

**A Political or a Cultural Project?**

**Contemporary Discourses on Central European Identity**



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# Impressum

## **A Political or a Cultural Project? Contemporary Discourses on Central European Identity**

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## Preface

The present book: *A Political or a Cultural Project? Contemporary Discourses on Central European Identity* is the anthology of disciplinary essays of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *International Scientific Workshop in Szigliget* of the Hungarian Academy of Arts Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology, which dealt with the contemporary cultural aspect of the absolute present. The workshop titled *Contemporary Discourses of Central European Identity* involved a great many issues, emotions and memories. The main discourse focused on the relationship between modern national identities and other regional ones. Both the national and liberal point of views attack the idea of Central Europeanism as being a Trojan horse, although it could serve as a bridge between nations, societies and other groups. Consequently, being Central European means having a special relationship with cultures and traditions, as well as the coexistence of several ethnic groups. Many other discourses dispute the above-mentioned aspects and even their very existence.

We can see that the majority of Central Europe's countries joined the European Community in the last two decades. While Austria became part of the EU in 1995, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary joined the political community in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, and Croatia in 2013, while Serbia's accession is *under construction*. The above-mentioned states had numerous links and still have many common cultural, memorial, institutional and folkloric roots. If the grievances of living side by side unwanted during the Ottoman, Hapsburg and Soviet empires could be replaced with a free, modern common identity, it would be a major achievement. The pros and cons comprise several discourses, as the centripetal and centrifugal forces are both very vivid in the region. While political identities can be born and rapidly replaced several times over, cultural identity has existed for hundreds of years and remains very strong even under persecution.

Our indicative questions dealt with the former and contemporary identities, the memorial aspects of the past and the present trials to bridge the region. The applied sciences of the workshop were similar to those in the previous year, thus, besides special aesthetic aspects, there was ideology-research, art theory and cultural anthropology. Finally, the list below can represent the common discourse to find—either to construct or to deconstruct—our identity:

- What does it mean to be Central European in respect to culture, cultural memory and the smaller groups' cohesive community?
- How have societies, nations and minority groups adopted the European and Central European identity?

- Which Central European phenomenon became relevant or dominant in the discussed period?
- What kinds of cultural movements have arisen since 2004?
- Do societies have any collective memorial experience of the accession?
- How can the Central European idea identify regional, minority and diaspora cultures?
- What is the most acceptable common language of the region's citizens?

8 The present book's nine essays answer these questions from many perspectives. The papers are divided into three parts: *The Idea of the Central European Identity*, *The Central European Cultural Identity* and *The Central European Political Discourses*. The first part (*The Idea of the Central European Identity*) involves three theoretic essays by Balázs Mezei, János Boros and Valerio Severino. The Hungarian professor, Balázs Mezei's paper (*Is there a Common Central-European Tradition in Philosophy?*) had a strong hypothesis: he claims that there was an authentic and independent philosophical tradition in Central Europe from Bernard Bolzano until Ludwig Wittgenstein. He argues through phenomenological examples and the analysis of German language Catholic and Protestant dialogues. He shows how Central European philosophy has summarized the most important intellectual outputs and how this kind of philosophy realizes a living bond among thinkers belonging to Central European culture even today. The paper by the Hungarian professor, János Boros (*Identity as a Concept of Action*) is the most provocative text in the book. He features ethnic conflicts from the point of view of epistemology. The author defines the problem of definition (of a person or a society) via intellectual history and metaphysics. After representing the difficulties, he finally suggests an intellectual method to understand the stranger. The paper by the Italian researcher, Valerio Severino (*The Process of Affiliation – Memberships in Central and Eastern Europe to CIPSH/UNESCO and European Organizations for the Academic Study of Religions*) sums up the previous scholars' intentions: he explores Central European religious life from the perspective of sociology. He examines the process of European reunification and Central European identity through the looking glass of the academic/non-confessional study of religions. He claims, through some examples, that the region's religious life cannot be mentioned in one system, since many of them are structurally different from one another as well as from the Western tradition.

The second part (*The Central European Cultural Identity*) deals with the cultural aspects of the region's identity, which was infected by political actions. These three papers by Ivana Medić, Leon Stefanija and Ákos Windhager focus on the topic from the perspective of musicology and comparative literature science. The Slovenian Professor, Leon Stefanija's essay (*Between Me, You, Us*

*and Them: Globalization in Music in the Œuvre of Uroš Rojko*) tells a tense story between professional and amateur music culture. He outlines a short historical sketch of the main Slovenian cultural schism in professional and amateur music life. The contribution focuses on music practices: the radical composer, U. Rojko (1954) is juxtaposed to the ideas of the so-called “autonomous social and cultural centres”. He reflects on the composer’s individual technique, the high cultural expectations and his controversial repentance. A similar topic, but with more tragic overtones, is described in the Serbian Professor, Ivana Medić’s paper (*Ex-centric Identities in Central Europe: The Curious Case of Snežana Nešić*). The paper emphasises the very term “Central Europe” as a variously understood one; some definitions exclude Serbia from this conceptual territory, while others include it, alongside Croatia and Slovenia; this discrepancy raises the issues of identity, placing, belonging, heritage, and inclusion, which are amplified by emigration and exile. After the theoretical implications, the study focused on the professional odyssey of Snežana Nešić (1973), a female composer and accordionist of Serbian extraction, educated in Ukraine, who has lived in Hannover, Germany for two decades now. Despite her long years of work and success, she was not able to achieve a supportive reputation. The paper by the Hungarian researcher, Ákos Windhager (*An Imaginary Diplomat’s Central Europe – Based on the Novels Protokoll [Protocol] and A legkisebb jégkorszak [The Smallest Ice Age] by János Térey*) sheds light on the practical values of the Central European identity. The protagonist in the Hungarian author’s novels is a cynical diplomat, who attends numerous international conflicts, treaties and events. The essay analyses the storytelling of everyday high life in Central Europe, which is set mainly in urban life with a dominant cultural approach and overly politicized actions.

The final part (*The Central European Political Discourses*) deals with the topics of autonomy, independence and political games. The three papers by Matthias Funkhauser, Barnabás Vajda and Petr Orság discuss the evidence for the cultural uniqueness of the political regime. The study by the German scholar, Matthias Funkhauser (*Between Fascist Minority Restriction and the Statute of Autonomy – The Development of the Educational System in South Tyrol After the End of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy*) explores the story of the German minority living in Northern Italy. The historical study underlines the importance of education in one’s mother tongue, which was not allowed by Mussolini’s state nor even by post-war liberal Italy. Similar political struggles are analysed in the next paper, written by the Hungarian Professor, Barnabás Vajda (*Historical Pull and Push Factors in Central Europe After 1989*). The paper outlines historical pull and push factors that have had an impact on Central Europe after 1989, especially after 2004 as a date of formal European integration. Its main question is: What are the most determining (structural, fundamental) historical processes

that have shaped Central Europe since 1989/2004? The same “European Union” topic is retold in the study by the Czech Professor Petr Orság (*A Political or a Cultural Project? The New European Empire as “Entropia”, and Central European Traditions and Connections*). This paper looks at politics and political negotiation as part of a wider cultural context and understands politics as an expression of the given cultural system. Making specific use of the example of the Czech Republic and its development, the paper attempts, within the wider historical framework, to demonstrate how tradition, symbols and various stereotypes or artistic expressions intertwine, meet and clash with the actions of political protagonists.

Nine authors’ studies discuss the same and only topic: Central European cultural identity, which is a vivid phenomenon contrary to the political, economic, epidemic and social circumstances.

Enjoy reading!

*Ákos Windhager*

# The Idea of the Central European Identity



Balázs Mezei

## Is there a Common Central European Tradition in Philosophy?

Some reflections<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The question in the title can be answered affirmatively. We do have a ‘common Central European Tradition in philosophy’. The significance of this answer can be properly assessed in that philosophy has always been the centre of the culture of a given nation, region, or civilization. Central Europe was specifically shaped by the rise of Protestantism as a culturally distinct region; however, the Catholic Reform also contributed to its specific blend. The main features of what we can call Central European culture are the following: a) The capacity to ask the question of presuppositions; b) Thereby the capacity to understand the unique importance of the human subject or, better, human personhood; c) An interest in creating an overall form of culture in which a synthesis of the sciences, the arts, philosophy and theology can be achieved; d) And finally, a unique interest in creating genuine newness in this synthesis, the newness not destroying the old (as in revolutionary traditions), but rather developing it in an organic fashion especially on the spiritual plane. The centre of these features is a flexible and newness-oriented understanding of human personhood expressed to an equal degree in the sciences, the arts, politics, and philosophy. Below I show how Central European philosophy has summarized these features in some of its most important outputs and how this kind of philosophy realizes a living bond among thinkers belonging to the Central European culture even today.

### Introduction

What is philosophy? Why is it interesting to ask questions about it? The ancient expression *philosophia* seems to be fairly harmless. It is usually translated as ‘the love of wisdom’. Who is against wisdom? However, if we turn to Plato we find that philosophy is conceived in rather mythical terms: Philosophy is “a gift from the gods to the mortal race whose value neither has been nor ever will be

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally delivered as a lecture. It was not elaborated in all aspects. In a future work I will offer more details on each important point in this lecture.

surpassed. [...] this is to be the supreme good our eyesight offers us.”<sup>2</sup> If Plato says that philosophy is the supreme good (μέγιστον ἀγαθόν), then we need to take it seriously: The Greeks indeed considered philosophy the greatest good. It is a different question why Plato claims that philosophy is offered to our ‘sight’. The solution may be sought in the meaning of eyesight for Plato. He says for instance that “Let us [...] declare that the cause and purpose of this supreme good is this: the gods invented sight and gave it to us so that we might observe the orbits of intelligence in the universe and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, philosophy is an operation that originates in optical experience applied to mental processes in a way that imitates the revolutions of the universe. This is the greatest good for human beings.

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I call this approach to the universe and our position in it “cosmo-theology”.<sup>4</sup> This is a theology, because philosophy is the work of the gods; and it is cosmological, because the visible movements of the universe prescribe the ways we are supposed to think. In other words, we have to think along the lines of the movements of the Sun and the Moon related to one another, to the other planets and stars; along the lines of the entire universe. No wonder that at the site of the so-called Antikythera mechanism, a bronze arm was also discovered, an arm typically belonging to the sculptures of “the Philosopher” around the beginning of our epoch in the Hellenistic world. The mechanism most probably belonged to a cargo containing materials needed for philosophy education.<sup>5</sup>

Without entering into the further details of this understanding of philosophy, we can clearly see that it is very different from what we call philosophy today. The greatest good for Plato is also very different from what we consider goodness today. What do we consider *the greatest* good today? Power? Money? Learning and research? Pleasure? It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer. The best answer seems to see that in modernity we have come to consider good what in the past was regarded as non-good: unrestrained dissolving of all structures. This shows that our situation today is not as good as one we like to believe. However, philosophy survived various critical periods and is still with us—as some kind of goodness, whether it be intellectual, moral, or scienti-

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<sup>2</sup> *Timaeus* 47b = PLATO: *The Complete Works of*. Ed. COOPER, John M., Indianapolis and Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, 1250.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 47c-d, 1250.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. MEZEI, Balázs M.: *Az ima genealógiája* = DÁVID, Nóra - FODOR, György - ÖZE, Sándor: *Tíz évhét: Fröhlich Ida Festschrift*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> For the mechanism, see <http://www.antikythera-mechanism.gr/>; for the bronze arm, cf. <https://www.livescience.com/60605-bronze-arm-at-antikythera-shipwreck.html> (both accessed 12.09.2019).

fic. In classic periods of philosophy, philosophy was still considered as being the greatest good: in the Renaissance by Ficino, in German Idealism by Hegel, or in phenomenology by Husserl. Our direct philosophical background is outlined here: German thought plus phenomenology. If these developments took philosophy to in some sense the greatest good, then we have rather up-to-date access to an understanding of philosophy as the greatest good today. Central European Philosophy (henceforth CEP) is precisely that period of our philosophical tradition in which the ancient understanding of philosophy as the greatest good has been renewed and interpreted in fundamentally new ways.

## The Central European Tradition

The Central European tradition in philosophy is often dealt with under the title “Austrian Philosophy”.<sup>6</sup> In fact, many of the philosophers belonging to this tradition were inhabitants of the Habsburg Empire or lived in territories close to this political-cultural unity. In other words, a diverse national background is involved in CEP: Germans, Italians, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians and Croatians, usually using German as their language of communication, belong to this circle. As a time-frame we can consider, on the one hand, Bernard Bolzano’s year of birth as the beginning of this history (1781) and, on the other hand, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s year of death (1951) as the end of the classical period. I.e. we are talking about a period of cca 170 years. Yet the periphery of this period is equally important: this is the framework of German speaking philosophy from Christian Wolff to Jürgen Habermas, or from Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to Roman Ingarden. After WWI, the new nation states contributed to this kaleidoscopic scene with philosophies written in languages different from German, i.e. Polish, Czech, Hungarian, and Croatian. With the demise of German hegemony in Central Europe, the philosophical scene drastically changed; yet there are still features which characterize Central European thought in a unique way.

The most important dimension in the background of CEP is the influence of Catholicism as a cultural type.<sup>7</sup> Catholic philosophy has a strong Augustinian component; yet the influence of Aristotle has become ever more important. In fact, a peculiar synthesis between Aristotelian-Scholastic rationalism and Augustinian mysticism characterizes this type. This must be the influence of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. MEZEI, Balázs M. – SMITH, Barry: *The Four Phases of Philosophy*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. MEZEI, Balázs M.: *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz*. New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, 201–219.

the musical culture of the Habsburg Empire: from the time of Viennese Music up to the series of musical academies in the region, music played the central role in culture and education. This situation made possible the rise of a number of great composers and artists that influenced philosophy in important ways.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the background is Scholasticism and Music, rationalism and mysticism—resolved in a unitary synthesis of intellectual endeavors.

More specifically, the basis of philosophies emerging in this tradition is the method of *rational intuition*. It is especially the history of phenomenology that shows this methodology in clear terms. Beginning with Franz Brentano—also a follower of Bolzano—to Martin Heidegger and contemporary thought we find the fundamental understanding of human knowledge in terms of a direct perception that is not mediated by discursive procedures on either the level of the senses or the level of logical and intellectual operations. Here a new kind of awareness comes to the fore, an awareness labeled in the past as “Intellectual insight”, *intellektuale Anschauung*. Of course, we have forerunners to this understanding in some forms of ancient and modern Platonism; yet the complex elaboration of this methodology belongs to phenomenology, i.e. a philosophy of characteristically Central European origin.

Beyond this epistemology, there is an underlying ontology. Being is the central question in this tradition and it is not only in the work of Heidegger that the problem of being was discovered. Bolzano and Brentano, and even Anton Günther had already investigated this problem in their own ways;<sup>9</sup> Husserl and the generations of phenomenologists, from Scheler to Edith Stein, elaborate the question from different viewpoints. The central idea is again interesting: we have a dimension of being so unique that previous ways of understanding it are not sufficient to describe it. Call it phenomenon, value, passive genesis, *Dasein*, *Ereignis*, or revelation, new ways of understanding reality have come to the fore in CEP.

Anthropology is again a field where we find the specificity of this philosophy. Human beings are defined in rudimentary ways in the Christian tradition, but it is only in CEP that a new understanding of a human being emerges. In some authors it is about a new notion of human personhood, in others the transcendental ego, in others again *Dasein* and its derivatives in existence—such as the various notions of “existence” in existentialist thinkers. The main point is that human beings need to be understood in new ways, in terms of an ultimate datum or absolute.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. MEZEI, Balázs M.: *Radical Revelation: A Philosophical Approach*. London, T&T, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> For Günther, see MEZEI: *op. cit.* (2013), 102–110.

In sociology and politics, the central idea of CEP is a specific set of unity and plurality. The notion is closely related to the idea of subsidiarity, which emphasizes unity in the context of structured plurality. In the thoughts of Alfred Schütz, Jan Patočka, Aurel Kolnai or Michael Polanyi, the vision of a unity-in-plurality kind of communitarianism emerges, a unity not defined in its opposition to traditions but rather as their further development. This is conservatism, but of the organic kind: novelty is the centre of development in terms of an incessant continuation.

If we wish to define the most important feature of CEP, then it is the idea of *novelty*. It is newness; but it is precisely as newness that it is related to the old. Newness in epistemology, ontology, society and politics all point to the idea of “renewing newness”—to use Miklos Vetö’s expression<sup>10</sup>—as the central characteristic of CEP in all its various expressions. We need to add that the very elaboration of this newness shows the outlines of a new kind of thinking. This new kind can still be called philosophy, if you wish, but an enlarged or renewed philosophy, an active possibility in human thinking not given in its previous forms. For the sake of simple language let me call it CEP, because it is within this framework that a new understanding of thinking and reality come to the fore.

## Main Features

Let me summarize the main features of CEP as reflected in various works of phenomenologists:

- Phenomenology considers itself in the context of the entire history of philosophy, even non-Western developments in Hinduism, Buddhism, Japanese thought or aboriginal and indigenous traditions.
- Phenomenology has a clear understanding of the importance of methodology. It developed the most intriguing methodology in the history of philosophy and did so on a level unparalleled by Anglo-American philosophies.
- Phenomenology, at the same time, has kept the independence of philosophy as an autonomous branch of human knowledge. I.e. it does not allow superficial tendencies to subordinate philosophy to a fashionable notion of natural science, logic or mathematics.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. VETŐ, Miklós: *L'élargissement de la métaphysique*. Paris, Hermann, 2012, 43–46.

- Yet phenomenology is science-related and it is relevant to the methods and contents of most of the special scientific endeavors from physics to cosmology or from biology to brain research. Phenomenology is simply relevant, yet it is not subservient, to the sciences.
- Phenomenology points out not only the autonomy of human thinking but also opens the door to a further evolution of human thought—an evolution going beyond contemporary notions of human thinking, philosophy, or theory.
- Phenomenology, is therefore future-oriented and thus harbors a not yet discovered wealth of possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

18 To formulate these points in a simple way, we can say that phenomenology is the centrally important dimension in the tradition of CEP. CEP has its own identity in phenomenology as an organic and future-oriented tradition. CEP is based on the plurality of cultures, including philosophical cultures, which nevertheless have a common tradition and a common network for communication.

Here I need to make some further demarcations. CEP is fundamentally different not only from Anglo-American philosophy, but also from French and Russian thinking. Anglo-American philosophy is mainly preoccupied with solving partial logical problems while it loses the big picture of intelligent order. French philosophy is hopelessly dualistic, or when it is not, it tends to become immanentistic with an intrinsic difficulty in respect to perceiving a universal spiritual hierarchy. Russian thinking is dependent on German philosophy in many ways, without however the complex profoundness of the latter. Russian philosophers often come out with statements but hardly ever produce a complex and elaborated argument. As opposed to these traditions, CEP is both visionary and analytical, speculative and scientific, revelatory yet argument-centered.

## The Trajectory

CEP overlaps the history of phenomenology, or better, the Classical period of the history of phenomenology from Bolzano to Wittgenstein. Contemporary French phenomenology is a different chapter and I will talk about it later. In Classical phenomenology we have:

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<sup>11</sup> For the importance of phenomenology for a new kind of thinking, see my chapter on Revelation in Phenomenology (MEZEI, Balázs M.: “*Revelation in Phenomenology*” = *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*. Eds. MEZEI, Balázs M. – MURPHY, Francesca A. – OAKES, Kenneth, Oxford, Oxford University Press [forthcoming]).

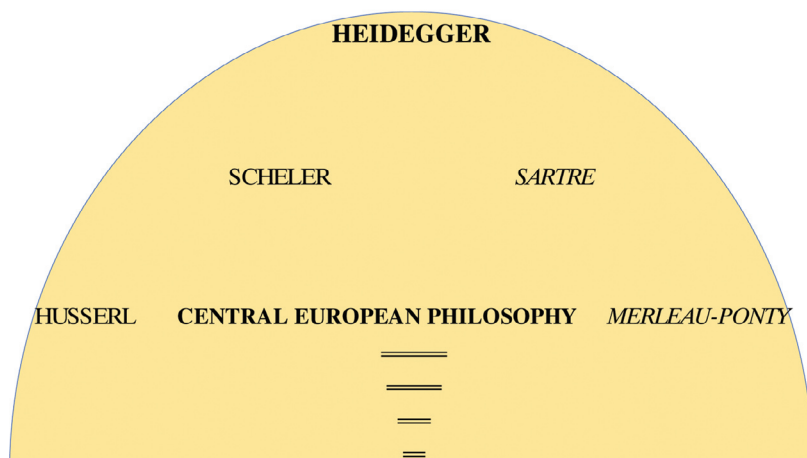
- a new method (direct intuition, evidence as such),
- new fields of research (wholes, gestalts, ideal centres and structures),
- a new focus of research (transcendental subjectivity or consciousness, existence, Sein and Dasein, as well as revelation),
- a new anthropology (from Kant to Nietzsche, from Scheler to Heidegger, or from Husserl to Michel Henry, from Edith Stein to JPII),
- a new vision of politics (phenomenological socialism in Scheler, metapolitics in Heidegger, an infinite community of philosophers in Husserl, care of the soul in Patočka, and the entire work of John Paul II),
- a new kind of thinking (descriptive psychology, transcendental phenomenology, material ethics, life-world, ontological thinking, revelational philosophy etc.).

If we consider the historical trajectory of phenomenology, we find its forerunner Bolzano, its father Brentano, its flourishing in Scheler, Husserl and Heidegger, and its continuation in the work of Ingarden, Patočka, JPII, Tengelyi and his circle etc.<sup>12</sup> In this trajectory we can observe both a rise and a decline: beginning with the limited research work of Brentano, we arrive at the overall metaphysics of Husserl and spill over to the new kind of thinking of Heidegger. From Husserl and Heidegger there arose a number of important thinkers in contemporary Czech, Polish, Hungarian and Croatian philosophy. Interestingly, the intermezzo of state Marxism in these cultures did not stop this development. Even under Marxism, phenomenological conceptions influenced thinkers, such as Lukács and Heller, Patočka, Ingarden and Kolakowski, Žižek and Tengelyi. Today, it seems, phenomenology and the traditions dealt with under this heading have a decisive influence in CEP.

When I use the term “trajectory”, I refer to the fractal nature of phenomenology. A fractal is a figure, each part of which has the same character as the whole. Phenomenology is trajectorial in its intrinsic nature: it has a beginning, an evolution, a high point and a decline in all its parts. Let me show you the big picture:

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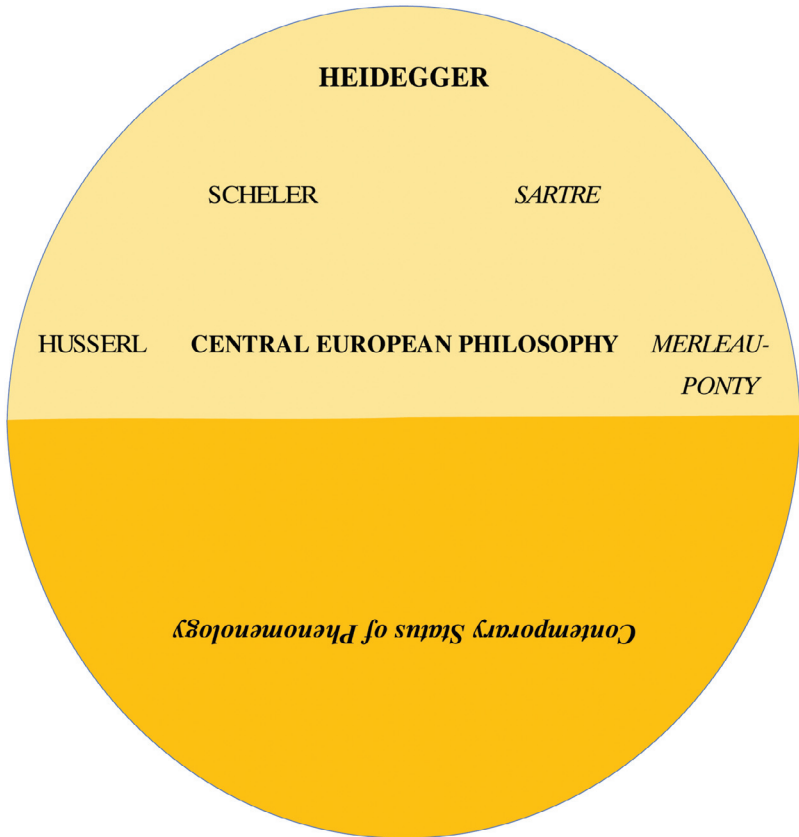
<sup>12</sup> Cf. TENGELYI, László: *Welt und Unendlichkeit. Zum Problem phänomenologischer Metaphysik*. Freiburg, Karl Alber, 2014.



This trajectory shows Classical Phenomenology. However, this curve is reiterated in each context of phenomenology, because this is the trajectory of philosophy as phenomenology. In other words, in various philosophical cultures belonging to the tradition, we have a fundamentally similar trajectory of a certain development.

## Contemporary Status

We thus have a strong tradition in philosophy and phenomenology, which offers a point of connection between various philosophical cultures in Central Europe. We also have the diagram of the trajectory, which describes the evolution of phenomenological thinking in the way fractals represent the core gestalt of figures. The trajectory of phenomenology in terms of an intellectual fractal describes the dynamics of phenomenological thinking in a simple way. This fractal can nevertheless be completed by a negative trajectory so that the entire figure is represented as a circle:



My leaving the lower part of this circle empty was intentional. The only text there refers to the contemporary situation about which I would like to say a few things.

These days it is French phenomenology that appears to be the most influential. However, French phenomenology has forgotten the roots of the phenomenological movement, most importantly Brentano and Husserl, i.e. the fundamentally Central European character. Instead of this character, we have a renewed influence of Cartesianism, as well as a degree of influence from traditional metaphysics in some new form, yet hardly anything which is able to revitalize the original impetus of phenomenology given especially in the works of Brentano, Husserl, and Scheler. In order to again find this impetus, we need to return to Brentano and understand his central idea, i.e. the idea of evidence as absolute knowledge. This idea was the origin of Husserl's pheno-

menology, Scheler's theory of value and person, and also Heidegger's notion of being. Evidence is direct awareness or knowledge in a sense not accessible in any other way than what we have as direct knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

In order for us to be able to revitalize the trajectory of phenomenology we need to find our way to the source, represented by Brentano in the history of phenomenology. Brentano was not a systematic thinker but he had some central ideas that, like a mustard seed, developed into the immense tree of phenomenology. We need to find, in other words, the original power of thinking, which can be nothing other than that the ultimate form of evidence is direct awareness of truth as truth. For the time being, I am working on this idea in the form of a philosophy of revelation.<sup>14</sup>

This philosophy can again direct the movement of the trajectory, a movement leading in due course of time to its "Husserl", "Scheler", "Heidegger" and many other thinkers belonging to these lodestars. CEP began this way during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it needs to realize its roots again. In the meantime, in the works of John Paul II or Edith Stein or Josef Seifert we still have a strong source of further developments.

## Future

This further development needs to be restarted. The main hindrance here is the very low level of awareness of the power of CEP, i.e. genuine phenomenology. Thus, we have a cultural task, namely the awakening of the genuine phenomenological tradition expressed in the main representatives of CEP. Our task is to teach and carry out research; but we also have the task of autonomous thinking, genuine philosophical and phenomenological thinking in terms of the main features' characteristic of phenomenology. We need an understanding of method, the central subject matter, we need to work out these in thoroughgoing monographs and also in teaching, and we have the task of showing the importance of this kind of thinking to the special sciences. We need to understand contemporary science, especially quantum physics, and its relevance to a number of various fields in cosmology, biology, brain research and special awareness research. We need a new understanding of consciousness, as for example László Ervin has attempted to achieve.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See again my Revelation in Phenomenology.

<sup>14</sup> MEZEI: *op. cit.* (2017).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. LÁSZLÓ, Ervin: *What is Consciousness? Three Sages Look Behind the Veil*. New York, Select-Book, 2016; LÁSZLÓ, Ervin: *What is Reality? The Map of Cosmos and Consciousness*. New York, SelectBook, 2016.

Yet the connecting points with the special sciences is not the proper field of phenomenology. Its proper field is the ultimate power of reality which discloses itself in our thinking and being. I have named this ultimate power “revelation” and developed, accordingly, a phenomenological approach to the problem of revelation called “apocalypitics”. I do not know if there will be any continuation of this research or even a recognition of the importance of this ultimate subject matter for phenomenology. But I know that this work has been initiated and further attempts are to be expected.

Here we need to make a distinction. CEP is European philosophy, i.e. it does not belong to Eastern approaches to Europe in terms of Eurasian intellectual movements. CEP has roots in the heart of Europe and it aspires to revive the classical tradition in human thinking in a new way and in new forms. It certainly shares Heidegger’s idea of a new beginning, but this new beginning is the central point in the intellectual fractal of CEP. CEP as such is a new beginning, it is renewing newness, as Vetö formulated; it is from, for, and about novelty. It is, thus quite revolutionary: CEP is the kind of philosophy capable of initiating groundbreaking changes, just as it did in the form of phenomenology. CEP is “apocalyptic phenomenology”, because it reveals the absolutely novel nature of reality.

The future of CEP is not dependent on political factors but rather on courageous thinkers that, as John Paul II said, cannot stop when confronted with any problem or question. We need to have a new philosophical courage not only to ask new questions but even the question of all questions, the question of questioning itself: why there is a question at all and why do we not rather have only answers?

The first reply to this problem is logical: if we have answers, we also have questions. The second reply says: all propositions are to be understood as answers to questions latent or revealed. We need to explore the latent questions and see there the power of the only question, the question of all questions: **why are there questions at all?**<sup>16</sup>

We see that we have questions because we have the original and direct knowledge of the fact that reality is questionable. It is real and ultimately real; yet it is also questionable in the sense that reality is taking new forms, it is changing and it is modifying itself. This self-disclosing modification makes it possible for us to formulate both our major and minor questions. And the self-

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<sup>16</sup> In philosophical literature we usually find this or that question, such as the ‘most important philosophical questions’, or the question of history, time, being, or person. Rarely do we find the most fundamental question: why are there questions at all in thinking? What is actually a question as such? It is well known that Heidegger made ‘questioning’ the focus of his thought. However, in his understanding the question of being as the central question still not based on the more fundamental question as to the question itself. Cf. KOVACS: *op. cit.* (1990), 123–170.

disclosing modification leads us to the understanding that reality is first of all the direct understanding of its primacy in our thinking and being. Phenomenology gets started from this understanding.

I do not doubt that even within the framework of CEP we have a number of conflicting interpretations. But we also have common ground, such as the centrality of human personhood. Personhood, virtue, philosophy is at the centre of CEP much more than in any other tradition. And it is in CEP that we have the awareness of the entire history of philosophy in both the East and West, a history we need to understand in terms of a phenomenological methodology.

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János Boros

## Identity as a Concept of Action

“Identity” is an ancient concept in philosophy, mainly used in the areas of logic and in political philosophy. Whereas in logic the concept can be traced back to Aristotle, in political philosophy the use of the term dates to later times.

The questions at the heart of the philosophical enterprise are “What is truth?”, “What is true?”, “What exists?” Socrates wanted to know “What is x?”, where x could stand for beauty, knowledge, goodness, man, time, and causation. These are questions of essence, of what-ness. Philosophy is the articulation of our desire to understand what is, what there is, what we are. Furthermore, we seek to discern what our destiny is, why x is our destiny and not something else, and why we have a destiny in the first place, whereas other animals do not.

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### Ostension and Definition (Epistemology)

If there is an x, if we encounter x, we suppose—originally and before all acts of knowledge or other actions—that there is an x and not something else. We do not say what x is, we do not act with it, we merely state that there is something named “x”.

In a cognitive sense, in regard to knowledge, we can have a twofold connection to x. We have a sensation of x and we can point to it, and we can describe or explain it. When we point to x and describe or explain it, we *identify* the object of our ostension and of our explanation. The identification or the expression of sameness is, however, full of prejudices and preconceptions, and includes other hidden components. In such cases, we simply have a strong belief that what we have pointed out and what we have explained are one and the same x, but a thorough analysis may show that this is not the case. As W. v. O. Quine puts it, “The sign ‘=’ of identity is a relative term; thus, a transitive verb, we might say, not boggling at the spectacle of a direct object in the nominative. Like any such term it joins singular terms to make a sentence. The sentence thus formed is true if and only if those component terms refer to the same object.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> QUINE, W. v. O.: *Word and Object*. Boston, MIT Press and New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1960, 115.

The last sentence of the above quotation is problematic. Although “identity” does not refer to anything, and therefore does not refer to *x*, we can use the concept of identity to connect two terms, two names, or a name and a description. The sentence “is true if and only if” the terms refer to the same object. And that is precisely the question: is the object the same in both cases or not?

Ostension is the opposite of sensation; it is the communication, without words, that the act of sensation has taken place. For many philosophers it is not obvious that the *x* which has been pointed out and the *x* which has been described are the same *x*. They doubt that the two are identical; in fact, they propose that we may be speaking of two different *x*s. Whether the *x* which has been pointed out and the *x* which has been explained may be considered the same is a problem that has been addressed by Sextus Empiricus, Augustine, Ockham, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and many philosophers since.

We can distinguish between at least two kinds of identity. The first means that *x* is one and the same, and if we keep every aspect/circumstance the same, we cannot simultaneously state that *x* is *x* and *x* is non-*x*. This is a metaphysical, epistemological (transcendental, doxastic, etc.), and semantic statement. Metaphysical identity means that something (*x*) *is just so* in the world. Epistemological identity means that we must suppose that if we know something, this is one something and not (at the same time, in the same place, and from any aspect) another. In a semantic statement we give the same sense to a proposition when, all circumstances being equal, we utter only this one proposition.

The other kind of identity is the result of identification, and is related to our different but basic cognitive capacities. Fundamentally, we have sensation and reasoning—and we say that the *x* sensed and the *x* known by reasoning or description are the same *x*, although approached in different ways. These are in fact not two different ways, but two aspects of the same way, because sensing and knowing by description are the constituents of one epistemological act. When the act is one, it is not clear whether that which is seen is correctly grasped and described by concepts.

## Original Identity (Metaphysics)

There is another, more fundamental sense of identity, which is an original tautology: *x is x* and not something else, for example, *y* or *z*. The condition of thinking about the world is to assume that the things in the world and the world itself *is* itself. There is no sense in saying that something is itself and, at the same time, under the same circumstances, not itself. *Itselfness* is the fundamental identity of a thing. “If *x* then *x*” is the formula for this kind of strict or original identity.

As Wittgenstein noted, “to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing.”<sup>2</sup> It would seem that, according to Wittgenstein, the concept of “identity” is nonsense and expresses nothing. With this he echoes the much earlier ideas of Aristotle.

The problem with original or metaphysical identity is that it contains a strong ontological commitment, namely that the/a world *is* somehow. Yet discussions continue to this day about whether the world in itself *is* somehow.

## Non-Contradiction

The concept of identity lies at the heart of the principle of non-contradiction (PNC). It is not possible that *x* is itself and the same *x* in the same respect is not itself, but something else, for example, *y*. This is the metaphysical or ontological understanding of identity or non-contradiction. If the existence of something contradicts itself, it cannot exist.

Aristotle puts it the following way: “It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not belong simultaneously to the same thing in the same respect.”<sup>3</sup>

There are three understandings of the PNC: a metaphysical, an epistemological, and a semantic one; these are sometimes termed ontological, doxastic, and semantic ways of understanding. The first concerns the things that are in the world, the second refers to our knowledge of them, and the third indicates the truth of the assertion. Aristotle’s assertion above corresponds to the metaphysical or ontological version of the PNC.

The principle of non-contradiction is the precondition for all that exists to be and for all that is known to be known, but it is not a syllogistic principle. It is ‘merely’ the precondition for all acts of thinking. It is a principle that “is necessary for anyone to have who knows any of the things that are.”<sup>4</sup>

It can be debated whether the PNC is the same as the principle of identity or different. Some would argue that the former assumes the latter, but the latter cannot be formulated without the former. So it can probably be stated that the formula “*x* is *x* and not another thing” is a variant of the PNC, and, vice versa, that the PNC is just another way of phrasing the principle of identity.

Many philosophers insist that identity is actually the most unproblematic concept; it is the basis or the precondition for all acts of thinking. If someone

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<sup>2</sup> WITTGENSTEIN: *Tractatus* 5.5303.

<sup>3</sup> *Metaphysica*. IV3., 1005b, 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

argues that the notion of identity is problematic and needs theoretical or argumentative underpinning, this is not easily done. What could the ground for argumentation and the supporting pillar be, if we lack the concept of a single ground or a single pillar in the first place.

## What of Identity?

If  $x$  exists then it is  $x$  that exists and not something else. When we state concerning  $x$  that it exists, we cannot make the same statement about something else. When we speak exclusively about  $x$ , we exclude every non- $x$ . The PNC is the condition of existence, as far as we understand it. It is also the condition for knowing about things that exist. There is nothing more to be said intelligently about identity.

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## What of Self-Identical Things?

### 1. Number

Self-identity is numerical identity. Something, an  $x$ , is one  $x$  and not two. There is no number without identity. 1 is 1 and not 2; 2 is 2 and not another number. *Self-identity is the foundation of numbers and of the field of mathematics.*

### 2. Limit

Self-identical things have limits or borders. Things that inhabit space-time are limited in space and time. Conceptual things are limited by their definition or delimitation. *Self-identity is the foundation of metaphysics and of the theory of knowledge.*

### 3. Relationship

There are many self-identical things in the world. Different things are in relationships with regard to one other. A relationship belongs to the thing ( $x$ ) and to the other thing ( $y$ ) that stands in relationship to  $x$ . A relationship arises between at least two self-identical things. If a relationship belongs to a thing in itself, then it is partially “in” that thing. A relationship belongs to all things included in the given relationship. It is a part of the identity of the things included in the relationship. There is at least one part of a self-identical thing that is also part of another self-identical thing.

Can a relationship itself be self-identical? We cannot speak at the same time and from the same point of view or aspect about  $x$  and its relationship to  $y$ . Self-identity provides the possibility of relationship without explaining it.

## Identity of Persons

Although it seems to be more complicated than the identity of  $x$ , all identities can be reduced to an atomic or numeric identity. A person is one, and no person can be another person at the same time and in the same sense. Yet, over time, a person can become another person.

At one point in time and space a person is one in himself. But a person is not an empirical entity, at least not a single entity to which we can point ostensibly and say, '*this* is a person.' This is a human being, one can say, who is a *person*. But the personality that characterizes the person is complex. Since it is not given, it remains to be constructed. A person is a construction, a being *under construction*, both in the sense of knowledge as construction and in a merely practical sense. Here, I will discuss not the epistemological, but the practical part of constructed personhood.

In the nineteenth century, the Romantics discovered that persons are not given but are made by the persons themselves. To what source can this seemingly novel idea be traced? It originates from the cradle of the West, from the Bible and from Ancient Greek philosophy. Western civilization is a civilization on the move. The Jews came out of Egypt, and they had to submit to the Law of Moses. To obey is to act, and to become a good Jew, to have a proper Jewish identity, one must act in accordance with Mosaic Law. Jesus said that his disciples are different in their actions, and it is the fruits of their actions that show who they are.<sup>5</sup> This idea from the Gospels was quoted later by the founding father of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce.

The Greeks discovered several sophisticated imperatives for living a good life. Socrates' continuous and restless activity was none other than his striving to follow the guidance or inspiration of his *demon*. The Oracle of Delphi gave humans the advice, "Know yourself." Today, it seems that the imperative has become to "Make yourself into that which you should be." This is a shift from a theoretical to a practical definition self-identity.

Robert B. Pippin remarks that a characteristic of Western identity is the anxiety that we are not what we really are or should be. "A kind of anxiety that in our official or public roles we are not really or authentically 'who we are',

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt 7:17-20.

that we are not what we are taken to be by others, now seems familiar to us as a characteristic problem in modern Western life.”<sup>6</sup>

To become something is a task, and to fulfill this task, we must search for goals and rules to regulate our actions. While doing so, we must keep in mind that it is also possible to fail. We find ourselves having to break through enormous epistemological barriers. We do not know who we are. We do not know where we are. So how can we figure out what to do? How can we choose the right way to act and to form ourselves?

As regards doing the right thing, Jesus says in the Gospels that if you want to find yourself, you should forget yourself.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Kant says that if you would like to do that which is best, you must purge your motivations of empirical desires.

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Pippin explains: “a practically relevant self-knowledge is the question at hand, and such first-personal knowledge cannot be understood on models of introspecting an inner essence, on the model of *being S* or *not being S*, but it is more like the expression of a commitment, usually a provisional commitment, which one can sustain or fail to sustain, and so in something one can always *only* be becoming (or failing to become).”<sup>8</sup>

This means that for a human being to be something or someone, he or she must embark on a continuous search for the right self-image and right action, and must commit to this search and this action. In this way, it is not introspection but continuous communication that is recommended.

As poets work on the language and submit their work to critics, active, self-becoming people should submit themselves to mutual and continuous evaluation by other active, self-becoming people.

The above ideas are very general and true for individuals of a free Western society, where rules tend to remain stable. Let us go on to consider what makes societies, and whether there is anything essential about them.

## Identity of Societies

The identity of societies can be determined *upwards* or *downwards*.

A society is identical with itself in the upward direction when the identity of the people or of the individuals can be summed up as one identity. In such a case, we get a society constructed by the people living in that society.

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<sup>6</sup> PIPPIN, R. B: *The Persistence of Subjectivity*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 307.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mt 10:39.

<sup>8</sup> PIPPIN: *op. cit.* (2005), 309.

Contractualism is the school of social theory that maintains that at the heart of a society, there is the agreement of the people inhabiting it. The problem with this form of identity is that there is a huge plurality of individuals, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate a unifying principle with which every member can agree. One opinion is that the leading common concept should be justice, and that a legal system based on the formal principle of justice must be set up to ensure that justice is acted upon.

Downward identity emerges when we define the identity of a group or of a society as deriving from a defined/predetermined identity of the group. The question here concerns the nature of the origins of the definition. From the point of view of where the definition originates, an upward identity may be termed democratic, while a downward identity would be considered dogmatic or dictatorial.

## What Makes Societies Different?

A great historical conundrum is why societies are different. Even a cursory overview of the world will reveal that there are divergent forms of government, distinct structures, customs, languages, habits, and concepts of justice everywhere we look. Ethnic and religious groups the world over do not want to change, but rather insist on remaining as they are. These different groups of people can be analyzed according to different aspects or standards. Assessing societies on the basis of justice is rarely attempted. The question remains whether we can use the concept of justice to evaluate traditional societies at all. Marx and his followers attempted to evaluate historical processes on the basis of justice, but their analyses turned out to be overly simplistic, even as their proposals for remedying the lack of justice failed in an obvious manner. They failed because their concept of justice was material and not formal.

## The Identity of Eastern Europe

For a case study of identity, I have chosen the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is a country with at least three ethnic groups: Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. They speak varieties of the same language and share the same geographical space. They differ in their religious and ethnic identity.

In the case of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, we can conclude that if sameness means identity and difference means separate or distinct identities, then we have groups that simultaneously share the same identity and subscribe to different identities.

Identity means sameness; therefore, the same identity means the same sameness. Difference means distinct sameness. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, we see citizens who are the same and yet different.

I am relying on Ugo Vlaisavljevic, one of the most eminent philosophers of the Balkans and of the former Yugoslavia. Vlaisavljevic lives in Sarajevo and knows from everyday experience how difference in identity and how sameness in separation subsist in the same city, in the same geographical space, and at the same point in time. For the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, historical/narrative time and space seem to be different.

He quotes Anthony D. Smith<sup>9</sup>, who has remarked, “We should not be misled by the paradox that nationalists claim they are rooted in antiquity and self-evidently natural when they are quite recent and novel constructs.”

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The European Union and the United States of America may also be termed recent and novel constructs. The problem is not that Bosnia-Herzegovina is a new state. The problem is that its citizens are killing each other and are unable to lay the foundations for peace. Peace cannot be established by armies, even if some philosophers are of the opinion that it can. Peace can be based only on justice. If there is no justice, there is no peace.

Justice cannot be established over a short period of time. The mistake of Communism and leftist politics was their impatience and intolerance. They sought to realize a just society overnight. And they created new, terrorist societies in the name of the single justice they imagined. They destroyed the deep, historically developed structures of the societies they touched, killed millions of people, while—very tautologically—they promised the people the Promised Land. This Promised Land never materialised, however. What happened instead? Fear, terror, pain, and deep-seated animosity arose within society, within families, and between individuals.

As Karl Popper says in an interview, “Communism has been replaced by this ridiculous nationalism. I say ridiculous because it sets against each other people who are virtually all Slavs. The Serbs are Slavs. The Croats are Slavs. And the Bosnians are also Slavs, converted to Islam.”<sup>10</sup>

This is absolutely not the best discourse to bring about justice and peace. It is almost impossible to understand from the outside the feelings of the people in Bosnia. They were oppressed by different powers for centuries, if not millennia. In their eyes, those powers were aliens, foreigners, who either forbade them to be who they were, or tried to prescribe most aspects of common life.

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<sup>9</sup> SMITH, A. D.: *Nationalism and Modernism*.

<sup>10</sup> BOSETTI, G.: *The Lesson of This Century. With Two Talks on Freedom and the Democratic State*. London, Routledge, 1997, 53.

Once the superpowers—the Ottomans, Habsburgs, Russians, Serbs, and Communists disappeared—the people found themselves in a vacuum with other people with whom they thought they shared a common history. But those people were also in vacuums of their own, and deeply ignorant of that which is necessary to heal historic wounds and to begin to build a sane common life. If your neighbor, your friend or your grandfather was Muslim, you joined those in the Muslim vacuum. If your grandmother happened to be a Croat, you became a Croat.

In the end, is nationalism really all that ridiculous? After living through the horrors of Communism in an ideological, geographical, and linguistic prison, can people be expected to become enlightened pacifist democrats overnight?

Popper has proposed to fight war with war. In response to the question of the possibility of peaceful agreement, he said, “You could never get peace inside a country by reaching a compromise with the criminals.”<sup>11</sup>

Who is responsible if someone becomes a criminal? An adult person is certainly responsible for his own actions. But does he bear sole responsibility? The past, the ideologies, the suppression, the cruelty of centuries and of empires, and the collectivization of Communism have all contributed to who he is. To be a criminal is to bear the most unfortunate identity. It is an identity from which everyone wishes to escape.

There can be no compromise with criminals. But is it possible to pick out individual criminals from wider society? There is no way forward but the decriminalization of entire societies in the Balkans, yet no one knows how this should be done. The solution is not another revolution, but to go forward with great patience and understanding. Material resources provided by the West are also vital.

To understand the ethnic situation in the Balkans, Vlaisavljevic uses the concept of *ethnic minority*. The Slavic peoples of the Balkans have been ethnic minorities throughout the centuries. Historically, they have defined themselves by their *ethnic homeland and territory*, which practice has always irritated dynasties and political kingdoms. The local community was always of primary importance for the individual. Constant *mobility* was a further characteristic of this life.<sup>12</sup>

The population of the Balkans is best viewed as a collection of minority populations: groups of people, families, and friends who have traditionally defended themselves against everyone who came from the outside. It is an

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<sup>11</sup> BOSETTI: *op. cit.* (1997), 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> VLAISAVLJEVIC, H.: *The South Slave Identity and the Ultimate War-Reality* = BJELIC, D. I. - SAVIC, O.: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*. Boston, The MIT Press, 2005, 191-208, 195.

identity based on conflict and warfare. They do not know anything different; they remember the last war and prepare for the next one. In such a culture there is no room for peace, for if there were no past or future war, their very ethnic identity would be in danger.

On the other hand, the ethnic groups of the Balkans have been deeply influenced, culturally and otherwise, by the foreign powers who ruled over them. Military imperialism always goes hand in hand with cultural oppression. Parts of a group may adopt the imperial religion; other groups may resist it. Over time, they become different in their religion and in their way of life. Finally, they see themselves as members of distinct religions and cultures.

Today, the ethnic wars of the Balkans are really wars of religion. Religions are the imperial remains of empires. Vlaisavljevic's thesis is that the wars in the Balkans have really been nothing but a continuation of ancient wars fought by previous empires.

Vlaisavljevic does not propose any solutions. Dewey has a proposal ready, but without a doubt, it would not satisfy today's Bosnians. His suggestion is to forget animosity, study philosophy and classical music, read world literature, and discuss new ideas with other people. He proposes that Bosnians seek out justice for all. But justice for all means transcending your own material, cultural, and religious identity. This is the price of peace and of the future of Eastern Europe and of the Balkans. As John Rawls puts it, "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."<sup>13</sup>

Without a new ignorance, a *docta ignorantia*, without a common political striving for an ethical forgetting of the past, there will be no justice in Eastern Europe, or in wider Europe; in fact, there will be no democratic Europe.

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<sup>13</sup> RAWLS, J.: *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1971, 12.

Valerio Severino

## The Process of Affiliation

### Memberships in Central and Eastern Europe of CIPSH/UNESCO and European Organizations for the Academic Study of Religions

The question at the focus of this essay is of concern to the Central European identity in the “Academic Study of Religions”. I would like to join the effort made in this symposium, in examining how the accession to the European Union impacted this identity, if any identity of this kind is effective in the given field of academic studies, and if any identity exists in the so-called “Religious Studies”.

The field of studies to which I refer has different denominations and has constantly recommended new ones, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also well known as the field of the “History of Religions”, according to its French traditional rendering (*Histoire des religions*), or “Science of Religions”, more naturally worded in accordance with the German *Religionswissenschaft*. Regardless of the multiple denominations, it is characterized by a recurring demarcation problem in science based on statements about what it is not: it is “non-theological”, “non-confessional”, “non-apologetical”. In this regard, the terms and concepts of “neutral”, “objective”, “unbiased”, “secular”, and “empirical”, are largely used to qualify the method applied.

My essay consists of three parts. First, I examine the “Central Europe” issue, with regard to the question “Centre and Decentralizing”. In the second part, I look at the main problem provided by the Symposium, i.e. “Together and/or/not at the same time”. In the last part of this paper, I take into account the specific topic of the “Iron Curtain” which is of concern to the European Academic Studies of Religions, starting from the end of the Warsaw Pact; with some concluding remarks.

## Central, Centre and Decentralizing in Europe and the IAHR

The set of questions I mentioned here, that is the Central European identity in the Academic Studies of Religions, is complex, so that when we encounter one problem, we run into another, and finally into the largest one: identity. Religious Studies represent a field of research that, because of its comparative approach, because it does not limit itself to any single national, confessional, or religious identity, because its target group is a global community of scholars, in order to improve intellectual exchanges, flow of information, and a multi-way of

transfer of knowledge, thanks to international networks and congresses held all over the world in a regular basis, fundamentally challenges the notion of identity.

Actually, the tradition of the international congresses on the History of Religions, to which I have just referred, originated from a European academic network, and started in Paris in the context of the well-known Universal Exposition in 1900.<sup>1</sup> As a part of that process, the History of Religions' Studies continue to hold international congresses every four-five years by constantly changing the place, the nation hosting the congress, as a tool of a process of decentralization, having, from this point of view, no idea of a centre in Europe at all. In 1950, the organization of the congresses turned to an association affiliated with UNESCO, under the umbrella organization of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies. The International Association for the History of Religions, the IAHR, planned to establish a permanent international forum, a worldwide body of national and regional members, so that it serves to promote cross-border interests. That said, it should be noted that in the phase of the international congresses, which led to the institution of the IAHR, no major congresses were held anywhere in Central Europe.<sup>2</sup> The first congress in this region was in Marburg, in West Germany, only a little before the construction of the Berlin Wall.

Further considerations should be made concerning centre, decentring, and European or global enlargement of the "History of Religions"-Studies. Today, UNESCO includes 193 states and makes its claim at international cooperation finally consistent. But in the Fifties, the UNESCO platform was not as large as it is now, and, because of its limits, its platform contrasted with the goals of the IAHR to be a world-wide association. In order to understand this clash, I would like to remember the situation during the organization of the first congress, in the first half of the Fifties, and eventually held in 1955 in Rome. In 1954, Russia joined UNESCO, and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia revoked their withdrawal from the organization of the United Nations, in line with the new position of the Soviet Union. At this point, the IAHR decided that an official invitation should be sent to the Academies of Sciences of the so-called People's Democracies, as well.<sup>3</sup> That means that the invitation to attend

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<sup>1</sup> *Actes du Premier Congrès International d'Histoire des Religions*, 2 vols. Ed. RÉVILLE, Jean, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1901-1902.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, 1900; Basel, 1904; Oxford, 1908; Leiden, 1912; Paris, 1923; Lund, 1929; Brussels, 1935; Amsterdam 1950.

<sup>3</sup> GANDINI, Mario: *Raffaele Pettazzoni negli anni 1954-1955. Materiali per una biografia* = "Strada maestra. Quaderni della Biblioteca comunale »G. C. Croce" di San Giovanni in Persiceto», 2007, 63, 2, 1-282, 66, 71, 144-145. Copy of letter, Raffaele Pettazzoni (President of the IAHR) to Claas Jouco Bleeker (Secretary General of the IAHR), Rome, 14.10.1954 (Pettazzoni archive, Biblioteca

the congress was issued to member counties of UNESCO, as a matter of principle. Therefore, the IAHR involved, or tried to involve Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, not because of their European identity, and their central position in Europe, but because they were identified by the IAHR Executive Board with the Soviet policy available to join UNESCO.

Today, the IAHR includes around 40 member countries and several regional member associations. In some cases, Religious Studies are mostly represented only at a regional level. For example, within the African association<sup>4</sup>, or the South American one<sup>5</sup>, only one national African association is established, Nigeria, and only one national group in South America is set up, namely that of Brazil. In contrast, the Central European countries developed three different networks within the IAHR. As far as Central Europe is concerned, several countries provided the IAHR with national associations or branches: Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Austria, and Germany. At the same time, countries of Central Europe are represented by two regional associations: 1. the ISORECEA, the Central Eastern European Association, established in the Nineties and affiliated in 2010, and 2. the European Association for the Study of Religions, the EASR, established in 2000 in Cracow. It is to be noted that the member groups of Central and Eastern Europe in the IAHR—not only Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, but Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well, with their national branches—have worked and still remain independent of the ISORECEA, while nearly all of them are members of the European Association.

These data are intended to show the complexity of the representation and delegation of Central European countries in the International Association, as an aspect of the identity and representation of Central Europe within this framework.

## “Together and/or/not at the same time”: Data Analyses

The study of the processes of the affiliation of the national member-groups of Central Europe to the International Association for the History of Religions

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comunale “G. C. Croce” di San Giovanni in Persiceto, *Correspondence*). In the archives of the Gramsci Foundation in Rome (Fondo Ambrogio Donini), I examined additional documents, which illustrate that other organizations of the CIPSH/UNESCO, i.e. the International Committee of Historical Sciences, or IAHR, started to invite representatives of institutions behind the Iron Curtain only after the inclusion of those countries, specifically in Central and Eastern Europe, to UNESCO.

<sup>4</sup> AASR (African Association for the Study of Religions).

<sup>5</sup> ACSRM (Asociacion de Cientistas Sociales de la Religion del Mercosur / Associacao de Cientistas Sociais da Religiao do Mercosul).

could provide the issue of the Symposium, i.e. the “together and/or/not at the same time” question, with new data. I collected documents relevant to the matter at hand, during a scholarship at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), which started in 2017.<sup>6</sup> In 2019, I started to analyse these data along with a team of ten scholars from countries of Central and Eastern Europe within the EASR activities, and within the framework of a panel in the congress in Tartu (Estonia) in June 2019, titled *Re-Unifying Europe: From the Establishment of the IAHR to the EASR*.<sup>7</sup>

In the archives of the MTA, specifically of the Department of Manuscripts and the Archives of the Academy, I found records, private correspondence, and files especially related to the Department of International Affairs of the Academy. My research findings indicate that the Hungarian affiliation started in Europe in the middle of the Fifties for the purpose of crossing the Iron Curtain. Hungary was the first People’s Democracy of the Eastern Bloc to establish a member-group, within the Academy of Sciences, in order to be affiliated with the IAHR. I reconstructed the first steps taken right before the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, I pointed out their background, i.e. the process of de-Stalinization and de-satellitization in Central Europe, and I uncovered the negotiations in the middle of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The Hungarian group was finally authorized by the MTA in August 1957 after the removal of three members due to the purge of political dissidents from academic life, in the Kadar era<sup>8</sup>. Overall, the establishment of one Hungarian branch of the IAHR was achieved in two years. It required a long period, and it did not produce the domino effect expected by the IAHR in the Communist bloc<sup>9</sup>. Only one other country among the Eastern bloc joined the UNESCO platform for “History of

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<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank the Director of the Department of Manuscript of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), Antal Babus, who supported my studies dedicated to the history of the membership of the MTA Hungarian group to the IAHR.

<sup>7</sup> Milda Alisauskienė and Rasa Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson (Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religion - LRD), Tomáš Bubík (Czech Association for the Study of Religions - ČSR), Eugen Ciurtin (Romanian Association for the History of Religions), Henryk Hoffmann (Polish Society for the Study of Religions - PTR), Roman Kečka (Slovak Association for the Study of Religions), Liudmyla Fylypovych (Ukrainian Association of Researchers of Religions), Janis Priede (Latvian Society for the Study of Religions - LRPB), Marianna Shakhnovich (Association for Russian Centres for Religious Studies), Ergo-Hart Västriik (Estonian Society for the Study of Religions - EAUS). With regard to the Polish association, I would like to mention the cooperation with Zbigniew Stachowski, Jerzy Kojkoł and Paweł Kusiak; and as for the Hungarian association (MVT) with Mihály Hoppál, Ábrahám Kovács and Balázs Mezei.

<sup>8</sup> More details in my forthcoming monograph: SEVERINO, V.: *The International Association for the History of Religions and the Cold War. The Membership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1955-1970)*, University of Rome, SMSR publisher.

<sup>9</sup> CASADIO, Giovanni: *Raffaele Pettazzoni and Károly Marót, Companions in Arms in the Field of the History of Religions = New Trends and Recurring Issues in the Study of Religion*. Eds. KOVÁCS, Ábrahám - COX, James L., Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2014, 33-51, 39.

Religions”-Studies in the Communist period, i.e. the Polish association, established in the Fifties, and affiliated only in 1970<sup>10</sup>, 13 years after Hungary.

It is to be noted that the only two countries to establish a membership during the Cold War were located in Central Europe. Both the *Polskie Towarzystwo Religioznawcze* and the *Magyar Vallástudományi Társaság* lived side by side, but no series of concrete actions and effective agreements were promoted in the interest of all concerned. No idea of a People’s Democracies /Eastern European bloc within the IAHR has ever been proposed or planned, as far I can see in the document related to the Hungarian group<sup>11</sup>. No alliance programme was launched that was as effective as, for example, as the “Afro-Asian group” programme created in 1958, in the IAHR, as a unit of countries which was similar to that established within the United Nations’ framework and with the same name.

In the Seventies, Poland made a breakthrough by hosting a special IAHR conference in Warsaw supported by the Polish Academy of Sciences, and successfully planned a second congress in 1989, in Warsaw again<sup>12</sup>, two months before the first crack appeared in the Berlin Wall. A Pan-Czechoslovakian group of scholars, succeeded in establishing a closer contact with this international association in 1990 in Brno, only a few months after the change in the political system. In the Nineties, two special IAHR conferences were organized in the Czech Republic: the first one in 1994<sup>13</sup>, as an alternative to the conference planned in Russia, during the last period of the Perestroika, which was in the end cancelled. The second one in 1999 was hosted in Brno, addressing the issue of the academic study of religion during the Cold War.<sup>14</sup>

Let’s consider the situation after 1989, the first five-year-period after, in more detail. As already mentioned, the third new affiliation of a country of the former Communist bloc was established in Central Europe again, in Czechoslo-

<sup>10</sup> SHARPE, Eric J. - BLEEKER, Claas J. - WIDENGREN, Geo eds.: *Proceedings of the Xiith International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Stockholm, Sweden August 16–22, 1970*. Brill, Leiden, 1975, 325, 340, 26.

<sup>11</sup> SEVERINO, V.: *The International Association for the History of Religions and the Cold War*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> TYLOCH, Witold ed.: *Current Progress in the Methodology of the Science of Religions*. Polish Scientific Publishers, Warsaw, 1984; Id. ed., *Studies on Religions in the Context of Social Sciences: Methodological and Theoretical Relations [Studia religioznawcze w kontekście nauk społecznych]*. Polish Society for the Science of Religions, Warsaw, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> DOLEŃALOVÁ, Iva - HORYNA, Bretislav - PAPOUŠEK, Dalibor eds.: *Religions in Contact: Selected Proceedings of the Special IAHR Conference Held in Brno, August 23–26, 1994*. Czech Society for the Study of Religions, Masaryk University, Brno, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> DOLEŃALOVÁ, Iva - HORYNA, Bretislav - PAPOUŠEK, Dalibor eds.: *The Academic Study of Religion during the Cold War East and West*. Peter Lang, New York, 2001.

vakia, one year before the break-up of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>15</sup> Only in the last years of Perestroika was a Soviet experiment of affiliation launched. It was discussed in Moscow in the Summer 1990, and again in the United States in August 1991<sup>16</sup>, close in time to the August coup in Moscow. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to it turning its association into a Russian group.<sup>17</sup> After Ukraine declared its independence, a Ukrainian association was established.<sup>18</sup> Due to the split of Czechoslovakia, the pan-Czechoslovak member-group of the IAHR was dissolved, and the independent Czech association was recommended in Paris, as well as the Russian and the Ukrainian ones, and was affiliated in 1995.<sup>19</sup>

In 1998, the Slovak association, and in 1997 the Romanian associations were recommended for affiliation, but no memberships were established during the second half of the Nineties. Only in 2000, and in 2005 are they respectively accepted.<sup>20</sup> During the period between 2000-2015, four new associations in Central and Eastern Europe were affiliated, i.e. the Romanian, Estonian, Latvian<sup>21</sup> and Lithuanian<sup>22</sup>, and two were reorganized; the Slovakian, and the Russian—the latter twice: in 2006 and 2011.

If we look at the big picture, we can see, besides the most impactful moment of 1989, that the number of memberships increased in the period when applications for entering the European Union were made—and finally, they have accelerated especially since 2004. The creation of the EASR in 2000

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<sup>15</sup> BUBÍK, Tomáš: *The Czech Journey to the Academic Study of Religions: From the Critique of Religion to its Study = Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Opened*. Eds. BUBÍK, Tomáš - HOFFMANN, Henryk, Brill, Leiden 2015, 1-54, 47.

<sup>16</sup> PYE, Michael: *Report by Secretary-General* = "IAHR Bulletin [Special congress Issue]" 15 (1990); also, in BIANCHI, Ugo ed.: *The Notion of "religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the Xvith Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Rome, 3rd-8th September, 1990*. "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, Roma, 1994, 16. *Minutes of a meeting of the Executive Committee. Burlington, Vermont, USA, August 9th 1991* = "IAHR Bulletin" 18 (September 1991), 2-6, 4 (Point 10).

<sup>17</sup> *News from the National Associations* = "IAHR Bulletin" 35 (May 1998), 53-73, 66 (§ *Russian Association for the History of Religions*).

<sup>18</sup> *Note, Ukraine* = "IAHR Bulletin" 24 (March 1993), and 26 (September 1993), 3 and 43.

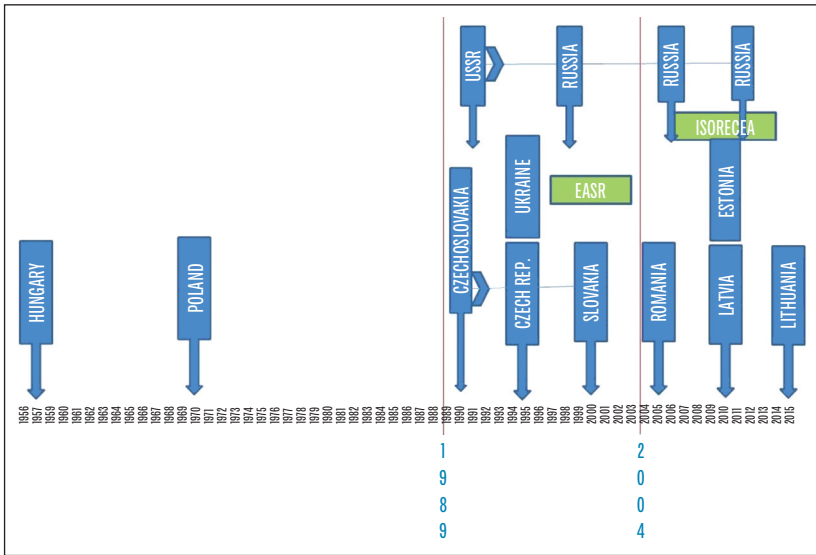
<sup>19</sup> *Draft Agenda for the International Committee Meeting in Paris on 19th September 1993* = "IAHR Bulletin" 25, June 1993, 5, point 6; *Minutes of the meeting held in Paris 19.09.1993*. = "IAHR Bulletin" 27 (October 1993), 2-7, 6 (Point 7 *Proposal for new affiliates*); *Minutes of the meeting August 9, 1995*, and General Assembly, *Minutes of the Meeting, August 12, 1995 [approved on June 5, 1996 by the Executive Committee]* = "IAHR Bulletin" 34 (1996), respectively 30-37, 36, 41.

<sup>20</sup> International Committee of the IAHR, *Hildesheim, Germany, May 24, 1998. Minutes of the Meeting* = "IAHR Bulletin" 36 (July 2000), 44-48, 47. And General Assembly of the IAHR, *Durban, South Africa Saturday August 12, 2000. Minutes of the Meeting* = "IAHR Bulletin" 37 (December 2002), 41-49, 42; *Minutes, General Assembly of the IAHR Tokyo, Japan Wednesday March 30, 2005* = "IAHR Bulletin" 39 (2010), 30-37, 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Minutes, General Assembly of the IAHR Toronto, Canada. August 21, 2010* = "IAHR Bulletin" 40 (August 2015), 37-48, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Jensen, *IAHR 2005-2010 General Secretary's Report. Erfurt August 23-29, 2015* [Copenhagen July 7, 2015] = "IAHR Bulletin" 40 (August 2015), 17-36, 28 and 49-77, 60.

Time schedule of the memberships and affiliations of national and regional groups to the IAHR



improved Central and Eastern European involvement in the IAHR, by establishing, within the European Association, memberships with the same national-group members of the IAHR, and by operating within the International association in its quality of regional association.

## The Iron Curtain and Central European Identity: Interpretations

In the third section of my paper, I would like to provide some interpretations of the contribution of Central Europe to the Academic study of religions, as an issue of both the IAHR agenda and the new European identity, as it arose in the EASR and ISORECEA, and to reflect on the activities shared, and the new ones to plan. Within this framework, according to the data analysed before, the 1989 events look crucial for the identification of countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the UNESCO platform for Religious Studies. But it is clear to me that a definition of Central European Religious Studies based on the transition from communism to democracy, intended as participation with Western organizations and the implementation of Western standards, in politics as well as in science, in the aftermath of the Iron Curtain era, is misleading. By this I am referring not only to the obvious fact that the studies of religion

in Central and Eastern Europe originated long before, i.e. since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I am rather referring to the fact that the affiliations to the IAHR, specifically of Hungary and Poland, between the Fifties and the Sixties, testify to the political and cultural change, or attempts to change, and to reform, in this region before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Respectively, they were affiliated close in time to the Hungarian Revolution and the Polish protests of December 1970, and, in my view, the two memberships belonged to these contexts. I do not deny the value and the symbolic importance of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but I do ask for the degree and nature of the reforms to be recognised, as far as the process of affiliation to the IAHR is concerned, and both the political and cultural practices of criticism, in this region, which led, though a step-by-step and slow process to European reunification and to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, as events that made the Central European identity, and impacted European experience of democracy, in the religious and Marxist issues as well.

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In respect to the question of 'how and to what degree such a Central European identity impacts the IAHR identity in our times and in Religious Studies, which is the main focus of my essay and the last part of my paper, I would like to briefly provide the reader with two inputs, both related to the reports and debates of the International association, that I examined during my investigation.

Firstly: in 1979, the first conference of the IAHR held in a Communist country took place in Warsaw, and was organized in conjunction with the Polish IAHR member-group linked to the Polish Academy of Sciences. The General Secretary of the Association, at the time, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and the representative of the Israeli group, stated that this meeting provided the opportunity for both Eastern and Western scholars to grow from the experience of a dialogue, and therefore to enlarge the demarcation problem in "History of Religions"-Studies by learning from each other.<sup>23</sup> In his view, the problem of demarcation in science which was—and still is—limited in the IAHR to the non-theological/non-confessional/non-apologetical approach, should also start to mark a distinction from the «ideological dogma», for example from Marxism. According to the report of the meeting issued by Zwi Werblowsky, and the problems and the vocabulary he adopted, the IAHR should relocate Religious Studies in the centre, between the Western European former location, i.e. the Faculties of theology, and the

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<sup>23</sup> WERBLOWSKY, R. J. Z.: *Chronicle* = "Numen", 1980, 27, 1, 190–192, 191: "In the west, History of Religions and Comparative Religion have long been (and to a great extent still are [i.e. in 1979] anchored, academically, in Divinity School and Faculties of Theology. The other side of the coin is the study of religions in institutions whose orientation and ideological dogma are Marxist (e.g., in »institutes for scientific atheism«). In this respect the encounter between Western scholars with their peers from Poland and the USSR at the Warsaw conference helped both sides to broaden their awareness."

Eastern European last location, i.e. the “institutes for scientific atheism”<sup>24</sup>. This document is interesting not only on account of its subject, but more specifically as one challenging the identity of Religious Studies by involving the East-West dialogue in Europe, in this task. Within this framework, the idea of Central Europe is neither geographically, nor historically based, but refers to a project of balancing the two traditions of studies of religion in Europe, which contrasted theology with ideology and ideology with theology. This idea of a centre, which is an East-West project of Europe, was formulated in Warsaw within the IAHR meeting. To put it another way: “Central Europe” might be intended as a project for relocating Religious Studies according to an East-West identity challenge.

Secondly, and this is the last point of my paper: I refer to a more recent document, i.e. the book published in 2015 on the history of the Academic study of religion in Central and Eastern Europe, titled *Studying religion with the Iron Curtain closed and opened*. I do not intend to examine the book now, but only to point out a specific issue that allows the issue in question to be updated. Tomáš Bubík, the co-editor of the book, which reflects on the history of Religious Studies in Central and Eastern Europe, formulated the general thesis that after the political change leading to democracy, in this new «context», Religious Studies seek to establish a «relationship» between scientific atheism and theology, by reaching a neutral position. The idea of “neutrality”, intended as a «tense relationship» between ideology and theology is not unrelated to the idea of a centre between two experiences and histories of Religious Studies in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

What is different, compared to the remark of Werblowsky and the situation in the Seventies, is the new religious identity in Central and Eastern Europe, after the breakdown of the Communist regime. At this point, religion is mainly perceived as a key-element of the new democratic identity. Bubík points out that “many Christians were instrumental in the collapse of Communism, and theologians and clergymen belonged among important figures of the change”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> BUBÍK, Tomáš – HOFFMANN, Henryk: *Preface to Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Opened. The academic Study of Religions in Eastern Europe*, cit., 13.: “The book therefore critically reflects a range of contrasting social and political premises and attitudes to the academic Study of Religions, which in a historical perspective can be divided into main tendencies appearing to a greater or lesser degree in all the countries involved: Free-thinking influences (often philosophically close to positivism and evolutionism) during the initial phase; Marxism and theological during the communist period; and a more ideologically neutral academic Study of Religions after the political changes leading to democracy. In our context we consider »neutrality« mostly based on the tense relationship of the academic Study of Religions to especially scientific atheism on the one hand and to theology on the other.”

<sup>26</sup> BUBÍK, Tomáš: *Is the Study of Religions in the Eastern Europe still behind the Iron Curtain? Response to Gregory Alles, Barbara Krawcovicz and Stefan Ragaz* = “Method & Theory in the Study of Religion”, 2018, 30, 2, 191-199, 196: “after the breakdown of Communist regime, scientific atheism was globally rejected as dogmatic attitude of Marxist-Leninist philosophy to religion. At the same

As a consequence of the religious issue having been at the forefront at the time, and because the Churches were advocates of freedom of speech and expression in the religious and theological matter, the democratic identity in Central and Eastern Europe no longer marks a substantial distinction between freedom of study of religion and a confessional framework. If this is the case, and in this context, then the fact of the increasing memberships of Central and Eastern European countries to the IAHR possibly challenges this new national religious identity, by seeking cooperation with an organization that is both global and non-confessional. As a conclusion, I wonder if these memberships aim only to challenge the new religious identity in Central Europe, or whether and to what extent they also challenge the identity of the IAHR. Maybe the International Association could reflect on its demarcation problem, and on the ability of the confessional and theological framework to participate in free-thinking and in democracy. In this case the religious identity of Central Europe today could provide this debate with a new input.

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time, theology and theological faculties were finally able to develop freely and independently, and religious studies was re-established as an officially recognized discipline. But religious studies found itself suddenly in need of defending and explaining itself both inwardly and outward, that is, after decades of virtual non-existence it had to justify its existence, desirability, importance and relevance as well as its difference from theology, which was quite naturally at the forefront at the time. Many Christians were instrumental in the collapse of Communism and theologians and clergymen belonged among important figures of the change.”

# The Central European Cultural Identity



Leon Stefanija

## Between Me, You, Us and Them:

Glocalization in Music in the Œuvre of Uroš Rojko

### Summary

An interesting tension has been developing between the professional and amateur music scenes in Slovenia. In broader terms, the logic of crumbling between high and low music brought about a rather interesting solution in 2016. The Ministry of Culture divided the Committee for Music into two: the Committee for Classical Music, Opera and Ballet on the one side and, on the other, the Committee for other Music. Whatever it refers to, the “other Music” is merely a concept of *in-/ex-clusion*, of confining or leaving out. It was introduced because of, supposedly, “pure” *pragmatic* reasons. Yet, the imagery of such a division is a telling one for an entire era of glocalization in which a set of other oppositions develops.

The contribution sketches the broader cultural antinomies that are also so specific to the Central European musical scene through the work of **Uroš Rojko** (b. 1954). In his oeuvre, a set of oppositions is detected that emerges out of two cultural paradigms indicated above with the division of the music committee at the Slovenian Ministry of Culture. In Rojko’s case, the ideals of several modernist traditions have brought the artist to cross the borders between the so-called DIY (do it yourself) practices cultivated in the “**autonomous social and cultural centres**” or “**Centres of Urban Culture**”, the modern successors to the National Reading Societies (1863–1945), or, since the late 1920s, the *light* music culture, or, since the 1960s, garage-band practices, or finally, since the 1970s, the alternative culture and its derivatives. Like any modern musician, Rojko also works according to the modernist ideology that was neatly described by Boris Groys: “Das Neue ist nicht bloß das Andere, sondern es ist das wertvolle Andere”. And it is exactly this rule of a thumb that generates a set of antinomies, so specific not only to the work of Uroš Rojko, nor to only that of Central European musical modernity, but indeed to its entirety.

**Keywords:** Uroš Rojko, musical modernity, music culture in Central Europe.

## Aim

My aim is to address the main antinomies relevant for the work of Uroš Rojko, a prominent composer with a rich international career and clarinetist, a professor of composition at the Slovene Academy of Music, and since 2016 a member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The details about his work to which I will refer here are elaborated in more detail in two books.<sup>1</sup>

The story focuses on an incident in Rojko's work in the mid-1990s when he suffered an artistic as well as a personal crisis that led him to seriously think about giving up his music career and turning to, as he said, more useful and certainly more lucrative endeavours, such as hatha yoga practice. Although Rojko overcame the crisis, the concepts in his work shifted somewhat and he gained new stimuli for his future work. Roughly speaking, this was his turning away from composition toward improvisation. Although both principles are still inseparable in his work, the relations between them point to other antinomies that I would juxtapose.

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## From a Musical Performer to a Composer

Rojko's educational background is that of a full-blooded musician: he received his first academic degree as clarinetist (1975) and afterwards composition (1981) at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, Slovenia, proceeding with his studies rather thoroughly, first in 1981 in Poland with Krzysztof Meyer, Bugoslav Schaeffer, and Włodzimierz Kotowski. However, he decided to earn another master degree. Between 1983 and 1986 he moved to Freiburg to study under Klaus Huber. After finishing his studies there, he enrolled to study three more years (1983-6) under György Ligeti.

His period of "apprenticeship" definitely gained him quite extensive knowledge of musical practices. He can well be regarded as one of the most informed composers in Slovenia in respect to contemporary music. And he is certainly one of the most internationally successful composers who was granted a plethora of awards by the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> STEFANIJA, Leon: *Akademik Uroš Rojko: skladatelj o svojem delu in odzivi nanj* (Zbirka Glasba na Slovenskem po 1918). Ljubljana, Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2016; STEFANIJA, Leon: *Sisyphusartig schön: Porträt des Komponisten Uroš Rojko*. Wien, Hollitzer Verlag, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> 1980 Ljubljana. Student's Prešernova nagrada Academy of music.  
1981 Ljubljana. "Zlata ptica" prize.  
1983 Linz. Alpe-Adria prize for Music for Orchestra.  
1984  
• Stuttgart. "Förderungspreis" for the String quartet No. 1.

## From a Composer to an Improviser

Although the concept of new music is viewed rather suspiciously today, it is still important as one of the central issues regarding Rojko's musical poetics. It should be understood as a certain compass for navigating through the history of musical practices gathered around the tripartite division of the musical world: popular music, »mainstream« and »advanced« or avant-garde music.

His view of the avant-garde is clear: "I did not accept the tradition of the German avant-garde as my own", claims Rojko.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he regarded the avant-garde from that period as a "dead end".<sup>4</sup> Although Luigi Nono's work left a considerable impact while in Freiburg and he had regarded Ligeti, for some time by then, as one of his main lighthouses in the dispersed horizon of musical life in the 'eighties, his impressions were uneasy ones. His work with Ligeti was especially frustrating. Ligeti "with his guru-like poise", recounted Rojko, "led me into uncertainty and a horrible split".<sup>5</sup>

His view of the avant-garde has been not only Rojko's motivating factor to distance himself from it but also to search for a certain *ahistoric* position: "What I've been doing now, in the last five years", pointed out Rojko in the middle of the 1990's, "is above all liberation of myself. I try to understand everything as translating, and canalizing primary energies into a palpable substance."<sup>6</sup> This is one of the clearest self-references that Rojko has uttered about his music: writing music is for him a process of *translating* "primary energies" into acoustic phenomena. Rather comparable to the acoustic research in post-WW II, Rojko sees composing in terms of a historically unbiased, emphatically

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- Leipzig. Honorary acknowledgement at the competition for composition Carl Maria von Weber for his String quartet No 1.
  - Vienna. First prize at the Alban Berg za compositional prize for his String quartet No 1.
  - Rome. First prize Premio Europa for Tongenesis for orchestra.  
1986 Amsterdam. Gaudeamus prize for Tongenesis.  
1987
  - Graz. Musikprotokoll prize for Music for twelve.
  - Boston. Finalist at the "Kucyna" composition competition for Music for twelve.  
1988 Ljubljana. Prešern' prize.  
1991
  - Vienna. First prize at the Wiener Internationaler Kompositionspreis for Inner Voices for flute and chamber orchestra (conducting Claudio Abbado)
  - Athens. Finalist at "Olympia" compositional competition for Ottoki for wind quintet.
  - Trieste. Prize X. Biennale della Musica dell'Arte.
  - Bonn. First prize Chorwettbewerb des Deutschen Musikrates for La bella donna dove amor si mostra for mixed choir.

3 Pogovor s Srečkom Mehom, *Pogovor*, Glasbena mladina, 1995/5, 6.

4 Brošura Radia Slovenije (Prix Italia '93), *Uroš Rojko Inner Voices*.

5 Pogovor s Srečkom Mehom [Interview with Srečko Meh] = Glasbena mladina 1995/5, 6.

6 Ibid.

“forgetful” process of immersion with sound: “To me, each piece is a challenge, an adventure that consists of doubt and enthusiasm. Doubt about whether I can ever bring it to an end, enthusiasm about any small discovery which promotes self-confidence and provides reassurance that it was worth starting it...”<sup>7</sup> His belief about the aesthetic function leads him to think that music should pursue sonic forms capable of embodying—and this is his central aesthetic ideal—the universal ideal of the *beautiful*. Rojko offered a description of his aesthetic ideals with the following words:

50 “Basically, I am striving to achieve beauty that has something profound, that has a base. This base does not belong to our world. It is something that our world cannot offer, although it is founded thereof. I would certainly not like to bring my music to the point of a New Age or similar [cultural phenomena], where the only goal is to reach a therapeutic condition [...]. I have no therapeutic intentions with my music. My music borders more on a natural experience, it tries to reach a sense of well-being. My life turned out in a direction along which I am searching for some other world. Music expresses this and is a part of me.”<sup>8</sup>

Rojko's postulates an “awakening of human sensitivity in recognition and comprehension of more subtle sonic layers”, where one should speak of “cultivation of the ears” on account of an almost ecumenical end: “to improve human beings through the medium of sound”.<sup>9</sup>

However *modernistic* a stance might be reflecting through the quoted artistic intention, contrary to the intellectual pretentiousness, or the ideological provocativeness, of the musical avant-garde, Rojko expects almost nothing from

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7 Uroš Rojko, personal website [http://home.arcor.de/uros.rojko/english/e\\_rojko.html](http://home.arcor.de/uros.rojko/english/e_rojko.html) (accessed 11.4.2014.)

8 Originally the quotes read: “Ein System sagt noch gar nichts aus, was du daraus machst ist wichtig.” “Die Idee, etwas Neues zu machen, war damals, als ich mit Serialismus und Neuer Musik beschäftigte, sehr wichtig [...] Es geht mir in der Tat um Schönheit, aber diese Schönheit hat eine Tiefe, hat einen Grund. Dieser Grund liegt nicht in unserer Welt, ist etwas, was unsere Welt nicht bieten kann und was ihr dennoch zugrundeliegt. Natürlich möchte ich meine Musik nicht zu einem Punkt von New Age oder ähnlichem bringen, wo es nur darum geht, therapeutisch einen Zustand zu bekommen [...]. Meine Musik hat keine therapeutische Absicht, sie grenzt schon eher an ein natürliches Erlebnis, so daß man sich als Mensch wohlfühlt. [...] Mein Leben ist so gekommen, daß ich für mich eine andere Welt suche. Die Musik drückt das aus und ist ein Teil von mir.” (*Lauschen auf die innere Musik. Wolfgang Rüdiger im Gespräch mit Uroš Rojko*, in the foreword to the CD ARS MUSICI {AM} 1122-2, Freiburger Musik Forum 1995, 15, 18-19.)

9 Uroš Rojko, Prehodnost zdajšnjega trenutka [Transience of the present moment] = *Nova revija* XX/225/226/227, Ljubljana 2001, 441. Cf. also the comment of his symphonic piece *La Gomera* (2012) in the interview with Sonje Kralj Bervar on the Society of Slovenian Composers on 24.4.2013 (the recording of the interview acc. on April 15th 2014: <http://www.dss.si/novice?day=2013-04-24>).

his listener. Persuaded in the "untranslatability" of the musical narrative, he believes that for both—for the composer as well as for the listener—it is necessary to "let events happen by themselves, and let the music and musical material unfold by itself".<sup>10</sup>

For this reason, he draws attention to the "innermost" of the sound, unimpeded by mimetic analogies:

"The most important truths are by no means explicable, the least so with words, and they cannot be analysed by the intellect. They can be reached only by experience, or perceived."<sup>11</sup>

This quoted thought—a view of music as an visceral, physical, experiential reality—should be seen as the central philosophical persuasion as well as aesthetical requirement posed by Rojko: he wants his music to achieve the efficacy of a *sublime physiological stimulus*—with *no semantic potential* "from without", not even from his past experiences with music.

And it was exactly this approach—to *explore* sound—that led Rojko to also intensify his performing practice that he had left behind in the mid-1980s. In the last two decades performance and improvisation also remained a strong impetus for his composition.

## Composing and Improvising: Between Construction and Storytelling

In spite of Rojko's artistic maturing in the tradition of "the critical avant-garde"—his "critical way of thinking" lives in his musical logic as a set of rigorously thought out compositional procedures and methods—the composer doubts the efficiency of a compositional system. A "system proves nothing", warns Rojko. What counts is the result: "what you can make out of a system".<sup>12</sup> Without entering into details about his compositional strategies, it may be sufficient to indicate the complexity of his compositional thought with several sketches from his *Der Atem der verletzten Zeit* (1988):

<sup>10</sup> Brošura Radia Slovenije [Booklet of Radio Slovenia]: Prix Italia '93, *Uroš Rojko Inner Voices*.

<sup>11</sup> Brošura Radia Slovenije [Booklet of Radio Slovenia]: Prix Italia '93, *Uroš Rojko Inner Voices*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Larisa Vrhunc, "Organizacija in svoboda – analiza skladbe Tongenesis Uroša Rojka [Organization and freedom – an analysis of Uroš Rojko's Tongenesis]". *Musicological Annual*, 2010, 46/2, 149–166.

## Example 1

*Der Atem der verletzten Zeit.* Sketch for the sections of the whole piece.

Individual letters have specific acoustic features:

A - unisono signal with overtones

$\alpha$  - shading

B - Contrasting signal with overtones

B - Static sound events with thinning and thickening, »stone music«

C - Chords: 1: E-F-Fis; 2: h-c'-cis'; 3: gis'-a'-ais'

D - Two-voiced lines with differential tones

E - eternal canon with glissandos

F - a version of A

Archive of the composer.

52

23. T. 82 12 Das Atem der verletzten Zeit  
Stück für Klavier und Schlagzeug

Handwritten musical score on a grid background, featuring various notes, rests, and markings. The score is titled "23. T. 82 12 Das Atem der verletzten Zeit" and "Stück für Klavier und Schlagzeug". The notation includes various symbols, some of which correspond to the letters A, B, C, D, E, and F mentioned in the text. There are several large, hand-drawn diagrams or boxes overlaid on the score, some containing numbers and letters. The score is written in black ink on a white grid background.

Example 2

*Der Atem der verletzten Zeit.* Sketches for harmonic series.  
Archive of the composer.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged paper, titled "Der Atem... -1- Erste Atikvotrin tonoo". The score is written on multiple staves, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The notation is heavily annotated with handwritten notes and symbols, including circled letters A, B, C, and D, and a circled letter 'a'. There are also handwritten numbers like "28.9.01.02" and "11.9.02.02". The score is divided into sections, with some parts enclosed in boxes or brackets. The overall appearance is that of a working draft or sketch, with many corrections and additions. The paper has a yellowish tint and some staining.





In short, the compositional procedures of Uroš Rojko are highly profiled, and demanding for the performers of his output as well as for the listener.

However, an interesting shift from his rather abstract musical logic toward a semantically engaged narrative may be detected especially in some of his later pieces. At the same time, the complexity has become more tamed, as it were. Two sketches indicate this point. On the one hand, the abstract sound phenomena, such as *sforzato*, *pizzicato* or *trillo* have motivic relevance for him:

### Example 6

Rojko's sketch for thematic materials. Archive of the composer.

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The sketch is divided into two main sections. The upper section shows a melodic line on a staff with a pitch contour line above it. The pitch contour line starts at a low point, rises through several steps, reaches a peak, and then descends. The melodic line is divided into 11 numbered boxes (1-11). The lower section shows rhythmic and articulation patterns for various themes, labeled I through VII. The patterns are drawn with horizontal lines and vertical strokes, indicating the duration and articulation of each theme. The labels include: I. tema staccato, II. tema flz, III. tema-pizz, IV. tema-flz, V. tema-klappen, VI. tema-gliss, VII. vibrato, I. tema-flz, II. tema flz, III. pizz, VI. flz, IV. klappen, V. gliss, VII. vibr., and latwea aus.

On the other hand, however, gestures that indicate a certain narrative emerge, as in the piece *Monolog des gefallenen Engels* (2013), where he instructs the player to achieve (square A) "als ob man was erzählen würde" ("as if one would narrate"):

**Example 7**

*Monolog des gefallenen Engels*. In the square A the figure of narration is described.

5

Monolog des gefallenen Engels UR 2013

\*\*\*\*) mit der Handfläche der L. H. gegen die obere Öffnung des Rohres schlagen

**A** Stimme: Fantasiensprache, gesprochen in die Öffnung des Rohres. Die Öffnung dabei mit den Lippen dicht schliessen. Fragmentiert agieren, in relativ tiefer Lage, immer wieder mit längeren Pausen, als ob man was erzählen würde, frei in Gestaltung

Aktionen der L. H. und der R. H.: hektisch abwechselnd, rasch, frei, unvorhersagbar

R. H. E-/- E-/-  
L. H. O+)

Durch die Aktionen der L. H. und den Finger der R. H. wird die Fantasiensprache klanglich und rhythmisch geprägt

**B** In die Öffnung des Rohres wie in eine Trompete mit gespannten, zusammengepressten Lippen blasen. Variabel fragmentieren, immer unterschiedlich phrasieren...  
**alla Tromba:**

**B** immer dichter und intensiver

*mf* t *f* tk -tk tk tk

Aktionen **A** und **B** sinnvoll abwechselnd kombinieren, zunehmend in Richtung Aktion **B**, fantasievoll, humorvoll

ca ♩ = 46

sehr dicht, hektisch...

*staccatissimo*

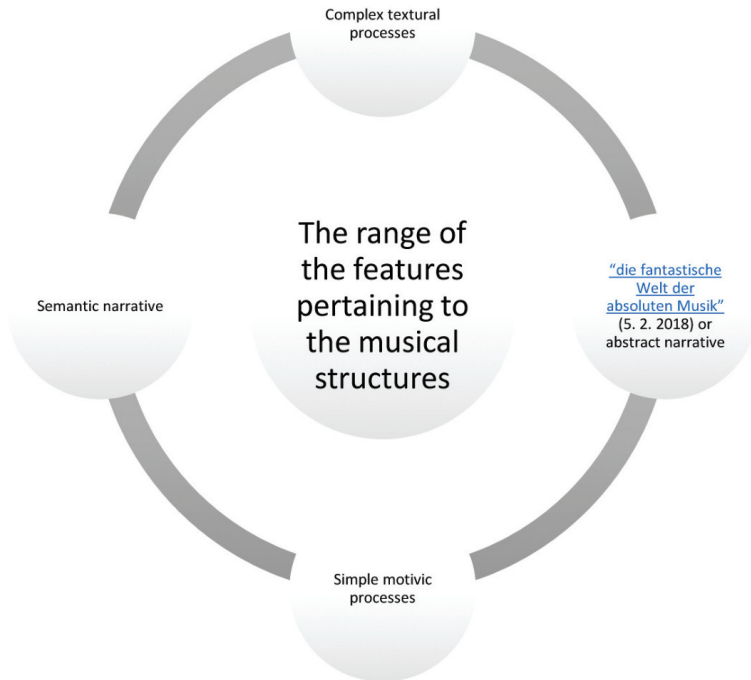
t - t - t - t

*f*

*simile* *molto rall.*

Similarly, the game of gestures leads to an orgy of sound-improvisation with different instruments in *Quasi Neoliberamente* (2016). In the foreword to his piece Rojko noted: “After measure 224, what follows is the epilogue of improvisations of musicians. In a musical and theatrical way, this part represents the escalation of the conflict situation: From a completely constructive dialogue with ‘respectful communication,’ an ardent conflict grows leading to a complete break-up.” (Translation L. S.)<sup>13</sup>

The range of compositional features in Rojko’s work may be summed-up schematically:



<sup>13</sup> The first performance of this piece is available on youtube as *Uroš Rojko: Quasi Neoliberamente*, <https://youtu.be/VD7qlwJuPIE>.

In Rojko's music, on the one hand, today a rare voice is being raised regarding the *sublime*<sup>14</sup> in art. The fine art of abstraction that is so important for the modernist movements and the avant-gardes in which, as Alex Ross notes for the "Darmstadt's hypermodern façade", artists were seeking "the age-old longing for sublimity and transcendence"<sup>15</sup>. As with many avant-garde compositional procedures, also in Rojko's work one can also say that the "veneration of the past and the use of historical compositional techniques eventually became the primary criteria for evaluation of the sublime in music",<sup>16</sup> Rojko's compositional procedures are founded on idiosyncratic poetics combining different compositional stylisations especially from the 1950s onward: from futurist ideas of noise, Cowell's tone-clusters, I. Xenakis, the Polish composers from the 'sixties, *spectralists* and *New Complexity* movement, Giacinto Scelsi, Conlon Nancarrow and minimalism. On the other hand, his musical poetics circumscribe what Helmut Lachenmann (another composer fascinated by Luigi Nono's views who also thought Rojko composition in Freiburg) apostrophized as the "emancipation of acoustically presented sound" that is always semantically lax and may lead to a "bulk of misunderstanding".<sup>17</sup>

One such misunderstanding is that besides strict compositional procedures, his music includes the opposites of composition: improvisation. Moreover, his music has more oppositions in itself: besides high complexity there is also minimalistic logic, besides abstract sound there is also semantic engagement, besides *jouissance* of "pure" (instrumental, absolute) music there is also socially engaged philosophy, even ecological drive. The majority of his pieces from the mid-1990s are actually based on *materials* to which he comes through impro-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for instance:

JUMEAU-LAFOND, Jean-David: *Le chœur sans paroles, ou Les voix du sublime = Revue de musicologie*, 1997, 83, 2, 263-279; MOTTE-HABER, Helga de la: *Das Schöne und das Sublime = Schönheit als verweigerte Gewohnheit: Der Schönheitsbegriff und die avancierte Musik im 20. Jahrhundert - Kolloquium des Dresdner Zentrums für Zeitgenössische Musik im Rahmen der 13. Dresdner Tage der Zeitgenössischen Musik*. Ed. DEMUTH, Marion, Saarbrücken, Pfau-Verlag, 2008, 66-72; WURTH, Kiene Brillenburg: *Sounds like now: Music, avant-gardism, and the post-modern sublime = Music and literary modernism: Critical essays and comparative studies*. Ed. McPARLAND, Robert P., Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing; 2nd Revised edition, 2009, 12-31; THOMPSON, Damian: *Are today's composers up to the challenge of writing sublime music? = The Spectator*, 27. April 2013, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts/music/8895001/transcendental-meditation/> (acc. 18.4.2014); RENIHAN, Colleen: *'History as it should have been': Haunts of the historical sublime in John Corigliano's and William Hoffman's The ghosts of Versailles = Twentieth-century music*, Sept. 2013, 10, 2, 249-272; GRABÓCZ, Márta: *Value in contemporary art and the category of the sublime in new music: Works of F.-B. Mäche, J.-C. Risset and P. Eötvös = Music: function and value. Proceedings of the 11th international congress on musical signification 27 IX-2 X 2010*, vol. 1, Eds. MALECKA, Teresa - MAŁGORZATA, Pawłowska, Poland, Kraków, 2013, 75-97.

<sup>15</sup> ROSS, Alex: *The rest is noise*. New York, Picador Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 299.

<sup>16</sup> GARDA, Michela: *Teorie e tipologie del sublime musicale nella seconda metà del Settecento: Presupposti estetici ed atteggiamenti ricettivi = Revista De Musicología* 16, no. 5, 1993, 3070-3088.

<sup>17</sup> LACHENMANN, Helmut: *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung - Schriften 1966-1995*. Ed. HAUSLER, Josef, Breitkopf & Härtel, 2/1996, 1.

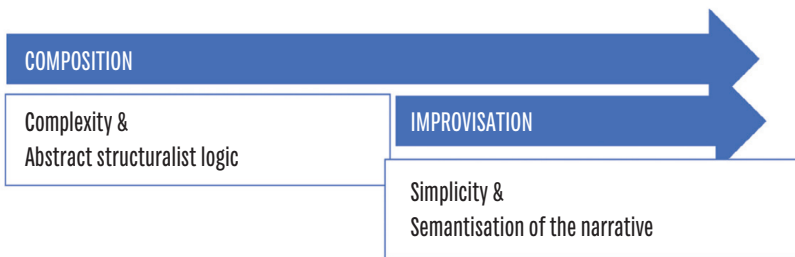
visation whereas he had always had a feeling for social phenomena that are strongly embedded in the Central European culture.

## From Music to More than Music

It holds true for Rojko's music what Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond's mentions as the search for the sublime in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century choral music: "several main outlines stand out: the expression of the supernatural, the symbolist aesthetics of mystery, the evocation of sleep and death and [...] a pantheistic vision of nature" in managing to "express the inexpressible".<sup>18</sup> However, although this music, as a reviewer noted for Rojko's opera *King David, Cither and the Sward*, is—"excitingly modern [...] and is] at the same time deeply rooted in archetypal patterns and figures",<sup>19</sup> it is far from being "pure" music. It is not some *musica perennis*—it strives to be the *musica viva*, tightly connected to the world, to the modern issues he finds important for humankind.

"The meaning of my work is not to create something that sounds beautiful, something 'catchy', something calibrated to the human nervous system and striking precisely where it feels best, knowing its 'weak points'. Much more than that, it is about cultivating the ear."<sup>20</sup>

It is this rather schizophrenic situation in which his art tries (and succeeds) in connecting oppositions that led Rojko to his crisis in the 1990s. The basic premise of composition and improvisation and the main fields of friction are indicated in the scheme below:



<sup>18</sup> JUMEAU-LAFOND, Jean-David: *Le chœur sans paroles...*, 279.

<sup>19</sup> König David, Zither und Schwert. Theater im Marienbad, 2010–2014, <http://www.marienbad.org/repertoire/antigone> (accessed 20.04.2014).

<sup>20</sup> ROJKO, Uroš: *Človek, ki zna natančno prisluhniti, je sposoben komunikacije na višji ravni* = RTV SLO MMC, 4. 6. 2018, <https://www.rtvlo.si/kultura/glasba/uros-rojko-clovek-ki-zna-natančno-prisluhniti-je-sposoben-komunikacije-na-visji-ravni/456963>.

If, however, the main premises of addressing Rojko's music – as defined by him and by the critics who wrote about his music<sup>21</sup> – are taken into consideration, the following seven issues should be stressed:



22

One could probably speak of different *monads* (G. W. Leibniz), parallel *art worlds* (H. Becker), *musical practices* (K. Blaukopf), or phenomena connected to *events of musical performances or acts of musicking* (C. Small). Tensions between these oppositions – Smudits calls similar issues “dimensions of modernisation”: in all the “tendencies of modernisation there are contradicting, oppositional developments”,<sup>23</sup> or, simply, we could speak about *glocalization* – indicate social process around art. If Blaukopf, Smudits, or Roger Fidler spoke of *media-morphoses* as *processes* of changing an art world, it may be useful to think of art itself as a pointer of more global processes in culture.

I am far from claiming that all the premises mentioned above have equal importance in Rojko's work. Also, different listeners would certainly react differently: for some, Rojko is far from composing *universal* music, even less a music that would fit the taste of the majority. However, the premises become more telling when the relations between the members of the communication chain are included, especially between the composer and the listener as well as within the distribution processes. When Rojko “speaks” through his music to the liberalist culture (as mentioned alongside his piece *Quasi neoliberalmente*), he speaks to us all. Or does he speak to those, who hardly bother with his music? Of course, do they have to...?

It is exactly these “pragmatic details”, or seemingly superfluous issues that are only indicated here, that are crucial for an era in which sometimes only

<sup>21</sup> STEFANIJA: *op. cit.* (2016).

<sup>22</sup> The premises are comparable to the oppositions between modernism and postmodernism in literature, as for instance in Ihab Hassan's *The postmodern Turn* (Ohio State University Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> SMUDITS, Alfred: *Music sociology after mass modernity = Roads to Music Sociology*. Ed. SMUDITS, Alfred, Wiesbaden, SpringerVS, 2018, 10.

liminality reveals important things. In the case of music, the more aesthetics dictates the effects of music, the more *fragmented* music consumption becomes. The global paradox that J. Naisbitt described as a process in which he claimed that the bigger the world economy is the more power the smallest players have,<sup>24</sup> turns out to be a reality in the music art world: the generally *unified* music distribution through smart devices generates more and more opportunities for fragmented music consumption (and music identities). The aesthetics alone are the measure for dis/likes on the streaming (or database) services today, not the ethics. We seek enjoyment in music, not knowledge. The “harmony of the spheres”, fundamental for music history for centuries, has ventured into diverse journeys of the many “harmonious me”: although that happened already with the opportunity to choose what music we will listen to on a radio and on TV, cassettes or tapes, LPs, or CDs, the smart devices and streaming services enhanced enormously not only the possibilities for the composer to be heard but, primarily for the listener to choose. The focus shifts from what is done to what is heard, from the thing to its function.

And it is precisely this interregnum of possibilities, contiguity, and the liminal issues that mark the oeuvre of Uroš Rojko:

“There is no doubt that this Rojko's music is tied to concert halls, as well as to festivals of modern music, [prescription concerts]. But at the same time, there is no doubt that, according to its universalist design, it tries to communicate with other artistic and existential forms – with film, church, theatre, meditation, yoga practice, even with a private listening room. According to one reviewer, Rojko's record from 1994 could: “become a new meditative cult object; Evaluation: unconditionally worthy of being listened to.”<sup>25</sup>

It is in this this view that the art world of music may stand for a cultural crossroads in which the individual lines lead from, and to, different ends. One should cautiously entangle the directions of these individual paths that, as in the case of Uroš Rojko, lead not only from one point to another but are also context-sensitive, closely tied to a perspective from which an observer views them. And as for music, it may also be fruitful for the cultural economy to reflect on the mechanisms involved in music as mechanisms that shape our everyday cultural reality in the widest sense of the word.

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<sup>24</sup> NAISBITT, John: *Global Paradox: The Bigger the World Economy, the More Powerful Its Smallest Players*. William Morrow & Co, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> STEFANIJA, Leon: *Sisyphusartig schön*, 178.

Ivana Medić

## Ex-centric Identities in Central Europe: The Curious Case of Snežana Nešić<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study is part of my ongoing research on the Serbian art music diaspora. After the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the ensuing wars, hundreds of thousands of people left the region and settled all over the world. This massive “brain drain” affected many areas; in respect to art music, around 50 composers left Serbia, which was an enormous loss for such a small country. Several composers continued their careers in the countries of Central Europe. The very term “Central Europe” is understood in various ways; some definitions exclude Serbia from this conceptual territory, while others include it, alongside Croatia and Slovenia; this discrepancy raises the issues of identity, placing, belonging, heritage, and inclusion, which are amplified by emigration and exile. After discussing the theoretical implications of these notions, I will focus on the professional odyssey of Snežana Nešić (1973), a female composer and accordionist of Serbian extraction, educated in Ukraine, who has lived in Hannover, Germany for two decades now.

**Keywords:** Snežana Nešić, contemporary music, Central Europe, identities, emigration, diaspora.

### Introduction

This study constitutes a part of my ongoing research on the Serbian art music diaspora, which encompasses both a comprehensive overview of the state of Serbian music created in exile, and detailed accounts on individual artistic destinies.<sup>2</sup> Here I focus on the professional odyssey of Snežana Nešić (married

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<sup>1</sup> The research presented in this article was financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> My publications related to this project include: MEDIĆ, Ivana: *Music of the Lost Generation: Serbian Émigré Composers = Serbian Music: Yugoslav Contexts*. Eds. MILIN, Melita – SAMSON, Jim, Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 2014, 143–164; *ibid.*, “ArHai’s *Balkan Folktronica: Serbian Ethno Music Reimagined for British Market*” = *Muzikologija/Musicology* 17, 2014, 115–127; *ibid.*, “Amerika je drugi svet: razgovor sa Natašom Bogojević” [America is a Different World: A Conversation with Nataša Bogojević], *Muzički talas* 44 (XXI), 2015, 20–27; *ibid.*, “Muzika izgubljene generacije: američka priča Vuka Kulenovića” [Music of the Lost Generation: Vuk Kulenović’s American Story],

Davidović),<sup>3</sup> born in 1973—a female composer and accordionist of Serbian extraction, educated in Ukraine, who has lived in Hannover, Germany for two decades now. I will begin by briefly giving an overview of the concept of the “Central European identity”, in order to provide the context for the ensuing discussion, but also to facilitate the geographical and conceptual positioning of Nešić’s oeuvre.

The issues of identity and of Central Europeanness are very complex and subject to different interpretations. The term “Central Europe” is understood in various ways and comprises continuous territories that are otherwise sometimes considered parts of Western, Eastern or Southern Europe; yet its exact frontiers are very difficult to determine. Does this region encompass territories that used to belong to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Holy Roman Empire, German Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Crown of Bohemia? Or, is Central Europe merely the area of cultural heritage of the Habsburg Empire (later Austria-Hungary), i.e. present-day Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and some parts of Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Poland and Ukraine? There are also interpretations of this concept that focus on the links with the West, especially from the nineteenth century onwards and the grand period of liberation and formation of nation-states; this idea is especially potent in the South-Eastern states, which favour the enlarged concept of the “East Centre”, because they seek to emphasise their links with Western culture(s).

For the present discussion, it is important to note that some of the existing definitions of Central Europe exclude Serbia from this conceptual Central European territory<sup>4</sup>, while others include it (or, at least, its northern province of Vojvodina). This discrepancy raises the issues of identity, placing, belonging, heritage, and inclusion, which are amplified by emigration and exile. How we are perceived by others (in this case, by historians, cultural theorists, writers of encyclopaedias and history textbooks) also influences how we perceive ourselves and vice versa. The (self)identification of countries belonging to this region was also inevitably influenced by historical and political shifts of allegiances, alignments and break-ups. The territory of present-day Serbia used to belong to two different empires: the northern parts of the country (the present-

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*Zbornik Matice srpske za scenske umetnosti i muziku* 60, 2019, 139–156; *ibid.*, *Paralelne istorije: savremena srpska umetnička muzika u dijaspori* [Parallel Histories: Contemporary Serbian Art Music in the Diaspora], Belgrade, Institute of Musicology SASA, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Her name is also often spelled Snezana Nestic (without diacritics).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. “Europe”, *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*. © 1994, 2000–2006 on Infoplease. © 2000–2017 Sandbox Networks, Inc., publishing as Infoplease, <<https://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/places/other/oceans-continents/europe>> (accessed 30.08.2019). This entry only includes the following countries in Central Europe: Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

day Autonomous Province of Vojvodina) were historically part of the Habsburg Empire and Austria-Hungary, while the southern parts of present-day Serbia belonged to the Ottoman Empire for many centuries. This historical divide is still a part of our experience and allegiances; hence the northern parts of the country can be considered a part of the Central European cultural space, while the southern territories barely share this heritage.

Since I do not aspire to offer any defining answer to the persistent question of what a Central European identity is, I will only outline how I understand this term in the present study:

- a person who embodies a Central European identity must inhabit, or have once inhabited, this (imaginary) geographical and cultural space;
- in addition to self-identification, this person must also be recognised by others as a bearer of a Central European identity;
- furthermore, the two theses above are dependent on how one defines and interprets both Central Europeanness and the notion of identity.

I have chosen the life and career of the composer Snežana Nešić as my case study because, both through her education and professional allegiances, Nešić is ideally positioned to reinforce the Central Europeanness of Serbian culture; yet, although Nešić is located at the very centre of the Central European space, she is paradoxically regarded as eccentric, due to her Serbian passport, Ukrainian education and, last but not least, her gender.

## Serbian Art Music Diaspora

As I discussed in my earlier writings, starting from the early 1990s—the period marked by the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars—hundreds of thousands (perhaps, even, millions) of professionals left the newly established countries that replaced the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Such a massive “brain drain” from relatively small countries such as Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina has had a devastating impact on many professional realms: in the field of classical/art music, at least fifty composers, of widely varying ages, left Serbia, never to return; and the trend has continued in the new millennium. In my chapter published in the book *Serbian Music: Yugoslav Contexts*, edited by Jim Samson and Melita Milin (2014), I attempted for the first time to track down these émigré composers and to re-incorporate them into the history of Serbian music.<sup>5</sup> Of

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<sup>5</sup> A complete list of Serbian émigré composers is available in my chapter: MEDIĆ, Ivana: *Music of the Lost Generation: Serbian Émigré Composers*, 143–145.

course, composers are not the only musicians who have emigrated; hundreds of instrumentalists, conductors and other music professionals have also moved abroad; however, there is an important difference. Serbia maintains a system of state-funded music schools and music academies that produces a large number of music performers each year; moreover, since their profession involves foreign travel as a matter of course, the issue of where they are based is not relevant. In contrast, there are only three universities in Serbia that offer composition courses, and only a handful of composers graduate every year.<sup>6</sup> One can now understand the extent of the loss to Serbian contemporary music. The most striking exodus was that of composers born in the 1960s, who were at the beginning of their professional careers at the outset of the war.<sup>7</sup>

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When discussing musical diasporas worldwide, Philip V. Bohlman identified “three very general forces that bring about the need to leave a place regarded as a people’s own. First, there are religious reasons leading to the expulsion from a place of origin. [...] Second, there are peoples and cultures with no place to call their own, thus making it necessary to move ceaselessly [...] Third, there are more modern diasporas spawned by socioeconomic reasons. The widespread emigrations and immigrations following from the breakup of empires and the conflicts of nationalism are among the chief causes for the third type of diaspora.”<sup>8</sup> Whilst researching my 2014 chapter, I conducted a series of interviews (either in person or online) with a number Serbian émigré composers; the interviews focused on the reasons behind their decisions to leave the country and their experiences abroad. The obvious first question was about their reasons for leaving Serbia. A clear generational gap can be observed here. A majority of composers born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s left the country in the early 1990s due to the third-economic reason, i.e. the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the ensuing wars, and the severe economic crisis, exacerbated by the economic sanctions imposed by the UN. Due to this political and economic crisis of the 1990s, it became impossible for composers to survive on their measly teachers’ salaries and rapidly declining commissions. On the other hand, the generations born in the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. those who were educated in Serbia during the war and afterwards, stated that the main reason for their leaving the country was the feeling that Serbia was too isolated and the composition courses too conservative.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>8</sup> BOHLMAN, Philip V.: *A Very Short Introduction to World Music*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, 117.

As to the issue of the émigré composers' inclusion in (or exclusion from) both local (Serbian, former Yugoslav) and global (read: Western) histories of music, it is not just the musicologists who are undecided; the majority of the composers themselves no longer know where they belong. Melita Milin asserts that the issue of who gets included in histories of music is a political one.<sup>9</sup> Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman observes that countries such as Serbia, which have built their professional cultures under the influence of a (western) "centre" or "centres" will forever be marginalized, due to the ever-present imbalance of power: "the (sub)conscious of that centre contains some psychological reminders of its professional-historical value, which always justified the centre's conviction that such an advantage gained it the natural right to the status of an arbitrator – in spite of the fact that the periphery was often musically more creative and innovative than the centre."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Jim Samson observes that "composers of an older generation such as Xenakis and Ligeti would probably not have made the mark they did on the new music had they remained in Greece and Hungary respectively. There was a rather clear sense of centre and periphery in the 1960s, and for these composers the charismatic centres of new music in Europe and North America proved to be the gateways to international acclaim. [...] Arriving at the centres did not guarantee visibility, of course; they were nothing if not competitive arenas. But avoiding the centres all but guaranteed invisibility. For a later generation the conditions were rather different. [...] For this generation the major cultural centres are no longer quite the passport to fame they once were [...]. In the end, a clear local identity [...] may prove more valuable than an allegiance to cosmopolitan modernisms."<sup>11</sup> In this respect, Serbia has long shared the destiny of all small peripheral cultures that have not been "on the radar" of the major European cultural centres, due to the imbalance of power between the centre and the periphery, between the rich and the poor, the large and the small.

## Snežana Nešić's Ex-centric Identities

Let's now focus on the protagonist of our case study. After completing her studies at the secondary music school in the central Serbian town of Kraguje-

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<sup>9</sup> MILIN, Melita: General Histories of Music and the Place of the European Periphery = *Muzikologija/Musicology*, 2001, 1, 142-145.

<sup>10</sup> VESELINOVIĆ-HOFMAN, Mirjana: *Music at the Periphery Under Conditions of Degraded Hierarchy Between the Centre and the Margins in the Space of the Internet = Identities: The World of Music in Relation to Itself*. Eds. SEEBASS, Tilman - VESELINOVIĆ-HOFMAN, Mirjana - POPOVIĆ-MLAĐENOVIĆ, Tijana, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2012, 25.

<sup>11</sup> SAMSON, Jim: *Music in the Balkans*. Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2013, 568.

vac, Snežana Nešić studied the accordion and composition at the Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky conservatory in Kiev, Ukraine in the 1990s and completed her post-graduate studies in 2003 at the University for Music and Drama, Hannover, where she was mentored by Professor Johannes Schöllhorn (Composition) and Professor Elsbeth Moser (Accordion). Since 2007 she has worked as a university lecturer in musical composition and the interpretation of modern music at the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media. As an accordion player she has won many international competitions (including the Internationaler Akkordeonwettbewerb Klingenthal and the Citta-Castelfidardo) and has received frequent invitations as a soloist with orchestras and ensembles including NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, Staatstheater Hannover, Staatstheater Braunschweig and Das Neue Ensemble. She also directs ensembles Incontri and Ur.werk, specializing in contemporary music.<sup>12</sup> The list of her most important compositions includes: (1) Music theatre and opera: *Antigone*, dramatic scene for soprano, cello, accordion and percussion after a text by Sophocles (1999); *The Edelweiss Pirates*, Youth Opera for 8 soloists and ensemble, with libretto by Kerstin Weiß (2005/2006); *Time of Colour*, Light-Scene for soprano, 2-10 players and video projection, after a text by Niki de Saint Phalle (2011); *The Evening Song of Still Standing Times* for soprano, actor and five players, after a poem by Daniel Kharms (2012); *The Night Song of Still Standing Times* for Countertenor solo, after texts by Daniel Kharms, Saint John of the Cross and Snežana Nešić (2012); *Himmelsklavier* for prepared piano, composed for the musical theatre "Lea, Opa und das Himmelsklavier" (2014); *The Rain Passed Over*, opera for 2 sopranos, baritone, ensemble and electronics, with libretto by Snežana Nešić and Tobias Ribitzki (2012/2016); *Eternal Light*, musical theatre for soprano, baritone, ensemble, live electronic and video projection (2018); (2) Orchestral Works: *Two Fragments* for orchestra (1996); *Kyrios* for soprano, tenor, mixed choir and orchestra (1997); *Painting of Light* for cello, accordion, string quartet and two string groups (2003/2005); *Butterfly Valley - Requiem for Inger Christensen* for violin and orchestra (2008/2009); *Turquoise* (2010) for chamber orchestra; *Equilibrion I* for ensemble (2016); *Equilibrion II* for chamber orchestra (2016); (3) Electronic and mixed media: *Eolus*, electronic composition (2006); *Where is Abel? I* music for a short film (2008/2009); *Where is Abel? II* for video, sound installation and any wind instrument (2009); *Time of Colour II* (2009/2010) for any keyboard instrument, live electronics and video projection; *Etude for the Beginning of Time II* for accordion and live electronics (2012/17); *Mirabilia* sound installation in memoriam Umberto Eco (2017); etc. In addition, she has written numerous soloists, chamber and choral works. All of her works

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<sup>12</sup> Nešić's full biography and list of awards is available on her official website: [http://www.snezana-nesic.de/?page\\_id=9&lang=en](http://www.snezana-nesic.de/?page_id=9&lang=en) (accessed 30.08.2019),

were commissioned and premiered by renowned soloists, ensembles, orchestras, radio stations and foundations.<sup>13</sup>

I interviewed Snežana Nešić about her professional odyssey on 5 February 2019 at her home in Hannover, during the festival *Quantum Music – Hannover Session*. We first talked about her decision to become a classical music composer, which is still a rather unusual career choice for any young woman in Central Europe (although not so much so in Serbia, where in recent decades women have dominated in this area, outnumbering men both as full-time composers and composition teachers, and winning the majority of accolades).

Originally from the small town of Smederevska Palanka, Nešić left her home early to train as an accordionist at the reputable music school “Dr Miloje Milojević” in Kragujevac. Yet, at the tender age of 12, Nešić had already made a decision that she would rather be writing her own music than playing someone else’s. In the early 1990s, she moved to Ukraine and graduated in composition and accordion in Kiev. Back in the 1990s it was not possible to study the accordion on the tertiary level in Serbia, so all prospective students had to go abroad (e.g. to Austria, Russia, Ukraine, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, etc.) Nešić admits that she chose Kiev because it was possible for her to study at two departments without paying any fees—back then, studying music in Ukraine was still available for free, even for foreign students (which is no longer the case); and due to the economic hardship caused by the political turmoil in her native country, she could not afford to pay high tuition fees elsewhere. In Kiev she met her future husband, a fellow Yugoslav expat—the conductor and harpsichordist Saša Davidović [Sascha Davidovic]. While in Kiev, Nešić received comprehensive and solid instruction in composition, orchestration, conducting, chamber music, traditional harmony, polyphony and musical forms. However, after graduating, she realised that she also needed to master more advanced contemporary compositional techniques and thus applied for a DAAD scholarship; upon winning it in 1998, she and her husband Saša ended up in Hannover, where she completed her postgraduate studies in composition. As the main difference in university studies of music in Kiev and Hannover, she singled out the fact that studies in Hannover are flexible and tailored to the needs of each individual student, in accordance with their interests and preferences, while in Kiev they are much more structured, at the expense of individual freedom—a sentiment shared by many expat composers who went westward in search of a greater freedom of artistic expression.

As to her involvement with the organisation of musical life and her leadership of contemporary music ensembles in Hannover, Nešić has asserted that,

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<sup>13</sup> Sound recordings of a number of her works are available on the Soundcloud platform: <https://soundcloud.com/nesic> (accessed 30.08.2019).

at least since Richard Wagner's time, German and Austrian composers have established their own music societies—*vereins*, thus becoming responsible for their own artistic policies and repertoires, promoting their own creative ideologies and achieving immediate contact with their audiences. On the other hand, Nešić observes that musical life in Ukraine is still dependent on state-funded institutions; as expected, she very much prefers the German system because it offers more creative freedom.

Upon completion of her studies in Hannover, Nešić immediately became the leader of the university's new music ensemble *Incontri*, while her husband became an assistant conductor at Hannover Radio. Their professional careers were somewhat hindered by the fact that, being Serbian citizens, they had to fulfil conditions to constantly reapply for work permits, which had to be renewed every few years; and only after more than a decade in Hannover did they finally receive permanent residence permits (although they still hold Serbian passports and citizenship). Aside from *Incontri*, Nešić has also founded another new music ensemble *Ur: Werk*—a wordplay on German words for “premiere” and “mechanism”. As of 2019 she has been involved in teaching, artistic leadership, concert performances and managerial duties to an equal degree. As a university lecturer on temporary contracts [*Dozent* in German], Nešić receives a salary about seven times smaller than that of a full professor, which is why she has to work on numerous projects simultaneously as well as juggle multiple jobs.

As to Nešić's role models, although she lives in Germany, she cites French “spectralists” Tristan Murail (b. 1947) and Gérard Grisey (1946–1998), as well as the Greek-French composer Georges Aperghis (b. 1945) as her main influences. Among her peers, Nešić has discovered a kinship with the work of the Montreal-based, Serbian-born, naturalised Canadian composer Ana Sokolović (b. 1968).

The next question was: should we consider Snežana Nešić a “Serbian” composer at all? Since she did not study composition in Serbia, and she neither joined the Serbian Composers' Union nor submitted her works to be performed at the annual International Review of Composers in Belgrade, her output has remained largely unknown in her homeland—unlike, for example, that of the aforementioned Ana Sokolović, who was “discovered” in Serbia in 2012, after a very successful premiere of her opera for six female voices; a cappella *Svadba - Wedding*. There is no one to blame for this situation: Nešić admits that she has not actively pursued performances in Serbia; yet she has not received invitations either. She would be happy to have her works performed in Serbia and to collaborate with her friends who have remained in the country; but, due to her numerous professional commitments, she does not have the time to put in sufficient effort to make it happen just yet. Hence, it would not

be inaccurate to nominate Nešić as the most successful contemporary Serbian composer who is yet to be discovered by Serbian audiences.

When asked about how she is perceived by the Germans, bowing to her national and professional allegiances Nešić is uncertain how to answer. She believes that, if she lived in a traditionally immigrant country such as Canada, she would probably be regarded as a Canadian composer of Serbian extraction. However, in present-day Germany, the issue of where someone was born is still quite important, at least for musicologists—i.e. the people who write histories of music, encyclopaedia articles, concert and CD/DVD reviews and, basically, create the entire discursive environment for the new music. Hence, in Germany, Nešić is regarded as a Serbian composer who happens to live in Germany—although her works have never actually been performed in Serbia. The best she can hope for, when it comes to her acceptance in the German contemporary music scene, can be observed in a recent interview with the Goethe Institute, where she was identified by a journalist as “The Serbian-German accordionist and composer Snežana Nešić”.<sup>14</sup> She jokes that her birth certificate and passport take precedence over the fact that she has lived and worked in Germany for over two decades.

With respect to her adherence to certain traditions it is important to note that, unlike many Serbian émigré composers, Snežana Nešić has never used Serbian or Balkan folklore, or Orthodox church chants, or any other musical “markers” of her ethnic origin as sources of inspiration—although she has admitted to being inspired by fresco paintings from the Monastery of Sopoćani when composing her work *Painting of Light* for cello, accordion, string quartet and two string groups.<sup>15</sup> Her approach to music creation is (self)consciously cosmopolitan, but actually Central European and decisively shaped by her German professional training. She has consistently avoided any national signifiers in her music due to her fear that they might sound “cheap” and “kitsch”, or simply distract the listener from everything else. Yet, she keeps several newspaper reviews in which German critics allegedly recognised some “oriental” elements in her music—although she claims that this is merely due to their pre-conceptions in regard to South-East European composers who, in their view, must always sound at least a little “exotic”, “different” or “other”.

Another layer of her identity is that of her gender. In stark contrast to the former Eastern bloc where women were encouraged to discard the centuries-

<sup>14</sup> KRELL, Michael: *A Conversation with Snežana Nešić: Positive Traces – Goethe-Institut Kanada*, s.a., <https://www.goethe.de/ins/ca/en/kul/mag/21180352.html> (accessed 30.08.2019).

<sup>15</sup> UNSELD, Melanie: *Im Blickpunkt: Snežana Nešić = Nina Noeske und Melanie Unsel, Jahrbuch Musik und Gender, Band 2 – Blickwechsel Ost | West Gender-Topographien*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag AD, 2009, 63–65.

long divide into male and female occupations and to pursue formerly male-dominated careers (including that of a composer of art music), which has resulted in the fact that nowadays women outnumber men in music composition and many other professional realms—in present-day Germany, female composers are still a minority. Nešić has identified this negative gender bias just by observing the number of students at composition departments across Germany and Austria, or the number of works by female composers performed at important festivals of new music—although she admits that things are slightly improving, compared to what the situation was like some twenty years ago. She draws attention to artistic directors of festivals, who habitually shun women composers. Nešić has also confessed to being shocked a few years ago when she attended a major contemporary music festival; the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, and realised that there were no female composers on the programme.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis of Snežana Nešić's Central European identity (or the lack of it), one would expect that an artist who left Serbia more than twenty years ago, before making any sort of impact there, and who has won major accolades in her adoptive country, would logically be regarded as a naturalised German composer or, at least, a Serbian-born German composer. Yet, this is not the case and, in Germany, Nešić is still stuck with her, essentially wrong, identity of a Serbian composer—based only on her birthplace and citizenship as the sole criteria for their inclusion into a certain social and cultural identity. Living "in the centre" of Central Europe did not centralize her, but quite the opposite—it emphasised the difference. On the other hand, the protagonists of the contemporary music scene in Serbia are yet to take notice of her work and introduce her to Serbian audiences. Because of this, Nešić is likely to remain "unclassifiable" for the time being, herself unsure whether or not she belongs to her homeland, and yet not fully integrated in her adoptive country. Were the funds for performances of contemporary music in Serbia more than minimal, it would have been possible to organise regular performances of substantial new works by Serbian composers in exile and to reinforce the feeling that they "still belong". Unlike some other, larger émigré groups, Serbian composers have been unable to establish diaspora communities abroad, mainly because they are so scattered across the five continents. Because of this, everyone is ultimately left to their own devices and, moreover, only they can decide whether they will strive to fully immerse themselves in their new environments, or remain émigré composers *ad infinitum*.

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Ákos Windhager

## An Imaginary Diplomat's Central Europe

Based on the Novels *Protokoll* (Protocol) and *A legkisebb jégkorszak* (The Smallest Ice Age) by János Térey

*In memoriam János Térey*

### Abstract

The essay sheds light on the elusive attributes of Central Europe through a highly ranked contemporary and controversial Hungarian literary landscape (J. Térey's two novels about a Hungarian diplomat). The essay demonstrates that traditional characteristics, such as culture and a common tragic history, have lost their original role as bridges to neighbouring societies. However, some new aspects are mapped out in the novels, such as unstable partnerships, broken socio-cultural traditions and an unbending insistence on city high life. The image of the political actions presented is a bitter diagnosis of the region's national and international options, which are indeed a cul-de-sac. The paper argues with the author's conclusions (1) that Central Europe's only chance of becoming a successful region is if nations forget their history, or, as the second novel demonstrates: (2) Central European countries need a new ice age to make them cooperate in order to survive. This dark fiction reveals the dysfunction of states and societies without any common values and the tragic burden of the past. However, the paper reveals the author's ironic style, which makes one thing clear; he believes in human reason.

**Keywords:** János Térey, fragile relationships, interrupted cultural tradition, social criticism.

### An Imaginary Diplomat's Central Europe

The topic of the 2nd Szigliget Workshop (May 2019), titled *Contemporary Discourses on Central European Identity*, focused on how the cultural identity of the eastern parts of Central Europe has changed since joining the European Union (2004, 2007, 2013). I found an artistic interpretation of the subject in János Térey's (1970-2019) two connected novels, written in *blank verse*, *Protokoll* (Magvető Press, 2010) and *A legkisebb jégkorszak* (Jelenkor Press, 2015). As the given era is too short for a comprehensive study, I was looking for literary works with plots that take place in this narrow time frame, and in

which the conflicts touch upon cultural identity with reference to the ongoing processes in the region. The two texts are primarily Budapest-novels, yet suggest a characteristic Central European atmosphere through the fates of the protagonists, the questions raised, and their symbolic geographical framework. As the protagonist is a diplomat, the author provides an overview on foreign policy, separately discussing the Hungarian-Slovakian diplomatic conflict, Czech-Hungarian friendship and Hungarian-Israeli family relationships. The common history of the region also appears in several scenes, for example the merry golden age of Austria-Hungary. The social criticism of the first volume and the criticism of the government from the second volume are tangible in the background of the plot. These novels serve the purpose they were designed for as they have both been critically acclaimed.<sup>1</sup>

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János Térey was an outstanding figure of the poet generation beginning with the change in the political system and attracted attention in 1991 with his book *Szétszórás* (Diaspora). His books, which were published almost yearly, were recognized by 21 significant, official artistic, social and state prizes. He considered himself a bridge-man, connecting groups of artists as well as contemporary art with the Hungarian lyrical tradition.<sup>2</sup> It is a mark of his renown that even though agreed with the current opposition's views in his literary texts after 2010, the most significant Hungarian literary state scholarship was named after him following his death.

Térey plays with the symbolic Central European framework in a number of his books: such as in *A valóságos Varsó* (1995, The Real Warsaw), in his book of poetry *Drezda februárban* (2000, Dresden in February), as well as in the play *Nibelung-lakópark* (2004, Nibelung-apartments). His historical overviews have divided his readership (e.g. *Paulus*, 2001, taking place in WWII and in the present; or *Kazamaták*, [Dungeons] 2006, presenting the Revolution of '56 with all its downsides), as well as *Asztalizene* (Table music), which also covered the opposition's protest in 2006. As much as he opposed the traditions of national identity, he insisted on Hungarian literary traditions and Budapest. He captures the "*wonderfu(g)ly*, [untranslatable play of antonyms] *attractively secondary Pest*" in several of his books: *Sonja útja a Saxonia mozitól a Pirnai térig* (selected poems, 2003, Sonja's way from Saxonia cinema to Pirnai Square), *Átkelés Budapesten* (2014, Crossing in Budapest), *Káli holtak* (2018, The Dead of Kál).<sup>3</sup>

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1 See RADICS, Viktória: *Decens cinizmus, sznob világ = revizoronline.hu*, 29 May 2011, <https://revizoronline.com/hu/cikk/3250/terey-janos-protokoll/>; GYÖRFFY, Miklós: *Bem téri spleen = Jelenkor*, 2011/5, 562.; TAKÁCS, Ferenc: *Télvég-játék = Mozgó Világ*, 2016/5, 114.

2 SZÁRAZ, Miklós György: *János = Mandiner*, 19 February 2020, 16/07, [https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20200219\\_janos](https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20200219_janos).

3 TÉREY, János: *Protokoll*. Budapest, Magvető, 2010, 22. In Hungarian: „csodacsúf, vonzóan másodlagos Pest.”

## The *Protokoll*

### Central European Plot

The plot in *Protokoll*, published in 2010, is set between the summers of 2008 and 2009, based on the events displayed in the book (e.g. the Madrid airport plane crash). The novel follows the listless, 40-year-old main protagonist, Ágoston Mátrai, the leader of the protocol department of the ministry of foreign affairs and his social relationships, friendships and love life. Although he longs for a partner, he does not find anybody—and even the end of the novel leaves this question open. In the summer, he sets off on an erotic adventure with his 42-year-old cousin, Blanka, but he leaves her in the middle of autumn. During the winter, he takes Dorka, a twenty-year old celebrated tennis player to bed—in a pornographic way—but this relationship is not long-lived either. He does not even bother looking for a relationship at the beginning of spring and brings a hooker back to his hotel room. At the end of spring, a stenographer at the Parliament, Fruzsina (aged about 25) succumbs to his advances—though presumably only in Mátrai's imagination. The allegory of the seasons is less reflected in Mátrai's official businesses. He travels to Israel in the autumn, stays at home in the winter and participates in trips to Tallinn, Brussels and New York at the beginning of spring. In the middle of spring he flies to Scotland, then walks across the Hungarian-Slovakian border. Besides the current events of his dating efforts, no relevant changes take place in his life.

He is asked about his problem at work over and over again but besides his languor, his boss, sees nothing, so Mátrai is confirmed in his position. Through his job, he attends posh events, where he is explicitly bored and hates everybody, especially the successful people (the trendy painter, the upstart gallery owner and his former girlfriend, a celebrated actress). Towards the end of the novel, he is overcome by misanthropy: *“My nation and humanity, / Battered or proud, I scare, / Not the country, only its people, / Part of its people. To be precise: / 98 percent of them. / The Third Republic tires me.”*<sup>4</sup>

His friendships are also controversial: Kálmán Donner (aged 40), an ER surgeon—the well-written figure in *Asztalízene*—Győző Karányi (aged 40), a theatre critic, and István Novák (also aged 40), an economist. During their frequent meetings, they indulge in alcohol, though they never get drunk. There is constant tension between Mátrai and his friends, for example, Karányi tells him off him for becoming a government clerk in the state apparatus. *“You are a good*

<sup>4</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2010), 89. „A népemet és az emberiséget, / Ha viharvert, ha büszke, rettegem, / Nem az országot, hanem csak lakóit, / Lakói egy részét. Hogy pontosítsak: / Lakói 98 százalékát. / Fáraaszt a Harmadik Köztársaság.”

boy, though very cold. / Yes, you are usually sensible, / It's a pity, you're in an office. Always / smiling where you are showed. Always losing the ones you must."<sup>5</sup> In Karányi's understanding this means that his work is not only pointless but also unethical. The day after their dramatic quarrel, Karányi commits suicide. However, what links Mátrai, Karányi, Novák and Donner is not just their friendly drinking bouts together that turn into falling-outs but also their shared mid-life crisis—the forty-something men's hardship common in literary pieces.<sup>6</sup> Belonging to the same circle, they regularly swap partners. Apart from his friends, the main protagonist sometimes meets his mother, the elderly actress, Vera (aged about 70), his brother, Balázs (aged 37), who works in IT, and his uncle (aged 75), a classical philologist, who has been exiled to a retirement home. It marks the atmosphere of the novel (and in many ways our times as well) that the elderly professor is not visited by his sister (Vera) or put up by his daughter (Blanka), with only Mátrai seeing him. His only relationship that is built on traditional European values is with his subordinate, Gyula Binder (aged 45), whom he calls a friend in the second novel. His only adversary in the book is his colleague at the ministry, Kovács (about 30), who openly intrigues against him but due to a protocol misdemeanour on his part, is sidelined. The mentor of the main character is Skultéti (about 60), the minister of foreign affairs, who supports him in a fatherly manner. The figure of the minister appears as *deus ex machina*. His official relations, friendships or love relationships do not make the protagonist happy, and he does not make them happy either. He does not even try to.

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## The Central European Characters

The characters have typical Central European names and personalities. The ancestors of Minister Skultéti were of Slovakian origin, just like Novák's, as his name implies. Although the protagonist's cousin, Blanka Gerdesits claims to be Hungarian, her name suggests Slavic ancestors. Kálmán Donner and Gyula Binder's names are German, and the latter identifies himself as Jewish, just like Mátrai's first and only love, Evelin. Blanka's new partner, Sándor Burány, is a painter who is supported by the minister. His name implies Romanian antecedents. Mátrai's antagonist, Kovács, has the most common Hungarian family name. The names of Karányi, the theatrical critic and the main prota-

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<sup>5</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2010), 172. „Te jó fiú vagy, csak nagyon hideg. / Igen, te értelmes vagy általában, / Kár, hogy hivatalban. Mindig arra- / Felé mosolyogsz, amerre mutatnak. Mindig azt rázod le, akit muszáj.”

<sup>6</sup> KONCZ, Tamás: *Szívügyei protokoll - Térey János Protokoll című könyvéről = Irodalmi Szemle*, 2011/3, 79.

gonist himself are pseudonyms based on the naming practice. Mátrai's family name refers to the highest mountain in Hungary, thus suggesting that he stands out from his narrow environment. His name is a play on the author's own name as János Térey adopted his family name, which emphasizes 'tér' (square), when he was at university.

It is typically Central and Eastern European how divided culture came about as a result of traditions having been interrupted by the dictatorships. Blanka and the protagonist look at pictures in Prado but see them differently, just as they view the burning of the fake photos in Budapest in a different way. Mátrai indulges in cultural assets: he inherits his uncle's enormous library, and goes to the opera, theatre and exhibitions.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, music is always on in both Térey-novels and if it is not symphonic, it is American pop. Mátrai is not attached to his own music traditions—except for Bartók's *Violin concerto*.

The fact that the characters work or used to work comes from the social structure of the region. Whereas they belong to the upper middle class, they did not inherit their wealth—the historical reasons are known—but earned it through work and relations. Burány, the painter, was elevated to the upper middle class by state patronage. Delfin, the actress, was raised by the appraising critiques of her ex theatre critic lover. The ER surgeon benefited from the gratuities so common in his field, while the economist relied on his influential work. Balázs became affluent as an IT specialist, which is currently the trendiest profession in Central Europe. The minister ended up in high society and surpassed the aforementioned characters by building on his former relations and office. The exception to the rule is Karányi, the theatre critic, who, on the other hand, has access to the events of the upper middle class by right of his occupation.

Mátrai sees no one in need around him, only when he wanders in places peripheral to him, such as Flórián Square (Budapest 3<sup>rd</sup> district's historical centre) and Blaha Lujza Square (Budapest 8<sup>th</sup> district—the most important transport intersection on Nagykörút). He flees on both occasions. He knows only one needy person, though not financially but socially, and it is his own uncle. In the retirement home he observes the deterioration of human consciousness and the weakening of the body, and partly the vulnerability of the elderly to their own condition. It is symbolic that in the other novel a deprived opera critic becomes homeless but Mátrai only sees him briefly. Protocol demands looking up and though it is the protagonist's merit that he is not blinded by it, he still has not learned to look downwards.

<sup>7</sup> TAKÁCS, Ferenc: „Mindent vissz a vesztes...” = *Mozgó Világ*, 2012/6, 91. Besides demonstrating the cultural structure, Takács refers to the opposing traditions in the literary ante-types of the novel.

## Fragile Relationships

Several typical Central European hybrid-relationships appear in the novel. Unlike in traditional societies, relationships and friendships are casual. While in Western societies singleness, distance relationships or moving in together are usual and based on emotional stability, in the novel, these types of relationships are tense. It is typical of the depicted relationships that although sexuality is their key element, this is illustrated by the author in a playful way only once. At all other times, it is described with foul language, almost in a pornographic manner. A study—also referring to Mátrai's non-functional relationships—characterizes *Protokoll* as the “novel of the lack of intimacy”.<sup>8</sup>

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He is still in a relationship with Dorka, the tennis player, when he starts flirting with Blanka, his cousin, in the hotel in Madrid. On returning, he walks out on Dorka without actually breaking up and carries on with his secret affair. Eventually, he ends the relationship with his cousin in Fővárosi Fűvészkert (the Botanical Garden of the capital), the best-known place in Hungarian children's literature. Their parting was coded in Mátrai's reticence and in the fact that he was not looking for the woman in her, but a momentary getaway from loneliness. In the end, Mátrai's pretext for splitting up is that Blanka is unwilling to empathize with his first love for having had to become a Hasid in order to marry a Jew. The real reason for their break up, however, is that the main protagonist did not fight for his relationship with Blanka. Not much later, he finds sensual comfort in his previous lover, Dorka. This move hurts his friend, Donner, who was her lover in the autumn. In the meanwhile, Donner has a child with the beautiful Delfin, whom Mátrai had left long before, yet they do not move in together. However, as his wife and two children leave Novák, the “family maniac”, he forms a crush on the actress. The only person living a traditional family life is Gyula Binder, the model clerk, but he never turns into a significant character in either of the novels. Minister Skultéti also has a classic marriage, but protocol expects it.

These soap opera like relations wear the characters down: Mátrai suffers from depression, Novák begins drinking, Karányi commits suicide, Donner longs for his ex-wife. Dorka is worn down by one-night stands, which manifest in her uncontrollable sobs and in her continual defeats. She becomes a world champion when she finds a man to marry her. The only one who is barely touched by the rapid change of relationships is Blanka, who raises her daughter alone. She fights for Mátrai for a while, then finds comfort in Burány, a painter. Fruzsina, whom Mátrai pursues for a whole year has an even more controver-

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<sup>8</sup> VISY, Beatrix: *A magány verklejje* = *HolMi*, 2011/6, 785.

sial attitude towards singleness. At first, she cherishes Platonic love for Mátrai, but when he reciprocates her advances her desires vanish instantly. She occasionally dates men, then accepts an expensive gift from the main protagonist but at the same time, she rejects him. At another time, at the beginning of the sensual scene, half-naked she throws him out of her flat. During their late spring rendezvous, she suddenly succumbs to Mátrai's advances—at least verbally. (It is important to note that their last meeting is questioned at the end of the novel if not left open.) Although the corridor gossip, and social occasion quips complicate each character's private lives, it is not social disapproval that primarily impedes happy relationships, but the characters themselves.

### Central European Locations

Mátrai lives in a narrow social and geographical space. The main location is Budapest. He lives in Római-part (Budapest, 3<sup>rd</sup> district, a residential area by the Danube), which is popular among the upper middle-class, and goes out in Újlipótváros (Budapest, 13<sup>th</sup> district, a residential area by the Danube). As his workplace is in Bem Square (Budapest, 1<sup>st</sup> district, an administrative quarter by the Danube), that is where he works and meets his acquaintances. When he visits the minister in his apartment, he finds himself in the upper one percent's symbolic area, Gellért-hill (Budapest, 1<sup>st</sup> district, a residential area by the Danube). Childhood memories connect him to the Fűvészkert, where his father used to work. He was hit by a lorry as he was walking out of his workplace in the party state times. It is no coincidence that Mátrai ends his relationship with his cousin at a location burdened by family memories. As mentioned earlier, he gets lost twice: once near his home as he stumbles into a drunken passer-by in Flórián Square, then he is held up when he is walking from the Fűvészkert to Blaha Lujza Square. After that he's surprised when he sees homeless people in the Blaha under-crossing.

Mátrai's Budapest-image, while built upon characteristic reality frequencies, is in stark contrast to social reality. His geographical moves show how narrow the confines of his life are: he only knows a limited number of locations. Therefore, there is no opportunity for him to develop emotionally, spiritually or socially. He can (or: could) only have a proper date with Fruzsina when he moves out of this environment and they go (or: would go) on a trip to Hármashatárhegy. The hill does not belong to the symbolic locations of the upper middle class even though it is a trendy tourist area within the borders of the capital.

The landscapes abroad are also symbolic. The main character spends the first summer of the novel in Madrid, which is an affordable luxury location

accessible from Budapest. As the Hungarian intelligentsia side with Barcelona (that is: in the sense of the city and not football), the Spanish capital is exotic for Mátrai. He feels at home in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem as well, where he used to live as a young diplomat. The Israeli locations are important for him because his first love, Evelin, who could not keep their baby because of his improvidence, lives there. At the same time, an interest in the Jews calls for remorse related to World War II from Central European intellectuals. Tallinn and Riga are also familiar to Mátrai, as he lived in the Baltic region for several years as an attaché.

Térey makes his characters describe both the beauty and the ugliness of Budapest with fondness, while also depicting the Central European Baedeker: *"Its impact depends on what came before, / What is followed by Budapest? / ... Charming after Kabul, Dortmund and Bucharest, / But always a wreck after Prague. / And a bit familiar after Lisbon. / Rugged, interesting after Madrid... / Pest is unlivable though unleaveable."*<sup>9</sup> Mátrai and his colleagues often belittle the domestic while holding the foreign in high esteem: *"What is Oktogon after the sentimental / Champs-Élysées? It is more and it is less."*<sup>10</sup> It is typical of the apathetic boulevardier that he would only purchase an apartment here, in Budapest. And it was not his alter ego but the author that commented on this: *"Budapest has no alternative in my life. So the relationship is familial, let's say, like a stepson with his stepmother."*<sup>11</sup>

Joining the European Union means that Hungarian diplomats often also visit the capital of the Union, Brussels. Although the European Union is the only wider political space, the Belgian city does not matter much for Mátrai. Despite the fact that he knows the "good places" near the EU-related buildings, he does not long for Brussels or bring home good memories. However, he relates to New York, the centre of international diplomacy in an entirely different way. He has to travel to the UN's climate summit that sets unsustainable objectives.<sup>12</sup> He misses a semi-official event to meet Blanka, who is also there. Despite the readers' expectations, they do not realize "the one" in each other but over-intellectualize their former differences in a typically intellectual way. New York overwhelms Mátrai, yet the sole significance of the Big Apple for him is still the fact that he managed to have a serious conversation with his

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<sup>9</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2010), 22. „Hatása attól függ, mi volt előtte, / Hogy mire következik Budapest? / ... Kabul, Dortmund és Bukarest után szép, / De Prága után mindig pusztulat. / És Lisszabon után kicsit rokon. / Madrid után érdes, érdekes... / Pest élehetetlen, bár elhagyhatatlan.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, „Milyen az Oktogon az émeletítő / Champs-Élysées után? Sok is, kevés is.” Oktogon: the main, eight squared square on the Nagykörút at Budapest.

<sup>11</sup> DARVASI, Ferenc: „Ott kell lennünk a terepen” – Beszélgetés Térey Jánossal a Protokoll című verses regényről = *Kortárs*, 2011/4, 22.

<sup>12</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2010) 214.

ex-lover. The parties, who are unable to understand each other in Budapest, come to an agreement in New York. This conciliation is politically articulate though the novel does not elaborate on this allegory.

Finally, Mátrai and the Minister's trip to Scotland would deserve a separate chapter. Skultéti, the imagined Hungarian minister of foreign affairs expresses his hopes for an independent Scotland in front of the Scottish political leaders present. Skultéti falls over a wrongly placed cable before his speech and then the scene begins. Skultéti gets away with his diplomatic stumble, Mátrai gets away with Skultéti's stumble and with that, his Central European diplomatic wider political dreams are over. Mátrai's monologue by the Scottish coast replies to his ideal of an independent Scotland: "*there is no means for deeds*"<sup>13</sup>. The experience of narrow space equally describes the Central European public life, culture and private life<sup>14</sup>.

## Central European Conflict

*"We agree with the Slovaks on one thing  
That we are neighbours—and that's all."*<sup>15</sup>

As a middle manager at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mátrai has a personal relationship with a number of diplomats. The Czech ambassador, Vendelin, becomes his friend and so Mátrai is sad when he leaves. He also had a diplomatic friendship with Gustaffson (fictional), the Swedish Prime Minister. His relationship with Hussein, Jordan's consul in Budapest, also begins favourably but the Arab diplomat runs a little boy over, and he is at fault, so he was recalled. Managing relations with the neighbouring countries is not Mátrai's responsibility, still he has to participate in the Hungarian-Romanian and the Hungarian-Slovakian conflicts, which took place in reality, though in a less humorous way. Both the Romanian and the Slovak parties forbade the president to enter the neighbouring country's territory when the Hungarian ethnic minority had their festivities. They exchanged diplomatic notes with the Romanian party, while a personal conflict evolved with the Slovakian one. The Hungarian president walked over the bridge in Komárom but the Slovak border patrol told him that he could not enter their country. In the end, the president turned back, but Mátrai's adversary, Kovács drunkenly showed a fig sign to one

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 288. „tettekre nincs mód”

<sup>14</sup> KERESZTESI, József: „Minden csak kitartás” = *HolMi*, 2011/6, 784.

<sup>15</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2010), 357. „A szlovákokkal egyben egyetértünk / Hogy szomszédok vagyunk - és semmi másban.”

of the border guards. Apart from these two notable events, nothing exciting happens related to diplomacy.

The lyrical voice cannot relate to the national memory community in a novel set in a diplomatic atmosphere. It cannot capture the sense of belonging to a nation in terms of having the same traditions, as rational patriotism or as constructive nationalism either. In reality, in 2006, the socialist government attacked opposition protesters using heavy-handed police tactics, which were unacceptable according to European norms. The novel describes this by reference to a howling mob rioting during a national holiday. With a European swank, the lyrical self-claims the social-democratic views to be normal and looks upon national togetherness with Central European anxiety<sup>16</sup>.

## *A legkisebb jégkorszak*

### European Plot

The plot in *A legkisebb jégkorszak*, published in 2015, takes place between the summer of 2019 and the spring of 2020, while Budapest is the location again. Since it has the same characters, the novel can be regarded as the sequel to *Asztalízene*, not studied now, and the above examined *Protokoll*. It differs from them as it depicts a dystopian world, the reality frequencies of which can be grasped through climate-related and party-political issues. The science-fiction genre is nothing new to Térey's poetry as *Jeremiás, avagy az Isten hidege* (2009, Jeremiah, AKA, the cold of God) is also set in the future. *A legkisebb jégkorszak* refers to climate change by depicting an ice age rather than global warming by citing real events. It started in the summer of 2019 with the simultaneous eruption of more than one volcano. The dimension of party politics can be traced to the fact that in the novel, Hungary is led by a social-democratic government, which the National Stalkers terrorists seek to overthrow. The plot has multiple story lines, which facilitates the presentation of numerous issues, including, for example, the kidnapping of a little girl, online harassment, and criminals who swindle people out of their property.

At the beginning of the novel, 52-year-old Mátrai is a consul in Iceland, but after a volcanic eruption on the island he is forced to return to Budapest. Since his wife, Fruzsina (aged 37), known from the previous book, is pregnant, the

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<sup>16</sup> BALAJTHY, Ágnes: *Diplomata a hegyen – Térey János: Protokoll = Alföld*, 2012/1., 115. Balajthy believes that Mátrai is not affiliated with either political side, and this is demonstrated in *Protokoll*. Mátrai, himself does not support any political parties, but the lyrical narrator of novel does, as I suggested previously.

main protagonist decides to resign from his post as a diplomat. From Római-part they move to Istenhegy (Budapest, 12<sup>th</sup> district, and an expensive residential area). Although he is unemployed for a year, their financial problems are insignificant; they are very far from destitution within the novel's time frame. After resigning, he leaves the social life of high society behind and spends his free time with his wife, or takes walks alone, and sometimes meets his old friends. Zoltán Radák, the 35-year-old social democrat prime minister, becomes a leading figure. He "inherits" Mátrai's spleen, known from *Protokoll*, and his inability to have romantic relationships. The head of the government remains popular despite some of his rigorous measures ("he has raised taxes and reduced the minimum wage... And has taxed pensions...").<sup>17</sup> In addition, he is sexually attracted to an actress, Lívia Binder (aged 28-30), and lets a lawyer, Alma Szemerédy (aged 38) flirt with him. His fellow politician is the mayor of Budapest, Béla Tárkány, aged somewhere between 60 and 70. The coming of the ice age interrupts both their careers so much so that after a making a mistake, Tárkány commits suicide and Radák—following the collapse in public order—is shot to death by an assassin of the National Stalkers.

A separate story line is devoted to the meteorologist of the time: Iván Dolina (aged 40-42) and his neglected wife, the lawyer, Alma Szemerédy mentioned above. They belong to the upper middle-class and are together due to the *status quo* of their relationship games, but after Alma's attempt to break up, they even start enjoying married life. Győző Labancz (aged between 50 and 60) has his own story line. He is the former owner of a restaurant. His daughter, Patrícia (aged 16) is harassed online and his other daughter, Bianka (aged 13) is kidnapped. His ex-girlfriend, Laura (aged 19) assassinates the prime minister. On top of this, Labancz—in accordance with his name in the story—becomes a time traveller.<sup>18</sup> During one of his migraine attacks he finds himself in Budapest at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then at the end of World War II and, finally, in the Rákosi-era.<sup>19</sup> His mystical stories counterbalance the novel's fictional scene. Each character meets Henrik Tompa (aged 61) at least once. He used to be a famous opera critic, who loses his flat to swindlers and lives in a community of homeless people in an abandoned clinic building in Zugliget (Budapest, 12<sup>th</sup> district, a trendy location for trips).

Although they have an episodic role throughout the plot, the National Stalkers are the enemy of the world in the novel. They are not seen from the reader's point of view nor from the narrator's but from that of Laura, Labancz's

<sup>17</sup> TÉREY, János: *A legkisebb jégkorszak*. Budapest, Jelenkor Press, 2015, 121.

<sup>18</sup> The surname of the character: Labancz means "soldier of the Habsburg emperors".

<sup>19</sup> The Rákosi-era was the second Communist dictatorship in Hungary between 1948 and 1956.

ex-girlfriend. The rumors about their cannibalism are fake, yet their terrorist attacks are bloody: they blow up a disco, launch an unsuccessful attack on a nuclear power plant in Istenhegy (Budapest, 12<sup>th</sup> district, a trendy location for trips), and have the prime minister assassinated. In the end, government forces raid them in their own headquarters and only Laura, the prime minister's murderer, escapes, fleeing to Slovakia.

The places are symbolic, yet again. The novel is set in the world of the upper middle-class, which, at the same time, is a mirror view of the other 98% of the population – the ones Mátrai had used to look down on. The characters come in and out of popular Budapest locations: Istenhegy, Normafa (Budapest, 12<sup>th</sup> district, and a trendy location for trips), the bank of the Danube, the frozen Danube, Vörösmarty Square (Budapest, 5<sup>th</sup> district, a tourist marketplace near the Danube), and the above mentioned Zugliget. Mátrai and his wife leave the capital only once; before she gives birth, and they go to Nagykovácsi, a small town near the capital that is very popular among the upper middle-class.

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## A Central European Political Satire

*“A leader cannot always be popular.  
History, Binder, will justify us.”<sup>20</sup>*

Some of the characters are caricatures (e.g. Zoltán Radák, the prime minister), while others are merely disguises of the lyrical self. Whereas the hero of *Protokoll* lived with spleen and criticized his milieu vitriolically, in the second part, Mátrai simply contemplates and wonders, he is not seething with rage. He is harshly reproached by the novel. It formulates a specific social criticism of the government, which provides the fiction with a sub-textual narrative. An excerpt from the open criticism: *“[The prime minister] corresponds to the picture of the charismatic leader / - so dear to the Hungarian people's soul / In being a wild genius and a traditionally / Sociopath president, wading in on the faithful's back; Regarding them as objects, like a simple screwdriver, / Some handkerchief, / Feeling no regret, shame or empathy: / He cannot put himself in your shoes, / That's how he is a road roller! And as he is a ruthless self-made man, / and a plain-mannered, and spontaneous chap at the same time. / He differs from the Hungarian ideal, / insofar as he is a melancholic type.”<sup>21</sup>* Causticity needs no

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<sup>20</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2015), 191. „Egy vezető nem lehet mindig népszerű. / A történelem, Binder, majd minket igazol.”

<sup>21</sup> TÉREY: *op. cit.* (2015), 120. “[A miniszterelnök] megfelel a karizmatikus vezér / – A magyar néplelék számára oly kedves – képének. / Annyiban is, hogy vadzszeni, és hagyományosan / Szocio-

explanation, and Hungarian readers know that many elements of the narrative regularly return in the media of the current opposition. It is only the lyrical self, though, that speaks of Mátrai's prime minister, no other character articulates such an opinion about him. Women look for his favours, while men accept his government. Another remark by Radák corresponds to the familiar political speeches of our times: "*Hungary has mostly been / A needy country, / And Budapest – apart from her millennia – / a needy city. She got used to it; being needy.*"<sup>22</sup> A concrete analysis is lacking, which the reader resents, but that is the nature of political speeches. Mátrai also considers the real current head of the government: "*The grey and short-statured, but strong-willed man, / Whose name is connected to the conservative-elitist turn in 2010 / as well as a dozen new stadiums; and high society, / multi-billionaire farm boys' golden age.*"<sup>23</sup>

The ice age overshadows the Central European geopolitics and diplomatic conflicts of the earlier novel. However, bad memories remain to haunt: "*The Hungarian people have frozen / And what hurt them most: / They have frozen into one with the jealous neighbours; Sharing with the Slovenian, Croatian and Austrian, / And even the Slovak, Serbian, Romanian and Ukrainian / Fellows, what's more, almost with the whole / Europe in snow-death... / Their unique fate has flown into a common bed.*"<sup>24</sup> This time, The European Union is also strongly criticized by Mátrai: "*EU zombie-officials are sitting inside. / In an intellectual sense / they are all warthogs. / Spiritually unvarnished people.*"<sup>25</sup> Just as the association of states is not mentioned in disparaging terms in the text once more, nor is the issue of migration brought up either, except on one occasion. Passing through the main square of Brussels, Mátrai is teasing his friend: "*How about this perky pencil here?*" Then his friend responds: "*Not familiar to me*", but the lyrical self knows: "*The minaret of a new mosque was towering over the square.*"<sup>26</sup>

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pata elnök, hívek hátán gázoló; Tárgynak tekint, akár egy szimpla csavarhúzó, / Holmi papír zsebkendőt, / Nem érez megbánás, szegyént, empátiát: / Nem tudja magát a helyedbe képzelni, / Így lehet úthenger! S mert kíméletlen önmegvalósító, / És egyidejűleg sima modorú és spontán fickó. / Annyiban tér el a magyar eszménytől, / Hogy melankolikus alkat."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 495. „Magyarország többnyire / Nélkülvöz ország volt mindig, / És Budapest – leszámítva parádés millenniumait – / Nélkülvöz város. Meg is szokta, hogy az."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 566. „Az ősz és alacsony termetű, de nagy akaratú ember, / Akinek nevéhez a 2010-es konzervatív-elitista fordulat / És tucat új stadion fűződött; s az urizáló, / Multimilliárdos parasztfiúk aranyideje."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 524. „Befagyott a magyarság / S ami különösen fáj neki: / Egybefagyott féltékeny szomszédjaival: / Osztozva szlovén, horvát és osztrák, / Söt szlovák, szerb, román és ukrán / Társaival, mi több: majdnem egész / Európával a közös hóhalálkozásban... / Unikális sorsa közös mederbe került."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 75. „EU-hivatalzombik ülnek odabent. / Intellektuális értelemben egytől egyik / Varacsok dísznök. Szellemileg kendőzetlen emberek."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. „És ez a hetyke kis ceruza itt?” „Nekem nem ismerős.” „Egy új mecset minaretje magaslott a tér felé."

What, then, makes *A legkisebb jégkorszak* a Central European novel? Térey's own comments were: "It is a Hungarian or Central European tradition that the writer-hero relationship can only be very close."<sup>27</sup> The author conceded the connection between Mátrai's fate and his own experience several times. Another attribute of the region is that from the end of the 18th century, the intelligentsia wrote poetry, novels and plays when they wished to criticize the government. Térey assumed this tradition and wrote a political satire at the time of a nationalistic, conservative government. Some comments of the narrative refer to the current government, but it mostly ridicules a fictional one. As with the terrorists, a few traditional national slogans are used, but in such a distorted way that their fictional nature is perceivable. Térey treats national remembrance in a similar way as well, and only makes a hero out of László Rajk (1909-1949), the creator as well as a victim of the system of terror during in the Rákosi-dictatorship, for example. As far as other historical figures are concerned, he portrays with dignity a Hungarian private buried in an unmarked grave during World War II.

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The verse novel genre of *Protokoll* already demonstrated that the text is not classically plot-driven, but a narrative poem. Thus, the plot is lifted *a priori* from the dimension of reality by the form itself. The texts' interpretation is not linear; there are numerous omissions and reticence in the background. Since *Protokoll* is primarily a novel of unrequited love with many episodes of bypasses, the lack of *epitasis* is not disturbing. As for *A legkisebb jégkorszak*, however, the key narrative is lacking to such an extent that the few consecutive events there are loosely hold the fiction together. The climate-story and the criticism of the government are a burden on the narrative, but the pamphlet-like scenes, e.g. the one about Facebook harassment, weigh it down even more. In regard to the various dramatic episodes, an analyst has interpreted the novel as the script for a TV film or series. All of the conflicts, apart from the political assassination, are resolved: the police rescue the kidnapped Bianka in two hours, her kidnapper is maimed for life by a wild boar and the woman in labour, who got stuck in the snow, is taken to hospital in a tank.

The loose plot is an alibi for the pamphlets, and for the sarcasm typical of our region. The misery of the small Central European states thus becomes a satire written in blank verse by Térey; and that is sufficient for a common identity.

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<sup>27</sup> DARVASI: *op. cit.* (2011), 25.

# The Central European Political Discourses



Matthias Funkhauser

## Between Fascist Minority Restriction and the Statute of Autonomy

The Development of the Educational System in South Tyrol after  
the End of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

### Introduction

South Tyrol—more precisely, the *Autonomous Province Bozen-South Tyrol*—has existed in its current political-geographical borders for almost 100 years. Its history is characterized by decades of struggle against oppression and for autonomy and self-governance.

The fascist dictatorship tried to Italianize South Tyrol and to suppress the German and Ladin-speaking population.<sup>1</sup> These Italianization measures concerned all areas of public life—including the educational system, because school instruction in German was forbidden by law—and infringements were punishable. As a countermeasure to the fascist restrictions, a network of secret schools was formed on the initiative of the priest, Canon Michael Gamper, which was labeled as “catacomb schools”.

After the end of the Second World War, South Tyrol received a first statute of autonomy under the Paris Peace Accords, but more than four decades passed before the final and complete implementation of autonomy. The development of the educational system in South Tyrol was also part of this multiphase process, which took place against the backdrop of ethnic conflicts, and between political compromise and violent confrontation.

### South Tyrol and the End of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

South Tyrol, the predominantly rural and multilingual border area between the German and Italian cultural areas, belonged to the county of Tyrol until 1918. For 550 years it had been part of the Habsburg Empire<sup>2</sup> and due to its location was an extremely important trade route between Germany and Italy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Ladins are a Rhaeto-Romanic speaking ethnic group. They live in South Tyrol, in Trentino, in the province of Belluno and in the Swiss canton of Graubünden.

<sup>2</sup> Before that, South Tyrol belonged to the Duchy of Bavaria.

<sup>3</sup> South Tyrol is today the northernmost province of Italy together with Trentino. About 530,000 people live in South Tyrol. Of these, about 60% are German-speaking, 25% Italian-speaking, 5%

After the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, South Tyrol was subordinated to a military government until 31 July 1919 and was subsequently awarded to Italy in the peace of Saint Germain de Laye—a decision that violated the peoples' right of self-determination agreed by the victorious powers.

The systematic and radical Italianization of South Tyrol and the repression of the German and Ladin speaking population began with the fascist seizure of power by Benito Mussolini in 1922.<sup>4</sup> Ettore Tolomei, who came from the region, was responsible for the Italianization measures and in the spirit of irredentism, sought to legitimize the claim that South Tyrol belonged to Italy by means of various sources and theories.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of Tolomei's Italianization, Italian became the sole official language and the provincial capital Bolzano was filled up with immigrants from the poor parts of Italy. In addition, buildings were created to stand as monuments to Italianism. In the course of toponymical changes all German cities, place names, mountains and family names were translated into Italian.<sup>6</sup>

## The Italian and the Tyrolean Educational System in the Area of South Tyrol Before 1918

Before 1861, the elementary school system of Italy had very different forms and levels of development. In particular, the Habsburg-ruled states profited from the Theresian reform. However, in accordance with the constitution of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, the Italian school system was given a central administration, which helped “to cement the social differences: the *Gymnasium* and the *Lyceum* were reserved for the propertied classes [...]. The elementary school [...] was given into the hands of the communities – it was the school of the poor.”<sup>7</sup>

Although Tyrol's first school ordinance of 1586 was still very much in the service of disseminating the Catholic faith, a new decree by the Empress Maria Theresa of 1774 had the goal of “illuminating the darkness of ignorance through

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Ladin-speaking, and 10% belong to other language groups. The capital is Bolzano with about 100,000 inhabitants, of which 75% are Italian speaking.

<sup>4</sup> Already in the run-up to the seizure of power there was an incident. In 1921, during a parade in Bolzano, the teacher Franz Innerhofer was killed by a troop of Fascist thugs.

<sup>5</sup> Tolomei tried to justify already in the 1910s the thesis, that South Tyrol is to be considered by the Brenner border after the principle of water separation as part of Italy.

<sup>6</sup> The names were invented freely in part.

<sup>7</sup> See Seberich, Rainer: *Südtiroler Schulgeschichte*, Bozen 2000, 19.

educational institutions, and of giving adequate instruction to everyone according to his standard.”<sup>8</sup>

Tyrol's educational system was at an exceptionally high level between the end of the 19th century and the First World War. There was a general eight-year compulsory schooling and well-educated teachers who had an acceptable social and economic status. Since the German-speaking population formed the majority, German was also the most important language. However, elementary school instruction took place in the respective mother tongue, while the secondary school lessons were held in German. At the turn of the century, the “language peace” was disturbed by various schools and cultural associations that were founded “for the protection of native-language schools in the linguistic islands and outlying areas of the Italian and German-speaking areas”.<sup>9</sup>

## The Phase of Restriction – The *Lex Gentile* and the Italianization of the School System

Tolomei's programme for the denationalization of South Tyrol initially concerned the schools only insofar as “strict monitoring of the German municipal and private schools [...] in which 6 to 8 hours of Italian lessons were to be given weekly” was mandated.<sup>10</sup> Only the reforms<sup>11</sup> of the Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile created the basis for the Italianization of the schools of linguistic minorities in South Tyrol.<sup>12</sup> Gentile's law provided that all elementary schools in the kingdom should teach only in the official state language. This decree brought about fundamental changes. Above all, however, it meant the introduction of the national unity school and consequently the dissolution of all schools of linguistic minorities.<sup>13</sup> On the far-reaching significance of the *Lex Gentile* Maria Villgrater writes:

“The *Lex Gentile* is the deciding fascist decree in the school sector and at the same time the most serious denationalization decree of that time. As already stated, in future [...] it will demand instruction in Italian in all Italian

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>11</sup> Royal Decree No. 2185, October 1, 1923.

<sup>12</sup> 1875–1944. Philosopher and politician.

<sup>13</sup> See VILLGRATER, Maria: *Katakombenschulen – Faschismus und Schule in Südtirol*, Bozen, 1984, 35.

elementary schools [...]. The change should be made by a gradual replacement of the minority language through Italian. With the school year 1923/24, all first-grade students had to begin instruction in the official state language; the following year, the latter had to extend to the second grade and so on, until the Italianization of all elementary school levels had been reached: at the same time supplementary hours in the native language should be introduced [...]. For the unconverted classes, Italian was considered to be a compulsory subject for five to six hours per week; the transfer to the next higher grade depended on the passing of an Italian exam at the end of each school year.”<sup>14</sup>

94 The Italianization of the school system met with great resistance in South Tyrol, which was expressed in numerous protest rallies. In this situation they could not think of building their own autonomous educational system. Instead, they had to try to pass on their own culture and language in a different way. Therefore, they set up a school system, which worked in secret and were labeled as “catacomb schools”.

## Construction, Organization and Practice of the Catacomb Schools

The foundation, construction and organization of the secret school system is closely linked to the name of Canon Michael Gamper.<sup>15</sup> After the coming into force of the *Lex Gentile*, Gamper repeatedly addressed the people of South Tyrol to raise their awareness of the imminent consequences of denationalization. *Der Volksbote*, a widely circulated newspaper in South Tyrol, printed a call to action from Gamper, which also contained the term “catacombs” for the first time:

“What should happen now? Should we lose the German nationality with the loss of the German school? Today’s rulers want it. A high-ranking government official justified the measure by saying that the government must ensure that we are able to recruit new Italian nationals as soon as possible. Should they succeed? Never ever! Our people will know how to prevent it. We have to imitate the first Christians. When they were no longer safe from worshiping in the public temples, they withdrew to the domestic hearth. [...]

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<sup>14</sup> VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 36.

<sup>15</sup> Gamper was born in 1885. He studied theology in Innsbruck and was ordained as a priest in 1908. In 1914 he became Canon in Bolzano. In addition, Gamper worked as a journalist. He took over the editorship of a South Tyrolean newspaper and was president of an Austrian publishing house.

When the persecutors got there too, they took refuge with the dead in the underground tombs, the catacombs.”<sup>16</sup>

Gamper first promoted home lessons in which children should be taught by their parents. At the beginning of the school year he wrote:

“Dear compatriots! Now the new school year begins. But if it starts only with the Italian lessons, then it is for you as much as none. Then you have to take care of the teaching of your children in their mother tongue. Every house, every hut must become a schoolhouse, every room a schoolroom, where the children receive their lessons in their mother tongue. And the teachers are you, you [...] fathers and mothers, [...]”<sup>17</sup>

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The systematic organization of catacomb schools began in 1925, when home lessons ceased to work for various reasons. Since any form of German-language instruction was punishable, they tried to minimize the risk of discovery of the secret schools. South Tyrol was divided into three parts; each subdivision included a larger city.<sup>18</sup> At the top of each district was a teacher whose main duties included visiting the schools as well as various administrative matters.<sup>19</sup> The education of the teachers took place unofficially. They were trained in courses disguised as craftsmanship courses.<sup>20</sup>

The fear that the *Carabinieri* might discover the catacomb schools was great among both those responsible and the teaching staff.<sup>21</sup> The range of penalties a discovery could entail ranged from fines to deprivation of the permit, to imprisonment, torture and exile.<sup>22</sup> In addition to Gamper, lawyer Josef Noldin<sup>23</sup> and teacher Angela Nikoletti<sup>24</sup> were among the protagonists of the organization of the catacomb schools. Both were arrested and died in prison.

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted after VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>18</sup> The first district comprised the provincial capital of Bolzano and the surrounding area, the second district the cathedral city of Bressanone and the third district the spa town of Merano.

<sup>19</sup> See VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 96.

<sup>20</sup> The first, disguised as a sewing course, took place in Bolzano in the summer of 1925, at which 25 young female teachers were trained.

<sup>21</sup> The term *Carabinieri* means the Italian police.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 24. For a detailed list of prosecutions by the Italian judiciary, see Maria Villgrater's dissertation, pages 208–251.

<sup>23</sup> 1888–1929. Noldin was banned from the Italian judiciary for his involvement in catacomb schools to the Lipari Islands where he infected himself with a virus. As the Italian authorities refused to allow him to leave the country he died as a result of his illness.

<sup>24</sup> 1905–1930. She died as a result of the ill-treatment she suffered in prison.

The places where practical lessons could take place had to fulfil various “safety criteria”. Remote farms in particular afforded good protection; they were difficult to access but at the same time had good escape routes. During instruction people took turns to act as guards to warn of danger.<sup>25</sup> A witness remembers:

“In Sarns, on the request of a teacher from Bressanone I knew, I started German lessons with three children in our apartment, but more and more came, and so a peasant family in the village above provided us with a room; but even then it became too dangerous and we walked – twenty children, the whole Italian school – into a heated room in an old barn [...], which could not be well seen from the road, but where we watched every dangerous approach and in the case of emergency we could disappear through a dilapidated rear exit. There I taught two to three hours two or three times a week.”<sup>26</sup>

The materials that the children needed for school lessons were stealthily obtained and hidden for classes. Contemporary witnesses report that they deposited the teaching materials in empty wine barrels and vegetable baskets, but also between handicrafts, board games or Italian booklets. The textbooks used were also broken up into individual sheets to disguise them.<sup>27</sup>

Due to the difficult circumstances, the teaching materials were of a simple nature. Exercise books didn’t exist. Instead, they used single loose leaves on which most of them wrote with pencil. Ink was rarely available. Makeshift blackboards were provided for teachers to write upon with chalk. They consisted of either cardboard or baking paper attached to a wall or door.<sup>28</sup>

The lessons in the catacombs were tied to temporal conditions. Contrary to the original plan that instruction should not take place before 7 am and after 7 pm, the evening hours were soon used because the children were in the Italian school until 4 pm and the lunch break was too short. Thursdays and Sunday’s were also available since there were no classes in the Italian schools on those days.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 128.

<sup>26</sup> From a letter from the teacher Marianne Pfalzer. Quoted after VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 128.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.* 128.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*

About 5,000 children were taught annually by about 220 teachers in the catacombs.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, this emergency educational system of the Fascist era ensured that South Tyrolean children remained in contact with their mother tongue. On the other hand, double lessons were also a huge burden for the children. For one thing, it was due to the time frame, since the children were in Italian school until 4 pm. Furthermore, inhomogeneous groups made it impossible to structure the children meaningfully by age or knowledge and to group them together.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the children were not allowed to betray themselves in German and Italian spelling.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the physical effort, the children also had to distinguish two versions of their story—the “official” version of the Italian school and the “unofficial” version of the catacomb school. South Tyrolean historian and former catacomb student Claus Gatterer summarized the resulting lack of identity as follows:

“We were torn, our shell was a lie: we lied about the school at home, at school about home and about ourselves.”<sup>33</sup>

## The Phase of Blocked Autonomy – Political Compromise and Violent Confrontation

After the end of the Second World War, South Tyrol was granted a first statute of autonomy in 1948 in the Paris Peace Treaty on the basis of the Gruber-De-Gasperri Agreement, but it was largely not implemented. For example, the merging of the provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino meant that Italy's political representatives once again formed the majority. But other contents of the autonomy agreement were also not put into practice. The dissatisfaction among the population of South Tyrol grew and in 1957 a protest rally at the Castle of *Sigmundskron* called for the separation of Trento and the implementation of full autonomy. As a result of this demand, two paths emerged during this time, which determined the solutions to the ethnic conflicts in South Tyrol. On the one hand, it was the political, long-term and diplomatic way of the South Tyrolean Prime Minister Silvius Magnago. On the other side various

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<sup>30</sup> Numbers provided by Gamper. See also SEBERICH, Rainer: *Südtiroler Schulgeschichte*, Bozen 2000, 84.

<sup>31</sup> See VILLGRATER: *op. cit.* (1984), 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 135.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted from STEININGER, Rolf: *Südtirol – Vom ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*. Innsbruck-Wien, 2014, 54.

separatist groups tried to force disengagement from Italy through bomb attacks on symbols of Italian power.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Austrian Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky ensured that the “case of South Tyrol” came before the UN General Assembly in 1960. As a result and in response to the attacks, the Italian Council of Ministers formed an expert commission in 1961. This commission, the so-called “19-Commission”, which consisted of representatives of the various language groups, had the task of finding political solutions to the problems in South Tyrol.

These obstacles allowed only a very limited development of the educational system in South Tyrol. Although German schools and a German school office were once again established, the Italian state financed the school system and still continued to administer it without allowing any concessions to South Tyrol. All efforts to autonomously reorganise the educational system remained unsuccessful until the beginning of the 1960s.

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## The Phase of Construction – The South Tyrolean Educational System and the Second Statute of Autonomy

The work of the 19-Commission provided a major breakthrough. After completing their work in April 1964, they presented a comprehensive catalog of measures, the so-called “South Tyrol Package”, which formed the basis for negotiations between Silvius Magnago and the Italian prime minister, Aldo Moro. Consequently, a second statute of autonomy came into force in 1972, which now included a significant expansion of autonomy in South Tyrol—but it took another 20 years to finalize it.

This political development also had a huge impact on the educational system, because with the end of the dependence on the Italian state, it became possible to build an autonomous educational system in South Tyrol, based on the German, Austrian and also on the Scandinavian systems.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the establishment of the kindergarten and vocational training system, the most important innovation is the secondary school law passed in December 1962, because the introduction of the secondary school made a uniform education for all 11 to 14-year-olds in South Tyrol possible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A detailed account of the attacks and their background includes the book PETERLINI, Hans Karl: *Feuernacht. Südtirols Bombenjahre*. Edition Raetia, Bozen 2016.

<sup>35</sup> The educational system continued to be financed by the Italian State.

<sup>36</sup> Every municipality with more than 3,000 residents should get a secondary school.

In addition, through this second statute of autonomy various cultural and educational initiatives that had already been launched in the early 1950s could be institutionalized. In particular, the music field benefited, because under the direction of Johanna Blum, a niece of the Minister of Culture József Eötvös, music courses that were already organized in different parts of South Tyrol, were transferred into music schools.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, three different schools were created, one for each language group, representing their interests and organizing their affairs.

By 1989, the era of Magnago ended.<sup>38</sup> His successor was Luis Durnwalder, who stood up for political opening and sought the dialogue between the different language groups.

## The Phase of Expansion – The South Tyrolean Educational System After the End of the Ethnic Conflicts

Against the backdrop of huge political changes and crises between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, such as the collapse of communist systems, the student protests in China and the conflicts in the territories of former Yugoslavia, the conclusion of the South Tyrol package, the settlement of disputes and the official end of the ethnic conflicts in South Tyrol were also announced. What was missing was the “international anchoring of the South Tyrol question. [...] the international guarantees for the German- and Ladin-speaking minority in South Tyrol in case of a possible violation of the rights laid down in the pact by Italy.”<sup>39</sup> Detailed consultations between Rome, Bolzano and Vienna ended with an amicable solution:

“On 11 June 1992, Austria gave the dispute resolution, and on 19 June, the long case of dispute South Tyrol was formally completed by the 'notification of termination of the dispute' to the Secretary-General of the United Nations under point 15 of the Operations Calendar.”<sup>40</sup>

It was especially the peaceful and successful conclusion of the lengthy negotiations that made South Tyrol, particularly against the backdrop of the Balkan crisis, a model for Europe.

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<sup>37</sup> The Association of South Tyrolean brass bands and the South Tyrolean Singers Association were founded as early as 1948 and 1949.

<sup>38</sup> Magnago withdrew from politics for health reasons and died in 2010.

<sup>39</sup> LECHNER, Stefan – MEZZALIRA, Giorgio: *Übergänge und Perspektiven*, Athesia, Bozen 2013, 250.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 250.

Linked to the settlement of disputes was an expansion of autonomy and competences and, at the same time, further changes in the educational system. These changes concerned the financing of the educational system. From 1992, the Italian State and the Province of South Tyrol shared the financing, with the Italian State paying teachers a basic salary supplemented by various allowances paid by the Province of South Tyrol.<sup>41</sup> The financial distribution was also extended to the maintenance of the school buildings. The elementary and middle school buildings were maintained by the municipalities, the upper school buildings by the province.

Syllabi in the original sense were abolished. Since 1992, a set of teaching guidelines has been developed by a group consisting of representatives of the school board, specialist advisers, inspectors and teachers. These framework guidelines provide the basis upon which each school district creates its curriculum. Here, the curricula are not a rigid, untouchable framework, but are revised within regular intervals and adapted to the needs and circumstances of the schools. The foundation of the University of Bolzano changed the education of primary school and kindergarten teachers. Until the early 1990s, the teaching staff of elementary schools was trained at teacher training institutions in South Tyrol. Since 1992 this training has been held at the Faculty of Education of the University of Bolzano.<sup>42</sup> This practice of the Faculty of Education is unique in Europe, as the kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers are trained together in a 5-year master's programme.

Other profound changes were the strong networking of the schools with other institutions and associations, the formation of overarching school districts and the state law on the autonomy of schools.

## The South Tyrolean Educational System Today

The current form of the South Tyrolean educational system is a three-tier, continental, trilingual system. The three language groups (German, Italian, Ladin) teach each in their own language in their own schools, whereby in the German school the Italian language and in the Italian school the German language is a compulsory subject.<sup>43</sup> Compulsory schooling in South Tyrol is 10 years in total.

At the primary level, every pupil aged 6-11 attends the elementary school (*Scuola Primaria*) for five years after kindergarten (*Scuola dell'Infanzia*) and

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<sup>41</sup> This includes, for example, the bilingualism allowance.

<sup>42</sup> The Faculty of Education is located in Bressanone.

<sup>43</sup> Trilingualism is exclusively the case in the Ladin school.

then the middle school for three years. This corresponds to the first part of secondary education (*Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado*). Both elementary and middle school are attended by all children between ages six and 14 uniformly. Following the inclusive pedagogy, there are no special schools in South Tyrol. Children with disabilities also complete these grades together with the other children. Integration teachers with special training were given the task of taking care of these pupils. Elementary school is completed by passing a state examination. Afterwards, the children decide which form of secondary school they want to attend – this happens in the second section of upper secondary school.

The second section of secondary school (*Scuola Secondaria di Secondo Grado*) lasts three-five and is attended by the 14-19-year-old pupils. The children choose either the five-year college (*Liceo*), which offers various emphases, or the technical college (*Istituto Tecnico*), which offers various training opportunities in the fields of economics or technology.<sup>44</sup> The third possibility is vocational training at the vocational school (*Istituto Professionale*), during which one can obtain a vocational qualification after three or four years and the general higher education qualification after another five years. The secondary level is also completed bypassing a state examination, which entitles pupils to further education.

The tertiary area covers a total of eight years and usually begins at the age of 19. It is divided into universities (*Università*) and vocational colleges (*Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore*). In South Tyrol, the highest educational institution today is a university with a trilingual study programme at the faculties of educational science, computer science, natural sciences and technology, design and the arts, and economics.

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<sup>44</sup> Emphases of the gymnasium: Classical gymnasium (*Liceo Classico*), Real gymnasium (*Liceo Scientifico*), Art gymnasium (*Liceo Artistico*), Language gymnasium (*Liceo Linguistico*), Music gymnasium (*Liceo Musicale*) Social sciences gymnasium (*Liceo delle Scienze Umane*).

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Barnabás Vajda

## Historical Pull and Push Factors in Central Europe After 1989

### Abstract

This paper analyses some historical pull and push factors that have had an impact on Central Europe since 1989, especially after 2004 as the date of formal European integration. It deals with the following main questions: Which are the most determining (structural, fundamental) historical processes that have shaped Central Europe since 1989/2004? Has it been a period of gaining more independence? Or on the contrary, has it been a period of losing identity? The analysis asks questions and provides some (limited) answers while taking into consideration political, geopolitical, military, cultural, and economic factors.

**Keywords:** Central Europe; European integration; independence; national interest.

In my lecture and study<sup>1</sup> I would like to analyse one single question which is why do Central European countries behave in the field of international diplomacy as they do? At the same time, in order to answer this question, we need to ask the following yes or no question: Is it possible to conduct diplomacy, in any Central European country, in *any* country, which is not based on national interest?

1989 was indeed an *annus mirabilis* after which Central Europe was seen for some time as a *tabula rasa* on the map of Europe. A fertile territory, ready to be conquered politically, economically, culturally, and even militarily.

At that time, there were at least two overall factors, or two major options, which Central European countries could choose from right after 1989. Either 'joining Europe' which unanimously meant the Western European orientation, and joining an already existing union of states expecting to achieve, sooner or later, a 'more perfect union'. Or to fulfil the desire for 'independence', an old dream of all Central and Eastern European nations, which would result in an 'own way', or a third political way, or a non-aligned way. Many of us remember that in and after 1989 both options were present. Both orientations were the subject of vivid public discourse, so in those years we witnessed a parallel existence, or a coexistence, of a 'national revival within Europe'.

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Since 1989, and especially since May of 2004 many pull and push factors have shaped the Central European region in both ways. By a 'pull factor' I mean any influence that appears attractive enough to inspire a country to join a bigger or more complex structure. By a 'push factor' I mean any influence that is not attractive or is actually repulsive, and thus prevents a country from joining an alliance or a union etc. We know that Central Europe has been a subject of many different pull and push factors. Pull and push factors in political, economic, cultural, and military terms. From another perspective, pull and push factors on a regional, European, and global scale.

Let us specify some factors. Some historical pull factors are: increasing living standards (the same salaries); freedom to travel (a system of free state borders); economic cooperation (the example of a successful European Community, later the EU); stability and peace (which is the driving force behind multilateral military and security structures such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, Slovakia on 1 Dec 2000; Hungary on 7 May 1996; Poland on 22 Nov 1996); the European Electronic Crime Task Force; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy; NATO, etc.

Many of us may remember right after 1989 how strong these pull factors were; and how strongly the slogan 'Back to Europe!' resonated among most social groups. By that time, however, more and more people had become sceptical, and we heard more and more news about the disadvantages of joining the European political and economic structures. Growing scepticism can be traced back to certain metaphors, such as 'From a Zoo to a Jungle', or 'Joining the EU is like an appointment at the dentist's', both quoted by Petr Ország as witty expressions of the complexity of general fears in almost all Central European countries, where familiar nationalism quickly became a shield against the rapidly changing and alien world.

And thus, some historical push factors came into being. These include economic independence as well as deep disillusionment and disappointment. One question could be to what degree is it possible to remain economically independent in the world in the 21st century. But it seems quite clear that economic independence is one the main reasons for some Central European countries such Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland rejecting the Euro.

As to disillusionment and disappointment, we could ask what kind of disillusionment and whose disappointment are we talking about? What I mean here is the disillusionment which is apparent in the European political structures that were set up in the 1950s and 1960s as well as in economic structures that favour well established Western European economic actors; both are palpable in recent scientific polls and surveys. And the subject of this disillusionment are certain layers of the political establishment, on the one hand, and on

the other hand the sheer masses of ordinary European people. We can take as an example the disillusionment of the Central European customer who was believed to be less demanding, or less picky than his/her Western European counterpart, and who has felt that he/she is inferior to Western European customers as far as the quality of everyday goods is concerned.

Turning to the strong historical pull factors, we can identify the following three major events:

- Ten Central European countries joined the European Union on 1 May 2004.
- Most Central European countries joined NATO. Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland in 1999; Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria in 2004; Croatia in 2009.
- Most Central European countries joined the OECD; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, albeit at different times: Hungary on 7 May 1996; Poland on 22 November 1996; and Slovakia on 1 December 2000.

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Beside these (above mentioned) pull factors, which seem to be very strong, and are generally welcome in Western European structures, there are some additional push factors which are considered as forms of being suspicious or selfish. A remarkable example of this situation is the creation of the Visegrad Four, a special regional sub-alliance within the overall alliance (of the EU).

Naturally, since 1989, and especially since May of 2004, these pull and push factors have indeed shaped the Central European region. Some of them initiated and encouraged an ever-greater integration into the European Union, but some of them seemed quite repulsive for many ordinary Central Europeans. The duality or ambiguity of these factors is so contemporary that by the time of this study (Summer of 2019), the fate of Central Europe, in this particular respect, has still not been decided.

In order to analyse the character of the duality of Central Europe as a consequence of the pull and push factors, I regard it as important to examine the issue of the 'national interest in diplomacy'. Thus, we have to ask: In the perspective of the aforementioned historical pull and push factors, what is the place of the 'national interest' in this process? In what direction has 'national interest' moved in the last thirty years, within the framework of the European Union?

In what follows I would like to concentrate on international policy and affairs<sup>2</sup>, and I would like to make my earlier point about the two options before

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, there might be other legitimate viewpoints considering Central European identity such as literature, music, etc. Also, it would be worth analysing pull and push factors in the economy,

Central European countries (either Western European orientation resulting in a 'more perfect union', or to fulfil the desire for independence, resulting in a third way) clearer.

The word 'independent' can mean many things, and in the present paper I would also like to omit theoretical ideas about both the concept of 'nation' and the question what 'national interest' means exactly. In order to indicate where my train of thought is going I will quote John Lukacs's words on both phenomena: "The nation [...] is in many ways a uniquely European phenomenon [...] National interest is what people think it is."<sup>3</sup> What really counts in my train of thought is that we have observed clear efforts in every Central European country to aspire to formulate their own independent foreign policy; and this is a process in which national interest has become a key word.

This process of an independent foreign policy is more transparent and remarkable if we compare it to the period of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the national interest of the Central European countries was subjugated to the interests of the Soviet Union as one of the two superpowers. What is more, even the Soviet Union itself had always been determined to pursue its own national, i.e. Russian big-power interest; and this idea was formulated by numerous contemporaries and experts.<sup>4</sup> This Cold War was a time when subjugated countries followed a foreign policy compatible with the interests of the Soviet Union. For instance, "under Communism, Czechoslovakia was at best a semi-sovereign state with very limited control over [...] its foreign policy", as formulated by C. S. Leff.<sup>5</sup> No wonder that in 1989 one of the greatest achievements in all the Central European countries was re-gaining their national independence.

After 1989, every Central European country made huge efforts to regain their power to formulate their own political, economic and military interest independently. 1989 was a fresh start when Central European political entities were able to start to formulate their own foreign policy, based on national interest.

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for example, the MOL Group, Slovnaft and its Central EU Foundation. These are fields, however, where I am not qualified to make a comparative analysis.

3 LUKACS, John: *A new history of the Cold War*. 3rd Edition. Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1962, 284, 303

4 Here I feel it is necessary to quote just two fundamental views from U.S. ambassador Charles Bohlen and Cold War historian John Lukacs. "I was convinced that the Soviet Union, as far as its own actions went, was largely motivated by its interest as a national state", BOHLEN, Charles E.: *Witness to History 1929-1969*. W. W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, 1973, 307; 'The history of Soviet Russian foreign policy is studded with innumerable examples when considerations of Russian national interests clearly proved more important than the interest of international communism, at the expense of the latter.' LUKACS, John: *A new history of the Cold War*. 3rd Edition. Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1962, 262.

5 LEFF, Carol Skalnik: *The Czech and Slovak Republics. Nation Versus State*. Westview Press, A division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1997, 213.

So, questions arise what has changed since the end of the Cold War, and what has changed since 1989 and 2004 in this field?

First of all, today we are witnesses to a multi-voice diplomacy in every Central European country. What a difference this is when compared to the Cold War times when between 1948 and 1989/1991, foreign policy in each and every Central European country was a one-voice diplomacy. It was done in a pro-Soviet manner by a handful of ideologists and bureaucrats. The framework for this kind of diplomacy was a one-party-system where concepts on foreign policy of political rivals as well as wider public opinion were practically non-existent.

After 1989, diplomatic relations in Central Europe became multi-vocal. There have been and there are since then many more shades. More voices are being heard. Today, everywhere in Central Europe there is a multi-party system where opposition foreign concepts as well as public pressure are entirely legitimate parts of foreign policy. Rival ideas and rival notions are common.<sup>6</sup> This kind of multi-vocality in diplomacy may sound confusing; for many even chaotic. But in historical terms and seen within the framework of free democracy, this is the everyday routine of doing foreign policy where one of the most reliable torches on the rough waters of international affairs is what any current government declares its best national interest.

This is already a huge difference when compared to pre-1989 times. But that is not all, since Central European countries formulated not only new and independent *strategic goals* on the international field, but revived many old *tactical elements* of diplomacy. In light of the newly regained independent foreign diplomacy, Central European countries started to follow their own national interest. They have all done this. To name but two examples: they all argue with their national interests when they do arms deals (jets, aeroplanes, etc.) or make their own separate deals (such as NATO bases in Romania)<sup>7</sup>; and they all name their national interest in the field of energy when planning long-

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<sup>6</sup> I can recount a very recent 'incident' within the Slovak foreign policy when the foreign strategy of the Slovak government, represented by the Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini ["Joining NATO was a strategic decision"] collided with the 'national interest' pursued by Andrej Danko, the Head of the Slovak Parliament and Pellegrini's coalition partner. This recent scandal within the Slovak government broke out around some planned US military bases in Slovakia, in the spring of 2019, when Mr. Danko went on a visit to Moscow on 9 May 2019, as an only representative of the European Union, despite open disapproval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

<sup>7</sup> As a recent example I can point out Peter Pellegrini's visit to the White House in May 2019 when the Slovak Prime Minister made not only a curtesy visit to President Trump but took part in tough negotiations over scheduled US military bases in Slovakia, and possible sales of jet fighters. See: [[https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/686846/fujara-tahak-i-tajnosti-ako-isli-slovenski-politici-do-bieleho-domu/?fbclid=IwAR21qEikVw\\_Y26m67bjIsZDUB5X4v30hkt4rimOpmSgCbDM8dNKQcQ01a-g](https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/686846/fujara-tahak-i-tajnosti-ako-isli-slovenski-politici-do-bieleho-domu/?fbclid=IwAR21qEikVw_Y26m67bjIsZDUB5X4v30hkt4rimOpmSgCbDM8dNKQcQ01a-g)] Accessed 25.06.2019.

term deals in oil supplies (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Romania). These are measures taken by the Central European countries, i.e. their separate deals seem selfish, or out of the box, and sometimes even anti-European.

Plus, there is one more phenomenon we have to add to the list of 'national interest', namely that after the end of the Cold War, Central European countries reached back to some traditional diplomatic tactics which they were unable to use prior to 1989. In my understanding, one of the most interesting features in the diplomacy of the Central European countries is how in the last 30 years they have been using old-fashioned diplomatic tactics. What I mean here is that international relations have had a historically known and described tactical tools (toolkit) and acting patterns (paradigms<sup>8</sup>) which have existed for centuries (at least since the Renaissance). It is enough to name only the most well-known tactics of classical 19th century diplomacy such as negotiations, bargaining, putting pressure on the opponent, distracting attention, a show or pretence of force, even threatening, blackmailing, cheating, etc. A further tactical element or classical diplomatic pattern is creating regional alliances; a feature that was unknown during the Cold War, but was indeed well known by the international European community both in the inter-war period, and certainly prior to the Great War. These tactical elements (and much more, including spying, using modern means of media propaganda, etc.) in the Cold War period were almost non-existent, or there were strict limitations on using them. After 1989, following a short period of time, Central European countries reached back to these classical diplomatic tools, and have not been afraid to use them.

As a conclusion, I return to the original thesis of my paper: Is it possible to conduct diplomacy, in any Central European country, in fact in any country, which is not based on national interest? No, I believe it is not.

So, what have Central European countries achieved during the turbulent years of transition since 1989? Have they been successful in deepening their integration into the European and global organizations? Or, on the contrary, have they formulated clear cut foreign policy and diplomacy of their own?

In my understanding, in most Central European countries both pull and push factors have been shaping Central Europe simultaneously since 1989, or at least 2004. Both options have been and still are so open and so undecided that I consider it a real possibility that there can be two outcomes in both cases: Central Europe may thrive somewhere in between, or it could be lost in a huge dissolution of nations (in the long term).

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<sup>8</sup> On the paradigms of the Cold war see: VAJDA, Barnabás: *A külpolitikai nemzetstratégiák lehetőségei és korlátai – a hidegháború alatt és utána. Az „Együttgondolkodás a nemzetstratégiáról és a nemzetpolitikáról” c. konferencián 2015. június 11-én Veszprémben elhangzott koreferátum írott változata = Együttgondolkodás nemzetstratégiáról és nemzetpolitikáról.* Nemzetstratégiai Kutatóintézet, Budapest, 2016, 84-89.

I would like to quote Mikuláš Dzurinda on how he saw those turbulent transitional times. In a recent interview Dzurinda, who was a prime minister between 1998 and 2006, and for some time the minister of foreign affairs (2010–2012) of the Slovak Republic, when asked about the 15th anniversary of joining the European Union, spoke about a kind of “end of euphoria”, and “end of the honeymoon period in the marriage with the West”.<sup>9</sup> He said that the summit of George W. Bush with Vladimir Putin at the Bratislava Summit on February 25, 2005 was a peak time for both the Slovak and the Central European foreign diplomacy.

However, he also said, that the economic crisis in 2008–2009 completely changed this unique situation. In Mr. Dzurinda’s view, 2008 and 2009 were years of historical turning points. He recalled one specific event: how disappointed he was when he heard the news about Gerhard Schroeder’s ‘energy agreement’ with Russia; that Germany was keen to be part of the North Stream II. energy project, despite enough energy capacity in Central and Eastern Europe. And finally, 2015, with its refugee crisis completely changed the flow of the European foreign policy.

International alliances require solidarity. But on international diplomacy, most political entities follow Henry Kissinger’s realpolitik advice: Follow your own interest.

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<sup>9</sup> Dzurinda: [https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/688611/nazor-mikulasa-dzurindu-15-rokov-v-eu-nas-posilnilo-aj-poucilo/?fbclid=IwAR0bC-NROchnCLKgsDZtb-aTldCrKli1eDbcSUDIP-GaxWMMo8nZyH8i\\_qE](https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/688611/nazor-mikulasa-dzurindu-15-rokov-v-eu-nas-posilnilo-aj-poucilo/?fbclid=IwAR0bC-NROchnCLKgsDZtb-aTldCrKli1eDbcSUDIP-GaxWMMo8nZyH8i_qE) (accessed 01.06.2019.)

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Petr Orság

## A Political or a Cultural Project?

The New European Empire as “Entropa”, and Central European Traditions and Connections

### Abstract

This paper looks at politics and political negotiation as part of a wider cultural context and understands politics in this sense as an expression of the given cultural system. Political negotiations arise from the wider cultural assumptions that influence it. People provide meaning to political processes by means of symbols, which politics either intentionally or unintentionally works with. I attempt to use this perspective to analyze the accession of the countries of Central Europe into the European Union. Making specific use of the example of the Czech Republic and its development, furthermore I attempt, in the wider historical framework, to demonstrate how tradition, symbols and various stereotypes or artistic expressions intertwine, meet and clash with the actions of political protagonists. Within this context, I present several works by Central European artists, which remarkably anticipated the future development and social-political movements on the European continent.

**Keywords:** Central Europe, Czech National Identity, Czech National Revival, Czech and German Relations, the Czech Republic, “Entropa”, the European Union, We and the Others

### Introduction

Czech politicians had been preparing for a long time for the moment the Czech Republic would be granted the presidency of the Council of the European Union in January 2009. After Slovenia, the Czech Republic was only the second country of the “new” members to be given the opportunity to run the Council. This was five years after the greatest enlargement of the European Union, by ten other countries, eight of which had formerly been under Soviet influence behind the Iron Curtain.

The preparations also included a publicity campaign aimed at attracting the attention of the domestic Czech audience to the European Union, as well as at highlighting the ways in which Czechs had served Europe and the ways in which they could be beneficial even now. The faces of the campaign were seven renowned Czech public figures—an architect, a scientist, a conductor, a balle-

rina, two sportsmen, and a model—who “had made it abroad” according to the creators of the campaign. The selection foreshadowed the blend of high/elite and low/popular culture for political purposes.

However, the (seemingly innocent) official slogan “*We will sweeten Europe*” acquired its own dynamics once it was out, due to its ambiguous nature. The creators of the publicity campaign probably used the pun on purpose. Did they know, however, how far the ambiguity of the slogan would go? The campaign was subjected to clever interpretations shortly after its launch. Czechs had already been labelled Eurosceptics due to some of their politicians, such as President Václav Klaus. Now, the motto had two meanings. The first, literal reading of the slogan, wryly references the “Czech” invention of the sugar cube, patented in 1843. Modern Czech nonetheless uses the phrase “to sweeten something” mostly in its negative meaning—that is, “to make something harder for someone” or “to give someone a taste of their own medicine”.

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The video promoting the Czech presidency clearly carried a great deal of ambiguity, different meanings and potential controversies. Take for example the sugar cube, believed to be a Czech invention, which indeed was made in a factory in the town of Dačice, and therefore in the Czech Lands. However, it had been invented by the then director of the sugar factory Jakub Kryštof Rad, or Jacob Christoph Rad to be more precise, a Swiss native who had moved to Dačice from Vienna for work...

Another connotation was more serious. The Czech Euro sceptics immediately argued that the choice of sugar cubes and the message of the entire promotional video were misleading as they suggested “We, Czechs” would dissolve in the EU like a sugar cube in coffee. Although the deputy prime minister for EU affairs tried to dismiss this objection, his efforts were in vain as it remained hanging in the public space, with part of the nation undoubtedly agreeing with the view of a small nation “dissolving” in the big, alien federation. This is a metaphorical parable that continues to revisit Czech history. It was as if dissolution had been inscribed in the identity and fate of the nation as part of its essence. The constant insecurities and feelings of threat perceived by a small, uncertain nation in the middle of Europe.

This is partly why Mirek Topolánek, prime minister of the Czech Republic, strove to mitigate the negative connotations associated with the original slogan. The first few days of the Czech Presidency in January 2009 saw him switch to a modified slogan during media appearances—instead of “We will sweeten Europe” he started using the slogan “Making Europe sweeter”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Media response, for example, see: ČTK: Heslo “*Europě to osladíme*” vláda změnila na “*Sladíme Evropu*” (“Government shifts from ‘We will sweeten Europe’ to ‘Making Europe sweeter’”). The article states that the negative response to the original motto was largely a domestic affair. Foreign

However, the ambiguous original slogan and clip seemed to herald what followed during the launch of the presidency itself.

It is an unwritten law that the presiding country of the Council of the European Union is responsible for decorating the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, which houses the Council of the EU. Most countries adopt a standard approach. France, for example, which chaired the Council before the Czech Republic, had decorated the building with a balloon decorated in its national colours. The Czech government commissioned the Czech artist David Černý to produce a work that would be unveiled at the entrance to the building as part of the launch of the Czech Presidency. David Černý originally presented the plan to create a work in cooperation with artists from all the EU member states. When the work was finished and unveiled in Brussels, it transpired that the sculpture, Entropa, had only been made by David Černý and his two assistants. However, the author's mystification was not the main problem. The fundamental controversy was the sculpture itself. While the ambiguous slogan "We will sweeten Europe" and the video were only criticized within the Czech Republic, Entropa caused international outrage. Although the artist himself declared the work to be an artistic, satirical view of Europe, and although the subtitle of the sculpture was "Stereotypes are barriers to be removed", this did not prevent criticism from member states that were offended by the way they were portrayed by Černý in the sculpture. The sculpture by Černý is discussed in more detail later in the text.

## We and They, or From One Empire to Another

This paper considers politics and political action as part of a wider cultural context. Politics is understood in this sense as an expression of a given cultural system.

Culture is defined for the purposes of this paper as a system of collectively shared opinions, notions, assumptions, ideas and meanings.<sup>2</sup> It can also be described as a system of ideas and meanings typical for the given society. In every society, the set of central values that it accepts and is built on can be

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media appreciated the Czech sense of humor and the DPA stated that "the small Central European nation, squeezed between Europe's western and eastern powers, has learned to swallow bitter pills and belittle hardship, using humor known for hard-to-police allegories and word plays." Available at: <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/158134-heslo-evrope-to-osladime-vlada-zmenilana-sladime-evropu.html> (accessed 17.07.2019).

<sup>2</sup> HOLÝ, Ladislav: *Malý český člověk a skutečný český národ. Národní identita a postkomunistická transformace společnosti*. Praha, Slon, 2010, 10.

traced to a certain point in time. The values integrate society, while also highlighting the aspects in which the society differs from others.<sup>3</sup>

Political action is based on a wider cultural background, which influences it in different ways. People attribute meaning to political processes through the symbols, with which politics works, whether intentionally or unintentionally. A good example of the multiple symbolic interactions between politics and the public sphere within a given cultural system is the above-mentioned Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union. Symbols were also used here to stir emotions and win over the recipients to the political agenda—the presidency.

Commissioned by the government, the creators of the Czech Presidency promotional clip attempted to work with symbolism that developed, through the selected personalities, some of the traditions that provide the basis for Czech national identity. The cultural anthropologist Ladislav Holý names three—the traditions of culture, education, and democracy.<sup>4</sup> The video works with at least two of them – the tradition of education was represented by a renowned chemist who invented medicines for treating viral diseases and, for example, AIDS around the world. Indeed, even the sugar cube represents the advanced tradition of education—namely the tradition of the Czech sugar industry. The architect, who left for Great Britain after Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and became successful there, is a combination of cultural and educational traditions. The cultural tradition is represented by the conductor, celebrated both in the Czech Republic and abroad. Although the two sportsmen (a football and a hockey player) and the model represent popular culture, not high culture, they, in principle, match the way Czechs build the idea of their own nation and national identity.

What do Czechs think of their fellow Czechs, and of others? Where do these ideas come from? How did they start to develop?

Collective identities always develop by distancing themselves from others. National identity is also formed in opposition to those seen as “others”.<sup>5</sup>

The modern construction of the Czech nation at the time of the national awakening was not derived from the “civic principle”, namely the nation as a community based on the civic principles arising from the ideas of the French Revolution in the West. The Czech Lands were ultimately dominated by the

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<sup>3</sup> HORÁKOVÁ, Hana: *Kultura jako všelék? Kritika soudobých přístupů*. Praha, Slon, 2012, 91.

<sup>4</sup> HOLÝ, 2010, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Criteria required for the development of group identities can be variable, and the friend-enemy boundary easy to manipulate, “similarly to historical and ideological pretensions, which allow us to hate each other ...” See LOEWENSTEIN, Bedřich: *My a ti druzí (Us and the Others) = Sociologický časopis*, XXXI, No. 2, 1995, 188.

concept of a nation based on the linguistic and cultural model, which was also prevalent in the German speaking countries. In short, the community is based on the ethnic principle.<sup>6</sup> The model also served as the starting point for the Czech National Revival. Czechs base their national identity on language and culture. This concept of the nation was then reproduced by Czech literature, Czech education and Czech politics.

Czechs were part of the Habsburg monarchy for four centuries. They began to construct their national identity within the monarchy primarily on the basis of their relationship with the Germans at the time of the beginning of the national emancipation; the National Revival. This did not primarily necessarily mean opposition to the Germans, German culture and the German language. For the enlightened scholar Josef Dobrovský, active in public life at the turn of the eighteenth century, and one of the main representatives of the first phase of the Czech national movement, German was the language in which he referred to Czech issues. Sceptical about any stronger emancipation of the Czech language and the Czech nation within the monarchy, he nevertheless made the Czech language, literature, and history his scholarly focus. He thus wrote his *History of the Czech Language and Literature* in German, voicing his doubts about the future of the Czech language. Accordingly, his *Grammar of the Czech Language* was published in German. Dobrovský also began publishing the journal “*Böhmische litteratur*” in German, in which he pursued his scholarly interest and critically addressed the public affairs taking place in Bohemia and Moravia. He viewed criticism as a public matter vital to the development of public debate. He deviated in this manner from the narrow professional and scientific framework, which led to censorship and bans on the journal.

Dobrovský's writings became the starting point for further national emancipation for a new generation of scholars who regarded the relationship with the Czech language and culture as part of the Czech national movement. The leader of this generation of intellectuals was Josef Jungmann, the author of a German-Czech dictionary published in the 1830s. In the dictionary he codified a new approach to Czech as a language of science, literature and art. At the same time, it was no coincidence that he tested Czech in relation to German. The aim of this “linguistically national” generation was not as yet to prefer Czech over German, but to use them in parallel. Czech was supposed to be a language comparable to German.<sup>7</sup>

The transition from the cultural-emancipation efforts of the Czechs to the political ones only culminated in 1848, the year of revolution. Temporary libe-

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<sup>6</sup> HOLÝ: *op. cit.* (2010), 57.

<sup>7</sup> KŘEN, Jan: *Dvě století střední Evropy*, Praha, Argo, 2005, 127-128.

ralization in the monarchy, which included easing of censorship, also allowed for the development and politicization of the Czech press. The political press became a major ambassador of the political public and Czech national interests. It was no coincidence that the main daily newspaper of the Czech Liberals, founded in March 1848, was called the “National Newspaper”. Nor was it coincidental that contemporaries spoke of “Czech fever” in connection with the rise of the Czech movement. Thanks to the temporary easing of press freedoms, the Czechs could, for the first time in their history, subject not only cultural and literary, but also state and national questions, to critical, uncensored reflections in the media. This new state of affairs was resurrected in the public sphere.

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One of the people who exposed the Czech question to public critical scrutiny was the liberal journalist Karel Havlíček. He wrote the polemic text *The Slav and the Czech* in 1846, adding a strong view to the composition of the Czech national and political programme. The text defined the position of “We” Czechs and the “others” in relation to other Slavs, not to the Germans. This was something new. Havlíček rejected the concept of a single unified Slavic nation. He curbed the hopes which part of the public fixed on Russia, where he had worked as an educator; which meant that he had had first-hand experience of the negative sides of Russian autocracy. It was in this text that he first voiced the idea of *Austroslavism* as opposed to *Pan-Slavism*, the unity of all Slavic peoples. *Austroslavism* maintained that the Austrian monarchy was the best guarantee for the further emancipation and development of the Slavic peoples in the monarchy, including, of course, the Czech nation.

This idea was later integrated into the political programme by the historian and politician František Palacký. For him, *Austroslavism* was above all a defence against *Pangermanism*.

1848, the year of revolution, saw Palacký publish the first part of the monumental *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* for the first time in Czech (originally written in German in 1836)—the most influential concept of Czech national history for a long time. He contrasted the Slavs (Slavic democracy) with the Germans (Germanic authoritarianism). The early beginnings of Czech statehood were—somewhat idealistically—characterized, according to Palacký, by the “old Slavic democratic spirit”, which was contrary to Germanic authoritarianism. He placed Czechs (We) against Germans (They). He viewed Czech history as a centuries-old battle between Slavs and Germans. Palacký, the guru of Czech national society (dubbed “Father of the Nation”), profoundly influenced the idea of the modern Czech nation with his concept of history. His thoughts inspired the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in 1918. Referencing Palacký was integral to the official ideology of the new state in the twentieth century.

Masaryk, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, attempted to redefine the understanding of the nation in the new state. This involved a shift from a traditionalist, cultural-language concept, to a modern civic concept, in the spirit of the ideals of the French Revolution. However, this attempt was not successful. The question of the emancipation of the various national minorities in the new state was one of the key issues.

Although Czechs were the dominant ethnic group in the new republic, the second largest group were Germans, old enemies of the Czechs. Slovaks only came after Germans in terms of population size. The founders of the new state therefore developed the concept of a single *Czechoslovak nation* to strengthen the nation's dominance in relation to other ethnic minorities and the Germans in particular. The German question (and generally the question of national minorities) played an important role at the beginning of the new state. Over the next twenty years of its existence, it was not generally addressed and thus remained open even at the end of the independent Czechoslovak Republic, on the eve of World War II. The occupation and the German protectorate of the Czech Lands “reset” the Czechs into the subordinate position towards the Germans. Us versus Them once again faced a fierce confrontation during the war.

The centuries-old difficult and conflicting coexistence of Czechs and Germans came to a radical end after the war. The end of the dream of a great German empire brought about a dramatic change for Czech Germans. Most of the more than three million German inhabitants of the Czech Lands were expelled. The Czech “We” triumphed, while the German “Others” were pacified. The end of the German presence in Central Europe did not mean, however, that the Czechs became masters of their own destiny. With the German Empire gone, Central Europe was invaded by the Russian Empire and its Soviet communism. The Czechs once again had to deal with “the Others”; the Czech nation was again under the pressure of an alien power. The official Communist ideology continued to develop the image of the Germans as alien enemies. Although driven out, they, as part of “international imperialism”, and their aggressive plans, posed a threat to the Central European socialist countries. The German menace was still felt in the public space, but at the same time people also noted the other “others” in everyday life. Specifically, after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the Soviets were increasingly considered alien occupiers. The iconic images of a defenceless nation facing the overwhelming odds of the enemy with its tanks in the streets of Prague and other cities made for an unambiguous definition of We and They (the Others). Communist propaganda, shrouding the military intervention and the subsequent occupation under the cloak of international aid, did not work. Soviet soldiers were seen as occupiers, representing an alien system against whom the public began to protest only in the anti-regime demonstrations of 1988 and 1989, which eventually culminated in the fall of communist rule in Central Europe.

Czechs were happy to adopt the motto of “Return to Europe”, namely the union of Western democratic states. One of the symbols of the return was the opening of the state border and the expansion of travel options. Popular destinations initially involved parts of the world that had been out of reach for most of the population during communism. To Czechs, freedom of movement was part of the liberation from the past. However, they may not have been able to grasp the wider context of the free movement of people, since it included a massive introduction of “the others”.<sup>8</sup> The world-famous Czech director Miloš Forman aptly compared the post-communist socio-political change to a transition from a zoo to a jungle.

It should be added that one of the reactions to entering the jungle, namely to the transformation of a familiar zoo into an unknown jungle, and thus a reaction to easier and accelerated mobility and movement, was the growing uncertainty felt by Czechs. The uncertainty of navigating the unfamiliar terrain of an open Europe expressed in the scepticism which some in society felt toward the European Union. The Czech EU accession was consequently preceded by increased calls for at least a partial restoration of the zoo certainties, camouflaged with words about national sovereignty and the national state serving as protection; a shield against the “alien” world.

## To Join or not to Join? National Sovereignty and National Interests vs. the European Union

One of the goals of “returning to Europe” was to integrate the Republic into the structures of the countries of the democratic Western world. Central European countries joined the NATO military alliance in 1999, and the European Union five years later.

The accession in May 2004 was preceded by a referendum a year earlier. Compared to the other candidate countries which had held referendums (with the exception of Cyprus), turnout in the Czech Republic was the third lowest (55,21% of the electorate). Only Slovakia (52,15%) and Hungary (45,6%) fared worse. The highest turnout was in Malta (91%). The Czech Republic had the lowest number of voters (77,33%) saying YES to joining the EU of all the Visegrad Four countries, while Slovakia scored the highest (92,46%).<sup>9</sup> Even after

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<sup>8</sup> HOLÝ: *op. cit.* (2010), 79.

<sup>9</sup> See: Referenda o přistoupení k EU v kandidátských zemích. <https://www.euroskop.cz/267/sekce/referenda-o-pristoupeni-k-eu-v-kandidatskych-zemich/> (accessed 17.07.2019).

joining the EU, Czechs have long been one of the largest Eurosceptic nations in the entire Union.<sup>10</sup>

Figures are less interesting than the arguments and opinions exchanged among politicians, publicists and the public before the June 2003 referendum. This was the time when the issue of joining the European Union was most pressing in the public debate in the Czech Republic. Questions of national identity, national sovereignty and national interests became established in the Czech media.<sup>11</sup>

Journalists and some of the politicians used the metaphor of “a marriage of convenience” due to the lukewarm interest of Czechs in the referendum, blaming the government and its inability to convey the issue to the public in a more attractive way (criticizing the government campaign for being pro-Union propagandistic instead of informational), as well as the Eurosceptic mood prevalent in part of society and within the strongest opposition party (Civic Democratic Party – ODS) and Communists (KSČM).

A reader described the atmosphere before the referendum in the article “Like a Dentist Appointment”, without directly referencing the historical traditions of the Czech nation, which are however implicitly present: “The Czech EU accession reminds me of a dentist appointment. I’m not too excited about going. I worry it’s going to hurt. I cannot be at all sure that the dentist is professional and will really be able to fix my teeth. Should I try some home remedies? But they could make it even worse. I don’t know. And I’m developing a toothache. I’ll probably have to go, along with my neighbour who has already booked himself an appointment.”<sup>12</sup> This is Czech Euroscepticism in a nutshell—we neither want to be in nor out of the EU.

The arguments of politicians and journalists repeatedly included the same range of topics and references they worked with. The advocates as well as the opponents of joining the EU tended to seek arguments in the past, and less so in the future. They built predictions for the future on the bad experience the Czech nation had had with “the others”, whether the Germans or, after 1945, the Soviets. The promotion of EU accession was usually associated with a better

<sup>10</sup> *Closer to the citizens, closer to the ballot. Spring Eurobarometer 2019. Eurobarometer Survey 91.1 of the European Parliament.* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/parlemeter-2019/report/en-parlemeter-2019.pdf> (accessed 17.07.2019).

<sup>11</sup> Three Czech dailies were analysed for the needs of this text (Lidové noviny, Mladá fronta Dnes—both dailies more to the right of centre in terms of political orientation, Právo—a left-wing daily) over a period from the beginning of May 2003 to the middle of June 2003, when the referendum took place on the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU. Public debate in the Czech media was the most intense during these weeks, as this involved a decision about the future direction of the country. The following year the media was primarily discussing the changes that the accession to the EU in May 2004 would bring for the Czech Republic.

<sup>12</sup> SOBÍŠEK, Ladislav: *Jako u zubaře*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 4 June 2003, A7.

future for “our children and grandchildren”. A dominant and recurrent theme was the loss of state or national sovereignty and national interests.

Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla<sup>13</sup> tried to argue positively, saying that “Handing over formal sovereignty will help us strengthen our own ability to defend ourselves permanently and promote our interests”, and “without the EU we would be [...] weak and exposed to much greater pressure from other parts of the world. Minor, partial problems are better than isolation and vulnerability.”<sup>14</sup> He depicted the EU as a community of equal states guaranteeing peace, security, freedom and prosperity.<sup>15</sup> He also argued in favour of joining the EU by referring to the traumatic past experience of the Czechs “with others”—such as the Munich Conference in September 1938, where the European powers, led by Germany, decided without the participation of Czechoslovakia to cede the Czechoslovak borderlands to Germany and Hungary. Czechoslovakia's Western Allies, France and Great Britain, approved of the agreement in an attempt to prevent war. This gave birth to the popular notions of the Munich betrayal of the Allies and of decisions made “about us, without us”. As a result of the trauma, the country turned to the USSR after the war, and became dependent on an alien power once again.<sup>16</sup> The Prime Minister also used the term “national interests” as a positive argument. (“...the European project is our national interest and... it would be good to join”).<sup>17</sup> Or later: “our national interest is not to be on the margin of a unifying Europe”.<sup>18</sup> He also emphasized how cultured the Czech nation was, referring to the tradition on which Czechs build their national identity: “I do not see a reason why a nation that is so skilled, so educated and so industrious, would not take advantage of this opportunity.”<sup>19</sup>

The right wing ODS (Civic Democratic Party) and Eurosceptics used national interest in a contrary way to argue against joining the EU. Prior to the referendum, Eurosceptic President Václav Klaus issued a short statement calling on citizens to take part in the vote, and recalled the importance of the event—emphasizing the “limitation of sovereignty and independence” of the Republic

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13 Špidla was Prime Minister and leader of the left-wing Czech Social Democratic party (ČSSD).

14 ŠPIDLA, Vladimír: *Evropská Unie a my*. Právo (daily), 31 May 2003, Pohled, advertising supplement of the Czech Social Democratic party (ČSSD), 2.

15 Špidla vyzval občany ke vstupu do Unie. Právo (daily), 13 June 2003, 2.

16 ŠPIDLA, Vladimír: *Vsadit na Evropu je správná volba*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 12 June 2003, A/7.

17 Špidla vyzval občany ke vstupu do Unie. Právo (daily), 13 June 2003, 2.

18 ŠPIDLA, Vladimír: *Češi nejsou jako kostka cukru*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 30 April 2004, A5. The prime minister employed the metaphor of the sugar cube in the text: “...Our history therefore provides the certainty that we will not dissolve like a sugar cube in European coffee...”. The government of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek consequently continued with the sugar cube metaphor in an advertising campaign promoting the Czech presidency in 2009.

19 Špidla vyzval občany ke vstupu do Unie. Právo (daily), 13 June 2003, 2.

in favour of a “supranational whole”.<sup>20</sup> When interviewed, he also said that he saw a danger in European centralism and did not believe that “a democratic system at a supranational level would be possible”.<sup>21</sup> The democratic deficit of European institutions was also mentioned by some commentators arguing against the entry. ODS warned against the emergence of a “European super state”, external dictates which would tell the Czech Republic what to do—once again the image of an alien external power. The party criticized the EU as a symbol of “supranational socialism”. They used ‘socialism’ as an implicit negative reference to Soviet-type socialism. In addition, EU critics resorted to exaggerated warnings about Brussels becoming the new Moscow for Czechs. Both ODS and the Communists offered the alternative of a national, sovereign state and the ideology of “nationalism.” They set national interest and the nation against the EU, which, as they understood it, represented a *supra-national, supra-state* entity, an alien *superstate*. The right-wing politicians of ODS, the party which drove the post-1989 political and economic transitions, and the communists, who verbally abandoned the Soviet era proletarian internationalism and began to fight for the nation and its interests, joined forces against the EU in a paradoxical accord.

The historian František Palacký, whose concept of Czech history fundamentally influenced the construction of Czech national identity, resurfaced in the arguments. His 150-year-old words were taken to serve the purposes of both the advocates and opponents of joining the EU. ODS politician Jan Zahradil, who opposed EU accession, paraphrased Palacký’s statement “We were here before Austria and we will be here after it is gone”, innovating it for 2003: “We were here before the European Union and we will be here after it is gone”.<sup>22</sup>

The director and screenwriter Ladislav Smoljak, in discussion with Zahradil, quoted Palacký’s words from the revolutionary year of 1848, when even the peoples of Central Europe, within the Habsburg Empire, were free for the first time ever to address constitutional issues: “If the Austrian empire had not already long been in existence, one would have to hurry to create it”. The metaphorical Austrian monarchy was, to Smoljak, the EU.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> A statement by the president of the country on the referendum on 9 June 2003. See <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/1785> (accessed 17.07.2019).

<sup>21</sup> VAČKOV, Veselín – MUSIL, Michal: *Václav Klaus: Měli jsme si víc užít naší samostatnosti, ale nejde to* (interview with the president). *Lidové noviny* (daily), 11 June 2003, 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> The words from the 1865 *Idea of the Austrian State*, however, express Palacký’s disappointment with having failed to enforce his political visions of the constitution of the empire, with the tendency towards the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (*Ausgleich*, *Kiegyezés*) and confirmation of German-Hungarian domination in the empire. Ironically enough, the EU critic Zahradil has been a permanent member of the European Parliament since 2004.

<sup>23</sup> SMOLJAK, Ladislav: *Co by tomu řekl Palacký*. *Lidové noviny* (daily) 9 June 2003, 1, 11.

Jiří Hanák also revisited Palacký, summarizing the heart of the matter: “The Czech nation was a ball passed between Germany and Russia for the one hundred and fifty years of its modern existence. Czech political leaders tried to solve this problem for a hundred and fifty years. Palacký saw hope in the multinational Austrian monarchy, Masaryk<sup>24</sup> in a democratic struggle. Beneš focused on Communist Russia.<sup>25</sup> None of that worked.”<sup>26</sup> Karel Steigerwald described the dispute between the advocates and opponents of the EU accession as follows: “It is a typical Czech conflict. Lackeys and firebrands. The lackeys believe that somebody will give us something, and the firebrands are fighting an enemy who wants to take everything from us. [...] Our fight for or against the EU is marked by one principal idea: not our fault, we the victims, we the recipients of gifts, we the robbed...”<sup>27</sup> He was thus citing a fundamental recurring motive of the Czech nation and its understanding of the historical We versus They: the image of Czechs as victims of history, not as active agents. Czechs always have to respond to the actions of “the others”, always have to adapt to them; they are not free masters of their destiny.<sup>28</sup>

One year later, the day the Czech Republic joined the EU, Prime Minister Špidla said that joining the EU would in fact strengthen the sovereignty of the Czech Republic if “we see it as the ability to influence our destiny”.

President Klaus, in contrast, said in his speech that the Czech Republic was ceasing to “exist as an independent state”, emphasizing the need to defend national interests and ensure that “our identity does not become indistinct”. He refused to fly the EU flag, and the day the Czech Republic joined the EU he went hiking, with his supporters, up Blaník, a mythical mountain of the Czech tribe, from where, according to legend, sleeping knights will set off to save the country when it faces its darkest hour.<sup>29</sup> The symbolism of the site could not have been any clearer. We Czechs here, in a mythical connection with Mount Blaník, with the alien EU against us.

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<sup>24</sup> Founder of the Czechoslovak State and its first President.

<sup>25</sup> Edvard Beneš, second President of Czechoslovakia after Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. His political activities after World War II were greatly influenced by the pre-war trauma of the “betrayal” by the Western Allies, who left the country to the mercy of Nazi Germany by signing the Munich Agreement. Beneš’s focus on the East, on collaboration with the USSR, unfortunately only placed the country under another vassalism, i.e. under the grip of the Soviet Union.

<sup>26</sup> HANÁK, Jiří: *Střízlivé uspokojení*. Právo (daily), 16 June 2003, 6.

<sup>27</sup> STEIGERWALD, Karel: *Lokajové, buřiči a referendum*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 9 June 2003, A/6.

<sup>28</sup> ŠPIDLA, Vladimír: *Češi nejsou jako kostka cukru*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 30 April 2004, A5.

<sup>29</sup> ŠÍDLO, Jindřich – GROHOVÁ, Johanna: *Klaus popřál z Blaníku Čechům sebevědomí*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 3 May 2004, A2.

## We, They and the Czech Dream

Culture and politics always went hand in hand in the Czech Lands. The originally cultural triggers gave rise to Czech political emancipation in the nineteenth century as mentioned earlier. The cultural sphere articulated a number of serious political and social themes during the twentieth century as well, in particular in the period of the communist dictatorship, when impulses from the cultural sphere actually anticipated future political changes. Although the relationship between culture and politics functions on different principles in liberal democracies, it is nevertheless of interest to observe this interaction.

Attention will now be focused on the way several artists portrayed in their works the period when Czechs were making decisions whether to join the EU. An explanatory note: the artistic works do not actually deal with the issue of joining the EU, but were created in the year that the Czech Republic joined the EU. They serve as testimony to what the particular creators considered essential at a time when the Czech nation was at a significant historical crossroads. The particular artists deal with the issue of Czech national identity and the relationship between Czechs and the others in a distinct manner.

Two films I would like to discuss won the 2004 Czech Lion Awards, annually awarded by a professional jury in a number of categories. Jan Hřebejk's *Up and Down* (*Horem pádem*) focused on Czech society of the day, while also predicting future trends.

The film opens with two Czech people smugglers taking migrants across the border. They successfully get the migrants to the other side of the border but accidentally leave behind a baby in the lorry. They decide against the idea of abandoning the baby in the forest, and solve the dilemma about what to do with it by taking it to a pawnshop where a friend of theirs buys stolen items. The baby is purchased by a woman who cannot have children of her own and brings it home. The catch is that the baby is dark-skinned, and the partner of the woman is František a football hooligan and Czech racist. A conflict arises when the leader of the hooligans comes to see František and notices that the child is dark-skinned. František is forced to choose between a relationship with the woman he loves, and the child she wanted, and being part of a group of racist fans who have for a long time been helping him suppress his own deep-seated prejudices and fear of the unknown.

The Czech We versus They is portrayed here in its extreme, which grew in strength in the real public space ten years later with the refugee crisis. The other storyline follows a university professor living with his new family, having completely pushed his former wife out of his life, including their son, who has emigrated to Australia. The daughter from the second marriage only learns about this when she finds out her father is seriously ill and the emigrant-son

is coming to visit. Once again—a different position of Us and Them. We who stayed and They who left.<sup>30</sup>

Although there are multiple storylines, the central theme of the film is migration, emigration, immigration, alienation and Czech racism. These are all topics that would become much more relevant in Central Europe in the years to come—linked to the economic crisis, and particularly the refugee crisis. They were still not a major problem for mainstream society when the film was being made. They are present in the film more as a background to the intimate stories of several people, as a latent future conflict on the minds of Central Europeans. The Czechs, after their isolation of nearly half a century behind the Iron Curtain and a decade of life in the open world, are experiencing something new—a growing confrontation with “others”, to whom they relate in various ways. The year the Czechs joined the EU was the moment when a number of these topics were only beginning to be identified.

Another remarkable Czech film of 2004, *The Champions (Mistři)*, provides another view of the confrontation of “We” and the others. Instead of the outside, the tension in the film comes from within Czech society. The traumas are ours, and yet none of the film characters recognizes them as a consequence of their own failures. Everyone blames somebody else or something else. We are watching, once again, “victims” of a variety of alien, unknown influences; the protagonists are predominantly those who lost in the post-1989 economic and social transformation. (Director Marek Najbrt claimed the film was “about damaged people living in a damaged environment, and so it is a bit about us in the Czech Republic. It reflects what we think of our national character, mentality and situation.”).

A remote village in the Czech borderlands is occupied by the few remaining inhabitants. The grim timelessness of the film is only anchored in a more specific time by television and the broadcast of an ice-hockey world championship—suggesting the story unfolds at the end of the first ten years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, a few years before the country joins the EU.

International sports competitions were one of the few spheres during Communism in which the Czechs authentically demonstrated their affiliation with the nation. They have remained so to this day. The Czech (often drunk) “We” is loud in front of the television, defining itself clearly in opposition to “the others”. The film’s innkeeper runs a pub on the brink of closing down, where local men meet to watch the world hockey championship on a low-quality TV set. Set against this background is the story of the bleak economic and social

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<sup>30</sup> Western liberalism and individualism views emigration as a personal decision, while socialism approached it as a moral problem, a betrayal of the country, the nation. This ambivalent perception of emigration lingered in the Czech Republic even after 1989. See HOLY: *op. cit.* (2010), 72.

disintegration of a former Sudeten village, from where the original German inhabitants were driven out after the war, and the region never recovered from the blow. This was true at the time the film was made and is still the case even today—the socially devastated Czech borderlands with high unemployment rates, where people are hopelessly in debt and face eviction and prosecution. Many seek their way out of frustration and anxieties about the future in alcoholism and rejection of the foreign. The film shows the same group meeting regularly to watch television and drink beer or hard liquor. The innkeeper is unable to find a way out of a spiral of debt. There is a disabled man in a wheelchair, who compensates for his physical handicap by racially insulting a man who they all call a “gypsy”. Yet he himself is “the other”, excluded from the mainstream society. The angry racist insults are supposed to help him belong to “We”; he does not want to be left out, even if the wheelchair symbolizes his social exclusion. The bus driver only spends his nights in the village and is planning to leave forever. He also represents “the others”, although he cheers the same teams on TV and drinks with others to fit in. He has an affair with the innkeeper’s wife, who longs for a child, but is denied this by her indebted husband. The innkeeper thus symbolically rejects the future (a child) due to the dismal present. Another man, based in Prague, spends the weekends at his summer cottage in the village. In a quasi-patriotic way, he “educates” others watching television to demonstrate their affiliation to the nation, their “Czechness”. He is “from somewhere else”, he too is one of “the others”, but nevertheless proclaims himself to be a local, whom everyone knows. This man shares his house with its original owner, the last Sudeten German, a historical representative of the “others”, the guilty conscience of the villagers, a reminder of the past. He tries to drive the German out of the house, but fails, and so takes indirect yet cruel revenge. Drunk, he and his cronies destroy German tombstones in the local churchyard, which the German has been looking after for all of the sixty years since the war. The German responds desperately by setting the innkeeper’s car on fire while the others are watching hockey in the pub—he makes an amateur Molotov cocktail using the kerosene for lamps he regularly lights at the graves of his ancestors in the cemetery. The men, however, believe the fire was started by the local lunatic. In the end they all, including the German (!), get drunk together in the pub watching the final match, for which the Czech hockey players have qualified. The escalated “historical” antagonism among the Czech We and the German They merges in an alcoholically desperate euphoria, covered by a temporary “sporting” team spirit—until the next conflict.

Another contribution to the discussion about who we Czechs are was made the year the country joined the European Union by the creators of a mystification experiment—the documentary *Czech Dream* (*Český sen*) about the making

of an advertising campaign and the opening of a fictional hypermarket. The filmmakers, two students of the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, had hired an advertising agency to promote a new superstore named *Czech Dream*.<sup>31</sup> It follows the preparation and implementation of the ad campaign and eventually the crowd of about three thousand shoppers who arrived at the place where the campaign had promised a hypermarket would be opened. The superstore management welcomed the shoppers and cut the ribbon. Security removed the metal barriers and the crowd broke into a run across the meadow to the superstore. A few minutes later, the people were shocked to realize all they had reached was the backdrop of the facade of a hypermarket that did not exist. They had chased rainbows, a mirage in a desert. The filmmakers argued that they had wanted to provocatively demonstrate the power of advertising and the fact that even a non-existent business or product can be effectively promoted: "We wanted to draw attention to the deceptiveness of a world created by advertising."<sup>32</sup> The critics would not accept this justification. It created hostility among the public and a number of journalists and politicians, who accused the creators of deceiving people. The artistic student documentary was turned into a political affair. The ODS deputy chairwoman rejected the film as "a mockery of ordinary people and their ordinary problems". She saw it as an intellectually upbeat shameful experiment, "a perverted filming of human humiliation and disappointment."<sup>33</sup>

The storm of resentment and rejection covered up the crucial question of the film, hidden in the title—What is the Czech Dream? What is the Fata Morgana of the Czech nation? Thanks to the timing, the disputes concerning the film interlocked in the media with texts promoting or rejecting the Czech Republic's entry into the EU. Part of the formation of Czech national identity is the Czech dream about others, and about themselves. This issue was not covered, however, in the debate on the provocative documentary of young filmmakers at all—despite the fact that the title of *Czech Dream* could not have been any more fitting. In addition, in terms of a purely practical prediction, the documentary foreshadowed the future of Czechs in the EU—the Czech Republic currently has one of the densest networks of supermarkets and hypermarkets; it is a leading EU country in terms of purchasing area per capita. The Czechs are also one of the EU countries most passionate about buying goods at a dis-

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<sup>31</sup> The documentary won at a number of international film festivals, for example, in Poland, Denmark, Slovenia, South Korea and the USA. It was broadcast on Dutch VPRO and Australian SBS.

<sup>32</sup> Jp: *Český sen: reklama k přemýšlení*. Právo (daily), 7 June 2003, 6.

<sup>33</sup> NĚMCOVÁ, Miroslava: *Český sen a česká realita*. Mladá fronta Dnes (daily), 5 June 2003, A/8.

counted price (over half of all food and health and beauty products are sold at a discount in the Czech Republic).<sup>34</sup>

## Europe or Entropa? Still Between Art and Politics

Let us revisit the beginning of the text—the sculpture Entropa by the artist David Černý exhibited in Brussels on the occasion of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2009.

Entropy is a basic physical concept. It suggests a degree of “uncertainty” or “disorder” in a system. One of the definitions is that it is “the degree of energy degradation in living systems, from concentrated to diffuse, in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics”.<sup>35</sup> Disorder, uncertainty, and perhaps even energy degradation are concepts that can also be applied to the concept of Entropa, an artistic, provocative vision of Europe as entropy. The sculpture looks like a heterogeneous, unstable mosaic of countries, with only the solid frame of steel construction providing stability—this could refer to anything? Europe as a fortress? A wall against the alien, who invaded Europe so dramatically a few years later, during the refugee crisis? Or is it a symbolic, limiting lattice, a mental prison, trapped in its own stereotypes and traditions, from which there is no escape?

The sculpture deliberately works with the stereotypical views of the individual countries, making fun of them using a grotesque hyperbole, sometimes cruel and cynical, sometimes barely tolerable. Given the installation site, Brussels—the seat of the political power (and powerlessness) of the EU—it is no surprise the culture and politics should have clashed. Subversive potential is inherent in art, as is the ability to provoke and enter into various contexts, which at times are surprising. Černý was taken aback by the intensity of the protests, perhaps also because he was not there only for himself, but was representing the Czech Republic, having been hired by the Czech government, which had committed itself to sponsoring the work. This is why the artist apologized for the sculpture and mystification associated with fictitious European co-authors, and did not accept any money from the country.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See: mkk: *Česko je evropskou velmocí velkých obchodů. Slevy jsou pro lidi jako droga.* <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/ekonomika/2730662-cesko-je-evropskou-velmoci-velkych-obchodu-slevy-jsou-pro-lidi-jako-droga> (accessed 17.07.2019).

<sup>35</sup> See Všeobecná encyklopedie Diderot, Prague, 1999, Vol. 2, 373.

<sup>36</sup> “We wanted to see if Europe is capable of making fun of itself. Grotesque hyperbole and mystification belong to the trademarks of Czech culture and creating false identities is one of the strategies of contemporary art” said Černý in a press release. (see: pje, ČTK: *Výtvarník Černý se*

The greatest upheaval was triggered by the representation of Bulgaria as a series of interconnected Turkish squat toilets. The Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded the work be removed and sent a formal protest note to EU officials. The Czech President officially apologized to the Bulgarian one for the sculpture. The artist ultimately wrapped Bulgaria in a black canvas at the request of Bulgarian politicians. Looking back now, this part of the story seems like a storm in a teacup that soon blew over.

Rather than recalling long-gone scandals, it is more interesting to study Černý's satirical vision of Europe with hindsight, from today's point of view. Measured by the ten years since the sculpture was unveiled in Brussels, much of the artistic hyperbole with which Černý deliberately designed Europe as Entropa, grinning with cynical laughter, has been strangely coming true. Let's have a look at a few examples.

The first are two countries that are regarded as the "engine" of European integration and have a significant impact on EU policy—France and Germany. The map depicting France is obscured by a banner saying "Strike!". The inscription is less important, however, than perhaps the emptiness underneath—a country which strives to be the EU's ideological leader but fails for many reasons. A more fitting description of its current state is the astonishment of the political elites over the vigour of the large-scale populist yellow vests movement. Or the inability of the same elites to introduce new strong ideas to the European space, which could inspire other peoples of Europe. The country, whose Enlightenment ideals and French Revolution ideas of a state of sovereign, emancipated, equal citizens, inspired and influenced many countries of the world, is now in the dark. So is all of Europe. Inspiration replaced by a cliché covering the void.

As if there was no idea concerning a great European project left other than economic prosperity, as illustrated by the other EU engine, Germany. The "engine" metaphor is not merely figurative in this case. The mosaic shows Germany as a system of interconnected highways resembling a stylized swastika, all sinister gray and black, which refers not only to the colour of the motorway asphalt. The exaggeration of Černý's sculpture would probably be too extreme today due to anxious political correctness. Seen from the perspective of the day, Germany did not mind. This also testifies to the journey the EU has taken in the last ten years. A motorway and a swastika. This is a symbol of Europe's economic hegemony as well as the difficult legacy of Nazism, which continues to restrict German politics and harness effective political action. The political

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*omluvil za plastiku, podle vlády nedodržel zadání.* [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/vytvarnik-cerny-se-omluvil-za-plastiku-podle-vlady-nedodrzel-zadani.A090113\\_175508\\_domaci\\_kot](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/vytvarnik-cerny-se-omluvil-za-plastiku-podle-vlady-nedodrzel-zadani.A090113_175508_domaci_kot) (accessed 17.07.2019).

impotence of the “economic dominator” of the EU could have dramatic consequences both for Germany and the whole of Europe, as transpired during the refugee crisis, which culminated six years after Černý’s work was unveiled. One of the side effects of the then bad political decisions is the rise of right-wing extremism, not only in Germany.<sup>37</sup>

There are cars driving on the sculpture’s motorway. Motorways and the automotive industry are the proud symbols of Germany’s economic prosperity. Today, however, the same things are more than a handsome credit to Europe’s economic star. A dark side to the economic endeavour and greed is the 2015 Volkswagen emissions scandal referred to as “Dieselgate”, where the car manufacturer falsified data on the amount of pollutants emitted by the Group’s cars into the air. One could go on. Cars produced by the emission-cheating German company drive on motorways whose systematic construction is tied to Nazi Germany. This links back to Černý’s sculpture, which was in its time seen as provocative hyperbole. With the passage of time, however, it has proven to be less of an exaggeration than it may have seemed.

The artist also managed to hit the heart of the problem in his sculpture in the case of the nearby Netherlands. A country gone down under water—with only a few minarets showing above the surface. The question is the same—a mere artistic provocation or another sinister vision of the future? The radicalization of Muslims as well as the rise of right-wing extremism, which accelerated with the refugee crisis, is a major concern for much of Western Europe and the Netherlands, where the traditional tolerance and welcoming attitude have reached their limits.

Luxembourg is portrayed as a gold nugget with a “For Sale” sign, with a phone number attached below. The number is perhaps of the then Luxembourg Prime Minister, later European Commission President, Jean Claude Juncker, a man whose overbearing demeanor is seen by Central Europeans as the embodiment of the “alien” arrogance of wealthy Western European elites. When Juncker was prime minister of Luxembourg, his country was purposely opposing the EU tax reform, thus helping hundreds of global multinationals access tax advantages. Luxembourg had made secret agreements with them, from which it profited. The scandal was exposed five years after Černý’s sculpture was made, but it was as if the artist knew.

Great Britain, which has always kept its distance from European affairs, is an empty space in the sculpture. The prophetic vision of Brexit and the awkward departure of a European power from the EU.

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<sup>37</sup> The Czech extremist right-wing formation SPD led by a Japanese immigrant, for example, became popular as a result of the refugee crisis.

Compared to the portrayals above, rendered with urgency and brought closer to reality by the years gone by since the unveiling of the sculpture, Central European countries are presented in a tamer fashion. The stereotypes are less extreme. Slovakia, depicted as a sausage tied with a string in Hungarian national colours, objected, but that was all. Poland is depicted as conservative Catholic priests erecting the rainbow flag of the gay rights movement, Hungary as the Brussels Atomium composed of melons and salami, while the map of the Czech Republic has the statements of Eurosceptic President Klaus running as if broadcast on television.

Černý's Entropa can be interpreted as an artistic exaggeration as well as a metaphorical parable, or as an example of the intertwining of culture and politics. The sculpture became a source of international outrage at the time of the Czech Presidency, and was criticized as a low and inappropriate joke. Time has shown, however, that, even in its exaggerated form, the sculpture may have delivered a truer image of Europe than the comforting image offered by authorized interpreters of European integration. Fortress Europe is in jeopardy. The protection of the external borders of the European empire is a reality, and it is increasingly difficult to find consensus on the future of the new European empire.

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## Appendix – From Euroscepticism to Red Underpants

We conclude with a few sentences, which, although not necessarily related to Czech national character and identity, may shed more light on the Czech national character. The parliamentary opposition in the Czech Chamber of Deputies managed to pass a no confidence motion in the middle of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, in March 2009, and the government fell. It was replaced by a caretaker government. Not even the Czech Presidency made the Eurosceptic President Klaus fly the EU flag next to the Czech flag at Prague Castle. It was only flown by his successor, President Zeman. This is no proof, however, of his pro-European agenda. Zeman actually built his real politics on courting authoritarian regimes in Russia and China, where he regularly travels to kowtow them. His statements in favor of these regimes are increasingly shocking to the Czech Republic's allies in the EU and NATO.

One final brief example of intersection of art and politics. Protesting the (not only) pro-Russian and pro-Chinese politics of President Zeman, several members of the diverse-artistic collective Ztohoven<sup>38</sup> climbed the roof of the Prague

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<sup>38</sup> The name of the group is a pun. It is a combination of three words "Z toho ven" (The way out), which phonetically reads as "sto hoven" (a hundred shits).

Castle disguised as chimney sweeps in September 2015, took down the president's standard and replaced it with a pair of giant red underpants. The collective explained their action with "finally, here was flying the standard of a man who has no shame".<sup>39</sup>

The fifteen years of Czech presence in the European Union could thus be summed up in the following hyperbole: From Euroscepticism to red underpants.

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