechs and Slovaks, and Czechoslovakia was presented as the reincarnation of this medieval structure, reborn after hundreds of years of involuntary separation. Textbooks praised the spread of Christianity supported by the local ruling elites of Great Moravia, noting that “Poles and Hungarians became familiar with Christianity via Czechoslovaks.” This created an image of the nation as a superior mediator of civilization, responsible for elevating its neighbors in intellect and spirit. The Hussite movement of the 15th century was likewise underscored in this construction of the concept of “Czechoslovak.” The majority of history textbooks referred to Czechs, Slovaks, and Moravians fighting with courage side by side in Jan Jiskra’s army, creating the impression of an ideological, spiritual, and physical unity between the nations. Hussites were depicted as the best representatives of the nation: “The ideals of courage, fearlessness, and love for the fatherland which they protected from the evil enemies of the Czech language and nation.” Consequently, the Czechoslovak spirit was defined by high and unique moral principles: “Hussitism raised moral and brave spirit in the Czech nation. This spirit was reincarnated in the Czechoslovak people in the preceding century in their fights for freedom and independence and in the World War in foreign legions.” Interwar history textbooks also reflected the politi-

The History of Teaching 1989–2012

POLAND

- After 1991: First new education laws introduced after 1989.
- 1999: Complex educational reform. Schools are required to follow the core curriculum and available selection of textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. At the primary level, these reforms introduce History and Civics. At the secondary level, four separate modules of history are introduced: World, European, Polish and Regional History (additionally classes are included on family and oral history).
- 2012: Reform of school curriculum. History only obligatory after the 1st year of high school for programs with a “humanities” profile. Instead, a new school subject is introduced — a combination of History and Society with recommended modules that include: “Europe And The World,” “War and Military Systems,” “Woman, Man, and Family,” and “The Fatherland Pantheon and Disputes.” The curriculum is set by the Ministry of Education and must be respected by all schools.
- Number of history lessons: two hours per week (more in classes with specialized “humanities” profiles).

CZECH REPUBLIC

- 1990s: Educational reforms supporting the liberalization of education are passed. Preparation of teachers’ aids (textbooks, etc.) is handed over to the “market.” After 1990, six publishing houses edit over

sixty history books, all presenting different interpretations and methods of organizing content. The only teaching aids that are universally used are the historical atlases published between 1995 and 2001.

- 2004: Introduction of New Educational Act. Schools design their own curricula (teaching plans, syllabi, and modules) and are free to structure and combine educational content into subjects as they see fit.
- 2007: Adoption of the Framework Education Program for Basic Education. In primary education, history is part of the People and Their World module, focusing on assigning events to time, the processes of history formation, and the most important moments in the history of the Czech Republic. At the secondary level, history education (conducted together with civics) is part of the family of subjects entitled People and Society – the objective of which is to cultivate historical consciousness and the continuity of historical memory, with particular focus placed on the 19th and 20th centuries, and the history of the Czech Republic introduced in a wide European context. The objectives of teaching history are not set independently, and subjects introduced by the curriculum should be elaborated by the schools according to their preferences.
- Number of history lessons: two to three hours per week. (Varies between primary and secondary schools).

SLOVAKIA

- 1990: Structural changes in curriculum content of subjects based on the ideology of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, especially in History and Civic Education. After gaining independence, twenty-eight legal reforms in education were introduced in the period between 1994 and 2008.
- 1997: Changes in the content of history lessons – greater emphasis on National history (40%) over European history (30%), World history (20%) and Regional and Local history (10%).
- 2008: Education Act introduces a central curricular policy. School educational programs must be in accordance with the national education program developed by the National Institute of Education and approved by the Ministry of Education. At the primary level, the program is introduced as History & Geography. By contrast, the secondary level offers history, geography, and civics together within the Man & Society module, although history is

cal relations of Czechoslovakia toward its neighbors. Germans and Hungarians received the most sustained attention of the textbooks. They were usually represented as oppressors of Slavs and usurpers, who occupied regions historically belonging to Czechs and Slovaks. This negative image was intensified by the description of Austro-Hungary as the “prison of non-German and non-Hungarian nations.”

On the eve of WWII, Czechoslovakia was dissolved. The Czech lands and Moravian region became part of Germany, as the Protectorate. Slovakia became an independent state under German influence. In Slovakia, a change occurred in the political sphere: the previously dominant Lutheran intelligentsia was replaced by Catholic clergy. Reflecting these shifts, official historiography took a new course. Textbooks used in Slovak schools during WWII interpreted the establishment of a Slovak state as the optimal historical development of the Slovak nation, finding the tradition of an independent nation-state in the medieval state of Great Moravia, but now without mentioning the Czechs. Collective identity was based on the concept of Christianity, especially Catholicism: “The Slovak nation, already at the time of its first performance on the stage of European history, was in service of Christian culture, which became a safe pathway towards its future.” All other forms of religious identity, such as Islam, Judaism, Hussitism, and even Lutheranism, were described as holdouts against the historical development of the Slovak nation. There was no longer a political need to represent Czechs and Slovaks as one nation, and the description of Czechs in textbooks was influenced by frustration. The image of Germans and Hungarians likewise changed. They were no longer represented as exclusively inhibiting forces.

History textbooks produced in Czechoslovakia during the communist era were joint productions of Czech and Slovak historians. There was always one textbook for each particular grade and one edition was published in Czech and another in Slovak. A central topic in such textbooks was occupied by the tradition of revolution, which was seen as the moving force in history. History was interpreted within the limits of Marxist paradigms of periodization and the struggle between classes, i.e. the oppressed and the oppressors. History was a drawn – out fight of serfs and workers against reactionary feudal rulers and capitalists. Czechs and Slovaks were represented as working class people and true revolutionar-

ies, and the construction of collective identity was based on the admixture of class and nationalist principles. A new paradigm was applied in the construction of the image of Germans and Hungarians. On the one hand, these nations were represented as enemies of Slavs and oppressive foreign rulers, which were an obstacle in the self-emancipation of Slovaks and Czechs. On the other hand, class membership became as important as nationality in history textbooks narratives:

Hussite revolutionary movement had an anti-feudal and democratic character and, therefore, it became of an international importance. Although this revolt was connected with the strengthening of the Czech national pride, the Hussite movement thoroughly applied the principle of international solidarity. While the German patriciate was as an enemy suppressed, the German poor became the ally of Hussites at home, as well as abroad.

The transitional years from 1989–1993 brought similarly dramatic changes to Slovak society. Most notably the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993, which encouraged yet another reassessment of the past.

For historians, this involved distancing themselves from the ideological constraints of the previous era, coupled with an emergent need for answers: how might they redefine the “essence” of Slovak history, and how could they properly overcome the limitations exerted on the historical sciences in the past. History teachers themselves were largely unprepared to face the new situation. Although primary schools were gradually provided newly written teaching materials and history textbooks from the beginning of the 1990s, it took a long time for historians to produce new textbooks for high schools, and teachers were required, in some cases until as late as the beginning of the 2000s, when an entirely new set of textbooks was finally published, to use the old textbooks produced during communism. In the meantime, new master narratives were sought out. Political elites demanded the reconstruction of the national past in line with the the rising nationalism and isolationism that characterized the first half of the 1990s. The influence of these groups was primarily asserted through their decision to introduce a textbook for history education that was not generally accepted by academic circles in Slovakia. The ma-

jority of historians saw the textbook as the revival of historical myth-making and as a simplistic tool for the negative stereotyping of others. The book subsequently became a divisive issue in Slovak society. Finally, with pressure from the institutions of the European Union, the textbook was withdrawn from public school education by the Ministry of Education in 1997.

During the past several decades, some Western European countries have sought to transform history education from an exercise in nation-building to a space for skill-development. While this approach is highly recommended by European Union institutions, it has gained little ground in Slovakia. History education is still in the

business of producing loyal citizens with a shared collective memory, and it continues to focus on grand narratives about the “heroic” past of the nation. At the same time, there have been numerous projects and initiatives that try to utilize history education to aid students in the development of critical-thinking skills, educating them in democratic values of mutual respect and estimation. I believe that this process will eventually be institutionalized within the state educational system. /

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A HISTORY LESSON FOR GOOD PUPILS

TAMÁS GOMPERZ

When we taught you not to love your country, and we taught you to keep an open mind, and to think globally, we made a big mistake. We were actually teaching you our own close-minded and embittered nationalism. And even though it's a disease, we still were willing to pass it on. This disease often results in the following symptoms: you find yourself distrusting everyone around you, you are filled with hate, and you try to cover up your inferiority complex with growling and grumbling. You might even embarrass yourself and the entire country by running around town with the urns of Arrow Cross Party¹ politicians.

But let's say that you, unlike such suffering souls, don't care about what took place in your great-grandfather's time. That wouldn't be a problem, in and of itself. But at some point, you'll have to encounter the fake beliefs and superstitions that the Hungarian people have extracted and distilled from this history, A fabrication that has only been used for self-torment. You still have the chance

to free yourself from the paralyzing pain of self pity. To do so, you simply have to draw different conclusions from history.

Let's start with the idea that because of Trianon, Hungary has suffered a catastrophe that no other nation has had to endure. This particular conviction fits perfectly with a national identity defined (in its past and present) by endless calamity and penance. It's also the sound of death rattle and weeping. Let's be honest, that's not motivating. And it's not even true.

Hungary's losses cannot be compared to the vanished empires of the British or Spanish. Although, losing a foreign colony is certainly not the same as the annexation of some of your population to a neighboring country. Nor should we be hypocrites. An average Hungarian citizen can't name five cities in Transylvania, cares nothing about the people living there, and, in all likelihood, never travels there. Trianon only “hurts” this citizen because the country has gotten smaller. As painful as that may be, it is far from unique.

For example, Serbians are probably going through a similarly traumatic ex-

likewise taught as a separate subject. The aim of the history program is the formation of historical and national consciousness (“healthy nationalism”), alongside the development of values based on humanity and democracy. For this reason, political history occupies nearly 70% of the program.

→ Number of history lessons: one to two hours per week. (Varies between primary and secondary schools).

HUNGARY

→ 1993: The Public Education Act is adopted, resulting in the decentralization of education. Schools prepare their own pedagogical program between 1996 and 1998, developing local curricula. Schools alter the programs of the most politically volatile subjects (literature and history) and selected new textbooks, thereby ending ideological restrictions on education.

→ 1995: Introduction of the National Core Curriculum which defines the common materials for teaching national culture and sets general regulations for basic education.

→ 2000: Introduction of the Framework Curricula for all schools which provides intermediary regulation between the National Core Curriculum and local syllabi. Public schools must meet national regulations while preserving as much autonomy as possible. History is first taught as part of a broader History and Civics module, and later, in grades nine to twelve, it is taught as a standalone subject.

→ Number of history lessons: approximately two per week in primary and between three and four per week in secondary.

UKRAINE

→ After 1991: Following independence, the educational system was one of the first social spheres that very rapidly underwent radical transformation. These reforms necessarily included the structural re-organization of the curricula.

→ 1996: New law on education is passed, which organizes the structure of education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the working out of the standard curricula for schools on different levels.

→ 1999: Introduction of The Law on General Secondary Education, which provides changes in structure and content. The basic curriculum consists of two main elements: a state component, determined by the Ministry of Education and Science

and obligatory for all secondary educational institutions (e.g. history program), and an optional component, developed by schools individually. Two separate subjects in secondary education: The History of Ukraine and World History. An obvious “war of textbooks” exists between Western and Eastern Ukraine, with either side offering strikingly different interpretations of a range of terms and events, which mobilize different aspects of national identity. (See the study of Karina Korostelina, 2009)

- Number of history lessons: two to three per week. (Varies between primary and secondary schools).

AUSTRIA

- The legal basis for education in Austria is the School Act of 1962, which has subsequently been revised at various points.
- 1995: Beginning of fundamental school reform: the autonomy of schools is secured by their ability to establish particular areas of emphasis. A gradual implementation of new curricula on the level of secondary schools also begins, although the curricular autonomy provisions allow for individual schools to organize their own programs within the general framework. At the primary level, only Local History (together with geography & biology) is offered, whereas at the secondary level history is part of the History and Social Studies module.
- 2000: Introduction of a new curriculum, developed by an expert group (comprised of teachers, professors, school inspectors, and representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture). This includes an introduction to History and Political Education. The Austrian school laws encourage a reasonable balance between national, European and international topics. Models of citizenship and human rights are taught in conjunction with history, including most current events.
- Number of history lessons: two to three per week. (Varies between primary and secondary schools).

GERMANY

- 1993: Introduction of a special agreement (emended in 2006) by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* on the types of schools and courses of education presenting a general framework of core subjects and topics. History is included

perience at present, with the carving up of their multinational state. The first lesson is therefore not to pride yourself on the unprecedented misfortunes of your nation, for it might anger the Lord of History. There are countless people who have never had their own state. Or worse yet, they had their own state, but lost their independence or were obliterated.

That is the least of it, though. The more harmful delusion says that (and whether it does so implicitly or explicitly, this is the starting point for all of the lamentations, vehemence, and political action) the tragedy of Trianon could have been avoided. That Greater-Hungary, the one you see on bumper stickers and kitchen walls, could have lived and then this whole country, with all of the Carpathian Basin, would be there for the Hungarians. For close to a hundred years, this lie has been poisoning the collective well, but in reality the country was beyond saving. Perhaps it wouldn't have fallen apart exactly ninety years ago, with the exact same border lines drawn, but the disintegration was inevitable.

A nation may be held together by the consent of the majority or via an army. Over half of the inhabitants of the Hungarian Kingdom of the last century did not want a common country. Given that these same inhabitants lived in interconnected territories between the center of the country and its borders, it became obvious that the people, along with their land, were eventually going to leave. This only could have been prevented or postponed by using military power, a power that Hungary did not have. Not only did it not have this power in 1920, but it has not had it for the past four hundred years.

In this sense, this version of Hungary was not lost after World War I, but in the 1500s, when the nation fell apart and was never subsequently unified. Only during Ottoman rule could one have put a Greater-Hungary bumper sticker on a wagon out of nostalgia. By the time of the Austro-Hungarian compromise, after Transylvania and the coastal territories had been re-annexed, only half of the population was Hungarian, and the country was no longer independent. Those who daydream of the restoration of old Hungary never imagine a country that does not carry out its own foreign policy, control its own military and has a ruler who does not speak Hungarian. This point is worth emphasizing, since these same circles consider the European

Union's insistence on enforcing voluntarily accepted contracts a form of colonization.

Without its own army, the country, in which Hungarians were only the largest minority, was held together by the band of the monarchy. And this probably held the country in place for a lot longer than Hungarians could have on their own. Had the monarchy been able to survive, maybe the endgame would have come later, but demographic factors and virulent nationalism ensured its eventual disintegration.

Why am I telling you this story? Because Hungary would have had to give up its independence, regardless. Greater-Hungary and an independent Hungary were/are mutually exclusive entities. A greater power was needed to hold it together. Now, you can draw another conclusion: the intolerant revisionist ideologies of “Hungary belongs to the Hungarians” and “No, No, Never” are not very sophisticated, but taken together they are actually lies. Even if these ideologies are presented simultaneously and by the same people.

Why is all of this relevant? There are two reasons. The inability of doctors and medical scientists to save a 102-year-old woman may really hurt us, but it would be different if we were talking about a child. The disintegration of Hungary may hurt, especially the severe economic and cultural hardships it caused, but we feel different about the pain if we think it could have been avoided, as opposed to when we acknowledge it as the inevitable end to a long life.

Moreover, when something could have been avoided, someone is usually responsible. However, if it is inevitable, or at least the result of a decision made by a million people, then reasonable people do not look for scapegoats. That is why Károlyi, Tisza, Apponyi, the Jews, the foreigners, including those snail-eating French, the disingenuous Romanian diplomats, and finally Clemenceau's daughter-in-law can not be blamed. The country's success is up to you, and not tied to what happened in Trianon. That is lesson number three.

Having got this far, we have to consider the hard part. How unfair was the decision at Trianon? Imagine a country where half of the people do not want to live with the rest. What is fair? If half of the population forces the other half's hand? Here is where we ought to intro-

duce the seldom-practiced, at least in our country, method of applying the same set of rules. If the Hungarians have the right to an independent state that is not part of the Ottoman, Habsburg, or Soviet Empires, then should not the same be true for the Slovaks, Croats, and Romanians? Do they have the right to their own states independent of Hungary? Even if one is a federalist and disagrees with the ethnic aspects, this question is still valid. It is valid because Hungary has never been the vanguard of federalism, even when it mattered.

Given two countries, A and B, one could say: let's draw borders that would result in the highest possible number of people from country A, as well as living in country A and the same for B. If that is fair, then the division after Trianon is less unfair, overall, than the previous arrangement. However, it is still very unfair, because based on population placement it would have been possible to draw borders better representing the aforementioned principle.

Have a look at this map made by Pál Teleki,² not the enemy. On the one hand, it shows why Hungary's dissolution was inevitable, and on the other hand it also depicts a more just way of laying out its borders. However, that has nothing to do with the Greater-Hungary bumper stickers and dreams. That would mean borders 40 km farther than today as well as Székely Land. Not sixty-three counties. Not Fiume and the beach, even if some people would think it fair for Hungary to control a territory with no actual Hungarians living in it. The Vienna Arbitration based on the aforementioned principles actually laid out a much fairer set of borders than the Treaty of Trianon. The only flaw was that Hungary had Hitler to thank for this. The case for Greater-Hungary was thereby connected to the loss of independence and a disgusting alliance.

It would be justifiable to ask why the winners did not opt for a fairer treaty. But there is another lesson for us to learn. If you play roulette and bet wrong, you lose. Even as part of the monarchy,

Hungary took part in launching a war that ultimately brought about the death of twenty million people and levels of unprecedented suffering upon Europe. Unlike in roulette, where gambling on red or black has no moral repercussions, starting a war does. And it is just flat – out wrong. Even if the Allies were not any better, the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians were the aggressors.

The winners did what they always do, weaken the opposition, so they chopped Germany and the monarchy to pieces, and they also presented their war allies with spoils. Now, tell me which of these decisions would have been opposed by Hungary, had it been on the winning side?

The Second World War, which settled the borders for good, is even harder to account for, since Hungary was not only an aggressor, but it fought alongside (to the last bullet) those for whom humanity's defeat was an interest. These were all decisions. Decisions made by politicians that were initially widely supported by the public. One can mock the unprincipled tactics of Romania and its last – minute decision to drop out, but just how much better is it to miss that final chance to get out of the war or to follow (on principle) a bunch of insane mass murderers to doom? Let that be lesson number four: decisions have consequences. If you keep making bad ones, you are going to lose badly, without the chance to minimize your losses.

Finally, you need to know that Hungary was incredibly unpopular in Europe before and during the two wars. Many people complain about the hostile attitude of Western politicians and journalists toward Hungary. They never think about why it is that the leaders of the time could not change this attitude. Of course, it is because everyone is always conspiring against us. Our politicians were definitely never presumptuous, incompetent, and obtuse, no way. We just build statues for them. /

Translated by Ábel Mészáros

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in Social Sciences. It is taught in primary education as part of a wider interdisciplinary subject, and then taught separately from the sixth grade onward. No national curriculum exists in Germany, as *Länder* are free to choose their own.

- 2002: Beginning of the development of common national educational standards: basic principles, competences, and expected levels of achievement are put in place. Schools still provide individual curricula which differ between regions – with some following a chronological pattern, while others utilize comparative and problem-oriented perspectives. Different balances likewise exist between national and international history.
- Number of history lessons: one to two per week. (Varies between primary and secondary schools and between states)

SERBIA

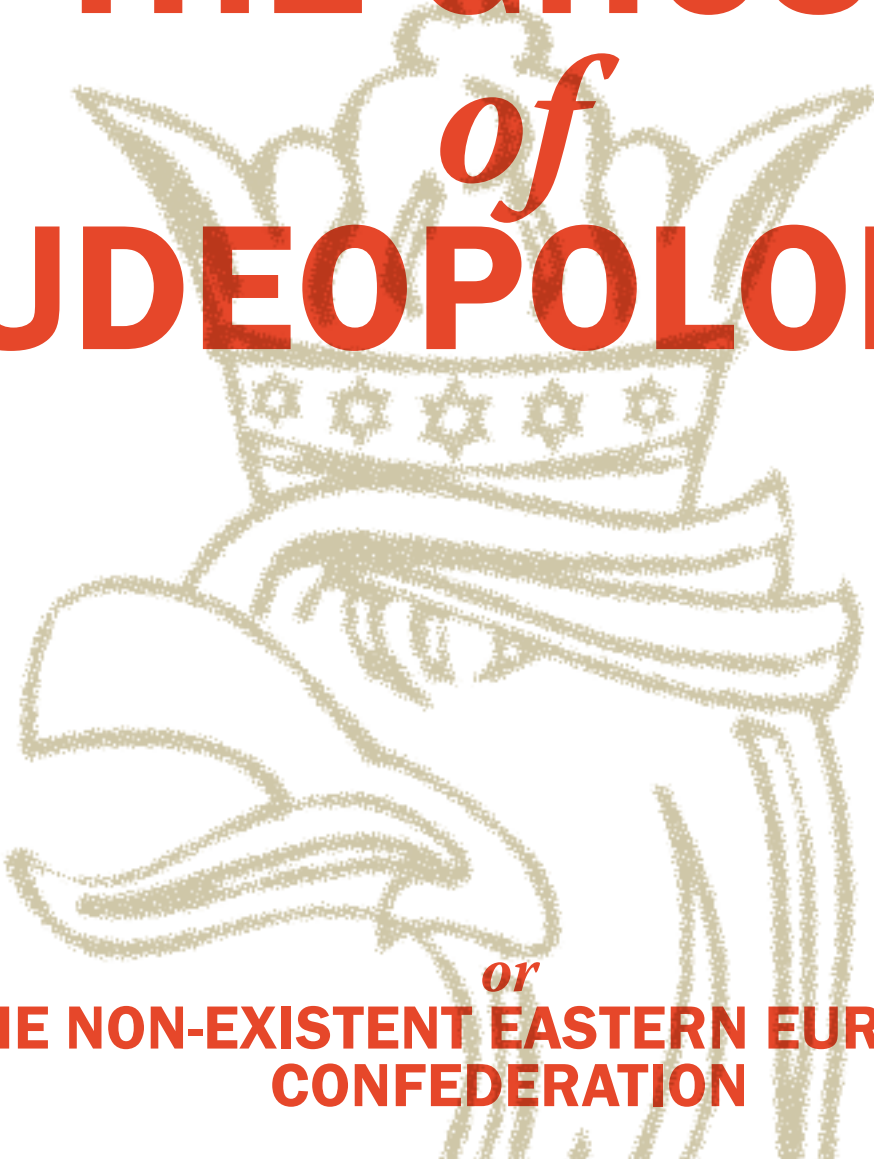
- After 1992: Reforms focused on changes in curriculum and adopting a new history program dedicated to the history of Serbia.
- 2001–2003: Reforms in education begin. Curricula are made more flexible, allowing individual schools to make modifications: instead of fixed and mandatory content, the reform introduces a framework with general guidelines.
- 2004–2005: Second wave of reforms. The newly appointed Ministry of Education annulled the majority of earlier changes, returning to the central curriculum system implemented by all schools in Serbia.
- 2009: Introduction of the new Law of the Foundations of the Educational System. In primary education, history lessons are taught from fifth grade onward and appear as a separate subject at the secondary level. Textbooks are based mostly on political history, and the curriculum follows chronological order.
- Number of history lessons: two per week.

Jędrzej Burszta

REFERENCES

- 1 National Socialist Party of Hungary. When in power (1944–1945), it led Hungary to collaborate with Nazi Germany. Its members were later tried for war crimes.
- 2 Prime minister of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1920–1921 and of Hungary in 1939–1941. Professor and well-known expert in geography. He accepted Germany's takeover of Czechoslovakia, remained an ally of Poland, and agreed to introduce anti-Semitic laws in Hungary in hopes of preserving the country's sovereignty.

THE GHOST *of* JUDEOPOLONIA



or
**THE NON-EXISTENT EASTERN EUROPEAN
CONFEDERATION**

ZOLTÁN HALASI

A literary excursion into the unfulfilled intellectual project of *Judeopolonia*, which nevertheless underpinned political and social history. A well-known Hungarian poet investigates traces of a literary work that portrayed the League of East European States – a buffer zone concept between Germany and Russia considered by some around the first World War to be the same as the mid-19th century concept of Jewish domination in Poland.

Poland was stolen. It was stolen in a way that was almost unrecognizable. Poland vanished. It was believed to be in its original place, but it was not. It passed out of sight.

POLISH STRATEGIES

It is August 1914. Poland has been divided under the authority of three empires since 1795. The so-called “Polish-question” has not been an issue in the international diplomatic arena for years. An independent Poland is not in the interests of any of Europe’s empires. Nevertheless, war breaks out, opening the possibility for change.

Two differing strategies dominate the politics of Poland. The first is based on the assumption that the greater number of Russians will ensure their victory, even if it results in an immense loss of human life. Poland’s most significant enemy is to the west, the Germans. And therefore, their primal fear is Germanization. This strategy and outlook is further predicated on the idea that the Russian Tzar will realize that the Polish people constitute a natural shield against any German invasion. Accordingly, the Polish people will fight for their autonomy side-by-side with the Russians. This “constitutional” thinking is promoted by the National Democratic Party and by its leader, Roman Dmowski.

The premise of the second strategy is that the Tzarist Empire will destroy and assimilate the Polish people. The ongoing conflict between the Germans and Russians provides the only possibility of survival for the Polish people. If the war weakens both great powers, an eventual impasse might lead to a political vacuum in Poland. Until then, the Polish legions organized in Galicia and in alliance with the Austro-Hungarian army will fight on. If the Russian establishment starts to weaken, the Polish “Prometheus” will hopefully give rise to a liberated army against the Moscovites. This strategy was proposed and promoted by the leader of the Polish Socialist Party, Józef Piłsudski.

There have always been antagonistic contradictions between the two main strategies. The future of Poland as envisioned by the Germanophobic Dmowski is as an ethnically homogenous state, as it was under the rule of the Piast dynasty in the Middle Ages, with its main focus on the lands under Prussian rule. The Russophobic Piłsudski is committed to

establishing a multiethnic state, as Poland was under the rule of the Jagiellonian dynasty. He would never renounce claims to Belorussian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian lands. Dmowski, an aggressive anti-Semite, believes in parliamentarism, while Piłsudski’s, leader of the Socialists, supports military action.

Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, the newly appointed commander of the Russian forces, publishes a manifesto for the Polish people on 14 August. He promises them territorial unity and cultural, political, and linguistic autonomy. He needs willing Polish soldiers to fight under the Tsarist flag, and the support of the civilian population. However, the promise of autonomy, for which Dmowski has been fighting for many years, is never realized. After all, the war is not driven by the intention of the Tsar to bestow rights on his subjects, but because xenophobia has won the day. In other words, the supporters of Russification succeeded over those favoring liberalization. Dmowski will only realize a year and a half later that nothing can be expected from the Russians on “constitutional” grounds.

Piłsudski’s situation is equally difficult. His legendary First Brigade (*Pierwsza Brygada*) is defeated and scattered. His people on Russian lands (who have to carry their saddles and find horses for themselves) escape from Kielce back onto Galician territories, failing to win not just a battle but also the support of the Polish civilian population. The Polish Legions’ military independence is coming to an end, temporarily. Piłsudski seeks to capitalize politically on the defeat: the military units are gradually subordinated to the German-Austrian forces.

A FEDERATION PLAN

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin has to deal with direct military goals and various future political concepts. However, these professional bureaucrats could have never come up with the idea of state formation with which a lawyer from Cologne surprises them with at the beginning of August. In the event of victory, the lawyer suggests that the German government establish a League of East European States (*Osteuropäischer Staatenbund*), which would function as a buffer zone between Germany and Russia, running from Riga to Odessa. Its territory would coincide with the Jews’ Pale of Settlement, the so-called *chertá osédlosti*, and would have a population of 30 million. Furthermore, it

would be recognized as a multiethnic federation under German protection, its form of government would be a monarchy, its capital would be Lublin, and its ruler a Hohenzollern duke. This formation would guarantee Germany’s safety from the East, and 1.8 million German and 6 million Jewish inhabitants would together perpetuate German culture, balancing out the political weight of the 8 million Polish, 5–6 million Ukrainian, 4 million Belorussian, and the 3.5 million Latvian and Lithuanian inhabitants. Yiddish, the mother-tongue of the Eastern European Jews, is a dialect of the German language; the Russian Jews could be considered natural allies of Germany. Until such a structure is in place, the most important task is to communicate the message to all of them to welcome the German forces as liberators by supplying nicely wrapped tools of propaganda.

JEWISH UTOPIAS

History has already drawn various state formations on the map of Central Europe, Central Eastern Europe or In-Between Europe. However, even more was dreamed into reality by politicians and intellectuals. The social fabric of Central Eastern Europe wove together all kinds of people imaginable, from the Estonians to the Tartars of the Crimea (from the 1840s ‘until 1914), apart from the one people that belonged only to the in-between, the Jews. The Jews have never been included in the concept of “constituent people.” As a matter of fact, they could not have been characterized as such: lacking a sovereign territory (they were scattered worldwide), lacking a language of the civilized world (as a “*Kultursprache*”, Yiddish was not recognized), and lacking an army. For the Jews, Central and Eastern Europe offered either assimilation or departure; sink or swim. In those countries where liberalism in the 19th century granted individual rights and consequently career opportunities – for example, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Prussia – Jewish assimilation was enhanced. Countries where individual rights were taken away from the Jews, such as Russia and Romania, were responsible for a dramatic increase in Jewish emigration. However the situation was not so simple, since it was possible to assimilate entirely without abandoning all traces of Jewishness, or partly retaining some religious practices. This is the model that is well-known amongst Jews: being a good Jew at home (keeping the Torah) and being a good citizen elsewhere

(obeying state law). However, all of this is a matter of individual choice which does not affect the nature of the collective pressure from which Jewish communities suffer. This collective pressure pushes in two directions. In one direction, emigration is coupled with the desire to found a new state. The other aims to end discrimination with social revolution. The first says that if there is a Jewish state, then Jews will be able to protect themselves; the other believes that in a classless society every man is equal. The first idea is Zionism, the second is socialism. Neither exists in its pure form, and Jews manage to formulate both in unique ways.

However, self-aware Zionists and revolutionaries make up only a small percentage of the Jewish population, with the great majority following their rabbis, loyal to the community, respecting the Tsar and deeply religious. They are the victims of pogroms, the news in the international media. They are the ones who will be saved by the Jewish aid programs of well-off Western European philanthropists, which otherwise drown in the mud of Tsarist administration. They are the targets of top-down, angry, Russian anti-Semitism. They are the internal enemy that could be killed or looted from time to time with the help of the authorities, without being taken to account. The only hope for this majority is the arrival of the Messiah.

THE LAWYER FROM COLOGNE

The aforementioned lawyer from Cologne first enters the public arena in 1891, when, at the age of twenty-six, he publishes a political pamphlet entitled "Wither the Russian Jews?" He drafts plans for a Colonial Company (*Colonial Gesellschaft*) which will provide projects on railroad construction as well as industrial and agrarian programs and succeeds in settling approximately half a million Russian Jews in Syria-Palestine within one year, utilizing capital of 10 million pounds. Jewish magnates of the day did not see any business opportunities in a Beirut-Gaza-Jerusalem railway line, nor in wineries on Karmel hill, or salt extraction from the Dead Sea, and therefore the necessary capital was missing from the start. Nevertheless, the lawyer from Cologne continued to care for the Russian Jews. A little bit later we find him next to Theodore Herzl, as one of the founding fathers of German Zionism. In 1898, he accompanies Herzl to the Middle-East: the four-person delegation manages to bring Wilhelm II under

its collective influence during his visit to the Turkish Empire. Their aim is to obtain Germany's protection with a quick diplomatic move in order to receive a charter from the Sultan, which would then permit them to establish Jewish settlements in Palestine. They misunderstand high politics. The young archduke supports the second "land taking" of the chosen people in theory, however Turkey does not dare stir up Palestine. The empire is large, as the Sultan says to Herzl, there is enough space elsewhere for the Russian Jews: let them dissolve gradually.

Max Isidor Bodenheimer – this is the name of the lawyer from Cologne – elaborates on the constitution of the World Zionist Organization, and he is elected as a member of the Action Committee. Furthermore, as one of the first directors of the Jewish National Fund, he finances housing projects, afforestation, and land purchases in Palestine. One of his earliest memorandums has already drawn the attention of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the plight of Eastern European Jewish communities, the relationship between Yiddish and German languages, and to the two peoples' common political interests: if Germany supports the establishment of Palestinian settlements they can capitalize on the Jewish settlers as Middle Eastern business partners and political mediators. In 1902, they did not seriously consider his proposal.

COMMITTEE FOR THE EAST

In the middle of August 1914, Bodenheimer is called to Berlin. This is not surprising, since the proposal is no longer about the faraway Palestine, but the war zone of strategic importance between Riga and Odessa. Bodenheimer has learned from past experience that the establishment of settlements in Palestine will not move forward in the short term, while the urgent issue that remains is to initiate a protection plan for the survival of Eastern European Jews. This is the primary aim of his federation plan, assuming it is carried out after the outbreak of the war. He negotiates for weeks with those responsible for Poland within the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. In the meantime, he cooperates with a few Zionists and well-known Jewish intellectuals in establishing the committee for the Liberation of the Russian Jews. The first tasks of the committee are to win the support of the Russian Jewish population and to present the Germans

in favorable light to this same population. For tactical reasons, the Committee soon changes its name to the less militant-sounding: *Komitee für den Osten* [Committee for the East].

Bodenheimer's actions are not met with unmitigated success. Leaders of the non-Zionist German Jewish association try to ignore and bagatellize it, and thus represent the Zionists (who indeed enjoyed only minor public support) in the eyes of the German authorities as unworthy partners. Since the World Zionist Organization wants to stay neutral in the war, its leaders issue a resolution which obliged Bodenheimer to label the committee's activity humanitarian in nature, and further, not to hold its presidency and avoid, where possible, Zionist involvement in the work. His conceptions of the *Osteuropäischer Staatenbund* are called naive and unthoughtful and are held at a distance. He is warned that while he aspires to become the savior of the Russian Jews, he could easily do them great harm with his pro-German activities.

Indeed, as the Eastern front shifts between Silesia and Volyn, between Masuria and Lithuania, local people suffer more and more. Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich wants the immediate pacification of the front and orders the deportation of the potential enemy: Jewish and German men of military age are to be sent to the hinterland. But the hinterland rejects them. There are no wagons and trains with deportees hinder transportation of troops to the front lines. Some places are in total logistical chaos. In response, Nikolai Nikolaevich decides to take the Jews of distinguished families hostage and send them to the hinterland. If any of the settlements prove disloyal, the hostages will be executed at once. Either way, whole cities are later to be deported, resulting in approximately 1 million homeless Jews. The Tsarist command holds the Jewish people responsible for the first major defeat in the war; it is speculated that Jewish households are communicating by phone with German headquarters, leaking information about the Russian strategy. Tsarist propaganda ignores the fact that the Germans use air scouting, while the advancing Russian troops consistently fail to do the same, as if the maneuvers of the enemy can not influence the outcome of the war. In this particular world of misapprehension, Jewish treachery is the cause of the catastrophe at Tannenberg.

HEADQUARTERS

While the Russians continue deportations along parts of the front line, accompanied by Cossack pogroms, the advancing German forces get in touch with the local people of the conquered lands. They have not come up with any specific plan concerning the region. With the help of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bodenheimer's memorandum is able to get through to the General Staff. In October 1914, Russian troops threatening to attack Silesia and Berlin are pushed back, if only for the time being. Ludendorff, Chief of Staff on the Eastern Front, invites Bodenheimer to headquarters. He brings along Franz Oppenheimer, who is the head of the committee and a famous professor of sociology and political economy in Berlin, as well as the agrarian expert of the Zionist movement. Since Ludendorff does not inform them about the exact whereabouts of his headquarters, Bodenheimer and Oppenheimer have an adventurous journey. The trains from Katowice are no longer safe. They have to get to Kraków by Red Cross transport, and from there they are carried further by a truck convoy which jolts along the rough track through the Russian-Austrian border, passing huge, Orthodox village church with golden domes, huts, and buildings with gunfire scars. In Kielce, a junior officer, who as it turns out was Prince Joachim, the son of Emperor Wilhelm II, lends them his car. Grenade and bomb craters accompany them on their journey, along with horse corpses, dogs, ravens, and marching Russian prisoners of war. In Radom, the main street is crowded with people wearing black kaftans, black hats, and looks of horror on their faces. The reason for the chaos soon becomes clear. Following the withdrawal of Austrian-Hungarian troops, three rabbis, accused by Poles of being traitors, were hung by the Russians in public.

Ludendorff is pleased to welcome them. He has a long discussion with Oppenheimer on the food reserves of the warring parties, and he assures Bodenheimer that the German troops hold strong positions from which they will never withdraw, as the Austrian-Hungarian troops did. In the evening, he introduces the gentlemen to Field Marshal Hindenburg, who provides them with written evidence of his support of their plans and activities. The lawyer and the professor feel deeply honored to be accompanied by such heroes.

This is where the story ends. On the way back from Radom their windshield is shot out by Cossacks hiding in the forest. Four weeks later, the German army withdraws. Neither headquarters nor the Ministry of Foreign Affairs again raises the idea of the Eastern European Federation. In the first half of November 1914 it disappears from the political agenda, forever.

JUDEOPOLONIA

Parallel to this story, the restoration of Poland's independence is gradually becoming an issue once more. The great powers are trying to outbid each other with promises. In November 1916, Germany establishes the Regency Kingdom of Poland with Warsaw as its capital. This is a transitional formation, out of which, as a result of a political vacuum, Poland could be reborn.

Forcing Poland into a federation as an amputated entity, tearing it from its Western and Galician lands (it would have remained in Prussian or Habsburg hands) and placing it under German-Jewish supremacy – this could only amount to the degradation of a country. The idea of depriving a country of its sovereignty could only be conceived by a devil's advocate.

So, what is the truth about WWI Poland? About stealing the country? This was not carried out in reality, but it did happen virtually. As one of the prominent figures of the Polish Age of Reform envisioned in 1817, the Moshkos dynasty would reign in Poland. Warsaw would be called Moshkopolis, and the Polish aristocracy would make ends meet as craftsmen. The capital would be muddy; Baroque palaces would smell like pubs; theatres would stage obscene pieces; the new upper class, who was fat, smelly, and dirty, would seize power with treachery, while using a language mixture French and Yiddish.

Since the satirical narrative of Julian Ursus Niemcewicz, *The Year 3333, or An Incredible Dream*, was published in 1858, the Jewish assumption of power has been a recurrent phantasm in the imaginations of the Poles. The idea of Judeopolonia was taken from Niemcewicz's pamphlet. Not so long ago, in 2001, there was a book published in Radom which with its title already suggests what it will be about: *Judeopolonia. Żydowskie państwo w państwie polskim* (Andrzej Leszek Szczęśniak: *Judeopolonia. Jewish Nation within the Polish Nation*). The map of state-formation suggested by

Bodenheimer appears on its cover. In Szczęśniak's narrative, the Jews are informers and spies for the Tsar, tightfisted hyenas and arrogant people who oppress the Poles, as we already know from Niemcewicz's narrative. Bodenheimer's stillborn action became a model and frame for all kinds of Jewish political intentions, and the symbol of the perpetual danger threatening Poland.

CONCLUSION

Isidor Bodenheimer belonged to that late Romantic generation that believed in great personalities, in being chosen, and in the strength of words and culture to solve the burning issues of his age by convincing and gaining the support of opinion-making circles. The historical fact that – contrary to the dominant political narrative of the region, the concept of the nation-state – he created a imperial structure, an in-between empire, shows not only his outdated, 19th century views, but also demonstrates his lack of knowledge of the region and its people. Count Hutten-Czapski, his negotiation partner in Berlin, an expert on Poland, rightly said that Bodenheimer's idea was doomed to fail. The count, loyal to the Prussian court but a Polish patriot, was aware of the fact that the Germans would put more emphasis on supplying their army with Polish draftees than how many Russian Jews spoke German. As a real politician, Hutten-Czapski was lobbying for the establishment of the Regency Kingdom, thus paving the way for Polish autonomy. Bodenheimer backed the wrong horse. This war could have been started, and dominated for a while by Germany, but they could not have won it. Especially not for the sake of the Jews.

On the territory of the Bodenheimer-like state, modern nation-states were born. Jews do not live there anymore. However, the myth of their conspiracy lives on. This mythical thinking says that even today they manage to economically bankrupt and destroy the peoples of Central Eastern Europe. They who were already destroyed here. /

Translated by Anna Lujza Szász

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POLAND'S PRESIDENCY IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP

MORE *than an* EASTERN ELEMENT



Andrzej Iwaniczuk/REPORTER

MATEUSZ GNIAZDOWSKI

Following more than twenty years of co-operation, there are still those who claim that the Visegrad Group has outlived its value and should be laid to rest. These voices present the false image of smaller partners who are incompatible with a much larger Poland, focused on its policy in the East.

Among those who put forward the “six feet under” argument, the most frequently cited flaw is the supposed internal asymmetry of the group: Poland is too large for any true partnership. That is to say that Poland’s size and geopolitical situation has risen out of proportion with its smaller partners, which leads to questions as to the “added value” of co-operation with smaller countries for Poland. However, when it has presented itself as a regional leader, Poland has been met with incredulity or coolness from partners. There has also been the fear that Poland does not actually need the V4, it is merely using it when it wishes to, in order to increase the legitimacy of its own personal standpoint or to strengthen its hand in negotiations.

In fact, the asymmetry of the V4 countries is a challenge but also an opportunity. The theory that Poland uses the V4 as its own instrument does not stand up to

a more informed analyses of the dynamics of co-operation, which is advantageous to both Poland and its partners. For Poland, the appeal of the V4 is as a structure which amplifies its voice in contact with large EU states and also with Brussels. It is significant that V4 co-operation has always been embraced by Polish society.

In turn, Poland’s partners value not only solidarity in the EU, but also Poland’s willingness to use its veto on issues that are in the interest of the entire region (such as limiting CO2 emissions, which would be a blow to the competitiveness of Central European economies). As an effective partner in the V4, Poland is also stronger in dealings with other EU states. And maintaining good relations with the traditional “engine” of the EU is also attractive for Central European partners. In uncertain times, mutual trust takes on increased significance. Even when a particular country follows a policy with political costs which can affect the entire region, mutual public criticism is generally avoided.

V4 co-operation has certainly made its mark on the EU. By synchronizing regional interests with those of the EU as a whole, it has begun to be seen as one of the EU's pillars in bringing harmony to co-operation on the Eastern flank. The practical element of co-operation in the EU has turned out to be more important than spectacular summits. One sign that V4 co-operation is in line with the logic of the functioning of the EU is that the V4 has taken on particular importance for Poland in areas which were priorities during Poland's presidency of the Council of the EU: energy security, the EU's eastern neighborhood and the Western Balkans, and also the multi-annual financial framework of the EU for 2014-2020. Talk of defense co-operation can increasingly be heard, especially concerning fortification of the cohesion of the V4 in its infrastructural and social elements. This has ultimately become the main theme of Poland's presidency of the Visegrad Group (2012/2013).

ENERGY SECURITY AND CLIMATE POLICY

The breakthrough in V4 co-operation on energy security was brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict at the beginning of 2009. Poland gained the support of the V4 in its call for work to be brought forward on an EU regulation concerning the security of gas supplies. This paved the way for the construction of a genuine crisis response system. V4 co-operation led to EU support for the expansion of trans-border gas connections and therefore to the creation of the technical capacity to offer support in the event of a shortfall, as well as the construction of an integrated and competitive European gas market.

This goal has largely not been implemented, but work has begun on the construction of interconnectors in the North-South gas corridor. The Polish-Czech connector in Silesia was opened in September 2011, the Slovak-Hungarian connection is under construction, and planning work has begun on a gas pipeline linking Poland to Slovakia. The Gas Target Model for the V4 and a road map for joint ventures are both objectives of the Polish presidency, intended to transform the region into an integrated, secure, and competitive European gas market.

Ensuring oil supplies remains a challenge for Poland's activity in the V4. This is essential since Poland's PKN Orlen

holds the majority of shares in Czech refineries, and the supply of Russian oil via the Druzhba pipeline is becoming increasingly problematic.

The V4 partners share Poland's opinion that it is necessary for EU states to maintain their independence in shaping their energy mix. The V4 has become the basis for a broader coalition which has been beneficial for Poland and the region in the energy and climate package adopted by the European Council in December 2008. Co-operation of the "V4+", the V4 group in conjunction with Bulgaria and Romania, has been successful in this area.

Co-operation has also been undertaken in the field of nuclear energy. The V4 views this as an essential, carbon-free energy source and is against its reduction or elimination within the EU. The Polish nuclear project is still in its earliest phases, but the V4 has great potential and ambitions to have an influence in the European discussion of this issue.

In turn, Poland's partners in Central Europe are very interested in how it will fare with the extraction of shale gas. Success or failure on this point may determine the development of events in other European markets. By co-operating with its regional partners, Poland may effectively counteract moves toward the launch of EU regulations in this area or even a ban on fracking. This is an example of an area in which the idea of subsidiarity is in the best interest of Poland and of the region.

COHESION POLICY

EU cohesion policy and regional development are among the most important issues for Poland in co-operation in the format of V4+ (defined above). In addition to closer co-operation with Bulgaria and Romania, Poland has also driven forward greater ties with Slovenia. The future of the cohesion policy was Poland's most important challenge in the preparation of a new EU multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020. Poland has emphasized that cohesion policy is a tried and trusted means of managing development, in which net contributors to the EU budget have also significantly benefited from the V4 region. Despite the parallel co-operation of the Czech Republic with a like-minded group of net contributors, in issues of great importance for Poland, such as the architecture of cohesion policy or the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the V4 states are natural allies.

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Upon entering the EU, the V4 countries pointed to the need to intensify relations with its eastern neighbors. The traditional priority for Poland's foreign policy is to support the countries of Eastern Europe – and in particular Ukraine – in the process of moving toward the structures of the West. This largely entails the promotion of the open character of the EU and NATO and the strengthening of the European Neighborhood Policy. This perspective is generally shared by the V4 countries, and therefore Ukraine has been a frequent participant in V4+ co-operation. The V4 has supported Ukraine's aspiration to join both the EU and NATO. For Poland, it is likewise important to maintain a united front across Central Europe on Belarus, making it more difficult for the Lukashenko regime to present our actions as being strictly in Poland's interests.

The "flagship" of Polish diplomacy in the East is the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which was announced jointly with Sweden in May 2008. The proposal gained the full support of the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU and the EaP was inaugurated during a special EU summit in Prague in May 2009. While it is true that politicians occasionally succumb to the temptation of presenting the Polish origins of the initiative, the EaP remains a common "progeny" of the V4. The V4 is fortunate in already being in possession of an instrument to bring the EaP countries closer to the EU, as the International Visegrad Fund launched the Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership program (V4EaP). The fund's budget has been increased from 6 to 7 million euros toward this end. Holland has added a further 1.5 million euros to the V4EaP program.

V4 co-operation in the EU's eastern neighborhood has not as yet been reflected by practical solutions such as co-operation in the coordination of international development assistance programs, despite the fact that the V4 partners have been working at this for some time. In contrast to its southern neighbors, Poland was slow to construct a modern foreign aid system. The search for V4 synergy in projects in the eastern neighborhood remains an unmet challenge. It requires the ability to utilize the "niche" approach and the specializations of the smaller partners. It would be sensible to aim for a V4 division of labor, which would also help Poland find a role for itself in the EU mechanism for coordinating development aid.

ENLARGEMENT POLICY AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

Poland supports the European and trans-Atlantic aspirations of the Western Balkans, but for a long time it allowed its partners from the V4 to take the initiative. However, in recent years, the conviction has spread in Poland that greater involvement from the V4 in Balkan issues will not lead to the eastern element being squeezed out from that co-operation but will in fact have a positive effect on the overall activities of the V4.

One of the key aims of the Czech, Hungarian, and Polish presidencies of the Council of the EU was to achieve progress in enlargement policy. A clear sign of this progress will be Croatia's accession to the EU in mid-2013, which will coincide with the end of Poland's V4 presidency. Acting independently, Poland is rather limited in its ability to offer project support, since – unlike its V4 partners – it does not offer development or transformational aid. However, it is possible to point to model solutions in the V4's experience in co-operation which are useful in the development of the regional co-operation of the Balkan states, for example the Czech idea to support the creation of a regional fund on the model of the Visegrad Fund. During its presidency of the V4, Poland announced its own idea for the coordination of efforts and expert activity in the field of sharing information with the Balkan states on experiences connected to EU accession negotiations.

CO-OPERATION IN SECURITY AND DEFENSE

The V4 countries co-operate in both NATO and EU security policy (usually along with the Baltic states). They share concerns about the cohesion of NATO with respect to issues such as crisis management beyond the NATO treaty and also the actual capacity for collective defense. In recent years, the views of the V4 countries on the development of the defense capabilities of the EU have converged with regard to work to reform the EU's crisis management and co-operation with Russia, maintaining complementarity in the capabilities and activity of the EU and NATO, and also the development of civil-military capabilities. Work has been brought forward on the formation of a Visegrad EU Battle group, which would be an investment in political cohesion and an incentive to develop military capacities

and long-term co-operation. Poland also lays stress on encouraging a strong regional representation in exercises of the NATO Response Force ("Steadfast Jazz 2013").

The traditional concern over Poland gaining an excessively strong position in regional co-operation has in recent years begun to be replaced by the expectation that Poland should be more active in security and defense issues in the region. Poland's partners in the V4 would like to increase their political influence or at least feel involved in solving the crucial security issues of NATO and the EU. However, this will not translate into an expanded defense capacity on their respective parts. Poland must develop military co-operation in the V4 in such a way as to stop the rot from setting in the military capabilities of Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

MORE INTERNAL COHESION

When laying out its agenda for its presidency of the V4, Poland decided to place particular stress on the fortification of the V4's internal cohesion. This concerns infrastructure – especially transportation infrastructure – linking the countries of the region, and also the social, civil aspect of co-operation. In neither of these areas has it been possible to make up for ground lost due to decades of communist decay. Poland found itself, at least geographically, a much more Western country after 1945, once again within the Piast borders. It is still facing the problem of how to match its southern border to the challenges of modernity.

The needs for dynamically developing economic co-operation are not matched by the condition of infrastructural and communication links. The Czech Republic is now the third largest market for Polish exports globally, with an interim value of 14 billion euros for Polish-Czech trade. Total annual trade for all three of Poland's V4 partners has already passed the 20 billion euro mark. In Poland's agenda for its V4 presidency, it placed great emphasis on the planning of spatial development, co-operation in removing discrepancies in cross-border coherence and development, removing barriers, and fortifying spatial coherence by use of instruments for territorial co-operation.

PROSPECTS

In spite of its limitations, V4 co-operation has turned out to be the most effective regional platform for the articulation of

Central Europe's interests in the EU and beyond. This has been demonstrated by the fact that the countries of Central Europe are bound together not only by common experience and transitory needs, but also by "shared, tangible, concrete interests in the EU" (R. Sikorski). The V4 has taken on solid form and should develop although, as Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, likewise has stated, "it causes some jealousy and occasionally reluctance in those who are used to being alone in coordinating their stance ahead of European meetings." Although Poland is also developing co-operation in other directions, Sikorski has admitted that our common interests bind us most closely to the newer EU member states and that "the Visegrad Group plus other countries is the structure which works best."

The growing significance the V4 has for its EU partners may be demonstrated by the fact that Germany's combined trade (NB. Germany is the main partner for all V4 countries) with the countries of the V4 is higher than with France (which is its largest trading partner individually) and also 2.5 times higher than with Russia. Some internal competition within the V4 is natural, but there are areas in which it is worth seeking win-win solutions which strengthen the region as a whole. The V4 has moved on from promoting the region for tourists from the Far East to the more ambitious goal of promoting Central Europe as an open zone for foreign investment which represents the best gateway available into the EU. More than 64 million people live in the V4 countries. This makes us not only an important part of the EU's common market but puts us in the top 20 economies in the world in terms of purchasing power. Better yet, the V4 is in 15th place globally in terms of purchasing power parity.

V4 co-operation has yet to give all its members the impression that Central Europe plays a key role in shaping the European Union. It has, however, brought about a situation in which our countries are much bolder in aspiring to such a role.

Translated by Nicholas Furnival

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photo Lukasz Ostajski/REPORTER

 JANA KOBZOVÁ

SHOULD CENTRAL EUROPE WORRY ABOUT PUTIN'S RETURN TO THE KREMLIN?

At the very least, Putin's return to the Kremlin is a worrying sign for his country's political future and for those who had hoped that Russia would take a more democratic turn.

But fears that his return would throw V4-Moscow relations back into a deep freeze seem to have been exaggerated. In any case, the relationship will remain rocky, oscillating between co-operation and mutual suspicion. This text argues that having reduced their own vulnerabilities to Russian pressure, Central Europeans should now focus on pooling resources more effectively with the EU, in order to safeguard their security interests and help steer the remainder of Eastern Europe toward democracy and prosperity. For Poland, this will mean the continued deepening of its cooperation with Ger-

When then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced his intention to run for the Russian presidency and thereby swap jobs with then President Medvedev last September, it was a clear sign that he intended to stay atop Russia for at least another six years. After winning the presidential elections earlier this year, Putin, the de facto political leader, has again become Russia's de jure head. What does this mean for the EU and the V4?

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many and the inclusion of the remaining V4 states in some of these initiatives. For the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, the challenge will be to become more actively involved, transitioning from Poland's passengers into Warsaw's allies.

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY – PLUS ÇA CHANGE?

The V4 countries were probably among the most delighted EU members to see Putin's protégé, Dmitry Medvedev, become the new Russian head of state. During Putin's first two presidential terms (2000–2008), Central Europe's relations with Russia were extremely reserved. Eager to enter NATO and the EU as soon as possible, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia focused most of their energy on building and improving relations with the West, rather than mending ties with Moscow. While detesting the idea of Central Europe's reintegration into the West, Russia had few means of halting the process. An absence of trust and numerous bilateral spats between various V4 countries and Russia – ranging from disputes over gas prices to accusations that Central European capitals were plotting a “color revolution” in Russia – scarred the already complicated relationship.¹

Despite the fact that most of the policy-makers from the region saw the two as part of same team, Central Europeans used the arrival of Medvedev as an opportunity to partially mend ties with Russia and create more opportunities for co-operation with Moscow.

When the reshuffling between Putin and Medvedev took place earlier this year, many asked what implications it would have for Russia's neighbors and the world. In the first place, these events are unlikely to affect Moscow's foreign policy course. That said, Putin and Medvedev did seem to place emphasis on different areas and issues. For example, Medvedev was inclined to criticize his country's dependence on oil and gas exports. His views were also reflected in policies such as the “reset” of relations with the United States and in the “charm offensive” toward the Europeans, which helped Russia seal twenty-five “partnerships for modernization” with EU states and the EU itself.³ At the same time, Putin's approval – if not always his initiative – was needed on key issues such as the 2008 war with Georgia and the Russian position on Libya and Syria.⁴ For such reasons, his “official” re-

turn therefore does not suggest any dramatic shifts in Moscow's foreign policy.

The traditional hallmarks of Russian foreign policy remain intact: its self-perception as a great and sovereign power on par with the US, claims to a privileged position in its “neighborhood”, and general resentment of any Western criticism of its domestic affairs (“foreign meddling”). As a presidential candidate, Putin accused the US of orchestrating the anti-government protests that caught the Kremlin by surprise.⁵ He also sketched out another integration project for former Soviet republics, the Eurasian Union, to include: Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and hopefully for Moscow, Ukraine. This is meant to become the engine behind greater economic and political co-operation in post-Soviet space, countering the EU's own plans for the region.⁶ Putin's general opposition to tougher UN action on Syria and Russia's abstention from the UN Security Council vote on Libya both suggest that Moscow will continue to oppose what it sees as the “flawed” Western concept of interventionism – based on the idea that states can forfeit their sovereignty by failing to protect their populations from mass atrocities.

MENDING TIES

As a Czech diplomat said after the latest Russian elections, “Putin is here to stay and his main goal is to maintain the system he built, there is little we can do about it.”⁷ Similar conclusions could be heard in Warsaw and Bratislava. While resigned to Russia's rocky trajectory, the V4 states have also become more confident with regard to Moscow, and are cautious not to let their concerns upset their and the EU's political and economic co-operation with Russia. A number of reasons for this approach may be cited. Although the V4 states would still like to see democracy and free markets take root in Russia and elsewhere in their eastern neighborhood, they no longer think that this will happen quickly or as a result of foreign intervention. The region has also started to address its vulnerability to Russia's pressure in the sphere of energy security and defense. Although Russian gas covers more than 50% of their respective gas needs (in the case of Slovakia and Hungary (for more information see Visegrad Insight Vol. 1 Economy section with analysis and opinion on this matter), it is more than 95 and 80 percent respectively), they have developed contingency

transit plans and alternative routes and built (or are building) interconnectors to help them cope with potential disruptions of the Russian gas supply.⁸ Should Moscow decide to turn off its taps yet again, or should another spat between Ukrainian and Russian gas companies erupt, Central Europeans will not be left in the cold as in 2009.⁹ Irritating as it was to the Kremlin, the decision to station components of the NATO anti-missile defense shield in Poland and to develop contingency plans for the Baltic States (something these countries have desired since their entry into the Alliance in 2004) have somewhat alleviated the region's security fears about Russia.

Finally, the EU itself has overcome some of its internal divisions over Russia, partly as a result of the V4's change in attitude. In particular, Poland has worked hard to put its relationship with Russia on a better footing, partially relinquishing its reputation as the EU's arch russophobe. Putin's return to the Kremlin is unlikely to dramatically upset this improvement: the Poles have been consistent in engaging both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin.¹⁰ In parallel, Warsaw has also tried to deepen co-operation with Berlin on a number of issues, including Russia. Recognizing that it probably went too far in its romance with Moscow under Chancellor Schröder, Germany has grown more skeptical of Moscow's trajectory. Both Berlin and Warsaw have also come to understand that for the EU to be stronger vis-à-vis Russia, Germany and Poland have to work together.

The other three V4 states followed similar, if less prominent, paths. Just like Poland, they remain skeptical of Moscow's intentions, but they have decided to prioritize pragmatism and related political and economic benefits over historical distrust. This volte-face has already brought some important results. All four states have concluded bilateral “partnerships for modernization” with Russia, and trade ties are once again blossoming following the drop in 2008/2009 due to the financial crisis. Moreover, with Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization, Central European businesses are seeking to expand partnerships and regional trade.

IS THERE A VISEGRAD TO DEAL WITH RUSSIA?

The Visegrad constellation has not proven to be the best framework for the region's co-operation with Russia. All four coun-

tries continue to engage with Moscow on a bilateral basis, rather than in the framework of the V4. In addition, Poland and Germany have commenced regular bilateral consultations in various frameworks: the two capitals have also launched trilateral meetings with their Russian partners. Although the V4's rotating presidencies periodically propose common initiatives on Russia – mostly in the spheres of cultural or student exchanges – few of these ideas have materialized.

This deficit of activity exists for a number of reasons. Firstly, although Russia is an important partner for all V4 countries, they have pooled their political and financial resources more effectively on foreign policy priorities closer to home.¹¹ Integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and stabilization and democratization in Eastern Europe have a more direct impact on the V4 economy, stability and security, as opposed to events in a “relatively stable” Russia. Although many would rightly argue that the V4's successful cooperation in their immediate neighborhood should serve as inspiration for a joint approach to Russia, this has not been the case. In the words of one Slovak diplomat, “when it comes to what the V4 can do and does together in relation to Russia, as well as Poland's role in this process, this is significantly different compared to what the V4 does in the Eastern Partnership [EaP] region”.

Actively trying to rid itself of the “new member state” label, and having decided to be a player rather than a playground, Poland's voice inside the EU has

grown on a number of issues, including agriculture policy, the euro crisis, and the EU's foreign relations.¹² Having weathered the global economic crisis better than most other EU members, and with a market of nearly 40 million consumers (bigger than the other three V4 countries combined), Poland's trade potential for Russia dwarfs that of the other three states. Security issues are also prominent: the planned stationing of components of a US missile-defense shield on Polish soil and Warsaw's recent proposal to deploy its own missile and air defense system in addition to that of NATO have turned into some of the most difficult issues in Russia's agenda with the West.¹³ Warsaw seems to be taking its defense more seriously than the rest of the V4: Poland has kept its defense spending at 1.95 percent of GDP, as mandated by law, while Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have reduced their defense budgets by 29%, 22% and 16% respectively since the economic crisis began in 2008.¹⁴ In other words, for political, economic, and security reasons, Warsaw is far more important for Russia than the remaining three Central European capitals.

What is more, while the V4 shares an assessment of Russia's trajectory, they do not have identical views on how to deal with Moscow. For some time, an informal split between Poland and the Czech Republic vs. Slovakia and Hungary has remained when it comes to their readiness to publicly criticize Russia's human rights record or take measures to reduce

their vulnerability to Moscow. Budapest has been less keen to assist democratization in Russia, unlike Prague (until recently) or Warsaw, which time and again spoke out in favor of Russia's embattled opposition.¹⁵ While sharing concerns about the lack of rule of law or human rights violations in Russia, Slovakia has often preferred not to raise these issues publicly. As a grouping, the V4 has no formal mechanisms to coordinate positions on these and other issues. Poland and the Czech Republic have also been working on more systematically reducing their dependence on Russian energy deliveries, whilst Hungary seems to have gone in a different direction.¹⁶ Slovakia, which relies almost entirely on Russia for its gas supply, is placing its hopes on new interconnectors with its EU neighbors. The expansion of trade opportunities also took place on a strictly bilateral basis, leaving out both the V4 and EU formats.¹⁷ Moscow's traditional inclination to pursue bilateral rather than regional or multilateral relations is an additional incentive for Central Europeans not to seek greater coordination when it comes to Russia.

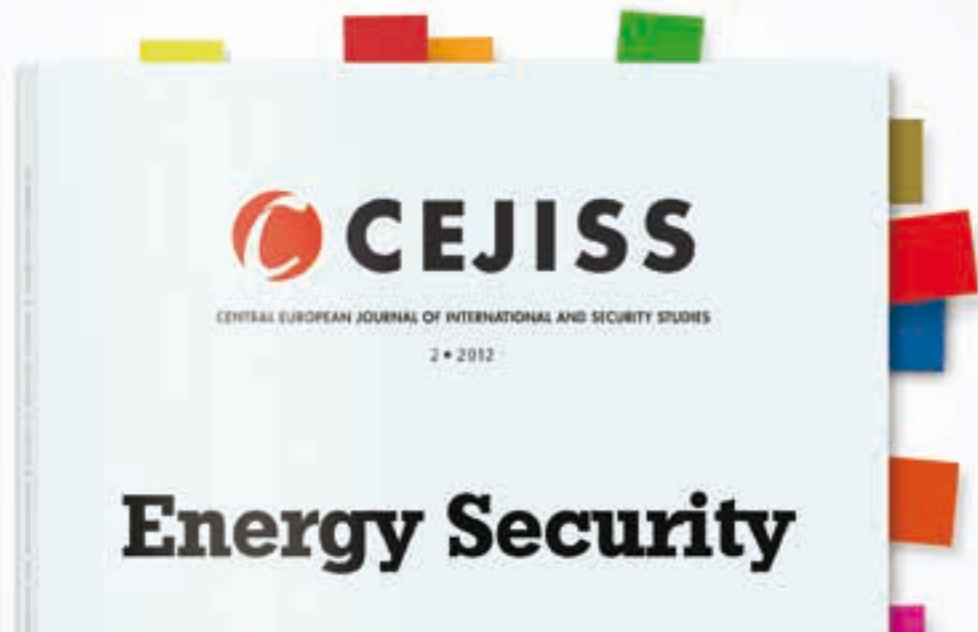
All these factors make the importance of Polish-Russian relations greater than that of the remaining V4 members. Moscow may look right past the rest of the V4, but it can ill-afford to ignore Poland. In a similar vein, as important as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia's interests are in Russia, they are far from the strategic necessity of Berlin or Warsaw. Poland has shown

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much more commitment and deployed more resources when it comes to Russia than any other V4 member. Its cooperation with Germany has also resulted in concrete initiatives. Although Polish diplomats would never say so publicly, the other three Visegrad members are often passengers rather than allies when it comes to Russia.

PUTIN-PROOFING THE EU'S EASTERN POLICY

Even if Putin's foreign-policy beliefs remain the same, he is returning to lead a different Russia. His country has experienced the biggest slowdown in GDP growth among the G20 members and has spent almost one-third of its foreign-currency reserves to stop the ruble's free fall (the reserves have now largely been replenished but still do not amount to pre-crisis levels).¹⁸ Putin has also been weakened politically, having lost his image as his country's uncontested leader. More people are discontented and expect the government to significantly improve governance, secure economic growth, and reduce corruption. The regime has responded with a mixture of populist measures to win back support, and has discouraged critics through the exemplary detention of several opposition figures, along with adopting legislation aimed at making the life of foreign-funded Russian NGOs more difficult.

The jury is still out on whether these steps will lead to greater citizen activism or stifle it, as the regime hopes. For now, Putin faces more domestic challenges than at the beginning of his previous term. This will also affect his foreign policy. On the one hand, the president is likely to continue Russia's outreach to foreign partners – most prominently the Europeans – in an effort to attract more investment and boost the economy. On the other hand, he will not hesitate to verbally attack the West to score political points with nationalist-minded voters, as he did during the election campaign. The “new” president is also set to establish the Eurasian Union by 2015, having already invested substantial political and financial resources into promoting post-Soviet integration. These trends run against some of Central Europe's own policy goals.

Putin's presidency is unlikely to abate the tensions over the development of the NATO missile-defense shield as Moscow continues to demand binding

assurances that the shield will never be used against Russia, which neither the US or NATO is able to provide. This will affect NATO-Russia ties and the rapprochement between Moscow and Poland (due to host some of the shield's components). What is more, Polish officials have stated that Poland needs its own anti-aircraft and missile-defense systems to be protected against short- and medium-range missiles in addition to the NATO shield. This step signals Warsaw's readiness to invest in regional security without waiting for the US or other NATO members to foot the bill. Moreover, it means that although Poland remains interested in co-operation and dialogue with Russia, it will not do so at the cost of its own security. Therefore, compromises are unlikely to be achieved anytime soon: disagreements over missile defense between NATO and Warsaw as well as Warsaw and Moscow are set to continue and possibly intensify. Although the remaining V4 countries are not planning their own missile shields, they should support Polish national efforts and contribute resources to the NATO system, while supporting the alliance's efforts to engage Moscow in a meaningful dialogue about the shield.

Secondly, Putin's push to establish the Eurasian Union will also have a direct impact on the priorities of the V4. That does not mean that the V4 should give up striving for the transformation of their eastern neighbors. To the contrary, it is in the interests of each of the four states for Eastern Europe to be integrated within the EU politically and economically. The V4 should keep up demands for reform in Eastern Europe and be willing to use pressure where necessary. In this regard, Warsaw set the wrong example as head of the European football championships by talking the other V4 states out of boycotting Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich for fear that this would “push Ukraine closer to Russia.” Those EU members calling for more political pressure on Kiev were right to want to demonstrate to Yanukovich that Ukraine will not be admitted to the EU if it turns autocratic. Poland's steps played into Yanukovich's attempts to balance the EU and Russia.²⁰

The V4's efforts to draw the EU's attention to Eastern Europe through numerous V4+ ministerial meetings and summits with the participation of EU

and German officials as well as their EaP counterparts is a good initiative and it should be continued. It is through these meetings and cooperation that an EU-wide consensus can be forged and the V4 proposals can gain more political traction at the EU level. Political cooperation can also be facilitated through numerous bilateral consultations among the V4 members – thus far, there are only a few such frameworks. Less than a year ago, Slovakia and Poland launched a regular dialogue which included developments in the EaP region. Prague and Warsaw have been talking about the EaP for a longer time. When it comes to EaP-related bilateral consultations among Central Europeans, the Hungarians are mostly missing. These consultations should continue and be broadened to include Budapest.

Finally, the V4 should continue to offer assistance to and prioritize the EaP region in their development programs. This is currently done both on a bilateral and multilateral basis, including through the International Visegrad Fund (IVF). Assistance to the region requires more co-ordination. The V4 should consider diversifying aid away from those NGOs and political parties that have failed to make a difference. Instead, they need to reach out to new pro-democracy and pro-European constituencies such as business groups, grass-roots initiatives, and associations representing public interests in less politicized areas such as social and environmental issues or in education. Pooling some of the aid resources into the IVF and extending its scope to include the EaP region was an excellent start.

To increase IVF impact, its funding rules need to be adjusted to reflect the situation in the region as well as the re-orientation toward projects which aim at longer-term solutions, as opposed to quick fixes. This requires the extension of the implementation period to up to thirty-six months as well as an increase in the maximum support for the project from the current level of 70% to 90% of overall costs (as is the case with many EU-funded projects). Furthermore, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia should join Poland by fully backing the work of the new European Endowment for Democracy (EED), not only politically but financially. The IVF's support to the EaP should complement rather than compete with the EED.

The proposed steps are not likely to stop Russia and its old/new president from seeking to reassert Moscow's influence in Eastern Europe or demanding its say in Europe's security. As argued above, Central Europe's relations with Russia will remain difficult. But with the right

policies, Central Europeans – along with other EU members such as Germany – can limit the fallout of Putin's return on their own interests. This may look less ambitious, but it would certainly be an achievement. /

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- 7 Unless otherwise stated, the quotes come from the author's interviews.
- 8 The probe launched by the European Commission into Gazprom's practices in Central and Eastern Europe might further reduce Russia's energy leverage over the region.
- 9 In Central Europe, the gas crisis affected Slovakia and Hungary more severely, although Poland and the Czech Republic also felt the impact of the disruptions. See the analysis of the European Commission in "The January 2009 Gas Supply Disruption to the EU: An Assessment," 16 July 2009, available at http://ec.europa.eu/energy/strategies/2009/doc/sec_2009_0977.pdf.
- 10 This does not mean that relations between Warsaw and Moscow cannot deteriorate for other reasons: the opposition Law and Justice Party (led by Jarosław Kaczyński) retains a very skeptical, if not outright russophobic worldview. Should it join the government, Poland's current outreach to Russia would be far more limited.
- 11 The jointly-funded International Visegrad Fund now sponsors co-operative projects between actors from the V4 and the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans. Within the V4 framework, the four countries have also held several high-level meetings, including summits, with their counterparts from the Eastern Partnership region as well as Germany's foreign minister Guido Westerwelle, the EU's High Representative Catherine Ashton, and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood, Stefan Füle.
- 12 "Dancing with the big boys", *The Economist*, 25 November 2010, available at <http://www.economist.com/node/17578876>.
- 13 The proposal tabled by the Polish president this summer differs from the American missile-defense system scheduled for deployment by 2018 in the range of missiles that are to be deployed: the US system is expected to be targeting missiles from longer distances, whereas the Polish missiles would be capable of shooting down short and medium-range ballistic missiles.
- 14 Tomas Valasek, "Prospects for Deeper Visegrad Defense Collaboration", *Central Europe Digest*, The Center for European Policy Analysis, 1 August 2012, available at: http://cepa.org/ced/view.aspx?record_id=352.
- 15 Speaking to an audience of businessmen and industry representatives, the Czech prime minister pointed out that "fashionable political signs" such as support for the Russian art collective Pussy Riot or the Dalai Lama harm Czech exports and should be avoided. See "PM Nečas: Support to Pussy Riot, Dalai Lama harms Czech export", *Prague Daily Monitor*, 11 September 2012, available at <http://praguemonitor.com/2012/09/11/pm-ne%C4%BD-support-pussy-riot-dalai-lama-harms-czech-export>.
- 16 Budapest supported the Russian-backed South Stream gas pipeline project alongside its direct competitor, the EU-sponsored Nabucco pipeline that would bypass Russia.
- 17 All four countries signed their bilateral partnerships for modernization with Moscow, just as other twenty one other EU members did. The signing of these agreements by almost all EU countries and the EU itself has effectively put the EU's previous transformational agenda for Russia, the so-called four spaces (NAME) on the back burner.
- 18 International Reserves of the Russian Federation, Bank of Russia, 1 August 2012, available at http://www.cbr.ru/eng/hd_base/mrrf/main.asp?C_mes=12&C_year=2011&To_mes=12&To_year=2012&mode=&x=10&y=6.
- 19 During the recent visit of Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat to Moscow, Moldova was offered a discount on Russian gas if Chisinau turned its back on the commitment to liberalize its energy market, see "Russia tells ex-Soviet Moldova to turn back on EU energy deal", *Reuters*, 12 September 2012, available at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/12/russia-moldova-gas-idUKL5E8KCBAX20120912>. Armenia, which has been trying to distance itself from Moscow and embark on a more independent course by seeking a trade deal and visa liberalization with the EU, is facing a rise in prices for Russia-supplied gas from the current level of \$180 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$280 in October and \$320 by 2013.
- 20 See Maciej Onoszko, "Poland says boycotting Ukraine would push it towards Russia", *Reuters*, 2 May 2012, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/02/us-ukraine-poland-euro-idUSBRE8411D020120502>.

THE ART OF REMEMBRANCE

ARTISTIC STRATEGIES TO REMEMBER THE ROMA HOLOCAUST



Insightful commentary on the public memory of the genocide of the Roma in the Holocaust.

▼ The Rohrbach Living Memorial, Kirchplatz, Berlin, Germany 2005



photo John MacDougall / AFP / EAST NEWS

ANNA LUJZA SZÁSZ

I invite you to come to Rohrbach and take part in the street performance, The Rohrbach Living Memorial, which is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of Roma, victims of Nazi persecution genocide. This invitation is open to men, women, and children of non-Roma and Roma origin." These are the opening lines of the public invitation of the Croatian artist Sanja Iveković, which was distributed to the residents of Rohrbach, in the northern part of Austria, during the Festival of the Regions in 2005. It then goes on to say that due to the lack of a national memorial to the Roma victims of the Holocaust, this artistic performance will "demonstrate that we are not willing to forget the crime, so that it may not be repeated in the future. By participating in this action we will also show that we are able to challenge not only the 'invisibility' of the Roma people in the troubled past, but also the widespread public prejudice and official discrimination which they are facing at present." In the end, the artist explains the hidden aesthetics of her idea, suggesting that instead of unshouldering the burden of memory on a permanent memorial we shall become "active witnesses," while its fragility is a metaphor that stands for the long process of "the recognition of the Roma and their culture within today's Europe."

How could a memorial not be permanent and fixed, or rather, what is the reason behind making a memorial that dissolves in time? What does "living" im-

ply in the title of the Living Memorial? How could an artist of the post-Holocaust generation "remember" events which she has not survived? Is it legitimate or authentic for an artist of Croatian origin to suggest an artistic design to remember the Roma Holocaust? What are the reasons for remembrance? Why shall we remember a past event which is almost forgotten and therefore displeases or embarrasses no one? What does "active witnessing" mean, and what do I have to do with this project, as a local of Rohrbach who spends each day peacefully with the other residents be they of Roma or non-Roma origin? These questions had to be assimilated into the memorial process by the artist(s) in each artistic design or reflected upon by the visitor/viewer.

Before turning back to Iveković's invitation and answering the aforementioned questions, I will introduce two other art projects. All the projects under consideration raise very similar questions, acknowledging the power of art as an effective tool to communicate across borders and communities and understanding the need to act in solidarity with discriminated communities, in this case the Roma. The primary aim of this text is to examine the various ways in which communal solidarity is created through memorial art works.

The projects focus on the forgotten elements of the Roma Holocaust, calling attention to the arbitrariness of political decisions on what will be remembered, challenging conventional aesthetics and

ethico-political concerns. There is an explicit or implicit link between the Holocaust and present-day racism in each work, emphasizing how thin the border between the two actually is, while also suggesting the necessity of learning about and remembering the Holocaust in order to prevent racism. The artists work autonomously, free of the “free market of ideas” and outside of the traditional institutional system of the art-world. These artists can not be labelled passive observers of the society from the Ivory Tower of Art, they are “instantaneous witnesses”, active participants in events by channeling their experiences into art and believing that artistic agency can make a difference in the lives and work of communities and institutions. What further characterizes the artists is their belief that their artistic responses to events may inform the broader environment about injustices and may call for action, strengthening and promoting solidarity among people. Finally, but most importantly, all these artists emphasize solidarity as a possible foundation upon which communities can be constructed, regardless of age, sex, nationality, or ethnicity.

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

I will start with a project that tackles the forgotten site that is the former internment and concentration camp of Roma in Lety, run by Czechs during the Second World War. Alfred Ullrich, a German artist of Roma origin, launched the project entitled “Pearls before Swine” on the site in 2000. A pig farm has been located on the site since the 1970s, and therefore the project calls for the implementation of appropriate procedures to relocate or demolish the farm and provide official recognition of the former camp site by the government and local authorities. At the site, Ullrich tore a pearl necklace belonging to his deceased sister and threw the pearls in front of the swine through the farm’s gate. The performance was documented in photographs which have subsequently been exhibited in various places in order to loudly denounce the injustice and disrespectful treatment of the former camp site, a graveyard to thousands and a place of remembrance for those who survived or lost loved ones.

Ullrich's project is greatly motivated by the fact that his entire family was deported to various Eastern European concentration camps in 1939 (his mother lost her parents, her first son, and twelve out of fifteen siblings) and the existence of the pig farm on the former concentration camp site deprives him of the opportunity to properly commemorate his dead relatives. Ullrich's project is motivated by a very simple cause: remove the farm and create a place for the remembrance of the mostly Roma victims of Lety. But how shall we interpret this aesthetic gesture of tearing a necklace into pieces? Since pearls were and are still used in burials, the pearl necklace perhaps represents the cycle of life. As the artist tears his dead sister's necklace and throws it to the swine, he refers to her unusual, unnatural death and exclusion from a proper burial ceremony, with the pearls carelessly buried in the mud under the feet of the swine. Not only her death is commemorated but the deaths of all the victims who were “thrown before” the brutality of the National Socialist regime. It bears mentioning that throughout history pearls have been appreciated as valuable items of nature, and symbolized wealth, status and beauty; pearl necklaces were meant to be symbols of order and harmony. Tearing the thread shows discontinuity, a disorder in the artist's life due to which it has lost its foundation and integrity. For Ullrich, the source of disintegration stems, at least in the first place, from the fact that his project is destined for failure. For that reason, Ullrich draws attention to the importance of the relationship between territory and remembrance. In this work of art, he claims that remembering needs to be practiced somewhere, hence active and concerted effort is necessary, allowing people to inhabit the space and to relate to that site and its memories. He is claiming that the relocation of the pig farm and the inauguration of a memorial to the victims of the Lety concentration camp would recognize

SITUATION OF ROMA



Children who attend preschool, aged 4 to compulsory age of attendance (Roma/non-Roma) (%)



Household members who completed general or vocational upper-secondary education, aged 20–24 (Roma/non-Roma) (%)



Employed household members, aged 20–64 (Roma/non-Roma) (%)



Average number of persons per room, excluding kitchen, toilet, etc. (Roma/non-Roma) (%)

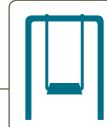


Persons living in household at risk of poverty (Roma/non-Roma) (%)

POLAND

POPULATION (2011 CENSUS) *38,000,000*

ROMA MINORITY (2001) *12,700*



43/62



26/86



25/55



2.5/1.5

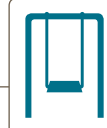


83/52

CZECH REP.

POPULATION (2011 CENSUS) *10,600,000*

ROMA MINORITY (LOCAL NGOS CLAIM) *150,000–175,000*



32/74



30/82



43/70



2.2/1.3

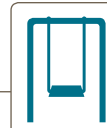


83/85

SLOVAKIA

POPULATION (2011 CENSUS) *5,400,000*

ROMA MINORITY (ROMANI CRISS REPORT, 2007) *230,000*



29/59



18/87



29/62



2.6/1.1

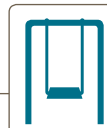


91/47

HUNGARY

POPULATION (2011 CENSUS) *10,000,000*

ROMA MINORITY 000 (MAGYAR AGORA POLL, 2005) *600,000–800,000*



82/89



23/63



36/48



2.3/1.2



82/48



▲ The Rohrbach Living Memorial (AT, 2005), Performance, Rohrbach, Kirchplatz, July 2nd, 2005

their sufferings and contribute to the cultural continuity of the community from generation to generation.

CIVIL UNITY FOR THE SINTI AND ROMA MURDERED UNDER THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST REGIME

A project of the European Roma Cultural Foundation (ERCF)¹ was dedicated to a very similar issue, the territorialization of memory, however it was different in its scale. Starting at the end of 2011, the project focused on the (then) unfinished Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Murdered under the National Socialist Regime in Berlin, urging its completion by creating an international network of supporters and by organizing a demonstration next to the site at Tiergarten, Berlin. The success of generating a network in a few weeks was mainly due to Germany's distinguished position in memory, more precisely, its symbolic and central role in remembering the Holocaust. As the project's description stated: "It is the main objective of the Initiative to carve the

memory of the Sinti and Roma victims into European collective memory," and "it is essential to commemorate the Sinti and Roma victims of the Holocaust and place them in history in order to acknowledge the continuing attacks on the Roma throughout Europe today."

In fact, not so long after Germany's reunification, an international competition was held in order to solve the German nation's "memorial problem," to provide a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe. In the same year, due to pressure from the Documentation and Cultural Center of the German Sinti and Roma, a powerful cultural organization and Holocaust archive in Heidelberg led by Romani Rose, a politician and activist of Roma origin, the Berlin Senate, the federal government, and the then federal president made the decision to erect a monument to the Roma and Sinti victims of the National Socialist Regime. According to the original plan, the construction of the Memorial would have been completed in the same year as the

memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in 2005. However, disputes ensued over naming amongst Roma organizations in 2000: Sinti Alliance challenged the lobby work of the Documentation and Cultural Center of the German Sinti and Roma and insisted on using the term "Zigeuner," which was resented by Rose and company. Therefore, construction of the site only began in 2008 and stopped soon after, principally due to unexpected conflicts between Dani Karavan, the designer, and the Berlin authorities.

This was the state of affairs when the ERCF initiated its project at the end of 2011, an unfinished construction site at one of the corners of the Tiergarten, and hesitation on both the designer's and the authority's sides to cooperate and start working again. Under the framework of the 7th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art, the ERCF advocated for the completion of the memorial by disseminating a so-called "Call for Unity," collecting the signatures of

supporters on a web-based platform and then creating an international network of Roma and non-Roma organizations and individuals to put pressure on the stakeholders to finish the building of the memorial. The pressure was twofold: (1) using channels of direct political lobbying in order to present the folder of signatures, and (2) calling the network to organize a demonstration on 2 June 2012 at Tiergarten. The project aimed to create solidarity across communities and develop the scope of civic responsibility toward the recognition of each other's pasts. It was implied that knowing more about the other is a means to equality and tolerance among communities.

ROHRBACH LIVING MEMORIAL

Finally, let's return to where we started, to the art project of Iveković. It is similar to the ERCF project in that it is based on participation and envisions a memorial not as something fixed, static, and material but as "living." Following the public invitation, those who replied "yes" and were willing to participate received a badge with a black triangle, a sign that was used by the Nazis to differentiate Roma, and were asked to sit or stand under the arcades from 8:00 to 12:00 and think about the murdered Roma. The origin of the project was an archive photograph of, as the caption says, "A group of Gypsy prisoners, awaiting instructions from their German captors, sit in an open area near the fence in the Belzec concentration camp." Iveković invited local residents of Rohrbach to re-enact the scene under the Arkaden am Stadtplatz. In this case, 're-enactment' did not mean exact copying (and affirmation) of a past event. This artistic practice serves to raise questions relevant to the present day with the help of a well-known past event. In other words, it investigates the possibilities of (re)acquiring knowledge of the Roma Holocaust by re-staging the photograph with, which we are all familiar but from which we have probably disconnected the specific information it conveys.

Iveković's project is not site-specific; Rohrbach was chosen as one of the participating settlements of the Festival of the Regions. The deportations of Austrian Roma were primarily concentrated on Burgenland. Instead of dealing with local stories, the artist's aim is to make people aware of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust in general. However, her work is more than just about formulating

the need to direct public attention to the fact that in Austria no state-supported memorial was erected to the memory of Roma victims of the Holocaust (in 1984, in Lackenbach, a memorial initiated by the Cultural Association of Austrian Roma was erected by the state of Burgenland). Her art certainly questions the traditional understanding of the monument as an everlasting, material manifestation of public memory with either a "heroic, self-aggrandizing iconography celebrating national ideals", as the American art critic James E. Young has noted, or the aim to heal, console, or provide a solution. Instead of following memorial conventions and materiality, the artist shifts the emphasis to participation and demands that each participant establish a relation with the past event. As one of the participants recalled: "When I sat there I remembered the Second World War. I was eight at the time and I remember it very well, as if it all happened yesterday." Another participant said that, "It was very easy for me to imagine how it would feel to not even be noticed. What surprised me most was that I studied the passers-by so attentively."

Iveković initiates, contextualizes, and directs the event with a few instructions in the invitation, including the time and place or the distribution of badges, and then leaves the participants on their own with the hope that each participant finds significance in the memory of the murdered and discriminated Roma in Europe. What is the source of hope for Iveković? How could an art performance evolve into a memorial and turn the site of history into a site of memory? First, let's imagine the process of re-staging the photograph, the re-staging of the past event "as it was." It evokes the Holocaust not as an event represented but as an event "experienced directly." The instructions of Iveković, the limitation on the participants' free movement, or the experience of being displayed to the gaze of non-participating residents, all leads to a re-enactment of the emotional principles that define the Holocaust. In this sense, the participants are not "left alone" by the artist to find a way to anchor memory (as it happens in many cases) but are "submitted" to a performance which provides an "explicit reference" to the Holocaust. Second, we shall not forget that the origin of Iveković's project is a photograph, and in her invitation she writes "I invite you to join us and become that image." This

suggests that visual memory helps forge an affective and effective relationship to the past. Similarly to Shimon Attie's *Sites Unseen* (started in 1991) work, in which the artist projects photographs of a now invisible Jewish past onto sites they used to inhabit (the work started in Berlin and then initiated similar installations at the Dresden and Hamburg train stations), Iveković, makes the photograph part of the collective visual memory of the wider public, of the passers-by. The hope is that, once the image becomes visible it, will be internalized by those who see it, allowing its "after-image" to continue to generate memory, even if the installation is no longer there. Not only do the participants become an inherent part of the image but the image itself becomes meaningful for the non-participants.

All three projects appeared to be successful, at least as measured by the number of participants, publicity, and or by their presence in the circulation of contemporary (international) art events. However, since they gained publicity mostly in and through art events, it is highly doubtful that the reference of the work (its main objective) will succeed in breaking out of the context of the art-world comma allowing it to become a potential political reality. Nonetheless, the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Murdered under the National Socialist Regime in Berlin was inaugurated on October 24, 2012. /

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REFERENCES

- 1 Hereby I have to acknowledge that I am one of the curators of the foundation and the project manager of the ERCF's project in Berlin. (www.romacult.org)





DEAD ENDS OF THE SOCIALIST ARMS RACE

ABANDONED SOVIET BARRACKS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

TEXT: JÁNOS DEME
PHOTOS: WOJTEK SIENKIEWICZ

▲ Brzeg (until 1945 Brieg) – Skarbimierz housing estate. Former German airport with the longest runway in the Polish territory until 1945. Today, a smaller runway is used by light aircraft. On the right side, Cadbury Wedel chocolate factory.



We gathered with friends in a remote settlement in the Great Hungarian Plain in 1988 to take ownership of our latest purchase, a Commodore 64 computer. It was high-tech. We connected the smuggled Western German hard-drive to a Soviet television and managed to install a homemade copy of the American game *Raid Over Moscow*. Then we simply had to take off with our fighter jets, fly over Soviet airspace in or-

der to reach the capital of the Soviet Union and start bombing the Kremlin. We operated on 8 bits and repeated our action thirty times a day, at least. It was not an easy job but utterly realistic. We were used to aerial warfare: in close proximity to our town, at the edge of the Hortobágy steppes in Kunmadaras, was the largest Soviet air base in Eastern Europe. Thanks to our location, we grew up with the daily experience of fighter jets training above our heads. As children, we probably shuddered more often at the sonic boom of the jets than at the sound of thunder. Sometimes there were more in the sky at the



▲ Brzeg (until 1945 Brieg) – Skarbimierz housing estate. Former soviet hangar for MiG-21 jet fighters.

same time, and some of them flew closer to the gardens than the storks.

Our favorite computer game lost its relevance a year later, when Moscow was attacked by other forces. Our school-leaving ceremony coincided with the reburial of the martyred prime minister Imre Nagy, an occasion when a young man named Viktor Orbán (currently the Prime Minister of Hungary) was the first to publicly demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Shortly thereafter, the political campaign of the first free elections started, during which one of the newly formed opposition forces deployed its anti-Soviet secret weapon. Their poster showed the back of the neck of a fat Soviet general and bore the victorious inscription: “Tovariszi Konyec”. They won the elections with it, and it was clear to us that there would be no future for our Soviets in the Great Plain. They came to our town in long bicycle convoys to the Sunday market to sell everything that was moveable in the barracks. We then watched on the evening news as the “Soviet troops stationed temporarily in our country” rolled out of Hungary. In response to the election-poster, there was a poster on each tank with the image of a boy soldier smiling and with the caption: “All the best, Hungarians!” Silence became a less unusual experience in our town.

Altogether, approximately 400,000 Soviet soldiers and their relatives left the territory of the Visegrad countries in the beginning of the 1990s. They left behind more than a thousand empty barracks and an untold number of military goods, based on data calculated by the local knowledge of self-appointed experts who deal with the histories of former Soviet military bases. As they explained, there were some monumental ideas regarding how the con-

siderable amount of “war booty” might be put to local use. However, in reality only a few of these projects were realized. Some former barracks have been converted into housing projects, such as the Kluczewo and Chojna barracks in Poland and the Hungarian sites in Debrecen and Tököl. A few former Soviet air bases have been put to civilian use, including Kołobrzeg-Bagicz in Poland and Kiskunlacháza in Hungary. Moreover, there are examples of air-bases which have been kept for military purposes, as in the cases of Nadarzyce in Poland and Sliac in Slovakia. Alterations with the intention of creating cultural or sporting facilities have been rare.

The majority of the former Soviet military barracks were never put to any use. Due to financial difficulties and the reductions in national defense, budgets the states in question had little ability to invest in the sites. In addition, negative public attitudes toward the former Soviet barracks made it harder to reach a political compromise about their future. The abandoned real-estate went to ruin in twenty years. In the meantime, locals and business entrepreneurs with a well established network unscrewed and carried away every useable or sellable item they could find. At present, the ruins are used of by paintball players or casts shooting video clips and feature films, while the airstrips remain popular amongst car and motor racers.

Mysteries of the Ruins

Ghost towns, this is what those areas which were abandoned are now called. One can find many such places around





▲ Brzeg (until 1945 Brieg) – Skarbimierz housing estate. One of three hangars used by Opole Flying Club. Armored rail doors are 1-meter thick.

the world. Ghost towns are the former industrial centers, research stations, military barracks, punishment camps, psychiatric facilities, or areas hit by industrial catastrophes. These are the dead-end streets of modernity which slowly become their own sites of memory, or their own memory parks, where we can face the failures of the recent past. In Eastern Europe, mostly the empty and dying former Soviet military barracks have become widely known as ghost towns in the sense that they are places which we do not consider part of our pasts or history. While they were functional they represented the military extension of Soviet power and they operated as military zones strictly removed from the public eye, with locals only able to enter with special permission. This special treatment fueled local imaginations in terms of what could be hidden behind the concrete walls and wired fences, in contrast to the ideal picture suggested by official propaganda. Circulating rumors condensed all local fears and beliefs. There were legends about a secret atom bunker, drilling bombs that missed targets, air catastrophes, alcohol consumption inside the barracks, unmerciful discipline, and Soviet soldiers and civilians lost without a trace.

These legends are still alive and are bound to be sensationalized by various TV shows dealing with the mysteries of the past. Among the adventurous tourists who enjoy such sites, the following destinations are considered most the interesting: Klomino and Pstraze in Poland, Milovice and Boží Dar in the Czech Republic, as well as Kunmadaras and Szentkirályszabadja in Hungary. This is according to the names listed by Szabolcs Kizmus, who leads barrack-expeditions in his free time for amateur researchers. According to him, the Internet is primarily responsible for making these places famous by discussing and showing them in popular thematic blogs, photo albums, and community sites which are visited or followed by thousands. The gloomy photos, videos with melancholic music, and personal accounts of such experiences are uploaded to these forums and then appear as authentic documents of “wicked” adventures.

On the Trail of Former Soldiers

Those who once had a personal relationship with the Soviet officers and their relatives do not believe the scuttlebutt and have a good laugh when their old friends come up in discussion. And this is also true the other way round – as economist Károly Vándor ardently explains. He received a great deal of help and good will, while he was asking locals and Soviet soldiers about their lives before the pullout of troops. He has conducted more than 2,500 interviews in the past two decades and organized a popular exhibition in Berkefűrdő, close to Kunmadaras, which featured a selection of precious objects he managed to collect during his research. In addition, he published two books that were praised by both professionals and laymen. Former Soviet officers regard him as the historian of the Southern Army. However, Vándor is not a historian by training. He was twelve years old when the troops left the country, and he never really accepted it. He searched for everything and everyone that was once related to the Soviet barracks. According to Vándor, the most significant breakthrough in his research was the arrival of the Internet, which allowed a massive number of former Soviet soldiers, pilots and engineers to get back in touch online and contribute to various forums. It also allowed him to get direct answers to the questions that had so long occupied his thoughts.

Vándor has alter egos in nearly every Eastern European country, who, like him, obsessively research the lives of the former Soviet barracks. In the Czech

Republic, Ales Hottmar has already published a book in English in which he explores Czechoslovak relations with Soviet troops, while Radosław Kacperski, a Polish engineer whose unfulfilled love was flying, is working on a similar volume. To my questions raised in English, he prefers to answer in Russian and talks about his belief that there are less and less of his countrymen who would like to collectively condemn the former Soviets. We have to understand that the foundation of international relations is not only national interest but also friendships among citizens, says Kacperski, in reference to his Russian friends who once served in his country. He confirms that the former Soviet soldiers were fond of their host countries no matter where they were stationed across the region. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union established different political and military relations with each member state of the Warsaw Pact. It is enough to recall the interventions in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 or in the Prague Spring of 1968, or the distinction made in Moscow after the Second World War between Warsaw and Prague as “liberated” and Vienna and Budapest as “occupied.” Amongst themselves, Soviet soldiers summed up their experiences in the following way: “One is on duty on foot in the GDR, seated in Poland, and laid back in Hungary.”

Researchers following the trail of former soldiers aim to study military techniques, along with the organizational and military strategies of Soviet military units and their plans for warfare. As a matter of fact, Vándor managed to decipher the code of a military maneuver conducted in Hungary in 1965. He succeeded where professional historians had not. He emphasized, and asked me to write that self-appointed researchers like him



▲ Olawa (until 1945 Ohlau) – former Prussian barracks after 1945 used by the Soviet Army. Fragment of propaganda mural.



never receive any help from professional colleagues who do their job in archives, without ever contacting former Soviet soldiers.

Finding Each Other, Somewhere Else

The abrupt switch in voice here is very confusing. First it's "us" and "our," after the colon "they" and "them." Who is speaking,

and who is being spoken about? If these are Vándor's words, that should be indicated. For their own part, they miss "the most beautiful years" of their youth which they spent in those barracks – so tells me the self-appointed historian. The personal memories collected by these men populate the empty buildings and breathe life into events preserved in photos taken secretly behind the walls of the barracks. They clarify the function of each building, they show us who lived and worked there as well as how they lived and whether they liked their stays there. I heard an unusual story about a girl who fell in love with a



Дмитрий Тимофеевич
ЯЗОВ

◀ Olawa (until 1945 Ohlau) – fragment of private military collection, owner is anonymous. In the photo a portrait of Dmitry Timofeyevich Yazov, the last marshal of the Soviet Union before its collapse. Such portraits used to hang in every chamber of the Soviet barracks in Olawa.

Russian soldier. After they received permission and got married she moved from a neighboring village into one of the Soviet barracks. Then I got to know the story of that memorable night when the Soviet soldiers asked for permission to leave the barracks in order to watch an erotic Western movie entitled *Emmanuelle*, which was screened in one of the villages. The narratives, writings and collections of self-appointed researchers and the few exhibitions organized around these themes

could enhance the transparency of these once parallel worlds. In light of the above, our Soviet ghost towns should not seem alienating, at least not to us, since their former inhabitants – who are now more frequently coming to visit the worlds they left behind – are rather shocked by what they find. On the occasions of their ceremonial returns, they find the flats where they once lived with their families in ruins. The floors are covered with debris; the paint has come off the walls. There are no windows or doors.

In the virtual spaces of Internet forums, idyllic and eternal barracks, which will never be left, take shape. In these barracks, military technique is used for non-military purposes and no one is attacked. There are no wired fences, stands, or gates. Without any military rank, such contributors can communicate as equal partners about the past, present, and what has changed.

Finally, Vándor told me that “as a child, when I was busy playing *Raid Over Moscow* at home, I was already a NATO

target, together with the Soviet soldiers in our neighborhood who were occasionally training with a simulated nuclear bomb. By that time, everybody already knew that the atom bomb would never be deployed,” he says reassuringly; “This whole thing turned out to be a giant and incredibly expensive game for everyone which no one could quit, however in the meanwhile one could still fly a lot.” /

Translated by Anna Lujza Szász

The author is a Hungarian sociologist and freelance journalist, mostly writing about the cultural aspects of social change.

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▲ Košice, Slovakia

Remembering the City

A GUIDE THROUGH THE PAST OF KOŠICE

Cities actually do travel – they have changed their geopolitical location in Central Europe. An introduction to one of many fascinating projects of the Terra Recognita Foundation – a joint Slovak-Hungarian effort to write a book about the social history of the city of Košice.

ISTVÁN KOLLAI

A conference on history didactics was organized in Hungary some years ago; during the course of events several bilateral initiatives were introduced. In this case, “bilateral initiatives” indicates shared desires to write common historical textbooks. Israeli–Palestinian, Polish–German, and various other groups of historians presented their conjoined work, discussing what they were able to achieve in past decades, the actual status of their projects (when they expect to “finish” their work, for example), and explaining why such common textbooks do not yet exist.

From this point of view, it is already a great achievement to have actually produced a book co-authored by young Slovak and Hungarian historians. The book in question, a historical guide to Košice, could not have been completed without the joint cooperation of the public and civic spheres, which provided the requisite funding to make strong cooperation between the Hungarian and Slovak editors and authors possible. The editors, Veronika Gayer, Slávka Otčenášová and Csaba Zahorán, faced a double challenge: sustaining a common vision among the various contributors and producing a book with a coherent shape.

The main aim of the book is to provide visitors to Košice with a guide by means of which they can become familiar with the diffused story of the city. If we walk through this center of rebirth on the eastern borderlands of the EU, we encounter a city with strong German, Slavic, Slovak, Hungarian, and Jewish culture – each wrapped up with the others. Over the centuries, peoples of various religions, different identities, and with differing mother tongues have been found in Košice. But not only the inhabitants have changed. The very name of the settlement has varied with the language in which it was being discussed: for Slovaks, Košice is the capital of Eastern Slovakia; for Hungarians, Kassa is one of the centers of historical Upper Hungary; and for the German settlers, their city was called Kaschau for many centuries. Only the “genius loci” remained relatively stable, while the town’s inhabitants, language, religion, identity, and tradition shifted. This diversity is hidden in the buildings, which can tell us the story of Košice–Kassa–Kaschau. In short, this guide is for those who would like to “get lost” in the past and present of Košice, but do not want to be lost in the city.

Readers of the book (and its associated website, www.multiculturalalkosice2013.com) will see that the city has many histories. Asking which events, tendencies, and phenomena constitute the most important elements in the life of Košice always will refer, at least in some way, to the perspective from which the question was asked. And in all honesty, the official national narratives of Slovaks and Hungarians are really quite far apart. There are hardly any topics which were approached the same way in school. A series of open questions and many complex, exhausting historical debates have burdened Slovak–Hungarian relations. Without attention to the differing facts or forms of logic that shape each side, any juxtaposition of the great national narratives is bound to be unproductive. “Understanding” does not have to mean recognition and acceptance of the other side; it simply means doing the work of becoming familiar with the logic and details of the other’s narrative.

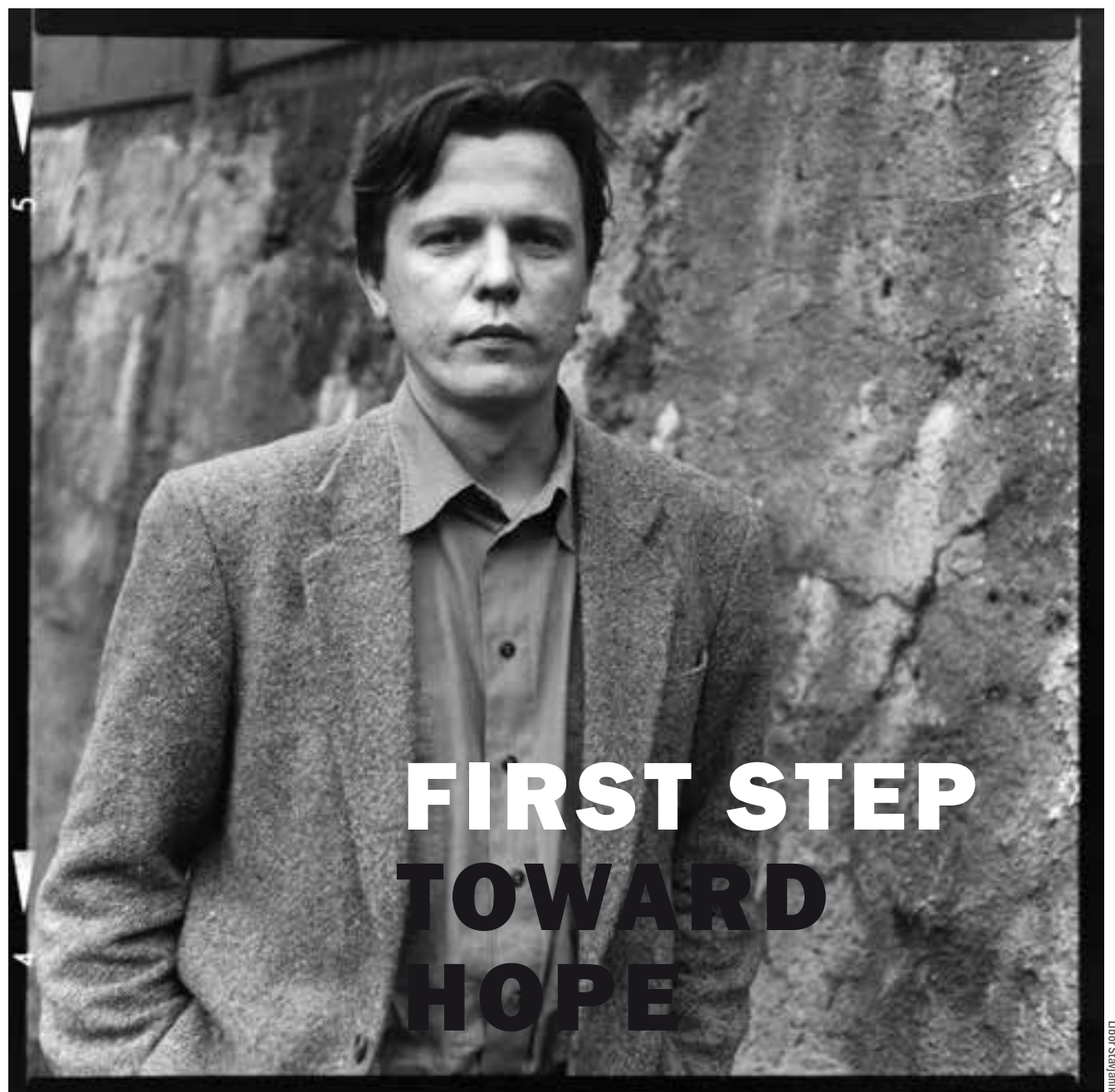
But at the level of buildings, among the people, these large problems may take on more comprehensible dimensions. Local history can be seen as a level at which national history can be deconstructed: local history can fill the “big events” of national history with real life,

revealing their complexity and how these larger questions concern the life of everyday people. Košice is more than a suitable place for this experiment. The town’s local patriotism and history can add a specific, Central European color to the fabric of respective national histories.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the story of Oppidum Cassovia always had a Central European dimension. Košice stands out as an example of understanding Slovak and Hungarian points of view, but it is worth mentioning that most inhabitants spoke German for centuries. The city was likewise an important center for Jews, and nations like Poland also had strong historical connections with their own Koszyce. Due to these expanded dimensions, it is hoped that the diverse palette of Central Europe will appear to readers, a diversity that we might call the “traditional multiculturalism” of the city.

In point of fact, the project as Central European in character. The organization which published the book, the Terra Recognita Foundation, located in Hungary, already has serious experience in creating these kinds of guides about Bratislava and Budapest. Two of the editors, Slávka Otčenášová from the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice and Veronika Gayer from the Institute for Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, represent the younger generation of the professorial sphere, and their work was to form a single guide from chapters written by Slovak and Hungarian authors. Their work was backed by the heads of a common committee of Slovak and Hungarian historians. This work was preceded by several important networking-events, including the “Searching for the Common Language on a Common Past” conference organized by the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The most active Central European grant organizations have supported the project financially: the International Visegrad Fund and the European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity. Generous support has been given by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a show of Hungary’s commitment to building Hungarian–Slovak relations. Košice is currently the cultural capital of Europe, together with Marseilles, and the book will be promoted at associated events. /

The author is the director of the Hungarian Institute in Bratislava.



Jan Balabán passed away unexpectedly on 23 April 2010. He was one of the most distinguished and respected Czech authors of the past two decades. His short stories and novels are written in a language of succinct designations and lively, sometimes didactic, insistent diction. They are all somewhat autobiographical, emphasize authentic experiences and avoid cheap literary effects and self-absorbed fabulations. They are immersed in a search for inner stability, dignified life in “emotional truth,” and informal faith in God.

PETR HRUŠKA

Balabán's texts are composed of scenes taken from the lives of people who are usually caught in a moment of crisis and are fumbling for a way out of loneliness or drowning in unexpected gusts of lassitude. His scenes are mostly cast against the backdrop of the industrial metropolis of Ostrava in the 1990s, although some use the backdrop of other Moravian cities or even more remote settings (such as the prose work *God's Rope*, which is set in an American milieu). At any rate, Ostrava dominates Balabán's writings. He moved there with his parents shortly after he was born, and that is where he spent the entirety of his life. He understood the character of this special city, exhausted by a hard life and monumental industry, and he was therefore well aware of its dramatic nature and hard-boiled charm.

Balabán's stories are mostly composed of powerful and expressive sets of signs, which are further interpreted and experienced in the text. Action does not dominate his work. Instead, he writes in an episodic form that draws on the ordinary elements of human existence, things like memories, interrupted dreams, and the petty happenings that take place in household kitchens and bedrooms, or possibly in pubs or factories. We also find scenes of movement, which unfold in cars, buses, and trains on their way to some vaguely specified goal. This is especially true in the short stories published in the collections "Middle Ages" (1995), "Holiday" (1998), "It May Be that We Go" (2004), and "We Are Here" (2006).

Balabán's exceptionally striking short stories and novels, thinking of *The Black Ram* (2000), *Where the Angel Went* (2003), and *Ask Dad* (2010), manifest a thirst for concise expression, devoid of any superficial descriptions of action and based on exact observations of detail. These are interpreted as original, poetic images, which gradually develop meaning. Images of human life's oppressiveness are most common. His main and secondary characters all seem to have wasted their lives. Left to the misery of their solitude, they are exhausted by their unsuccessful attempts to reach an understanding and deprived of any faith in the positive security and deeper meaning of existence. At the same time, their grievous condition is always accompanied by the author's understanding of the painfulness of their fates, as well as by the feeling that this burden, if experienced honestly, is, after all, the first step toward hope and authentic human warmth. However, the glossy, superficial elegance of our external reality is treated with irony, especially when based on the cheap consumerist contentment of our familial, professional, and "spiritual" lives. This kind of satisfaction ensues from glossy stereotypes, and it can only

be achieved by making real effort and facing disturbing questions about the authentic manifestation of our human nature. Balabán's texts are mostly populated by sots and vagrants, divorced partners gawking at the ceiling or awkwardly hovering in the doorway, insomniac parents quizzically observing their children, and loners desperately trying to believe in God. But these very same characters cannot be dismissed as superfluous elements in a parade of desolation. They all contain a point of catharsis, a soft-grained punch line, usually in which they pull themselves together, and dare to take small, immediate action by which human dignity is restored, at least for the given moment. At other times, the way out of desperation is provided by the character experiencing a moment of love and tenderness or becoming aware of the fact that such a moment exists. The characters are somewhat demanding – they are exhausted and depressed, they are often short of understanding and faith, and yet, they are not willing to resign themselves to the alienated world and stubbornly insist on the painful emotional authenticity which suddenly gives meaning to the bleak space-time spreading out around them. Sometimes overtly, but more often implicitly, these features indicate the author's fundamental quest for the real value of human existence and the metaphysical horizon to which he refers himself.

Jan Balabán studied Czech and English literature and was often inspired by his favorite authors, including Raymond Carver, William Faulkner, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Ivan Bunin, and John Donne. The latter English poet once wrote: "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Jan Balabán liked this line and used to quote it on different occasions: in professional debates, friendly talks, and pub disputes. Obviously, it became one of the expressions of his *Weltanschauung*, in that it came to characterize his work and life. He was particularly attracted by the coherence, interconnection, and reciprocity of human fates, all of which emanates from this sentence and is enhanced by the knowledge of how endangered and fragile our existence is. Balabán's anxiety is ultimately always redeemed by a positive presence, especially interest in another person's story. He realized, in fact, that participation in the fate of others is ultimately very powerful, since it is the only thing that can make us better. /

Translated by Marek Sečkař

The author is a Czech poet and literary critic. His latest book *Darmata* was published in 2012.

EYE TO EYE

 JAN BALABÁN

I put the telephone down and thought of a painting by Květa Válová. It shows two large canine eyes imprisoned behind the pickets of a fence or mesh of a cage. The picture is perfection. Two sets of eyes – the dog's and the viewer's – separated by a barrier. Anyone gazing into those eyes will likewise find himself on the other side of the fence or in the cage. United in helplessness. We're often drawn into this kind of situation, and it's not just dogs on the other side of the fence. The embarrassed gaze of divorced fathers looking into the eyes of children who are going back home; the glances of visitors leaving a hospital room; the longing looks cast after a departing bus, the bleak look at a door slammed by someone walking out on us. We are compassionate and capable of empathy. We can be taken aback by the weight of the world, as long as we view it from one side as merely onlookers. The painter, Válová, however, serves it to us *en face*. Eye to eye. There is no room for empty words of compassion.

I put down the telephone. A friend has just told me that his “adult” child has overdosed and is in intensive care, fighting for his life. I was ashamed of having uttered so many easy phrases: “It’ll be okay... you’ll see, it’ll turn out fine... I’m thinking of you.”

There’s a pane of shatter-proof glass in there. The glass can certainly be broken, but not by eyes. Pale skin, tubes and instruments on one side; suspended breath and suppressed tears on the other. These are merely background scenes from “Chicago Hope.” The only thing that’s real is one set of eyes burning into another. Who are we? What is happening to us? And what will become of us?

The pointless arguments and accusations have died out: I can live any way I want! But you’re destroying yourself! It’s my life! But I’m responsible for you! To hell with your responsibil-

ity! Come back home! I can’t stand it at home. We love you. I hate you, etc.

The words of the police fall under the same heading of futility: He’s an adult. We can’t force him to do anything. If he doesn’t break the law, we simply can’t step in. But he’s harming himself! That’s his right. But he’s lying and stealing! It’s your word against his.

Stronger than bullet-proof glass, the laws protect our freedom to do anything. They say you have to wait until he hits bottom, hurts himself, or commits a crime ... Just wait. But what’s to be done till then? What’s to be done until, in this particular drama, crisis becomes catastrophe, to be followed, perhaps, by catharsis, or by nothing at all, as in most modern plays?

Until then, there’s no time and no life, even if something passes and something survives. There are only two helpless sets of eyes. Two people and two worlds of contradictory reasons and hopes, all united by pain.

A week after Good Friday, I realize that all of us are going through this, or will go through this. But for now, we don’t need to see eye to eye.

THE GOLDEN NORTH

“I’ll drink a bottle of vodka and strangle myself with the clothes-line, because it’s not a life any more.” This is what one unhappy Romany father telephoned to his white friends when the spiral of debt drove him to the brink of despair. And if he actually carried it out, he wouldn’t have been the first to do so, nor would he be the last. Unlike many others in his neighborhood, this is a man who had a job and supported his family. But then the borrowing started. It was impossible to resist. First some electronics, a plasma screen, a dishwasher, brand-name duds, and so on. Signatures under contracts he couldn’t un-

derstand. Anyone who could understand them would respond with a single word: usury. It used to be a punishable offense. Then come the debt collectors, repossession, loans to pay off the loans, and then loans to pay off the loans that were used to pay off loans. Wages and benefits garnisheed, pared back to the bare minimum. Everything swallowed up by double-digit interest rates. The principal never gets paid down, the family falls apart, and everyone, if they can, gets out ... This is not a life. "And who forced you to do it?" asks the usurer – excuse me, I mean the financial entrepreneur? And people will say: "Look – even further proof of the irresponsibility of those who enjoy life now and try to pay later."

As Jan "Eskimo" Welzl described it to us early in the last century, they also had these special entrepreneurs who would go from village to village in the Golden North, offering liquor that the Inuit found irresistible and were willing to give absolutely everything they had to obtain. Many drank themselves to death. After the whiskey drummers had passed through, whole villages that had thus been robbed (or bought out) simply died. When seized by the hand of justice, local custom in those outlying areas dictated that the whiskey drummer be soaked in gasoline and burned to death while everyone watched. Eskimo Welzl claims to have often done so himself. Such were the draconian punishments meted out to those who abused the trust of people who enjoyed life now and wept later. And no one asked who forced them to drink. After all, they bought the drink voluntarily.

It would seem that the primitive peoples of the Arctic were clearer about these fundamental matters than we are. In our society, the elimination of the whiskey drummers might find a parallel in shutting down the casinos or the 24-hour pawn shops, or denying operating licenses to usurious loan companies. In the simplest terms possible, the imposition of

justice is located in the limitation of free enterprise. Eskimo chieftains and the head trappers, who certainly knew nothing of socialism, were sure that their own survival was imperiled by the very existence of certain kinds of enterprise. This stands in stark contrast with our democratic affluence, in which we leave our naïve, childish, or simply more gullible fellow citizens (and not only the Roma, not by a long shot) in the clutches of extortionists who should not be allowed to operate legally, let alone advertise on television. The Golden North indeed!

THE WHITE HORSEMAN

"Get out, you drunken pig!" a woman's voice shrieked. It was only half-past seven (in the morning) and Mr. Záruba, a local drunkard, flew out the pub door, given the heave-ho by men only slightly less drunk. He remained seated in the snow on the sidewalk. At home, he'd spent the whole night drinking wine with the apocalyptic name of The White Horseman, two liters for the equivalent of two dollars. He got a bad case of the shakes in the early morning, and, wanting company, he fled to the bar where he had spent most of the past five years.

He'd forgotten that he was already banned. Not because he was such an alcoholic, but because he showed up drunk instead of getting drunk in the bar. He only created a ruckus and spent no money. His welfare check, which had already stopped coming, was no longer enough to get him drunk in a pub. "Let him drink that plonk (bum wine) of his at home, but keep him out of here," said the bartender and owner of the pub, where everyone had already settled back into their places with beer, shots, and video lottery terminals. "I can't stand those drunks," she confides to me when I look up from my morning papers. "I mean, seriously, I haven't touched a drop myself for the last ten years: no beer, wine, or alcohol," she says, speaking like a

good Ostravite, for whom real alcohol is only hard liquor. "I'm a teetotaler, and I feel good."

"And what about the slots?" I say, nodding toward the eight blinking boxes where gambling addicts hang out day and night. "Get outta here!" this elegant and energetic woman retorts, "Only a crazy person would stick his money into those things, what can I tell you? You're an intelligent sort, right?" Which forces me to ask, "Why do you have them in the first place? Is it good business?" "I'm not forcing anyone, so let them play. They're poor buggers, after all." "But you don't force anyone to drink, either." "Sir, if people drank as much coffee as they do booze, I'd open a coffee shop and wouldn't have to deal with people like that..." she said, pointing out the window where Mr. Záruba was tottering along on the sidewalk on uncertain legs, searching in vain for a meaningful direction in which to head.

I refold the newspaper, in which some of our politicians are talking about the apocalyptic signs of the times in just as level-headed terms as the teetotaling owner of the grog shop, and I go outside. "So, where are we off to, Mr. Záruba?" I ask him. "To hell," replies the white horseman, who is unlikely to mount a horse any time today. I recall the label on the bottle with its artlessly rendered knight pasted onto a large plastic [*plastove*] jug that I see for sale every day on the counter of our local store. Mr. Záruba and his colleagues call it a "double" of wine. In any case it's manufactured by a teetotaler and it's also good business. What would happen to business if there was no demand for all these disgusting products? That would be the end!

-- December 31, 2010

B-52

Anyone who has seen a wolf or fox in the forest and thought about it, if only for a moment, must have understood that a beast of prey is so robust and sleek, among other reasons, because it has to kill, tear apart, and devour another living creature at least once every three days. That is the beauty of a wolf. My dog is alive thanks to the fact that I fill his bowl with pellets made from the bodies of creatures that human predators have killed, ground up, and mixed together with disgusting animal leftovers, and God knows what else. It's then presented to the public as something good and proper, merely to increase returns in a time of lean profits.

Let's look at a real danger, one that speaks to us only when we see a real predator. The last time this happened to me was a few years ago at the airport in Rome. A small crowd had gathered on one side of the transit hall, and so I went to take a look. Everyone was pointing in the same direction, and the feeling in the air was something between excitement and fear, a kind of European emotion that happens when cowardice and courage are fighting it out. Sitting on the tarmac between various white and silver civilian aircraft was a machine for killing people, a B-52 bomber that was covered in khaki camouflage with a black underside. A machine for night bombing. It stood out from the other passenger planes like an eagle amongst ducks. I could barely believe my eyes. It actually had eight engines and a belly that could absorb wagonloads of terrifying explosives. This machine can kill a city. At the time, they were flying to Iraq. To this very day, I'm not sure if that was a just

undertaking. The aircraft in question must have experienced some kind of mechanical failure, otherwise it would have landed at an American airbase in Italy and never have shown itself to the civilian world. And now here it was, sitting there with the Airbuses and a Czech Airlines OK 25.

A terrifying American aircraft! My buddy, an aviation historian, has nothing good to say about them. Unlike the Liberator and other wonderful machines of long ago, he says, this one is nothing more than a bomb-carrier and, protected from above by invincible fighters, it functions more as a "superannuated threat." Nothing new in aviation.

I don't know what the Americans have these days – the sky-borne manta-ray of a stealth bomber, or something worse? And what about the Russians? Do they have something bigger and more powerful than the Antonov 124? What is the significance of such things in politics and life? I'm glad I've finally seen such a monster. I'm glad I shuddered at its power and nonsensical design. The rational brain of an aeronautical engineer could never have given birth to this – and it didn't.

I lived thirty years of my life under a regime run by people who did not have my interests or those of my family, relatives and brothers, or even of its own comrades at heart. I have no desire to think of them in the terms of their own philosophy. I experienced a government of evil people, communists, who kept their fellow men and women alive in a relatively acceptable form of slavery, merely for their own advantage and out of fear of even more powerful communists, none of whom were working in the interests of the people. In its own way, the system was as disgusting as the design of the B-52 bomber. In a reasonable world, no one would build such a flying machine. But we don't live in a reasonable world.

Our president, Gustáv Husák, was sent to jail for nine years by his comrades, and then he became their leader. Husák decorated his worthy comrades with the Order of Klement Gottwald, the man under whose rule he had originally been sentenced to death. He himself may even have received the same medal. Those long kisses with Brezhnev must have been genuinely humiliating for this bitter, haughty lawyer who was no lover of people. And at the same time, his term in office was likewise a humiliation visited upon the ignorant masses, whom he had always despised, during which, as an artful surgeon, he managed "to transplant the heart of Europe into the Soviet asshole," as an old joke had it.

The old comrades of the revolutionary avant-garde, Brezhnev, Husák, Honecker, Kádár, Jaruzelski, Zhivkov, Castro and company, could not march against their enemies or secure any victories for the working people of the world because they all shuddered at the thought that at some point the eight-engined B-52, loaded with nuclear apocalypse, might be heard overhead. Unable to stand up to that show of force, they could only tell lies and suffer lingering kisses on red carpets rolled out at their respective airports. This aircraft of global intimidation spared my childhood and youth of a world war, and so did the war machines and instruments of destruction on both sides of the world that came later, all as inhumanly unimaginable as the B-52. These were the angels of death that stood watch over our future. And this is why our age is evil.

When I wake up at night and don't feel like sleeping or waking – I realize that things in this corner of the world will only be well when everyone of my own generation has died, given that society is run by individuals from 50–70 years old, and I

know, with considerable shame, their intractable habits and my own – then I suggest to my tired wife that those B-52 engines ought to be roaring above us again. Despite being religiously lukewarm, she wrings her hands and says, “Dear God, may that never happen.” And so hope lives. Hope will outlive us both!

– November 1, 2009

LOSERS [SOCKA]

The first autumn fog rolls in over the highway. Four lanes of heavy machines roar by, interspersed with fragile private cars. The only way to cross the road is on a green light. So we walk each way across the black-and-white lines, worrying about whether these thirty-ton monsters will manage to brake in time. There are gardens on the other side of the road with zinnias, chrysanthemums, asters, dahlias, and other autumn flowers radiant in the grey air. A bus stop. We have a couple of minutes before it will take us away. A fellow with his arm in a cast. His elbow. Probably going to the clinic. Black as coal, another clutches a ticket in his hands, as if to say: “I’m an honest man. I pay my way.” In a garden beside the bus stop there are pears, as full and heavy as the breasts of ripe women.

But something disturbs our morning longings. There’s a restless young man in a dark suit that almost fits him, with an almost well-knotted tie, almost expensive glasses sitting on his nose, and in his hands is a bag with an almost decent laptop inside. Okay. But like the smell wafting from a barn door, he exudes the faith that everything will soon be completely all right, the way it should be. It’s just that now he finds it highly distasteful to be standing at the bus stop with such people. After all, he doesn’t belong in a place like this any more.

I’m rude and ask him: “Haven’t you got a car?” He looks away. Disdainfully and shamefully at the same time. “Who are you with? KPMG? PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte and ... Oh no, you probably carry a briefcase for some dumb moneybags and hope that one day you’ll be like them.” I look at him as I would at some kind of laboratory sample and think of the many such ambitious, motivated, unseeing and unhearing young men I have seen from my interpreter’s booth. And the many ambitious, motivated, and feeble-minded presentations of theirs that have gone into my ears, through my brain, and out of my mouth. And this uptight young man gazes off to one side, confident in his own success. I’m rude, so I continue to probe: “Are you waiting for the bus?” He turns his head even further away, as far as his upper spine will allow. And it allows for quite a bit of movement. He’s pliant. I want to ask him if he’s aware that ambitious, motivated, unseeing, and unhearing fools with laptops full of nonfunctional financial models are now committing the greatest evil in the world? He senses this and cringes. It’s not that he’s afraid of a punch in the mouth so much as meeting his boss or his clients with a fat lip. He’s perspiring like that barn door. He could be my son. A handsome young man. He’s waiting for it to be over. And it will be over.

An almost decent car pulls up to the bus stop. An above-average black Fiat. Arise! His boss or a colleague has come to pick him up. The ambitious lad hops in so quickly it’s a wonder he doesn’t hurt himself, just so he won’t have to spend another second with those losers at the bus stop.

– October 4, 2009

FUCK YOUR GOD

My son showed me the kind of things young people enjoy watching on YouTube. Someone recorded a neighbor screaming at his wife, and then he posted it on the Web. However, the shower of foul-mouthed insults, which young surfers find amusing and horrifies those of us who have been through the occasional domestic argument ourselves, does have an added dimension: the man in question is ethnically Slovak, while his wife is Roma – a Gypsy. The torrent of insults and threats leaves the impression that this fellow is living with her only because he can use her to compensate for his wounded self-confidence. In a drunken rage, he flings the food she has cooked for him at her, and turns upside down the flat that she had tidied, telling her that not even a dog would eat it, and that “the place is a goddamn shamble, just like a gypsy slum.” But he’s not just compensating for his petty manhood and the nagging suspicion that he’s the one who is feeble-minded; he’s compensating for the pride of his family, nation, and race. His loud complaints about the inferiority of his wife’s people are laced with threats like: “I fuck your god, I fuck your soul, I fuck your whore of a mother,” and so on. How this calumny against God turns out in reality, which for some societies is an assault on the very essence of their sense of community, we know well from Balkan and African ethnic wars: the ritual raping of women and girls, the slaughter of babies, the desecration of the dead...

If his wife is such a “piece of work,” why does the fellow simply not leave her? Who would he have to shout at if he did? Whom would he despise? He would remain alone in his own misery. All aggressive racists are in a similar situation: Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, etc. What would they do without the Roma? They claim to hate the Roma minority because they steal, don’t work, and create disorder wherever they are. But the ethnic majority also thieves and creates disorder. The wife of this foul-mouthed man may not be the best cook or housekeeper, but thousands of non-Roma women are just like her, and why should anyone have to cook and clean for a foul-mouthed man? The fact is that society tolerates a certain kind of crime and misery, and may even praise it, but it hates other kinds, from the depths of its own inferiority complexes, and wants to set the exterminators on its perpetrators. A successful swindler in politics or business tends to arouse envy or admiration, whereas rich Romany driving a Mercedes arouses anger and hatred. It’s not a matter of social cleansing or even extermination. The fattest rats do everything out in the open and often enjoy the support of politicians and the media. What’s at stake here is the need to find an object of visceral hatred sufficiently different, wretched, and helpless that even the most wretched of the majority can derive satisfaction from bashing them. Among other things, people are, or can easily become, a very dangerous pack, especially when they are out to fuck gods and souls. /

– July 16, 2009

Translated by Paul Wilson

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LOST IN TRANSLATION

Mitteleuropa, 1990

Jane DeLynn, an American writer, is primarily an author of novels investigating sexuality and human relationships. In her own words: “I became a writer because I thought the things I had were so weird no one else in the world could share them, or if they did they must feel as lonely and miserable as me. I would have greatly welcomed such novels myself, so I began to write them.”

In the past, she also worked as a journalist and correspondent in various conflict zones, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait during the First Gulf War in 1991. She has travelled widely, exploring various local lesbian cultures, in search of experiences and material for her prose.

She visited Central Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

What follows is the reconstructed travel diary of her visit to Central Europe in the early 1990s.

JANE DeLYNN

It was January 1990. My girlfriend's mother had just died. She lived in France, and for some reason the memorial was to be a month later. I would have flown off to the Caribbean and zombie-ed in water and sun, but my partner, Marie-Christine, thought that visiting Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in the dead of winter was just the thing to cheer her up.

The Wall had just fallen. Everyone seemed ecstatic but me. Most revolutions ended up making things worse. The rulers and political prisoners might change, but little else. And why should I – a Jew – be expected to rejoice in the reunification of Germany? As far as I was concerned, it should have been kept divided for the length of the planned Thousand-Year Reich. Solidarity? Poland? Worse. And now that the US had lost its Jungian dark shadow, who could fill that role but ourselves?

First stop: Vienna. Marie-Christine believed in psychoanalysis, so we had to visit Freud's birthplace. It was not an optimal time for Americans to be there: Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, whose Nazi past was for some reason ignored while he was Secretary General of the UN, had been banned from entering the US. All around us in cafes people drank their *Kaffe mit Schlag* while we signaled in vain for a waiter. Unless it was not nationality at all, but that somehow, despite my blue eyes and Asian-looking hooded eyes, they could still smell the Jew within.

Perhaps a gay guide would have helped, but we had not thought to buy one, so our thoughts about Austrian homosexuality were an amalgam of Freud, Krafft-Ebing, *Mädchen* in Uniform, campy Nazi officers in World War Two movies, and the sense that a society that gave birth to the gold-covered paintings of Klimt must have more than its share of perversion. This, however, would

be of no help in navigating current Vienna, we'd have to rely on “gaydar.” At the hotel we received an immediate shock, as the hotel clerk looked at us in disgust when we requested a king or queen-sized bed, insisting all he had was a room with double beds and a bathroom down the hall. Was homosexuality illegal? We peeked in what seemed like *sympatique* bars as we walked around the city, but our quest was fruitless – in both senses of the word.

What to do? The opera of course, where any male unaccompanied by a wife was likely to be gay and almost certainly recognizable by a persona usually confined to gay bars: loud laughter, voices that trilled up and down octaves, excessive hand movements, and the reference to each other as “Mary.” Lesbians were fewer in number and less noticeable in their behavior, but still, any female couple...

Despite years of practice and a presumed facility, I still had trouble walking over to someone I didn't know and introducing myself. “*Je m'appelle Jeanne.*” “*Me llamo Juanita.*” “My name is Jane.” The response “So what?” had once driven me out of a bar in humiliation, and I dreaded its repetition.

But travel frees us from our usual ways of being, if only because it gives us leeway locals don't have. We can ask stupid questions in horrible grammar and worse accents. No blame for violating customs we don't know. And if we make fools of ourselves, at least we have the consolation of knowing we'll never run into those people again.

So I thought, but I had never been to the Vienna opera, a Rococo palace compared to Lincoln Center, with people in formal dress as if it were the 19th century. Americans had long since stopped dressing up for the theater or opera, and we were in our travel clothing. At least my pants were black, albeit wool, but

Marie-Christine had obstinately left her mourning duds in France, and was wearing purple corduroys and a green sweater dotted with tiny yellow ducks that had surely been purchased in a flea market, her favorite place to shop. No place could have been worse for someone with unerringly bad taste and a belief that money spent on clothing was money wasted. To top it off, she insisted on wearing her parka during intermission instead of leaving it behind.

I immediately wanted to slink back to my seat, but Marie-Christine was unaware or indifferent to the inappropriateness of our appearance. "I think those women are looking at us," she said. I turned around to see a group of women staring at us with great interest, presumably talking about us too, for their conversation was interspersed with further stares.

Could they possibly be interested in us? In their long formal dresses and gold and diamond jewelry, they could not have provided a greater contrast. But perhaps they were some contemporary repressed version of the elegant and wealthy cross-dressing dykes who had lived in England and France in the earlier part of the century and had filled my heart with longing and false expectations for what seemed a glamorous and less repressive time: Violet Trefusis, Vita Sackville-West, Natalie Barney, and Romaine Brooks.

Sexual attraction could not have been further from my mind. But an entree to lesbian Austrian life would be fascinating.

"Let's walk over to them," Marie-Christine suggested.

"No!"

She ignored me, so I followed her. But as we got closer and could better see the women's expressions, it became clear their look was neither one of curiosity or desire nor curiosity, but contempt. Even hatred.

Such distaste seemed excessive, even for our apparel. Were we so obviously American, or I so Jewish?

Despite our tight budget and the exorbitant price of bar drinks, those looks drove us to the bar. "I finally understand Freud," I said. "He invented the unconscious as a way of excusing such horrendous behavior. Have you ever met such unfriendly people in your entire life?"

"Excuse me, but did I hear you correctly?" said a voice in a barely perceptible German accent. We turned to see a handsome if somewhat foppish man in the midst of a group of other handsome, if somewhat foppish, men. I was glad to be talked to, even if only to be chastised. Perhaps they could tell us where a gay bar was, even bring us there themselves.

"You are sadly mistaken. Nobody can be warmer than Austrians, once our initial aversion to strangers is overcome. Your looks are skeptical. But I will prove this." He took an engraved invitation out of his pocket and handed it to us. "You must come to a reception my wife and I are hosting next Wednesday. You shall see then if people are unfriendly. And why do you say we don't like Americans? We Austrians have not forgotten how you liberated us from Hitler during the War..."

Next stop: Hungary. Despite the expense of overseas phone calls in those days, I called my parents to let them know I was going behind the Iron Curtain. My father, who had marched with Patton across Europe, was not impressed, but I knew my mother would be full of worries. I did not always think before I acted. What if we got caught in some demonstration? Got arrested? Shot? Better wait for a year or two until things had settled down.

Her anxiety only augmented the pleasant titillation that the prospect of (extremely unlikely) danger induces.

While waiting for our train, we heard two men speaking a language unlike any we had ever heard. They were... could it be?... Albanians! Rare animals we had seen in zoos, but nothing as exotic as an Albanian – whom we had been told were locked not just behind an Iron but a Steel – even Titanium – Curtain. Hard currency was valuable – they told us they had been routinely allowed to travel to Italy to work. Could *The New York Times* be as unreliable as *Pravda*?

Budapest only increased our confusion concerning communism. Pastry shops with mouth-watering treats. Teens in logo tee-shirts; baseball caps that read "NY Yankees." Pirated CDs and videos sold out of boxes like on Canal Street in NYC. Sunglasses I wouldn't have been embarrassed to wear. Heterosexual couples pawed each other in public. The private apartment we were staying in had the usual appliances one might find in America, albeit older and less stylish. But the TV was no electronic version of the Lada, but was made by Phillips, the Dutch electronics company. How could Hungarians afford a First World TV? Where was communist misery and deprivation, or were we in some version of *The Truman Show* – a gigantic movie set which Jim Carrey had mistaken for the real world?

A gay guide would have been no help in Hungary. Although the sight of naked women in health clubs never aroused me in the slightest, the elegant baths in the Hotel Gellért seemed a possibility. And indeed, there was something vaguely arousing about how bodies would appear and disappear in the haze of the giant steam room where we waited for our massages, augmented by the sounds of the masseuse's hand slapping skin. But all this disappeared in the dressing room. Back to the opera.

The opera house, a slightly younger sister or perhaps cousin to the one in Vienna, brought up memories a thousand movies had shown us of couples dancing to "The Blue Danube Waltz" toward the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But the clothing was far less formal than in the Viennese opera, plus instead of the grim Viennese there were cheerful Hungarians.

Assuming homosexuality was illegal in communist countries (though it wasn't) and would therefore be hidden (it was), we were alert for the slightest of signs. I sensed a kinship with two women, whose eyes seemed to evince the sad expression of people whose inner selves had to be hidden. I knew such expressions well. Several times we had exchanged nods and smiles. I was getting up my courage to walk over to them when the bell signaled the end of intermission. So we looked for them after the opera, and caught them as they were putting on their coats above the grand staircase.

We went over to them. Their expressions were friendly, but talking was difficult. We of course did not know Hungarian, and Russian had been their second language, so they had only a slight knowledge of English. After introducing ourselves, we stood there smiling at each other.

Then I pointed to the bar. "Bar."

They shook their heads, the bar was closed. I shook my head, and mimed taking a drink. They nodded, and motioned us to follow them. They brought us to a water fountain.

I shook my head. "Bar." I pointed to my partner, then me, then put the first and middle fingers of each together and held them up to show we were together. "Women."

They conferred. "Restaurant."

"Women." I again pointed at Marie-Christine and myself.

"Restaurant. For women. Of course."

Outside they found us a taxi. But instead of joining us they shut the door. I opened it and motioned them to join us. "Come.

I pay." I took out my wallet. The shorter one pointed at her watch and shook her head. Her friend was talking to the taxi driver.

"Very nice. You will like." She shut the door. A bit nervously, we waved goodbye.

"Don't worry," said the taxi driver in better English. "I know very well." The ride was amazingly long, but we told ourselves this was hardly surprising; places for gays were sure to be hidden.

After what seemed about half an hour the taxi driver stopped in front of the kind of old-fashioned restaurant. We hesitated getting out of the car. Could this be the right place? Would we be able to find a taxi to take us home? "Very nice. You will like it," the driver kept assuring us.

And we did, very much. Two dollars for a gigantic plate of fried goose liver. Ice cream and some variation of apple strudel for dessert. Gypsy violinists playing songs you've heard in a thousand movies.

What it was not, however, was a gay restaurant or bar.

Next stop: Czechoslovakia. A freezing train, a sink without water, men shoveling coal into an open furnace. The Iron Curtain still existed, though it was getting rusty. Our taxi drove us down an eerily empty Wenceslas Square to our hotel, no sign of the hundreds of thousands of joyous revelers we had seen on our TVs just a few months before.

But how long could one be joyous with such food? No vegetables except potatoes, cabbage, onions; perhaps, if you were very lucky, a carrot. The North Sea must have been out of fish. For breakfast at the Europa – an elegant hotel – a variety of bologna and a plate of uncooked bacon whose disgusting white strips of uncooked fat were being consumed – appropriately, to my mind – by a young German couple. No fruit except a lone orange splayed open so its segments resembled a flower; an apple divided into thin slices whose outsides were turning brown.

Or perhaps it was the nascent stirrings of capitalism. No matter how large the tip, the taxi driver always seemed disgruntled. The laundress wanted forty, okay thirty dollars, for washing our clothes. It took a \$10 tip to get our room.

We had drinks with a Czechoslovakian curator I had met while he was teaching in America. With eyes closed and a beatific look on his face he took deep sniffs of the Scotch we'd bought him. He was living on a pension, and hadn't had any since returning from the States. The tiny sips he took to drag out the pleasure made me feel ashamed of the way I gulped things down. He refused another, saying the second was always less pleasurable, and would dilute the intensity of the memory.

"But things will be better now," I said, "with the Revolution."

"Yes and no. The people in charge have changed, but the others are the same. If you are young, perhaps, but for people like me, on a pension, it will be bad. Prices will rise. I like America, but I do not like your capitalism. One time I am in a store looking for popcorn. Many brands. There are fourteen different ones each with a drawing of a man on it."

"Orville Redenbacher."

"Yes. I look at the ingredients to see what I like best. But they are all the same, even the one that says 'butter flavor.' There is no butter in it."

We sat quietly a few minutes to honor his pessimism, and then I asked if he knew of a bar for women.

He seemed confused. "I am not homosexual. You know I have wife, even if we do not live together."

"But you're in the arts. You must know such places."

"If there are any, they would be very hidden."

"You said homosexuality wasn't illegal."

"Technically, that is true. But.... Czechoslovakia is very different from the United States. Such things are considered personal here."

"Someone you know..."

He thought for awhile. "Yes, there may be one person. But we have never discussed such things."

We met his friend the next day. He was friendly but nervous. He took us to the place he always went to. We walked a number of blocks in the cold, and then he stopped in front of a door with no name or sign that it was a bar. You could hear no noise. When we knocked we heard the door unlocked. They recognized him and let us in. At first few people were there, but it soon got more crowded. There were both men and women, but many more men than women. It was much more restrained than such a bar would have been in the US: a few subtle looks between the men, women occasionally putting an arm around each other.

I thought being American would have aroused some interest, but it didn't, except for the bartender. Our friend had plans for the evening, and after introducing us to a few male friends who spoke English, he left. We talked with them awhile, but their English wasn't very good and after discussing what Americans had seen of Czechoslovakia and the Revolution the conversation soon petered out. Still, the men were friendlier than the women. This did not surprise me. It was true of bars in the United States as well.

Perhaps it would have been different had we gotten drunk. But we were in a subdued mood, dull and gray as the sky. Our glass of wine had depressed us rather than otherwise, and we soon left. All in all, it was a night not very different from many I had spent in New York.

Coda: 1998. My mother and I were in St. Petersburg during her "farewell tour" of Europe. It was the white nights, and after my mother fell asleep I would go down to the river and watch people walking their cats, a sight that never failed to amuse me.

1998 was the year of crisis for the Russian ruble, and the street where we were staying, across from St. Isaac's Cathedral, was almost completely empty. Nonetheless, every night when I returned from my walk and got out of the elevator I would see two or three attractive women with low-dresses and too much make-up lounging on chairs, looking bored and staring into space.

Prostitutes, I realized. They were not my type; I preferred reticence and subtlety. But the hot days and midnight sun made me feel like a cat in heat, and I wondered if they would accept me as a customer. Why not? They could use the money, and there was no fear of my beating them up. Perhaps they were lesbians, like most American prostitutes are said to be. They did not respond to "the gaze", but perhaps they thought it one of disapproval rather than desire.

On the other hand, they might be disgusted, even angry. Perhaps there was some line I was not supposed to cross. They could take my money and not fulfill their part of the bargain. They could report me to hotel management, or blackmail me with threats of going to the police. They could rob me, strip me naked, tie me up, and leave me on the bed.

In life one always needs luck, whether hiring a prostitute or crossing the street. So I flipped a coin. /

The author is an American writer. She has published the novels *In thrall* 1982, *Don Juan in The Village* 1990 and *Leash* 2002. She lives alternately in New York City and on Long Island.



THE OTHER [?] EUROPE

What is Central European art and how is it defined? It may come as a surprise to learn that art institutions only reflect debate on this subject, a debate taking place elsewhere.

PIOTR KOSIEWSKI

A monographic exhibition of Alina Szapocznikow was opened at New York's Museum of Modern Art in October of 2012. "The Polish artist has been given credit by an institution which sets up hierarchies and sanctions values," as Dorota Jarecka reflected on the event in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the Polish daily. And she continued: "Along with Szapocznikow, more prominent areas have been reached by the art of so-called Eastern Europe – a region which has long since ceased to exist." Szapocznikow's show at MOMA was acclaimed as a huge success and many more comments followed. The most interesting of such remarks came from Magdalena Ujma. Quoting numerous opinions of the event on her blog "An Art Critic on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown," she asked: "Could someone remind me of the definition of postcolonial discourse?"

Before directly addressing this question, let us return to Dorota Jarecka's remark on the art of obsolete Eastern Europe. She went on to write: "But from New York's perspective it does still exist – the distance between Prague and Warsaw, Moscow or Kiev is not very visible from there." *Gazeta Wyborcza's* critic

uses the term “Eastern Europe” as a cultural and cognitive concept to describe our part of Europe. Another term, perhaps even less frequent today, is that of “Central Europe.”

The reluctance to define art in these terms is related to the devaluation of the concept of “cultural center” and of art history written according to geographic divisions. It has also been provoked by the breakdown of a polarized worldview, with a strict East-West division, as well as by postcolonial research which has helped to create a general attitude of moderation and of distrust toward strict group identity definitions. And yet, the terms “Central Europe” and “Eastern Europe” are related to the problems of our own self-understanding in this part of Europe.

On this point, we should note the remark of the French political scientist Jacques Rupnik:



“The questions of the two decades, 1989–2009,” in which the identity of this region “has switched from Western peripheries of the East to Eastern peripheries of the West. [...] When we were told: you are people's democracies of Eastern Europe, the answer was: no, we are Central Europe, our identity is different from the rest of the Eastern Bloc. But after 1989 we began to reject this identity also. This was because the term ‘Central Europe’ could distinguish the countries of this region from the West, while they considered themselves to be a part of it.”¹

Rupnik was speaking about countries situated between Germany and the former USSR. Indeed, the idea of “Central Europe” is “a distinctively modern one”, which “has no deep roots in Europe's past”, as Tony Judt wrote in his *Grand Illusion*. This would be Central Europe defined as a kind of cultural and political community, an idea which has long been forgotten, despite the existence of the Visegrad Group (a concept which has only recently reemerged).

Even if we get rid of all these concepts, we are still left with the problem of how to speak about art produced in the region in the second half of the 20th century and how to remake the West's perception of the area. It is a question about what kind of presence the region's artistic activity will have, as well as who will con-

struct the narratives of it, if it turns out that we cannot escape geography (or history). How will the art created in this part of the former Eastern Bloc be perceived, including the art produced after 1989?



“During the last decade there appeared a number of influential anthologies focused on gender, feminism and art/visual culture whose aim, among other things, was to show multifaceted and multicultural aspects of contemporary feminist and gender theories and discourses. None of these books that were published in English in the Anglo-Saxon world has any significant reference to Eastern Europe.”² – Martina Pachmanová in a text from the catalogue accompanying the exhibition “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe.”

Offering a comprehensive review of art from the regions of post-communist Europe, the exhibition featured works of over two hundred artists from twenty-four countries. Paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, video works, and installations were all put together to create a multi-threaded story about the art produced from the 1960s to the 2010s. Prepared for Vienna's Museum Moderner Kunst (MUMOK), the exhibition was on display from November 2009 to February 2010 before moving to Warsaw's Zachęta (March–June 2010). It served as tangible evidence of growing interest in the art production, contemporary and historical, of the former Eastern Bloc. It featured works produced before 1989, both official and underground, by artists such as Marina Abramović, Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu, Tibor Hajas, Sanja Iveković, and Natalia LL. Its author, Bojana Pejić, was attempting to examine the ways in which gender and perceptions of social roles were pictured in the region's art, as well as how these issues were reflected both in the ideology and practice of a socialist country. “Les Promesses du passé 1950–2010. Une histoire discontinue de l'art dans l'ex-Europe de l'Est” was launched in April of 2010 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition also presented the art from this corner of Europe, drawing on both the eras of real socialism and the present. Historical works by classics of

modernism, such as Mária Bartusová, the Gorgona group, Jiří Kovanda, and Alina Szapocznikow, were put together with the art productions of the past two decades by Paweł Althamer, Deimantas Narkevičius, Anri Sala, and Kateřina Šeda (but also Yael Bartana and Tacita Dean). The exhibition curators, Christine Macel and Joanna Mytkowska, proposed several thematic lines, such as anti-art or public-private spheres, along which to construct the entire narrative of the exhibition.

“Gender-check” featured works from almost the entire territory of the former Eastern Bloc, whereas “Les Promesses du passé” was confined to the regions between Berlin and Kiev, although it also displayed works by Thea Djordjadze from Georgia and Dimitri Prigov from Russia. Both exhibitions posed the question of the presence of the region's art in Western art history. And they suggested that we give up looking at this art through previous paradigms, eliminating the East-West dichotomy. Marcel and Mytkowska's declaration was perhaps most bold: “Eastern Europe does not exist.”

Both exhibitions can thus be considered further steps toward removing the isolation surrounding art from the region, which was in fact hardly present in the West before 1989. It was hardly accidental – as Piotr Piotrowski pointed out in his *In the shadow of Yalta* – in response to the opening of the great “Présences polonaises” exhibition at Centre Pompidou in 1983, the recently deceased, outstanding Polish critic Mieczysław Porębski published a text entitled *Absences polonaises*. The last two decades have been an effort to overcome this absence, which is a difficult process, since, as Piotrowski pointed out,

“the external and the internal perceptions of a culture differ to a significant degree. Those perceptions rely on different languages, have access to different knowledge and, above all, have different historic frames of reference. We describe the history of local art differently in ‘the peripheries’ [i.e. in our part of Europe – P.K.] from how it is described in the ‘center’ [i.e. in the West traditionally understood – P.K.]. From the perspective of the ‘peripheries’, we see the ‘center’ in a different light. Above all, we see different centers or, more precisely, we are aware of tensions among those centers, something that is not apparent from the perspective of the center and its singular point of view.”³

Attempts to fill this gap or absence have not been rare in the past two decades, beginning with the renowned exhibition “Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa” put together by Ryszard Stanisławski and Christoph Brockhaus in 1994 for the Kunst und Ausstellungshalle in Bonn, which – in spite of the vast and valuable material on display – ended up reinforcing the partition of art to Eastern and Western (all the more so since the post-Yalta division had been equally applied to works created before 1945). The exhibitions that followed, such as “Der Riss im Raum” [“A split in space”], displayed at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin the same year (and then in Warsaw and Prague in 1995), were an attempt to break away from the perspective imposed by “Europa, Europa.”

Since the exhibition in Bonn, the problem of what principally defines the region’s art has been reemerging, whether it is geography, politics, or processes within art itself, as well as the question of whether the area can be treated as artistically homogenous. Bojana Pejić wrote:

“Eastern Europe” is (and always has been) pregnant with historical and cultural diversities, [...] it is populated with people having different national, ethnic and religious origins and cannot be reduced to one common name.”⁴ [...] Negative criticism directed toward museum exhibits of contemporary art claim that such exhibition policies “isolate” Eastern European productions from the rest of the world – and of course, the mechanisms of the art market – since they actually produce a “ghettoization” of this art.⁵



There is a related problem that is worth discussing. As Piotr Piotrowski argues, most critics and art historians from our part of Europe used to think that the most important task ahead of us is to integrate the artistic production of the region into the universal art cannon. They do not want to be – as he wrote in his *In the shadow of Yalta* – part of the “other” Europe, they want to be in Europe, as such. They want to use the ‘Western idiom’ and the universal language that has been developed in the West, as this will allow us to “understand each other

better.”⁶ But at the same time, Piotrowski reminds us that, “There is no such thing as a neutral language. Today, English is the universal or global idiom, one we all use in our everyday life. The same holds true for art. The universal language of artistic culture is today the language of Western art.”⁷ It is therefore necessary, he insists, not only to remake the art geography that has been in use but also to transform the center-periphery paradigm itself. We thus need to distinguish what is “other” or “different” from the Western paradigm, rather than considering the art produced in different circumstances as subordinate.

Other researchers have also emphasized the irrelevance of the “Western idiom.” Commenting on “Gender check,” Izabela Kowalczyk wrote:

“The main issue I encountered was the incompatibility between Western feminist theories and the interpretation of works created in the Eastern Bloc. Transferring these theories to the context of East-Central Europe simplifies the situation and perhaps even omits certain key issues.”⁸

At the same time: “If [Western theories are – S. S.] ‘used’ in order to interpret particular works, these works are usually modeled on Western tendencies.”⁹ Bojana Pejić, on the other hand, pointed out the paradox in which art historians “succeed nevertheless in rewriting ‘our’ [Central or Eastern European – P.K.] art histories with a method of ‘strategic universalism.’”¹⁰ This is possible, because these histories deal with artistic phenomena reflecting modernist concepts of the autonomy of art. And this must not necessarily mean ignoring historical or geographic context.

It was hardly accidental that most of these displays concentrated on independent art, leaving out productions that had been promoted by the state. A significant exception was the “Gender check” exhibition, which included examples of the official art production from the former USSR and GDR. In the case of Poland, the sphere of “socialist art,” encompassing various types of “realism” produced under state surveillance, was already marginal in the official historiography of the Polish People’s Republic era (taking up socialist realism in research was even considered to be a kind revisionism and so Wojciech Włodarski’s book on the subject was published in Paris by

Libella in 1986, while back home it officially appeared in print only after the fall of communism).

Finally, the question of the “Western idiom” is associated with the problem of the actual relationships that existed between artists from both parts of Europe in spite of the Iron Curtain. A good example would be the presence of the Fluxus movement in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Owing to the acquaintance between the movement’s leader George Maciunas and Józef Patkowski, the director of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio at that time, compositions by artists associated with Fluxus – such as John Cage and La Monte Young – were also performed in the course of the Musical Workshops, along with the works of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki or Bogusław Schaffer. In addition to this, several Fluxus concerts involving visual artists were organized: in Vilnius and Prague in 1966 and Budapest in 1969. Later, in 1977, Jarosław Kozłowski organized a Fluxus concert in Poznań. Thus, the problem of postcolonial discourse that Magdalena Ujma raised is hardly ambiguous, since the artists themselves deliberately got involved in Western artistic circulation, or even considered themselves as naturally belonging to it.

IV

A reconsideration of the perception of art from our part of Europe may also involve the problem of institutions. The Fluxus East exhibition, which was – as the organizers themselves phrased it – the first “inventory” of Fluxus presence in Central and Eastern Europe, was prepared in 1977 by Petra Stegmann at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, and then shown in Vilnius, Kraków, and Budapest. “Les Promesses du passé” was the outcome of a multi-year project realized by the Centre Pompidou. Similarly, “Gender check” was prepared by Bojana Pejić with a team of experts from twenty-four countries. What is more, this last project was initiated and financed by ERSTE Foundation, which explained its participation on the grounds that “public museums are rarely able to prepare their exhibitions on the basis of such extensive research work.”

In some cases, this involves very systematic action. The Viennese MUMOK presented art from Central and Eastern Europe

already in 1987 in its “Expressiv” exhibition. The 1990s witnessed “Reductivism” (1992), devoted to abstract art in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary from 1950 until 1980 and “Aspekte/Positionen” in 1999, dealing with the relationship between art and politics in the post-war period until the fall of the Iron Curtain. MOMA, on the other hand, has recently started a project entitled Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) in a Global Age: A Program for Research at the Museum of Modern Art, which aims to direct the interest of museums to those geographic areas which have for the most part been neglected by the art history written from a Western perspective. Three research teams are working on the project, looking into the art of Japan, South America and East-Central Europe.

Curators and researchers from Central and Eastern Europe have been invited to participate in these numerous projects and exhibitions, where they play an important role. And yet, as a matter of course, our self-descriptions and narratives of our own experience are yet again being constructed from the “Western” point of view, and it is from this point of view that we are getting to know the art of our neighbors. On top of that, substantial collections of the art produced in this part of Europe during the past half-century are mostly to be found in Vienna (created by ERSTE Foundation and financed by ERSTE Group, a powerful Austrian financial institution which also owns banks in Central Europe), Paris (Centre Pompidou) and Barcelona (MACBA – Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona). At the same time, there exists no museum in our part of Europe that would possess a representative collection of historical art from the region, with the exception of Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, which has gathered an interesting collection of works from the territories of former Yugoslavia. This also holds true for museums that possess interesting collections of Western art: Ludwig Múzeum – Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum in Budapest or Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. The art produced after 1989 seems to be more accessible, but, once again, a convincing collection of works from this part of Europe is nowhere to be found.

Illusions aside, unless strong institutions are established, it will never be possible to present our own, separate narrative about the art of this part of

Europe or to get to know the past and present accomplishments of our neighbors. Existing institutions already seem to be realizing this. The first exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw was “As soon as I open my eyes, I see a film,” devoted to art experiments of former Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s (1998, curated by Ana Janevski), and indebted to the exhibition “Ion Grigorescu – In the body of the victim 1969–2008,” hosted by the same museum, this important Romanian artist could have entered the international art scene (2009, curated by Kathrin Rhomberg). This same museum also co-produced the exhibition of Alina Szapocznikow at MOMA, together with WIELS Centre d’art contemporain in Brussels.

However, strong institutions cannot be established without state support and the state becoming aware of the fact that contemporary culture is an important element of identity building and of the self-narratives that are told to others. This problem is common to all countries in our part of Europe. Unless this changes, we will not be able to take advantage of the interest that new art from our region – by Deimantas Narkevičius, Roman Ondák, Anri Sala, Wilhem Sasnal, Nedko Solakov, and Monika Sosnowska – has aroused in recent years, nor be capable of telling convincing narratives about our experience after 1945.

The art from the former post-Soviet states is not the only area being discovered by the West. There are also others struggling with the question of how far the Western view is dominated by a “center” perspective and to what extent it remains sensitive to our distinctness and otherness, as well as capable of getting beyond hierarchies and systems of subordination. In November 2012, in London’s Tate Modern, the exhibition “A Bigger Splash: Painting after Performance” opened, it is devoted to art produced since the 1960s until today. An intriguing assembly of works has been proposed, bringing art from France, England, and the United States, together with the work of Geta Brătescu, Sanja Iveković, and Ewa Partum, and also artists from Brazil (Hélio Oiticica) and Korea (Ku-lim Kim, Kang-so Lee). This single example suffices to show how complicated the map of artistic production has become in recent decades, allowing room for regions that have so far been overlooked, as well as phenomena hitherto marginalized (such as female or gay art). And obvious though it may seem, we had always better check who is telling us a story and how (as well as who remains silent and why). /

The author is a Polish art historian and art critic. He collaborates with the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the monthly magazine *Arteon*.

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As former communist states, Poland and Hungary used to be quite familiar with what went on in each other's theaters. This cultural exchange was brought to a temporary halt in 1989 and only gradually reemerged in subsequent years. Since 2004, EU funds and international festivals have provided new venues for networking, and young Hungarian directors have increasingly been invited to work in Polish theaters. Meanwhile, the art world in Hungary remains haunted by the specter of communist totalitarianism which is today disguised in the rhetoric of nationalistic cultural policy.

THEATRICAL ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN POLAND AND HUNGARY



Krzysztof Lisjak

▲ *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*, directed by Attila Keresztes, Silesian Theatre, Katowice, Poland 2010

JUDIT BARTA

About a dozen extremely elderly people enter a classroom and start walking to the music of a monarchy-era march. They all carry a mannequin of their younger selves. They are dead.

Each actor is staring ahead, repeating the same movement mechanically. The entire first half of the 20th century was staged in the play, presented with humor and a love of life. Even in 2013, the dramaturge Teri Feldmár, who belongs to the hitchhiker generation of the 60s and 70s, vividly recalls this performance of the *Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor, which she originally saw back in 1975. For her and a thousand other young Hungarian intellectuals and fans of the theater, it was considered quite chic to hop on the train or hitchhike to festivals in Kraków, go listen to jazz in Warsaw, watch a play in Wrocław,

Where to watch a play? Main theatres in the region

POLAND

State financed theatres

- Warsaw: National Theatre, Nowy Teatr (New Theatre), TR Warszawa, Teatr Powszechny (Powszechny Theatre)
- Wrocław: Teatr Polski (Polish Theatre), Teatr Współczesny (Contemporary Theatre)
- Wałbrzych: Teatr Dramatyczny (Drama Theatre)
- Gardzienice: Centre for Theatre Practices "Gardzienice"
- Supraśl: Teatr Wierszalin (Wierszalin Theatre)

Private theatre companies owned by actors

- Warsaw: Polonia Theatre and Och Theatre owned by Krystyna Janda
- Warsaw: Teatr Szóste Piętro" (Sixth Floor Theatre) owned by Michał Żebrowski
- Warsaw: Music Theatre Sabat owned by Małgorzata Potocka
- Warsaw: IMKA Theatre owned by Tomasz Karolak

HUNGARY

- Budapest: National Theatre, Radnóti Színház (Radnóti Theatre), Független Színház (Independent Theater), Katona József Színház, Vig Színház, Mu Színház (Mu Theatre), Káva Színház (Káva Theatre), Thália Színház (Thalia Theatre), Trafó House, XX
- Miskolc: National Theatre
- Székesfehérvár: Storm-Vörösmarty Theatre
- Szombathely: Weöres Alexander Theatre

CZECH REPUBLIC

- Prague: Národní divadlo (National Theatre), Divadlo v Dlouhé, Divadlo na Vinohradech, Dejvické divadlo
- Ostrava: Divadlo Petra Bezruče, Aréna
- Hradec Králové: Klicperovo divadlo
- Brno: Divadlo Husa na provázku, Národní divadlo, Reduta Theatre
- Ústí nad Labem: Činoherní studio

or wander through the contemporary art galleries of Gdańsk. Famous experimental directors such as Jerzy Grotowski, the inventor of the so-called "Poor Theatre," who inspired Peter Brook, among others, mesmerized young Hungarians. "If one wished to see an avant-garde and exciting theatre, one had to go to Poland," remembers Teri Feldmár. Despite greater poverty in Poland, the more lenient state machinery allowed for greater spiritual movement. Authorities didn't really disturb the life of theatrical companies in Hungary, but they somehow managed to narrow the frame of imagination.

THE COMMUNIST BLOC AND THEATRICAL PROXIMITY

A wave of Polish and Hungarian students spent time studying in each other's universities during the 1960s and '70s. This provided sufficient opportunity for them to observe the trends dominating their respective artistic landscapes. At that time, one of the best-known Polish playwrights in Hungary was Sławomir Mrożek, who offered an acute representation of the absurd realities of the Eastern bloc. Witold Gombrowicz and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) made for popular reading. An anthology of Polish drama was published in Hungary in 1969, entitled *Tango*, and was followed by individual volumes of Witkiewicz, Wyspiański, Gombrowicz, and two books on Mrożek. Despite active state censorship on both sides, theatre served as a welcome channel for political ventilation. Winks to the audience, allusions, and double entendres filled the performances and forged the audience into a collective. Despite these common features, acting and theatre differed in the two countries. In Poland, the theatre was a deathly serious business expressing national sentiment against the occupiers, with directors fulfilling a messianic role. Polish acting had traditionally been highly expressive, almost metaphysical, visually captivating and laden with metaphors. By contrast, Hungarian theater was more realistic, and focused on dialogue, hence less expressive, in comparison to Polish acting.

"In Hungary in the late '60s and early '70s a young, daring and more open-minded generation of directors emerged from the one and only Academy of Drama and Film," as András Török wrote in the foreword to *Shabby Paradise, Contemporary Hungarian Theatre*, pub-

lished in 2004. At the same time, oppositional fringe companies – many of them banned by the state – started to pop up. They performed in front of loyal and closed audiences in youth clubs and private flats, sparking discussions emboldened by visions of genuine leftism, idolizing Che Guevara, and condemning the Vietnam war. Later taking the name of Studio K, Orfeo was a well-known alternative theater. Another was the company of Péter Halász. Three men squat on the floor around a small table. They drink tea from a samovar. A girl is sitting on a stool with a script in her hand. She reads through lines from Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in a highly emotional tone that is filled with pain and longing. The three men repeat after her, in listless and apathetic unison, "Let's go to Moscow." That was the farewell performance given by Halász Péter's company before they emigrated to the USA.

REGIME CHANGE AS TEMPORARY MUTUAL AMNESIA

There were high expectations in Hungary as to how the structure of the theaters would be transformed by the collapse of communism. However, an effective and forward-looking cultural policy failed to take shape – apart from the fact that the repertory theaters are owned by municipalities and not the state. The only exception is the National Theatre, which remains in state hands. According to Patricia Pászti¹, the abolition of censorship in Poland "generated a transformation of the language of the stage and a short-term crisis in literary language." She claims that this crisis emerged in the vacuum of pluralism, with the dissolving of thematic unity, alongside an increasingly fractured theatrical community and audience. Persisting for at least five years, the crisis in question largely subsided in two waves of creativity in 1995 and 2003. These waves were dependent on the emergence of heterogeneous values. And "instead of a space for collective reactions, [the theater] became a place of entertainment for individual artistic needs." The theatre had to say farewell to its public role.

Only a few years after the regime change, the staging of a modern drama about the 1956 revolution in Katona József Theater provided a symbolic break with any unity the previous system had provided. The audience sat frozen and transfixed in their seats as the illusion through which they had all lived became

palpable. The play in question, entitled *Kazamaták* and written by András Papp and János Térey, concerned a bloody episode of the 1956 revolution on the Square of Republic (Köztársaság tér). The story depicts the lynching of party functionaries stuck in the headquarters of the Working People's Party. Those inside include loyal communists, careerists, employees, a mix of honest and dishonest people, while outside in the square there are revolutionaries, workers, former aristocrats and arrow cross members – a similarly heterogeneous company. The members of the audience who were living testimonies to the events were at loss as to how to react and didn't even dare to look around in the theater. Nobody knew to which side their neighbors belonged.

After a few years of mutual amnesia, Hungarian writers emerged within the pages of *Dialog* [Dialogue], an important Polish magazine dedicated to contemporary drama. Translations of Árpád Göncz (1991), Pál Békés (1994), Miklós Hubai, Zoltan Egressy (2000), György

Spiró (2000), Sándor Márai (2002), and János Háty (2003) were published. As Pást suggested, when compared with the Polish tradition, these Hungarian writers seemed to be highly natural, socio-graphical and realist. On the Hungarian side, *Prophet Ilja*, a drama written by Tadeusz Słobodzianek, was translated, and a book entitled *Polish Drama Today* was also published. Katona József Theater staged Słobodzianek's important drama, *Our Class*, which resonated as powerfully in Hungary as in Poland.

NEW OPENING

"Kornél Mundruczó opened the perfectly closed doors of Polish theatre" (Wprost 2012). This line was written after the performance of the *Bat* or *Nietoperz* – *My Little Cemetery*, adapted from the Strauss operetta and directed by Kornél Mundruczó in TR Warszawa in Warsaw as the first part of his *Death*-trilogy. It was in Vienna that Grzegorz Jarzyna, the main dramaturge of TR Warszawa, first saw the performance *Ice* directed by Mundruczó, and then invited him to direct a play at their theater. Organizing the event took more than two years. Meanwhile, Mundruczó directed in Hamburg, Hanover, and Obenhausen. In Poland, he decided to deal with the problem of an ageing society, and with people who became "useless" burdens to society. Through consideration of these themes he arrived at the issue of euthanasia, which was not only a sort of a taboo in Polish society, which still considered itself highly religious, but a rather anti-theatrical theme. As he indicated in an interview for *Színház* (Színház, Dec. 28, 2012), a Hungarian theatre magazine, these were the challenges he sought to approach. Can we die together on stage in a way that is not signaled by ketchup? The genre of the operetta was chosen because it had this "let-me-have-fun-for-the-last-time feeling." And moreover, "it at once says yes to life and craves death." For a believer, the work poses the following question: How should we die when God is dead? "The absurd is mixed with the grotesque, intelligence with joy. The director manages to avoid pathos when he talks about life and death, and he captivates the audience, literally 'feeding' them small colorful pills that must be eaten when the tension becomes unbearable," in the words of the Polish weekly *Przekrój*.

What struck Mundruczó about Poland, for lack of a better word, was

SLOVAKIA

- Bratislava: Slovak National Theatre, As-torka Korzo '90 Theatre, Puppet Theatre Bratislava, Aréna Theatre, SkRAT Theatre, GUnaGU Theatre, Theatre Non.Garde, P.A.T., S.T.O.K.A.
- Banská Bystrica: Bábkové divadlo na Rázcestí (Puppet Theatre at the Cross-roads)
- Bátorce: Pôtoň Theatre
- Košice: Theatre Na peróne, State Theatre Košice
- Nitra: Andrej Bagar Theatre
- Martin: Slovenské komorné divadlo (Slovak Chamber Theatre)
- Trnava: Ján Palárik Theatre
- Žilina: Stanica Žilina-Záriečie (Station Žilina-Záriečie Theatre)

its "romantic" attitude to acting and its strong openness, and can-do attitude, which are rarities in the Hungarian theatrical world. It is a customary method for him to leave the company by itself for a while asking them to work out a scene without any instructions from him. The first time he introduced this method the actors were perplexed, but later on they demanded to be left alone.

He was not the only young director to return home electrified by the Polish theatre world and its receptive audience. Three years ago, Attila Keresztes from Szatmárnémeti directed Gombrowicz's *Yvonne, Princess of Bourgogne* in Teatr Śląski im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego in Katowice, and it became one of the most highly regarded pieces of the season. This was followed by his direction of *Hamlet* two years later. Máté Szabó also directed *Yvonne*, this time in the framework of a Gombrowicz festival at Radom Teatr, again with success. Less successfully, Eszter Novák's efforts at the Teatr Studio in Warsaw were received with rather poor reviews: "Everybody is suffering, everybody is grey, sad and dirty. The dialogues are monotonous and slow."

The Trafo Theatre, a contemporary arts center in Budapest, has extended an invitation to TR Warszawa's *Bat*, and the play is scheduled for the upcoming season.

EXPERIMENTAL COMPANIES STIMULATING CO-PRODUCTION

The Back to Babylon International Studio, operating within the Kompánia Theatre in Budapest, is an atelier that houses interna-

Contemporary theatre directors: Europe Theatre Prize recipients from V4 countries

POLAND

- Krystian Lupa (Europe Theatre Prize)
- Krzysztof Warlikowski ("New Theatrical Realities" Prize)

HUNGARY

- Árpád Schilling ("New Theatrical Realities" Prize)

SLOVAKIA

- Viliam Docolomansky ("New Theatrical Realities" Prize)

Directors and thespians in the spotlight: national theatre awards in 2012

POLAND

- Annual prize of Konrad Swiniarski for best director: Piotr Cieplak (2011/2012)
- Annual prize of Aleksander Zelwerowicz for best actor and best actress: Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik, Mariusz Bonaszewski, and Krzysztof Dracz (2011/2012)
- Prize of "Boska Komedia" ("Divine Comedy") International Theatre Festival in Cracow for best director: Krzysztof Warlikowski (2011/2012)

HUNGARY

- Színházi Kritikusok Céhében (Prize of Theatre Critics' Guild): best performance: ensemble of "Our Class", directed by Gábor Máté, best director: Zsótér Alexander (2011/2012)
- Aase-díja (Aase Award): Andai Györgyi, Papp János, Tóth Eleonóra, Maszlay István (2012)
- Ivánka Csaba Award: Tóth Éva

CZECH REPUBLIC

- Alfréd Radok Award (Cena Alfréda Radoka): best director: Paul Claudel, best actress: Helena Dvořáková, best actor: Martin Pechlát (2011)
- Thalia Awards (Ceny Thálie): Tereza Dočkalová, Josef Jelínek, Vlastimil Harapes, René Tuček, Luděk Munzar, Helena Dvořáková (2011)

SLOVAKIA

- DOSKY: best director: Diego de Brea, best actor: Miroslav Noga, best actress: Szidi Tobias (2010/2011)



tional, experimental companies and artists undertaking related research. Their projects include a program series on Central Europe, conducted with the participation of Slovakian, Czech, Hungarian, and Polish artists. Their first performance in 2008 was entitled the *Walls of Hate: Memory and Identity Complex* – an event series that dealt with extremism in a social, individual, historic, and mythological perspective. The actors, musicians and designers who took part tried to question the utopian premise of a common Central European identity. They staged a performance two years later, which was the product of a joint workshop by the Polish Teatr Jednego Wiersza [One Poem Theatre] and the Kompánia Theatre. The play was based on the short stories of Bruno Schulz. Both projects received a grant from the International Visegrad Fund.

Kornél Mundruczó, a prestigious theatre and film director, noted that many great films seem to lose their magic appeal when watched many years later. By contrast,

fringe and independent companies working at the edge between the professional and amateur theater are often even more sensitive and responsive to the political and social milieu in which they exist, and therefore they play a key role in renewing existing genres and the work of repertory theaters. In Hungary, these independent projects – many of them founded in the 90s – have been mired in financial uncertainty for many years. Some of them are in such a dire state that they are often forced to work without salaries for months. Adding to their hardships, the annual operation fund of the entire independent theatre field was withheld for a whole year by the Ministry of Human Resources in 2012. In Poland, some within theater circles lament that the preceding nationalistic and ultra-conservative Law and Justice Party seemingly did more to promote culture than the ruling, pro-European Civic Platform. (The Guardian, Aug. 1, 2012. "European arts cuts: Polish drama turns to tragedy as cuts bite"). That



Kuba Dąbrowski

▲ *The Bat*, directed by Kornél Mundruczó, TR Warszawa, Warsaw, Poland 2012

should give hope to the Hungarian theater world, because the current ruling party, if nothing else, is ultra-conservative in its taste. Perhaps, in spite of all the odds, the independents will thrive at last. /

We would like to thank the Polish Institute in Budapest for help in preparing this article.

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AVERAGE PRICE FOR A THEATRE TICKET (ADULT, NO DISCOUNT) IN EUR compared with:

MULTIPLEX CINEMA TICKET (SATURDAY, ADULT)

HOUR OF BOWLING (SATURDAY AFTERNOON)

PRICE OF A BOOK (NOVEL IN PAPERBACK)

TICKET TO MODERN ART MUSEUM (ADULT)

GLASS OF RED WINE (0.25 L) IN A DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT

PL	H	CZ	SK
18	11	14	12
7.5	5.25	7.2	6.5
20	20	12	18.6
10	12	14	16.9
3	2,7	10	6
3	2	3	2.5

Sources: theatres', cinemas', museums', bowling centers' respective websites. Paperback novel price based on Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Wine glass prices estimated with help of restaurant guides for Warsaw, Budapest, Prague and Bratislava.

Recent artistic cooperation in V4

FILM

→ Drama: Peter Zelenka's "The Karamazov Brothers" (2008): a Czech theatre group stages Dostoyevski's masterpiece in Nowa Huta, the industrial part of Cracow, to a soundtrack by Jan A.P. Kaczmarek

→ Dark comedy: Mark Najbrt's "Polski film" ("Polish Movie") (2012): a comedy about Czech filmmakers striving to make a movie with Polish co-producers

→ Drama: Juraj Nvota's "eŠteBák" ("The Informer"): Slovak-Polish-Czech co-production starring Maciej Stuhr

→ Zdeněk Jiráský's "Poupata" ("Flower Buds") (2011): the decline of a family in a small industrial town in the Czech Republic, with the remarkable performance of Małgorzata Pikus, an actress of the Polish Scene at the Český Těšín Theatre. The film was awarded The Czech Lion (Český lev) for Best Film, Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Actor in Leading Role in 2011.

→ "Essential Killing" (2010) by Jerzy Skolimowski was coproduced, among others, by Poland and Hungary.

THEATRE

→ Jan Dravnel is a young Czech actor, active in the TR Warszawa ensemble since 2005, recently seen in the Polish master Krystian Lupa's "City of Dreams" (2012)

→ Márta Ladjánszki is a Hungarian choreographer praised for "JOSHA" dance performance during the Malta Festival in Poznań (2012)

→ Hungarian director Zoltán Balázs's "Leonce and Lena" was presented during the Dialog Festival in Wrocław (2012)

→ Hungarian Kornél Mundruczó received rave reviews for "The Bat", based on Johann Strauss's operette, at the TR Warszawa (2012)

→ "Our Class" by Polish playwright Tadeusz Słobodzianek, directed by Gábor Máté won the Hungarian Színházi Kritikusok Céhében (Prize of Theatre Critics' Guild) (2012)

→ Boris Kudlička is a Slovakian opera set designer regularly cooperating with Mariusz Treliński at the National Opera in Warsaw. In 2006 he was awarded the Polish Order Gloria Artis by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage for his artistic achievements. At the 2010 Expo in Shanghai, Boris Kudlička won (along with the WWAA) a silver medal for designing the Polish pavilion.

→ Ondrej Spišák is Slovakian director who is frequently collaborating with the Laboratory of Drama established by Tadeusz Słobodzianek

→ Jakub Krofta, artistic director of DRAX Theatre in Hradec Králové, directed "Madame", based on a novel by Antoni Libera, at the Teatr na Woli in Warsaw (2012)

→ Michal Spišák directed "Solitaire.sk" at the Old Theatre in Nitra (2012)

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1 Patricia Pászt is a translator of Polish dramas and an active proponent of modern and contemporary Polish drama in Hungary. Her doctoral dissertation, which is cited above, concerns Polish drama from 1990–2005.

The International Visegrad Fund is quickly becoming one of the major contributors of cultural, academic and civil society projects in the region.

KARLA WURSTEROVÁ

– the newly appointed director of the International Visegrad Fund – speaks about its development.

future of the fund

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY JIŘÍ SÝKORA AND NATALIA KIERCZAK

What changes do you plan on making as new director?

The fund is a personal challenge. I see an opportunity for better cooperation in the V4 region in all areas covered by the fund – cultural exchange, scientific cooperation, research, and education. The fund brings people closer together because it helps eliminate stereotypical ways of thinking. This is clearly visible in even the smallest projects we support. As the only permanent institution of the Visegrad cooperation, the fund is a unique asset in expanding the brand consciousness of the V4 around the world.

We have an opportunity to develop sponsorship agreements in the V4 region and beyond. Thanks to this we will have better ability to tackle the challenges of

the 21st century. The fund represents an added value to the region on the international political scene, especially in priority regions like the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.

A fifth of the fund's budget was devoted to supporting projects outside the V4 last year. Why should Visegrad countries participate in such ventures?

The fact that 20% of funds – this proportion will be even larger in 2012 – supports projects outside the V4 region is a consequence of the long-term priorities of the Visegrad Group. The fund has become an important tool of V4 foreign policy. We are trying to help build potential in neighboring countries and regions, especially those which are not a part of the EU and

thereby support transformation processes. By increasing the potential outside of our borders we also help create potential within. For example, we have found strategies to encourage Polish, Slovakian, Czech, and Hungarian NGOs to work together on a number of projects, and we often carry unique know-how with respect to our eastern and southern neighbors. This way we contribute towards greater recognition of the V4 on an international level. Thanks to this we are able to attract the attention of important sponsors, such as the EU, the US, Japan, etc. This outward orientation is an attempt to cooperate on a wider, regional level, but in a long-term perspective it can have many positive effects on the V4 region itself. Strengthening positive values is important to us.

The yearly budget of the fund, currently about EUR 7 million, is financed through identical contributions from every state within the V4. What is the role of other sponsors?

We are observing an increase of interest in all our programs – not only grants, but also mobility programs, scholarships, and artistic residencies. There are many reasons for our efforts to find new sources of funding. First among these are today's global economic problems, to which we need to react by diversifying our sources of income. Secondly, our aim is to increase the effectiveness of the sponsor cooperation to which I referred to earlier. We are very happy that many

sponsors give us offers of cooperation, like the Dutch government, for example, which supported us with a grant of EUR 1.5 million for the Eastern Partnership program. Every offer is considered, including some more modest ones, and we are trying to find projects which are beneficial both to us and the funding partner. We do not want to limit our support to non-governmental organizations in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. We are also looking for alternative solutions, such as supporting scientific exchanges between the V4 and other countries, such as the US.

Our main partner should be the European Union, and that is why we

are trying to make use of EU funds as efficiently as possible. It is imperative to harmonize priorities, many of which are shared and belong to the long-term perspective of the EU. In this category, transatlantic relations, expansion of the EU, and regional cooperation all come to mind. /

Karla Wursterová is the executive director of the International Visegrad Fund. Her three-year term began in August 2012. Before working for the fund, she was the director of the Department of Development and Humanitarian Aid of the Slovak Foreign Ministry.

V4 GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

	SMALL GRANTS	STANDARD GRANTS	STRATEGIC GRANTS	SCHOLARSHIPS	ARTISTIC RESIDENCIES*
APPLICANTS	natural/legal persons	natural/legal persons	natural/legal persons	students applying for scholarships for Master's or PhD studies	artists (V4 citizens)
PARTNERS	natural/legal persons from at least two V4 countries (other than the country of the applicant)	natural/legal persons from at least two V4 countries (other than the country of the applicant)	natural/legal persons from all V4 countries	higher education institutions from V4, the western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries**	host institutions from V4 countries
DURATION	up to 6 months	up to 12 months	up to 36 months	1 or 2 semesters	3 months
BUDGET	up to €6,000	over €6,001	individual budgets	€2,300 student/semester; €1,500 /higher education institution/semester	up to €2,500/institution; up to €2,500/artist; € 5,500/group of artists
APPLICATION DEADLINE	March 1st, July 1st, September 1st, December 1st	March 15th, September 15th	March 31st	January 31st	information updated on the website
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION		www.visegradfund.org/grants		www.visegradfund.org/scholarships	www.visegradfund.org/residencies

* The fund finances three programs of artistic residencies: Performing Arts, Visual&Sound Arts, and Literary Residencies.

** Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine

A Different Country

Back in 1987 **Marcin Król, a prominent Polish philosopher and historian**, wrote about the subject of democratization of public memory and the new challenges that this process brings. This essay offers surprisingly up-to-date reflections on tensions that democracy has brought to history studies in Central Europe.

MARCIN KRÓL

I would not recommend this article to anyone who feels that not much is changing, or that nothing substantive has taken place in Polish society. If you do not sense that you are living in another country, a wholly different country, it might be best if you stop reading now.

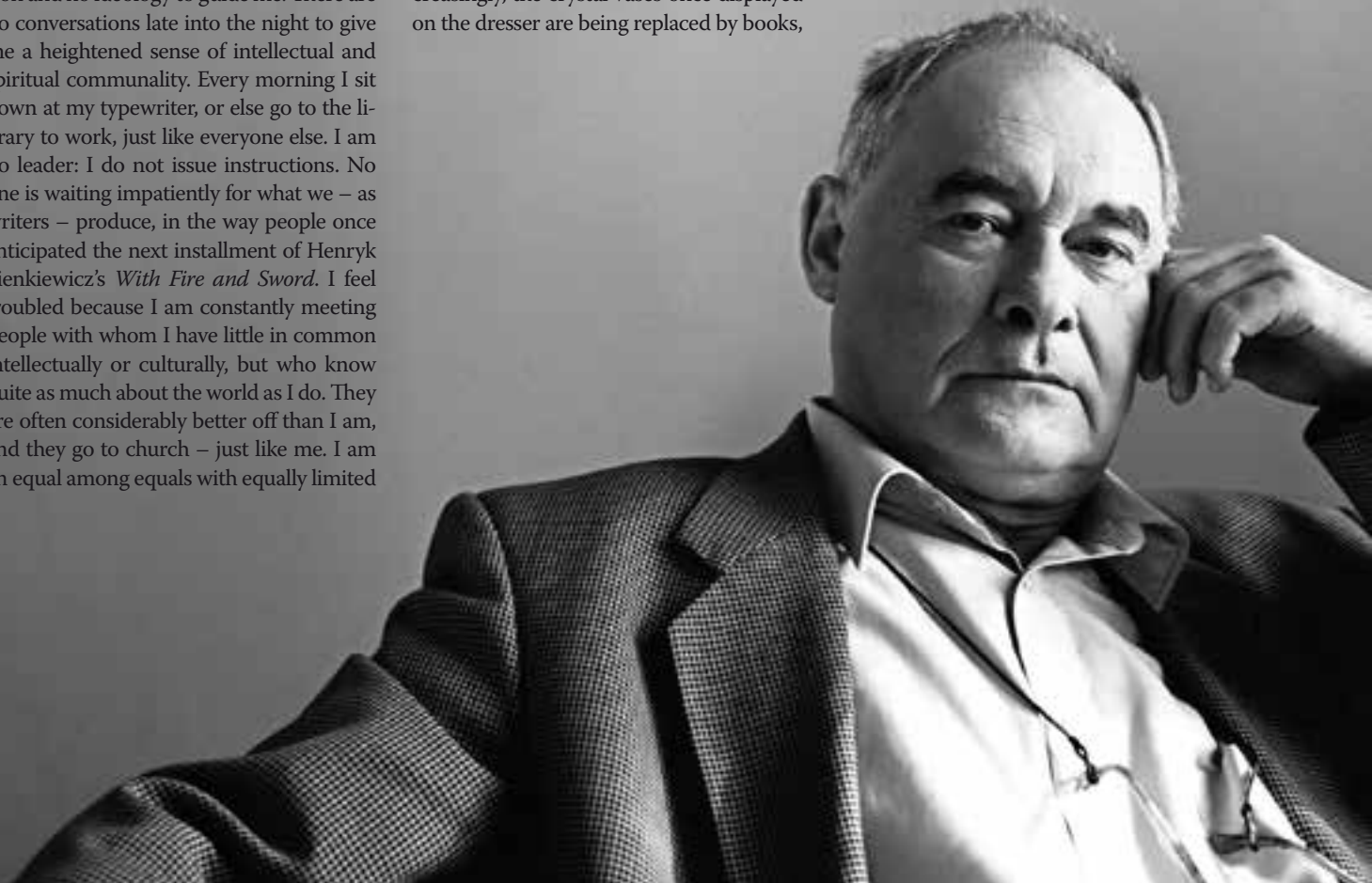
And what of myself? How do I feel in this different country? Both worse and better, I'd say. Worse, because I am not yet accustomed to being alone. There is no mission and no ideology to guide me. There are no conversations late into the night to give me a heightened sense of intellectual and spiritual communality. Every morning I sit down at my typewriter, or else go to the library to work, just like everyone else. I am no leader: I do not issue instructions. No one is waiting impatiently for what we – as writers – produce, in the way people once anticipated the next installment of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *With Fire and Sword*. I feel troubled because I am constantly meeting people with whom I have little in common intellectually or culturally, but who know quite as much about the world as I do. They are often considerably better off than I am, and they go to church – just like me. I am an equal among equals with equally limited

opportunities. I live. I make compromises. When I attend a mass for the nation, I may weep. But if I feel threatened by an excess of national togetherness, you won't see me for dust.

Equally I feel better because, for the first time in years, I can cherish the hope that the work I do, the work we produce, will find its way – not into the heart of some kind of rural idyll (I have never had any hopes on that score) – but into ordinary, unprepossessing Polish homes where, increasingly, the crystal vases once displayed on the dresser are being replaced by books,

and where public issues are discussed daily, much as in my own home. I feel better because I feel freer. I no longer have to worry about lifting other people's spirits. Instead, I can get on with my job, which is writing. And I can assume that ordinary people might end up reading what I've written.

Am I overstating the effects of the transition we have witnessed? There are two errors it would be particularly easy to make.



The first, which isn't serious and may even be helpful, is based on perceiving more than is actually there. So if I say that, from 1980, a process began which led to a universal, though still elementary, growth of civic engagement in Poland, then the mistake is not overly dangerous. Indeed, if one considers any statement a potentially self-fulfilling prophecy, then an observation such as this could ultimately encourage the same, highly desirable development. The second error is more serious and blameworthy, given that it belittles the facts. Those who fall into this trap either fail to see the existing signs of change, or cannot perceive the forces that threaten democratic transformation. They will spin yarns depicting an idyllic world alongside, or even despite, the sombre, grey perspectives that reality presents.

The position I have chosen demands that I look to the future without any anticipation of remarkable happenings, miracles, or other supernatural interventions. It is uncomfortable because it forces me into an error. Yet, for me, it is the only feasible position, at least as far as I want to make any real contribution to public life. The thinking behind this is simple. If the process of civic engagement is to broaden and likewise acquire greater depth, then Poland's new civil society will provide me with readers, interlocutors, and fellow citizens in the – hitherto closed – community of the free (or at least those enjoying a sense of intellectual freedom). If the opposite proves to be true, then not only shall I be lonely in the usual way, even though I'm surrounded by others, but I shall be alienated, because outside civil society we are all essentially indifferent to one another. I do not refer here to religious communality, which, after all, cannot serve as a substitute for all forms of social co-operation. Civic engagement is not just an analytical concept which offers a practical opportunity. It constitutes a risk and a gamble. But I, for one, am prepared to put my money on it.

In recent years, a rudimentary form of communication – the language of politics – has given me a sense of linkage with virtually everyone living in Poland. We have acquired the right to use this language. To a large extent we have been responsible for winning it. It is a subjective right, but it is also objective when enforced in the public sphere. It is only recently that I have learned, when meeting someone new, not to think primarily about their social origins. More often than not, I am now unable to classify

people by their appearance or ways of expressing themselves. I know that to a large extent the factors contributing to this state of affairs have been essentially negative: the social revolution of the 1940s and 1950s, division, fragmentation, loss of social diversity, and universal poverty. I am far from being an advocate for total equality, and I do not honestly believe that it can ever be fully achieved on a grand scale. Yet, in Poland, it was the elimination of inequalities in social status that gave the development of civic engagement a kick start.

Additional factors also came into play, but as time went on the situation was affected, above all, by an increasingly strong community of people with no sense of control over their own lives. Today, when I am in a public place, I say what I please and am aware that others are doing the same. Civic engagement has also had a further effect. I no longer feel obliged to be permanently alert to high-level political developments. We have come to realize that there is such a thing as localized politicization, that it is possible to form pressure groups, and that it can be worthwhile campaigning for specific issues.

I am uncertain about what has really happened and whether civic engagement – the social process of developing a civic sense – will not be halted or reversed by the exterior forces of politics and economics. I do know, however, that in writing about these things we can have an effect on social consciousness and – very indirectly – on political and economic issues. So it is worth focusing on what lies within our sphere of influence: that is to say on ourselves and the newly formed community of citizens. I do not underestimate the external threats to which this community is vulnerable, but it seems to me that internal threats also exist, which are equally as important and hard to repel.

The Second World War and the ensuing systemic changes in Poland had undeniable revolutionary consequences, no matter how we choose to assess them now. For the next thirty five years, the events of the war and the radical social, economic, and – in particular – ideological changes that followed, served to nourish intellectual and political discourse in Poland. Intellectual life and, by extension, Polish consciousness as a whole, became dominated by a combination of apologia and criticism: on the one hand, the unequivocal rejection of the post-war status quo, and attempts to justify what had hap-

pened on the other. Gradually, as the years passed, the emphasis shifted toward a debate of position and interpretation.

The following three decades were steeped in controversy over issues such as the Warsaw Uprising, the events between 1943 and 1947, and developments at the heart of the Communist Party during the Nazi Occupation. There was tension over the political struggle that continued until 1948, accompanied by concomitant disputes between the administration of the country and émigré communities, the Marxists and non-Marxists (who included socialists as well as Catholics). There were other disputes relating to Stalinism, the Thaw, revisionism, and the first timid and politically regulated attempts to write the real history of post-war Poland. The debates of the time were closed and auto-thematic. Theories of dubious value were initially presented, but the books that were written did not quite ring true. The authors, or their younger contemporaries, subsequently subjected these views to renewed criticism, causing them to eventually become targets of criticism for the generation that followed.

Increasingly frequent references to the 19th century and the inter-war period appeared to broaden the horizons of the intellectual imagination. But they did so only superficially. The Polish mind was locked in a vicious circle imposed by post-war conditions, and by the generation that came into its own soon after the war ended. Subsequently, the intellectual and moral meanderings of this group also came to fascinate later generations. And yet, is it not time to acknowledge that the war and the post-war era are over? Aren't things different now? Are we not living in another country?

Obviously, anyone is free to argue otherwise. Some people may want to go on exploring the ways in which our minds are held "captive." By all means, let them do so – but please don't try to persuade us that these are relevant issues which continue to affect our lives. This is history: neither more nor less than that. Some may want to remember the remarkable moral fiber of those who never surrendered. That too is history. There was a time when intellectuals could spend their time meditating on their mission. That time is over. The rich, terrible, and bittersweet story of Polish national communality, which was once so engrossing for us all, has ended. The important questions no longer relate to our sense of community as a nation but to the effects of a new and truly significant "revolution."

Just as the conservative lobby had hoped, Polish democratization was shrouded in an aura of veneration for tradition, and a yearning for a lost past that was associated with the culture of the petty nobility (*szlachta*) and the intelligentsia. Stock phrases from 19th century writing, and those wonderful lines from the national poets Juliusz Slowacki (on the transfiguration of consumers of bread) or Zygmunt Krasiński (on goodwill), were suddenly translated into empirical reality. Equally, as socialists had anticipated, democratization took place in a mood of egalitarianism and social solidarity. Either way, judging by the political and cultural models that have been applied, the new civic sense can be traced directly to a patriotic tradition cultivated and preserved by the Polish intelligentsia and nobility.

By the same token, civic engagement puts an end to ideas about the special mission of this group. All those Polish “accursed questions,” engendered and nurtured by the traditional beliefs and practices of nobles and intellectuals, trapped the Polish mind in a cycle of auto-thematic reflection. Today this has been relegated to the past. Thanks to social democratization, these issues are now important only as a topic of historical study. They are no longer features of contemporary, living history. Or rather – they should not be.

We are addressing a very specific phenomenon. A battle is being fought over whether the development of civic engagement should continue to be affected by imaginative constructs once essential to ensuring that democratization could take place at all. Will Polish society become a prisoner of its own history? Or will it turn away from the past, renounce its old mentors, and begin to extrapolate the future from its own, new experiences. Will the discovery of civic engagement be an end or a beginning? This will depend on many factors and, among other things, on whether the groups that formulate the language and imagination of the new society – that is to say artists and intellectuals – will be able to depart from a world that is familiar and comfortable but unfit to provide the necessary means for understanding the effects of change.

At a spiritual level, the history of Poland goes on. But in order to perceive this, one must discard the outer layers in which that history has been clothed. The image of the insurgent fighting in the Warsaw

Uprising, for example, or the worker committed to the positivist notion of concerted social effort; the faithful follower of Józef Piłsudski; the supporter of the nationalist Roman Dmowski; the fighter of the Polish Home Army (AK); or the free thinking revisionist. These images, these various forms of attire, were once the property of specific factions or historical groups and applied to a particular context. To wear them now, in a democratized society, would be to play an infantile game of reaching into a box for adornments that are both ill-fitting and long out of fashion.

The issue is this: How are we to encourage early stages of civic engagement, even while we consciously let go of long-established fictions, myths, fashions, and turns of phrase? How should we support the emerging form of a different country, in spite of the limitations imposed by politics and our overdeveloped historical imaginations?

We know now that the greatest danger comes from ourselves, that is to say, from intellectuals who have lost their sense of social mission and are losing any sense of the purpose of their efforts. The temptation to abandon thought in favor of ideology can be overwhelming. We also know that an erstwhile elite’s resistance to democratization must mean pointless engagement in a losing battle. It has to be avoided.

So the problem is that civil society, to which many threads of Polish political thought have aspired, closes a long period in Polish history and places us fair and square before a new set of problems. But the issues we now face find us unprepared. We have never had an opportunity to take stock. The introduction of democracy, even at a potential and elementary level, does not need literary prophets and seers. It needs trained specialists. We are seeing a growth in the demand for professionals – even professionals with expertise in the “history of the spirit” – which is why I’m overjoyed when I see that professionalism is increasingly the criterion by which intellectual and artistic endeavor is judged. It is time to step outside the dispute about “clerkism” (the notion of art for art’s sake) and social engagement. The debate is wholly anachronistic, brings few benefits, and leads to considerable misunderstandings. Like other disputes I have mentioned, it is also ultimately auto-thematic.

When I consider this different country, the transformation that has taken place, I won-

der what kind of communal identity it is that links us, as Poles. In the past, we formed a symbolic community tried and tested by history. This community must and shall live on. Democratization has broadened it quantitatively to a degree that ensures there is no need to be concerned about its power or its future. However, there could be cause for concern about the fate of democratization, particularly if the symbolic community were to continue existing in isolation, and if there were no sign of the development of a civic community that shared relatively little with the other, symbolic and historical, national community.

An individual participating in the civic community does not part with his distinctive identity. On the contrary, he belongs to civil society because he knows that this is in his best interest. A civic community exists in a permanent state of conflict balanced by constant negotiation. And the civic community develops within the context of what civilization has produced. This gives it a measurable value, an easily verifiable quality, within the sphere of law, industry or finance. Social justice is obviously a serious issue for a society such as this, but the production of goods and services for the community is even more important.

Conflict between the symbolic, historical community and the civic community is by no means inevitable. On the contrary: the fact that we belong to two communities at once averts the likelihood of conflict. We have participated in both communities only very briefly. One is still in its infancy. The other has two hundred years of historical experience, as well as the full force of the Polish patriotic reflex behind it. If we were to remain exclusively bound to the national community, it would be evidence that we live in a highly anachronistic culture. It would equally imply the loss of the greatest social opportunity to have appeared in Poland’s recent history.

The scenario I have outlined partly reflects the existing situation, and is undoubtedly very desirable. However, I am not certain whether or to what degree it is practicable. The less freedom there is in public life, the stronger the symbolic, historical community will become, and the easier it will be to forget that the country is different, that it could be different. But a lack of freedom is bound to have sinister implications. If you have taken a breath of fresh air and learned to live as a citizen, you may yet be willing to attend another commemorative event, and give the ritual display of Polish symbolism and history another try. But the

time you spend at an occasion that is half-ecclesiastical and half-theatrical is likely to seem empty and wasted.

The internal history of Polish nobility and intelligentsia, as a class, was immensely rich. That group no longer exists, and political and art historians have only recently begun to do its story full justice – thanks to a wider range of available research methods, and perspectives. We know that the tradition and power of this group was underpinned by discourse on Poland's "accursed questions." The new civil society – oriented as it is toward social solidarity – possesses neither an equivalent traditional identity nor the strength that emerges from this counterpart. It may be powerful emotionally and symbolically, but, partly as a result of democratic progress, the historical thread has been broken. The white walls of the traditional Polish manor house have collapsed, and no "revaluation" can raise them. The generation that acted as custodian to memories linking the past with the present is already dying.

This could lead to a potentially disastrous scenario. The historical, symbolic community is no longer founded on concrete memories: customs, objects, appearances, recollected details, etc. As a group, the historical community may be powerful but, when tested against tangible reality, its voice rings hollow. Meanwhile, the civic community has barely germinated, it has little experience, it is poor, limited, and fragmented. Having lost our history, and properly separated ourselves from it, we could find it impossible to create effective bonds in the present.

As we already know, democratization carries social fragmentation in its wake. How can we counter this? Civil society can develop only in conditions where freedom is allowed to flourish, even if this is confined to a local level. So it is worth ensuring that the existing margin of freedom is properly exploited. Reflection on the principles of civil society and how it functions is also indispensable. After all, only those endowed with inner strength can afford to make compromises. Here as well, I fear that the strength of the historical and symbolic community may fall short of what is required. And in any case, it remains unclear where its power should be directed.

In this new and different country, one of our aims must be to promote the return of a hierarchy of absolute values in intellectual and cultural life. It is not a case of

disowning consumerism and eliminating it from popular culture. Consumerism inevitably accompanies democracy. We should instead enhance and strengthen the driving force behind mass culture by reviving values of a higher order. In fact, the cravings that motivate us as consumers, and our fantasies as a culture, significantly support our weak bonds with European civilization. They continue to encourage Polish society to look toward Europe. But we can only maintain vital intellectual and artistic links with Europe at the level of high culture.

Rather than gathering under flags and banners, it might be worth thinking about having a conversation in the marketplace, at the forum, and seeking opportunities to discuss fundamental values. Doubtless, history cannot be rewound. But social consciousness can be appropriated by a history that is dead and buried. We are in an unusually difficult situation. The temptation to seek social unity for negative reasons is justifiable, powerful, and easy. But consider how dangerous this could be for intellectual life and the future of Polish society. A strategy that recognizes and accepts a state of 'abnormal normality' presupposes the greatest possible internal freedom in the way we assess social phenomena and cultural projects. As a strategy, it has the weakness of being conflict-inducing and not entirely effective. Equally, it possesses the strength of being true to existing circumstances.

The possibilities may be very limited. It seems to me, however, that there is very little choice. Intellectuals may not be directly responsible for the democratic transition that began in August 1980, nor do they have the power to give the transformations that characterize liberal democracies the momentum they need. But, as professionals, we are not entirely unserviceable. First, the changes that have already taken place must be recorded. We must also be mindful of the principle so often noted by sociologists that any prophecy might be self-fulfilling, and we should remember therefore that a good, reliable and sympathetic account of events may be a step toward further change. Second, we must strengthen and deepen the civic engagement that has already been instituted. This is assisted neither by expressions of veneration for the democratized masses nor by moralizing about them. However, it can be supported by treating people living in this new and different country as adults, who need to be informed, and deserve to have a sense of their own value, and access to sensible and unprejudiced critical assessment.

People obviously need far more than this. Clearly, we must not squander what the symbolic, historical community has given us. It is self-evident that without adequate public information, intellectual life will always be struggling to find its way between the conflicting demands of social obligation and objective judgment. Yet in the face of a world that threatens to offer neither tradition nor a future, civic engagement creates an opportunity which has to be grasped, even though the risks may be high and the chances of success slim.

It may be inappropriate to add that differently formulated strategies may also prove helpful in finding a way forward. The tendency to depict reality according to a prescribed model, and to draw fixed conclusions, emerges from a temperament constantly in search of "normative" conditions in which to think and function. All that is happening – the transition we are witnessing or the direction in which we are moving – does not necessarily merit rapturous applause. But if these changes are indeed valid and socially beneficial then – remembering Alexis de Tocqueville's argument – we must ensure that democratization does not break completely with the past, and that it is enriched by the integration of old values, measures, and norms into what is new. Innovation need not provoke unmitigated joy, but we must be aware that the new has arrived and that old ways, ancient narratives, and symbols are no longer enough.

Things are different. Things really are both better and worse. I feel worse because I have understood once and for all that I live in a world that is formless, a world whose future I cannot know and which makes me vaguely fearful. I feel better because I know that it is worth exploring history from the perspective of individual, personal experience, rather than from the ramparts of a national fortress. And I anticipate that a new range of vantage points could reveal many hitherto unfamiliar and important things. /

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