

Introduction 'Re-thinking European Politics and History'

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A likely reaction to the title of this collection of essays might be an exasperated: 'Again?'. Recent decades have seen perhaps unprecedented interest in issues of European politics and history, resulting from a variety of socio-political processes: the end of the Cold War and the 1989 transformation, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the enlargement of the European Union, recent economic crises and rise of populist movement across Europe, new migrations and new (or revived) ethnic conflicts, just to name a few. This interest has been reflected not only in the topics of scholarly conferences and publications, but has shaped universities' curricula and led to a reconfiguration of the boundaries between academia and other domains, such as political life and mass media. Recent decades have extended scholarly knowledge beyond its traditional field. Scholars' expert knowledge is referred to by journalists and their findings are often (mis)appropriated by political leaders. At the same time, the traditional university system has been re-composed and, as a result, 'Europe' is debated not only by historians, philosophers and sociologists, but those from fields such as 'European Studies', 'Nationalism Studies' and 'Cultural Studies'.

Such trends have important outcomes. With the expansion and popularization of academic knowledge, the question of scholarly responsibility becomes even more salient. While scholarly thoroughness and self-reflection remain essential, we are newly invited to ask what wider impact our work may have – or what impact we want it to have. Further, the birth of new specializations makes questions of interdisciplinarity and research methodology unavoidable, while giving us new tools which might permit us to better comprehend the problems we raise and questions we strive to answer.

It is for that reason that the contributors to this volume decided to inquire, 'again', into European history and politics. To try to 're-think' issues at the core of present-day debates is to ask broader questions, reframed by scrutiny of recent critical trends. In other words, while contributing to the understanding of concrete historical and political processes, the authors aim to pose questions about the very process of understanding them – about the

research techniques, theoretical frameworks and interpretative tools which we employ in the process of building knowledge. At the same time, they contend that such a reflection enables them to re-address and more fully explore their research foci.

The volume is divided into three parts, each consisting of three contributions. The first part tackles the politics of memory and history, focusing on the ways history is constructed, narrated, and disseminated. The second part explores the complex relation between democracy, ethnic diversity and economic factors by providing historical and present-day case studies. The format of the last part differs, as instead of three different papers it offers a three-voiced discussion on philosophical, historical and anthropological methodology, which well reflects some of the concerns addressed in the other two parts of the volume.

In the opening article, “Instilling the Idea of ‘Double Identity’: History Curriculum in the Schools of Austro-Hungary”, Yulia Komleva explores the process of forging ‘double identity’ among citizens of the Austro-Hungarian empire by analyzing history textbooks and educational decrees. She argues that imperial authorities considered the production of a common identity and a simultaneous maintenance of regional identities to be the best response to national movements and increasing aspirations for independence. Komleva demonstrates that authors of textbooks skillfully combined the idea of a ‘common fatherland’ and the promotion of ‘transnational’ heroes with narratives of local historical figures, who were accepted yet presented in a ‘politically correct’ way. Her research on the shape and outcomes of educational policies in Austro-Hungary is relevant to the contemporary process of identity formation among EU citizens.

The process of the dissemination of history is taken up by Tamara Banjeglav as well, in her article “Memory of War or War over Memory?: The Official Politics of Remembering in 1990s Croatia”. She investigates those states practices which aim at re-shaping collective memory – re-naming of streets, re-establishing national holidays, re-moving commemorative monuments – and hence, all those practices which entail a re-evaluation of past events. Scrutinizing the situation in Croatia, Banjeglav demonstrates that the field of national history and collective memory is not only composed of different layers of historical events – which she exemplifies with the events of the Second World War and ‘Homeland War’ in the 1990s – but that past events are continuously reexamined in the light of present ones.

This first part concludes with the article “Confessions, Excuses, and the Storytelling Self: Rereading Rousseau with Paul de Man”, by Ben Roth. He commences the essay by elaborating de Man’s distinction between ‘confession’ and ‘excuse’, which enables a novel rereading of Rousseau’s autobiographical ‘Confessions’. In so doing, he critically engages with deconstruction, calling for a broader than purely discursive idea of the self. Expanding on de Man’s and Derrida’s conceptions, Roth argues that the self ought to be interpreted not just through linguistic difference, but rather through the narratives or, more precisely, the ‘network of overlapping, similar, contrasting, and contradictory plots’ in which we find ourselves. In this way, his invitation to reflect on the process of constructing individual (hi)stories perfectly complements Komleva’s and Banjeglav’s explorations of collective memory and national history.

The second part starts with Olha Martynuk's article "Sacred Hills and Commercial Downtown: Ethnic Meanings of Urban Spaces in Late Imperial Kiev". Through an analysis of residential patterns in 19th-century Kiev, Martynuk illustrates the processes which reinforced the historical division of the city into an Uptown and Downtown. These processes occurred, in her view, through the attribution of ethnic meanings to different parts of the city as well as a set of connotations tied to the representations of different ethnic groups. Hence, Martynuk demonstrates that the historical study of Kiev reflects the interplay of ethnic, economic and political factors in shaping social relations.

The problem of ethnic diversity in the context of imperial power is pursued also by Philip Howe in his article "Imperial Austria as a Precursor to Consociational Democracy". Applying the idea of 'consociationalism' in the study of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, he pays particular attention to the ethnic composition of the country and its gradual democratization, while discussing both favourable and unfavourable conditions for consociationalism. Howe aims to bridge the disciplinary gap between political science and history by demonstrating, on the one hand, the usefulness of the concept of 'consociationalism' for historical studies, and, on the other, that historicizing this idea has important implications for developments within political science. Thus, his findings testify to the importance of cooperation between the two disciplines.

This part is complemented by the article "Small States Outside World Markets Bulgaria's Trade Relations with Germany and the Soviet Union 1932-1956", written by Vera Asenova. The author describes her doctoral project, which aimed at exploring the logic and functioning of 'bilateral clearing regime' – the system of international trade and economic cooperation which was first advanced by Nazi Germany and further adopted by the Soviet Union in relations with South-eastern European countries. Outlining the main outcomes of her research, Asenova proves the importance of enriching economic analyses with insights from historical and political scientists' works. The adoption of a multidisciplinary approach enables her to provide a micro and macro analyses and to demonstrate the role her study may play in understanding present-day international relations. Altogether, the three papers account for the necessity of a multidimensional analysis, of both the interplay of different (socio-political, ethnic, economic) factors as well as the interaction of past and present circumstances.

As mentioned above, the third part of the collection is dedicated to an interdisciplinary discussion, entitled "Comparative Methodologies". In her opening remarks, Elizabeth Robinson observes that any discussion of philosophical methodology must in fact start with the question 'what is philosophy?' She further contends that a good deal of what can be defined as philosophical methodology are questions of this sort and that while philosophers constantly pose such queries – for instance, 'what is truth?' – it is less clear what counts as providing an answer. Generally speaking, there is no agreement on the proper methods of philosophy. In turn, discussing historians' methodology, David Petrucci argues that representatives of his discipline tend to agree on how to establish 'what is true': by studying written sources. However, he also observes that the concept of 'truth' is problematic, as it raises the question of standards for determining facts as well as the problem of different (competing) accounts of past events. He exemplifies this problem

by discussing in detail a case study, based on files found in Viennese archives. Following the same path, Agnieszka Pasięka discusses the problem of 'truth' in the light of anthropological methodology. She emphasizes the specificity of ethnographic methods, usually direct and informal interactions with people, which highly influence the nature of gathered material. And yet, despite the divergent methodology, her ethnographic case study invites similar questions – of competing truths, reliability of studied sources, as well as the very aim of scholarly practice. The three contributions open reflection on fundamental methodological issues; not only do they highlight the variety of research methods and modes of interpretation available, but they ask as well about the possibility and usefulness of their combination.

All in all, the collected essays discuss a broad spectrum of phenomena without losing their focus on the main questions born in a process of re-considering European history and politics: the question of a mutual constitution between the study of the past and the study of the present; the problem of manifold, fuzzy and conflicting sources and the possibility of their integration; as well as the issue of varied analytical frameworks and their compatibility.

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