

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism the battles about the right interpretation of the twentieth century past are still being fought. In some countries even the courts have their say on what is or is not the historical truth. But primarily politicians have claimed a dominant role in these debates, often mixing history and politics in an irresponsible way.

The European Parliament has become the arena where this culminates. Nevertheless, not every Member of Parliament wants to play historian. That is the background of Politics of the Past, in which historians take the floor to discuss the tense and ambivalent relationship between their profession and politics.

Pierre Hassner: "Judges are no better placed than governments to replace open dialogue between historians, between historians and public opinion, between citizens and within and between democratic societies. That is why this book is such an important initiative."

Cover picture: Reporters/AP



Politics of the Past: The Use and Abuse of History

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Edited by  
Hannes Swoboda and  
Jan Marinus Wiersma



Socialist Group in the  
European Parliament

 **Renner**Institut

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## **Dedicated to Bronisław Geremek**

Bronisław Geremek, historian, former political dissident and our dear colleague, was one of the speakers at the event which we organized in Prague to commemorate the Spring of 1968. As always, his contribution to the debate was balanced and full of insights. His life was devoted to just causes whether writing his famous history of poverty or being one of the leaders of Solidarność. To him we dedicate this publication. He was a true citizen of Europe who always looked forward, as his article, which we were allowed to reprint, illustrates.

The contributions  
in this publication do  
not represent the Socialist  
Group's official position

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# Table of contents

<b>Preface: Never Again</b>	<b>7</b>
Martin Schulz	
<b>Preface: The Past Does Not Go Away</b>	<b>9</b>
Karl Duffek	
<b>Introduction by the Editors</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Politics of the Past: The Use and Abuse of History</b>	<b>15</b>
Jan Marinus Wiersma	
<b>THE PAST AS PRESENT</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Common Memory and European Identity</b>	<b>31</b>
Bronisław Geremek	
<b>The Word Concentration Camp means different Things to different People</b>	<b>43</b>
An interview with Norman Davies	
<b>It Does Not Hurt to Apologise</b>	<b>61</b>
An interview with György Konrád	
<b>HISTORICAL DILEMMAS</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Beyond History and Politics</b>	<b>71</b>
Pierre Hassner	
<b>Memory Wars</b>	<b>81</b>
Krzysztof Pomian	
<b>Historians and Political Agendas</b>	<b>87</b>
Wim van Meurs	
<b>The Use of History to Legitimize Political Power: The Case of Germany</b>	<b>97</b>
Martin Sabrow	
<b>Historical Bias in Poland: Lustration as a Political Instrument</b>	<b>105</b>
Andrzej Friszke	
<b>European Social Democracy and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Totalitarianism</b>	<b>113</b>
Bernd Faulenbach	
<b>The Interpretation of the Soviet Union's History: The Baltic Dimension</b>	<b>121</b>
Česlovas Laurinavičius	

<b>Comparing Fascism and Communism</b>	<b>129</b>
Constantin Iordachi	
<b>HISTORY IN PRACTICE</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>The Real Problem Latvians Have with History</b>	<b>147</b>
Viktor Makarov	
<b>Diversity in Historical Education: A Balkan Example</b>	<b>155</b>
Hannes Swoboda	
<b>For the Record: PSE MEPs react</b>	<b>159</b>
Helmut Kuhne, Miguel Angel Martinez, Justas Paleckis and Józef Pinior	
<b>SPECIAL REPORT: SLOVAKS AND HUNGARIANS</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>The Historical Dimension of the Relations between Hungarians and Slovaks</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>History – A Fundamental Pillar of National Identity</b>	<b>171</b>
Milan Zemko	
<b>A Common Past, a Divided History</b>	<b>181</b>
László Szarka	
<b>History and National Identity</b>	<b>193</b>
Stefan Šutaj	
<b>MEMORIES</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>Resistance and Exile</b>	<b>207</b>
Miguel Angel Martinez	
<b>Remember August 23, 1939</b>	<b>215</b>
Marianne Mikko	
<b>Moscow versus Prague</b>	<b>219</b>
Boris Orlov	
<b>Social Democracy and the Prague Spring</b>	<b>223</b>
Jiří Paroubek	
<b>Renaissance of Democratic Socialism</b>	<b>227</b>
Józef Pinior	
<b>My Personal Encounters with History</b>	<b>229</b>
Hannes Swoboda	
<b>Witness, not Victim</b>	<b>237</b>
Jan Marinus Wiersma	
<b>Memory is a Loaded Gun: An Epilogue</b>	<b>243</b>
Hannes Swoboda and Camiel Hamans	

# Preface

## Never again

Martin Schulz

Collective memory gives people a sense of belonging. History helps to explain the world. A shared view of history can motivate people to take action that changes the future. History is subjective and open to different interpretations. Many politicians have used a partisan view of history to further their own ends.

Each country and every generation has to deal with their own past, but this should not be done by promoting myths or by using politically motivated interpretations of history to attack opponents. We inherit the collective memory and the history our predecessors left for us and we should use this appropriately and honestly. As a German, I feel strongly that I have to live with the horror of the Third Reich and Auschwitz, the lowest point in human history.

The history of the European Union is a history of the determination that grew out of the ruins of 1945 – it is a history of 'never again'. The EU has led to the longest period of peace in Europe since Roman times. The lesson we have learnt is that this determination must be renewed every day. Despite the lessons of history, right wing extremism and populism are alive in Europe. The current economic crisis must not be allowed to lead to a greater resurgence of the Far Right.

Europe's tragic history did not end in 1945 with the defeat of the Nazi regime. I come across this everyday when I am talking with colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe who suffered under communist dictatorships.

We cannot walk away from our history, and today's politics are of course related to events that happened in the past. We should refrain, however, from abusing history for political gain.



That is the reason why the Socialist Group has published this book and that is why we asked historians, not politicians, to take the lead. Reading their contributions, I have the distinct impression that the history of Europe and its nations is better understood by these experts than by those politicians who choose to emphasise conflict and make inappropriate distinctions.

This gives me the confidence to repeat that the continuation of European unification lends a moral and intellectual basis to the European Union right up to the present day, and I believe the European Union is therefore one of the best answers to the divisions that have torn Europe apart in the past.

# Preface

## The Past Does Not Go Away Karl Duffek

At the heart of the project of European integration there has always been the idea to prevent wars and violent conflicts on our continent by means of economic co-operation. Let the past be the past, let us now – after 1945 – open a new chapter of our history, that was the concept. After the demise of communism this project has finally been extended to the whole of Europe.

The past, however, proved to be quite nasty. It did not go away as easily as some of us might have expected. Ethnic or national conflicts, civil wars of former days, allegations of various kinds, the obvious burden all post-authoritarian societies have to bear – all this is still very much alive in the Europe of our days.

And that is why, to my mind, this publication is so very important. The only way to tackle the repeated intrusion of the past in the political debate of today is to face it, to discuss it, to explain the myths each and every nation in Europe has developed and to confront them with the historical truth.

Take the case of my country, Austria, for example. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we had two periods of fascism. First, our very own kind of Austro-Fascism in the years from 1933 to 1938, when the conservative forces abolished democracy, banned the labour movement and, in some respect, paved the way for the Nazi dictatorship which immediately followed.

It took us, with a few notable exceptions, a number of decades until we began to develop a more complex picture of Austria's role during the Third Reich – with Austrians being not just the victim of foreign invaders, but also contributing in a substantial way to the atrocities of Nazi terror.

After 1945, after the liberation from Nazism by the Allied Forces it was, of course, important to re-build a democratic society. And it was certainly a difficult task of our post-authoritarian nation how to

treat those large numbers of people who in one way or another were involved with the regime that had just been destroyed.

To find the right balance between the necessary cleansing of a society and punishing of strongly involved people on the one hand, and the integration of all the others into the new society, on the other, cannot be easy. Shortly after the end of the war a large consensus was formed in favour of a fast and very broad re-integration.

If this is often criticized today – and in many cases rightly so – one should also remember the words of Eugen Kogon who immediately after the war spoke of a “right of political error” and the challenge of convincing former followers of Nazism that democracy is better than what was there before.

The integration of former Nazis into the Austrian post-war society certainly helped a fast political and economic stabilization of the country. But a price had to be paid: There was, especially among elites, a strong continuity of people who kept their positions after the war. And the recent past was turned into a taboo which should not be talked about – with all the respective consequences for the victims of Nazism and their descendants.

This is one of the important and long lasting contradictions of the Austrian past, which we have lifted from silence over the last two or three decades, and a lot has been researched, written and openly discussed over the years. And there is, today, a broad consensus about the assessment of this period in our history.

Our first period of fascism, however, with its violent conflict between the two major political camps in this country, is still waiting for an open debate and a national consensus on questions of responsibility for the eruption of violence, the role of patriotism, the resistance to the rising Nazi forces and so on.

So, the past is still haunting Austria, as well as every other country and nation on our continent. In Europe, we have come a long way from the conflicts of former centuries, from the terror of fascism and communism, towards democracy and a common peaceful future. Facing and analysing the complex history of our continent can be very helpful on this way.

# Introduction by the Editors

In 2008, the European Parliament adopted a resolution about the artificially created famine in Ukraine in the thirties of the last century, called Holodomor. There can be no doubt that this terrible event cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian farmers and was the result of a decision of the Stalinist regime to eradicate those opposing the implementation of its agrarian policies. The Socialist Group in the European Parliament was very hesitant to support a parliamentary initiative on this issue, not wanting to make official political interpretations of historical events. In the end its parliamentarians voted for the resolution out of sympathy for the people of Ukraine and because wordings like 'genocide' were avoided in the final text. The Ukrainian embassy in Brussels was very active in promoting the parliamentary debate with the argument that the terrible episode of Ukraine's history was important enough to be internationally recognized. For many Ukrainians it happens to be an element of the reconstruction of the country's history after it became independent.

The Russian embassy reacted with a long letter explaining why the Parliament had acted wrong. In Moscow, the Ukrainian lobby for the recognition of Stalin's cruel legacy was explained as an anti-Russian campaign. And maybe it was, since many Ukrainians, especially from the western part of the country, try to define a new national identity by creating a contrast with the former 'oppressor'. There is in that country also indignation about official attempts by the Russian authorities to create a more positive historical picture of Stalin as the man who saved the country and kept it together. The Russian president Medvedev refused in November 2008 to attend an official commemoration of Holodomor in Kiev; an indication of a further deterioration of the relations between the two governments. In this case caused by history!

We are all witness of an unprecedented return of history. Newly independent democratic states of course have to develop a different historical narrative in order to be able to redefine or reconstruct the past in the light of the new circumstances. In times of big changes, people seek cultural comfort looking for something positive and stable in the past. Who can be against that and against a growing historical awareness?

One has to make a distinction between memory and history. The first is based on identification with the past, the second, on the contrary, is based on distance with respect to the past, on the treatment of it as an external object and not as a part of the self, as Krzysztof Pomian describes it. Memory helps us to remember what went wrong and what is worth repeating. Politicians are part of this process and should assess their own role. It already starts with questions of commemoration. City councils decide whether to open a new museum, whether to commission a new statue and who should be remembered when naming new streets. The same goes for national governments and even European institutions. But one has to be very careful not to let these decisions become part of a political dispute. The best way to avoid that is by asking historians for independent advice and by encouraging an open debate about different historical interpretations.

In 2008 we commemorated important and tragic historical events which are still the topic of current debates: The *Reichspogromnacht* of November 1938 and the *Prague Spring* of 1968. The Socialist Group organised events in Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland to commemorate the victims of totalitarian regimes and to draw lessons for the future.

One cannot deny that there is a relation between history and politics, between historians and politicians. History plays a role in every person's life. It determines our knowledge of the world around us; it teaches lessons and offers insights that can help to define our actions. Some went even so far to say that history is past politics and politics present history and the well known historian E.P. Thompson claimed that history is not simply the property of historians.

But there are enormous dangers of misinterpretation when historical facts enter the realm of actual politics. That is the reason why this publication was made. Our aim is to promote a discussion

about the tense and ambivalent relationship between historians and politicians by letting historians analyse the difficulties we encounter when translating history into the present.

We are fully aware of our own subjectivity, being politicians with an agenda, but since we cannot walk away from the issue, we better try to tackle it. The editors are not professional historians and therefore we do not pretend that this book is an accurate or scholarly representation of the current debate. But so be it.

This publication discusses basically four issues. Firstly, we ask the question: What is history and can it be objectively presented? The second theme deals with the politics of the past and the role of historians and politicians. Thirdly, we address the 'totalitarian' past of Europe. And finally, we try to define the role played by democratic socialists and social democrats in the twentieth century history of Europe.

The articles in this book are an illustration of the variety of topics that are part of the present debate about the politics of the past. They are the result of seminars, interviews and individual contributions of historians and politicians. We included a number of articles that deal with actual controversies related to history within and between countries: In the Western Balkans, in Latvia and between Slovakia and Hungary. Some of us wrote their own memories to illustrate how different backgrounds and historical experiences influence our personal views on recent history.

The history working group of the PSE Parliamentary Group was the meeting point where we discussed the concept of this book. It consisted of Helmut Kuhne (Germany), Miguel Angel Martinez (Spain), Justas Paleckis (Lithuania), Józef Pinior (Poland), Hannes Swoboda (Austria) and Jan Marinus Wiersma (The Netherlands). As always, we could count on the support of the Renner Institute in Vienna.

We would like to thank the members of our staff who did a complicated job very well: Herwig Kaiser, Rosario Moles, Agnieszka Gregorczyk, Kerry Postlewhite, Matthias Verhelst, Dimitri Culot and Kati Piri, who was responsible for the production of this publication.



# Politics of the Past: The Use and Abuse of History

Jan Marinus Wiersma

When politicians appeal to historical facts to justify political claims, we should ask ourselves what history actually is. What do we know for fact and what can be interpreted? The British historian E.H. Carr, whose book *What is History?* (published in 1961), dominated this debate for many years, wrote that historical truth lies somewhere between valueless facts and value judgements. The objective facts are there but their selection and interpretation are subjective. Norman Davies talks in his interview, drawing on Carr's work, about the need to separate evidence from judgement. Carr believed in historical causality but other historians deny that this helps us to explain the present and predict the future.

Carr developed a master narrative that shows the progress of mankind. Many later historians decided instead to concentrate on local histories believing that one can only know a lot about little. Some claim that history is only about '*battles and kings*', others prefer a sociological approach and use different concepts of time. The definition of history is thus a subject under constant debate without definitive answers.

Most professional historians agree that objective interpretations of historical facts are not possible. Facts as such mean nothing. Historians select them and create the framework within which they get meaning. They look at the past from their own perspective, different from that of their predecessors and successors. Historians are not neutral and are influenced by their contemporary societies.

What applies to historians also applies to politicians. Nevertheless, historians use scientific tools to study the past and they try to be as impartial as possible. History is neither a purely subjective undertaking where every narrative of the past is equally good; nor, however, is objectivity to be found in uncritically accepting embellished images of the past. Politicians are warned often enough by historians to be very careful claiming objectivity but this opens



another debate formulated by Richard Evans: "In this sense, the problem of how historians approach the acquisition of knowledge about the past, and whether they can ever wholly succeed in this enterprise, symbolizes the much bigger problem of how far society can ever attain the kind of objective certainty about the great issues of our time that can serve as a reliable basis for taking vital decisions for our future in the twenty-first century."

Is history a linear or cyclical process in which certain patterns can be discovered and where there is an overarching guiding principle like progress? If so, can we learn from it? The limits of objectivity do not make its pursuit irrelevant.

Social democracy has its origins in Marxism, based on the theory of historical materialism, the determinist prediction of a certain course of history leading to the ideal society. The theory did not work in practice but adaptations of it produced the social democratic philosophy of change which played a fundamental role in the development of West European welfare societies.

Croce saw history as the story of liberty. He gained a lot of followers after the collapse of the communist system but has also lost many in recent times. Big ideas seem to be a thing of the past. What we believe to know is that there are learning processes – knowledge is cumulative – that allow us to create objectively better conditions for humankind. And even when one argues that history is without patterns, studying precedents can help to avoid mistakes. History is not a laboratory in which we can perform experiments to discover and test scientific patterns. We can make generalisations which provide a certain predictability, aware that exceptions are frequent: as R.J. Evans wrote: "This is because history never repeats itself; nothing in human society, the main concern of the historian, ever happens twice under the same conditions or in exactly the same way."

## **Politics of the past**

To what extent should historians play a role in the political debate? What limits should be imposed on politicians when they invoke historical facts?

There are many examples of historians mixing political preferences with historical judgements. Martin Sabrow illustrates this in his article on the German experience. Sometimes historians play judge in self-constructed courts of history and many have warned against this. Hobsbawm, for instance, remarked: "I used to think that the profession of history, unlike that of, say, nuclear physics, could at least do no harm. Now I know it can". Hobsbawm, however, does not reject the idea of partisanship. He acknowledges that historians have political views and religious beliefs that influence their research and writing. Hobsbawm, a communist, believes that historians can and should contribute to a cause if they do so using proper historical methods. For him, contributing to positive change is the responsibility of scientists.

Polish historian Andrzej Friszke points to the dual use of history: "By its very nature, history, and especially recent history, is a very particular branch of learning. It exists in an uneasy relationship with the memories of those involved in the events concerned. It can play an important role in either legitimising or challenging a contemporary state, its regime and ruling class"

Martin Sabrow warns that if the cooperation between politicians and historians is too close, it might be harmful: "I do not wish to recommend a diminution of political interest in the past. However, the relationship between history and politics can develop into a fatal friendship offering the reward of public attention and moral esteem whilst destroying the radical independence of historical research and its disposition to rethink history."

Dutch Historian Wim van Meurs comments: "Debates on the use and abuse of history in politics and the separation of objectionable partisan views from historical interpretations that are expected to promote values of democracy, individual freedom and national identification are inherently political." He points out that the art of politics is compromise while the essence of academia is contrasting diverging positions.

Pierre Hassner analyses the manipulation of history in several countries and asks himself: "This imposition from above can only be challenged by the reaffirmation, individual and collective, of Solzhenitsyn's and Havel's commitment to live in truth, and the

theoretical and practical impossibility to separate truth, freedom and pluralism.”

These quotations speak for themselves. Let me end this section with Norman Davies’ remark that politicians should, despite all the possible pitfalls, do what they can to facilitate the role of historians in political debates. Everything has history.

## **About memory**

What to remember and how to remember is, in many countries, a very topical and urgent question that keeps both historians and politicians occupied. It does not only concern schoolbooks and history teaching, but also the use of public space to represent history whether in the form of monuments, museums or otherwise. Often decisions of this kind lead to fierce political debates and they are certainly not limited to esthetical values. There were protests in Estonia by the Russian inhabitants when the authorities wanted to move a Soviet war monument to a less conspicuous place and there was widespread controversy in Germany about the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

Memorials and the like help people remember but how are decisions about relevance and appropriateness made? It is easy to agree that monuments and buildings of historical significance should be protected. More complicated are questions concerning monuments built to commemorate specific people or events. Many manifestations of memory represent a subjective representation or reconstruction of the past. They highlight famous people and victories in wars while the lives of ordinary people and defeats are neglected. They of course give an interesting picture of how societies saw and see themselves but are usually not a balanced reproduction. Historians and politicians should try to re-establish the balance where it is lacking: not necessarily by removing what is already there but by adding elements that make the picture on the streets and in the museums more complete.

The same dilemmas confront those responsible for what is taught in schools and universities, as the contributions of Hannes Swoboda and Viktor Makarov show. The latter makes an interesting distinction between enforced collective remembrance, collective

oblivion and collective reflection. Makarov chooses the third option which allows scope for interpretation and I too agree with him.

The European Parliament is actively attempting to promote better access to the intriguing history of our continent. A European House of History will be opened in Brussels in 2014 – the first truly European museum that will complement many existing museums of national or local history. Taking the nation state as the main or only basis of historiography is to ignore the relevance of the history of Europe as a concept and as a cultural and political reality. The proposed museum will concentrate on the political history from World War I and will of course include the process of European integration. The museum should, however, not gloss over contradictions between European integration and the internal development of national societies in member states. Europe is also a story of terrible failures and mistakes, in particular the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century. It will be a challenge for the museum's creators to deal with these issues in a balanced way, to do justice to the victims of both fascism and communism, and to the oppressed in South and North, East and West. The museum should show what unites Europe but should not shy away from what has divided and in some cases still divides us. The museum's curators should take into account Norman Davies' point about the lack of any authority post-1945 capable of organising a comprehensive exhibition about the events of World War II. Davies, a member of the high level academic committee of the new museum, argues that Europe's memory of the events of 1939-1945 remains fragmented – distressingly fragmented.

During our meetings, questions were raised about laws adopted in several countries to promote or ban certain interpretations of the past. The most notorious examples are the issues of the Holocaust and the so-called Armenian genocide. Historians have protested against the activities of lawmakers and I tend to sympathise with their objections. In the case of the French law which determines that the death of hundreds of thousands Armenians at the hands of the Turkish authorities during the first part of the twentieth century was an example of genocide, there is still controversy amongst historians whether this is the proper label to use. There is consensus, however, when it comes to the description of the extermination of the European Jews by the Nazis as Holocaust.

## History and national identity

Historians and politicians are permanently engaged in historical reconstruction: trying to define or redefine national identity. A risky business as we shall see. We witnessed that process in Germany after World War II, in Spain after the end of the Franco regime and now in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. Such processes are necessary, but the question is how they can take place in a balanced way, combining positive and negative aspects of past experience. In the cases mentioned there have been different degrees of internal controversy, unequal readiness to deal with 'blind spots' and different political aims when discussing these issues. Many historians have warned of the dangers involved in attempting to define national identities.

In his contribution, Wim van Meurs states that: "It is not only the views of historians that change over time; the understanding of their own role in national politics and society changes too. National history – or, for that matter, European history – is inherently selective and one-sided." As Ernest Renan noted, history is not so much about collective memory, but first of all about forgetting. He defined the nation as: "... a group of people united by a common hatred of their neighbours and a shared misunderstanding of their past."

The following question is also very relevant to the current debate. Can one make a distinction between left and right-wing interpretations of history? Take for example the recent *Historikerstreit* in Germany and the debates between the Partido Popular and the PSOE about the Spanish civil war and the Franco period. Is it possible to make a distinction between a culture of national pride, a culture of blame, and a culture of cleansing? To be proud of past national achievements as such does not have to be negative; it can be a source of confidence. A lot depends on the manner in which past achievements are commemorated, for example, by including others or not. One should avoid a bias in favour of the victors and must not forget the many victims of historical events. The mere fact that a country is democratic now, cannot be used as an excuse to ignore a darker past. When analysing these processes in the new member states, one should acknowledge the difficulties encountered there with the process of simultaneously reducing the importance of the nation state as part of European Union membership and reconfirming its post-communist national independence.

## Reconciliation

In many new democracies there have been heated debates about how to reconcile the present with the past. The results have been very mixed. In some countries like South Africa, Chile or Spain the emphasis was put on reconciliation to clear the path for consensus about the future; in others, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the element of individual justice and revenge weighed more heavily: but even there it seems to have made a difference if the transition was properly negotiated. “We have to accept the truth that everybody was guilty”, Václav Havel once said. Is that enough compensation for the moral injuries inflicted on individual victims and does it re-establish their dignity? Some kind of retributive justice seems appropriate but it has to be handled with care; politicians decide who should be held accountable for what and they should do this very carefully – involving historians to help make judgments – because the danger of abuse always lurks around the corner. Poland is a good example. Andrzej Friszke describes recent attempts at rewriting the role of former opposition leaders and of those who negotiated the peaceful transition in that country. This conservative campaign was, in his view, simply meant to detract from the merits of those who deserve recognition. Pierre Hassner supports this view: “Falsifications designed to discredit rivals are universal features in the struggle for power and are ordinarily fought in court or in public debate before being submitted to the verdict of historians.”

The demand for official apologies for misdeeds committed in the past appears to be growing, but many governments are very hesitant because of possible legal consequences. Some sort of apology and official acknowledgement of mistakes might be appropriate in some situations. Nevertheless, one should avoid this turning into some kind of automatic apology culture that replaces the more important need for in-depth understanding.

## Comparing Nazism and Stalinism

A lot happened in the twentieth century, described by Hobsbawm as the age of extremes. There was enormous progress on the one hand, and terrible massacres on the other. It is the trauma that understandably dominates history – the first man on the moon is not

the subject of much controversy, the legacies of Hitler and Stalin are. One wonders why they attract so much more attention than what happened to the Spanish, the Portuguese and the Greeks who experienced long periods of fascist dictatorship. To the individual it makes no difference whether he or she was a victim of Franco or of Stalin. Nevertheless and understandably, the distinction is made because of the immensity of the horrific crimes committed by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes whether directed against race or class.

The dominant historical experience of Western Europe was the Nazi regime; in the European Union's new member states there was the added experience of communism. This does of course affect the interpretation of the twentieth century in these two parts of Europe. Norman Davies has written extensively on this topic and has drawn attention to the lack of interest in Western Europe for the crimes committed by Stalin.

What should be the purpose of comparing the two regimes? Should we emphasise the differences or should we rather look for the commonalities? Here are a few examples of the kind of actual discourse in Brussels and Strasbourg. In debates in the European Parliament, colleagues from the Baltic states sometimes promote the view that Stalin was worse than Hitler, ignoring, in the heat of the debate, their own history of anti-Semitism, the authoritarian past of their countries in the period between the two World Wars and the enthusiasm of many of their fellow countrymen who joined SS divisions or became guards in Nazi concentration camps. When the European Parliament celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War, a member of the European Parliament gave a speech deploring only the results of Yalta, making no mention whatsoever of Hitler and the Nazis. The opinion that the Second World War only ended after the downfall of the Soviet Union is also frequently aired.

Looking simply at the numbers, Stalin murdered more people than Hitler. Is the singularity of the Holocaust therefore not singular at all, or, as certain colleagues in the European Parliament have publicly stated, should we accept that disregard for communist mass murders is a result of a version of history developed by the Soviet regime? Were Hitler and Stalin exceptional phenomena, alone to

blame for what happened? They are both dead, can we therefore put that past behind us? Or were they rather manifestations of bigger trends in their societies at that time?

Totalitarianism has been used to describe the two systems, isolating them from the democratic West and official anti-fascist interpretations in the East. This fitted well with the Cold War rhetoric. In fact, these official interpretations were highly ideological and aimed at defending the status quo.

The totalitarian paradigm has been attacked by contemporary historians who have used modernisation and development concepts to show that Hitler and Stalin were the products of their circumstances, determined by a clash between modernity and tradition. These researchers reject the interpretation that the intentions of Hitler and Stalin were the determining factors. As van Meurs writes: "The core assumption of totalitarianism, total control of the fascist or communist dictatorship over the population made historical research all but redundant." The danger of this structuralist approach is, however, that it normalises in a way the two horrific regimes by making them less exceptional. I agree with Kershaw and Lewin that the specific conditions which produced Stalinism and Nazism will not recur, but, as they say, the future is open and we can never be quite sure what is over the horizon. By continuing the debate we can keep the hope alive that it will never happen again.

Freed from ideological ballast, historians have turned to more detailed studies of the societies of the Third Reich and the Stalin era. This does not mean that evaluations of the past no longer differ depending on the historian's or politician's viewpoint. There is still an East-West divide which is most keenly felt in the former communist countries. They still have to settle a score with the communist period while in the West the heated debates about the Nazi period are more or less a thing of the past. Marianne Mikko writes: "The European dimension of the Nazi and Stalinist crimes has not yet been properly addressed. Mass murders are just as much facts of our history as the great achievements of culture and trade are. The treatment of the perpetrators should not be differentiated." Another colleague, Miguel Angel Martinez, who might agree with Mikko's statement, nevertheless, looks at Europe's past from a different angle when he refers to the rewriting of its history by blaming



everything on Stalin and communism: “At Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam Stalin was not alone, he was there with the leaders of the main Western Allies. They all, by mutual agreement, took the decisions that resulted in the situation that arose in Europe, and they were all responsible for the suffering that many people endured as a result of those decisions. All of them. Stalin and the others and as far as Spain is concerned, the others even more than Stalin.”

The debate will continue, but let us consider here the recommendations of Wim van Meurs: “In the first place, it is essential to distinguish between nations on the one hand and democracy on the other, both as objective and as norm. By implying that what is good for the nation must also be good for democracy or that the nation takes precedence over democratic values, moral contradictions arise, for instance the apparent need to justify Nazi collaboration for the sake of the nation. Secondly, it is necessary to promote understanding for the peculiarity of the double dictatorial legacy in the new member states in the public debate in Western Europe and to counter Western prejudices of alleged fascist sympathies and irrational anti-Russian sentiments in Eastern Europe. Thirdly, we need to avoid confusing the nostalgia of the last generation of war veterans and ideological outbursts of neo-fascism and national Bolshevism among the younger generations. Finally, middle ground has to be found between the implicit condemnation of an entire nation on the basis of the past strength of and support for totalitarian movements in a country on the one hand, and national amnesia claiming that fascist and communist leanings had always been alien to the democratic national character on the other.”

Bronisław Geremek wrote that while enormous progress has been made in unifying East and West in institutional and economic terms, the unification of memory still has to happen. This problem cannot just be treated as an element of our cultural diversity because common memory is the foundation of a feeling of shared identity.

Finally, it is interesting to have a look at the contradictory experiences of Germany and modern Russia. While the Germans have dealt extensively with and recognized their terrible past, the Russians have done this to a much lesser extent. The most plausible explanation is that Hitler was totally defeated and Stalin not. He was the victor and the communist system, albeit in a different form, survived him. This, however, does not justify historical amnesia.

## The place of social democracy

A discussion on the course of the twentieth century and the role of fascism and communism cannot be complete without a reference to the position of social democracy.

Social democrats never aligned themselves with pre-war fascism; on the contrary, they were some of its first victims. There was a strong left-wing opposition to the south European dictatorships with a very active exiled component that led to the formation of strong social democratic parties before and during the democratic transition. Why did this not happen in Central and Eastern Europe as a reaction to communist regimes?

After 1945, social democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe either disappeared quickly or were forcibly absorbed by ruling communist parties. Experiments in socialism with a human face failed and the dissident movements, at first glance, lacked a visible social democratic element. The picture is more differentiated when listening to two witnesses of that period from Poland and Czechoslovakia – Professor Friszke: “There can be no doubt that this opposition movement with its links to the traditions and values of the democratic left played a significant role in defining the opposition’s principles, organisation and strategy.” He continues: “The section of the opposition movement with ties to the values of the democratic left decided not to form a separate organisation... As a result, it had to dramatically scale back specifically left wing values. People also felt that a successful transition from the bankrupt communist system to capitalism meant putting left-wing economic ideas to one side. The democratic left in Poland thus abandoned its left-wing tendencies and emphasised its general democratic stance, both anti-nationalistic and pro-European. Consequently the left-wing of the Polish political spectrum was occupied by former Polish United Workers’ Party activists and people linked to the communist regime. Efforts to create a left-wing founded on Solidarity’s ideas failed. The result was a confusion of concepts and discourse. The average citizen continued to associate the left with communism and post-communism. The traditions of the former patriotic left faded into oblivion.”

EU-Commissioner and former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Vladimir Spidla told us during the seminar commemorating the

Prague Spring: "In the mid-1950s, Czechoslovakian society and broad swathes of the Communist Party began to suspect the truth about the crimes committed. That, together with the growing domestic difficulties facing the regime, as well as a crisis of morality and values, indirectly led people to remember the ideas and values of Czech and Czechoslovakian social democracy under the first and third republics. Analyses of the situation printed in an anthology that the leaders of our party-in-exile published in London in 1958, predicted that a major internal social disruption of the Stalinist regime in Prague would soon become inevitable."

While social democrats refused any compromise with the fascist dictators, they have been accused of not doing enough to challenge communism. It is even said that by entering into dialogue with official communist parties, social democrats prolonged the regimes. Europeans in general were accused by the Americans and communist opponents of being too soft and for that reason, in dissident circles, NATO was more popular than the European Communities. This also explains the success of the myth that Reagan's confrontational policies towards the USSR lead to its downfall. In reality it collapsed under its own dead weight, or as Norman Davies said "I usually liken it to a dinosaur that had a heart attack and died on its feet." With hindsight one has to admit, nevertheless, that dialogue did not deliver concrete results. On the other hand, we do not know what the situation would have been if these contacts had not existed.

Leading western social democrats believed that they could promote change from within and they were not the only ones. They based their model of cooperation and convergence on this assumption, convinced that a process of confrontation was dangerous for the whole continent and would have especially dire consequences for the two Germanys. This implicated a certain acceptance of the status quo but who in those years could have imagined what happened after 1989? In the 1980s, Western Europe was in the grip of a threatening regional nuclear arms race and those who opposed new missile deployments tried to find allies on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The Helsinki Agreements, concluded in the 1970s, were the embodiment of the contradictions of pan-European politics. For the Russians they symbolised the acceptance of the status quo; the Americans emphasised the human rights dimension.

West European social democrats highlighted the element of common security but also knew that the agreements gave an important legitimacy to dissidents. Assessing the overall role of social democrats in the twentieth century Professor Bernd Faulenbach concludes that social democracy can be regarded as a European movement for freedom.

## Conclusion

We do not pretend to have all the answers and the various contributors to this book do not all draw the same conclusions. "All history is contemporary history", Croce wrote. And E.H. Carr concluded "History is a permanent dialogue between the society of today and those of the past." Both of these historians, like Hobsbawm, believed that causality can explain history. These convictions have been contested by later generations, but all historians agree that something can be learned from the past and that it is possible to understand and find meaning. This means that there can be progress, people do emancipate and these processes will continue albeit in forever changing circumstances and in different forms. This is not a hard fact but, in my view, a credible conviction which underpins our engagement as social democrats. We all know that we are subjective, but we hope that this knowledge will help us to remain as objective as we can and to deal with history very carefully.

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## THE PAST AS PRESENT



# Common Memory and European Identity<sup>1</sup>

Bronisław Geremek

Quarrels over words, both in political debates and in life, express genuine tensions. The word 'enlargement' appeared in European discourse fairly late in the day. It could not have been applied to the European Community during its formation, or to the Cold War world, divided into two rigid blocs in the post-Yalta order. Originally, France and Germany joined forces in the common management of coal and steel to eradicate the roots of the major conflicts of our modern era by committing themselves to reconciliation. Reconciliation is not a word used innocently; it refers to centuries of hostility, jealousy and hatred. The lists of the dead on display in French town halls, the cemeteries in both countries, and works of literature in both languages create seemingly insurmountable barriers of memory. Yet the Franco-German alliance was forged through the political will of the French not to repeat the mistake of Versailles and through the sense of culpability of the Germans. Should we see these events of 1950 as a way of turning away from the past and looking to the future or of trying to overcome history?

When the Marseillaise was sung by Gaullist and Communist MPs together in the French National Assembly a few years later, following the vote to reject the creation of the European Defence Community, we might have been led to think that it was merely an illusion that history had been overcome. But the Treaties of Rome in 1957, establishing the European Community a year after the Soviet army had crushed the Hungarian uprising, expressed a political will to

<sup>1</sup> This article was published earlier under the name "*Existe-t-il une conscience européenne?*" in the Robert Laffont publication "Notre avenir d'Europe" (July, 2008), edited by Michel Rocard and Nicole Gnesotto.

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unite. The area of free trade and cooperation initiatives in key areas did not look like a political construction at all, but the feeling of the six founding Member States that they were putting down roots in a shared history was clear. The Community declared that it was open to all other European States – wording that was surprising for its boldness and imagination: the ‘other European States’ either could not even dream of joining, or did not want to. The will for openness was given strength by the success of the enterprise. The Community grew as more countries joined, doubling the number of members. Among these new memberships, those of Spain, Portugal and Greece assumed a historic dimension, crowning as they did the fall of dictatorships in those countries and showing the Community to be not only a common market, but also a political body holding common values. The new memberships certainly caused adaptation and finance problems. French public opinion feared the entry of Spain, one of its large neighbours and a major agricultural producer like itself. The entry of Greece, the first Orthodox nation in the Community, gave rise to some cultural fears. However, these new entries did not generally threaten the internal stability, particularly because they were well spaced over time.

It was at the end of the Cold War that the European Union found itself facing the need to respond to the expectations of the countries freed from communism. For the EU, this was certainly a challenge similar to the one posed by the fall of the dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, but though less developed than the founding countries, those countries had had a level of economic development that was broadly speaking comparable to the founders, particularly since they were market economies. The United Kingdom’s membership, blocked for a long time by France, had cast doubt on the EU’s evolution towards a federalist model. Nevertheless, these were only problems of mutual adaptation, while 1989 – that *annus mirabilis* of European history – caught Europe off guard and signified an unprecedented upheaval in the formula and reality of European integration. This was a crucial moment for European unification, but Europe was not ready for it either politically or psychologically.

One might think Europe would see this new challenge in terms of unification, as Germany did, being able to overcome the fear and mistrust between the ‘Ossies’ and ‘Wessies’ (‘We are one people’

cried the Ossies as the Berlin Wall came down; 'So are we' the Wessies replied, or so the anecdote goes). Western European societies were sensitive to fears that the end of separation between the two political camps marked by barbed wire between East and West at the borders and in people's minds might give rise to population migrations on a scale comparable to those of the early Middle Ages and result in a loss of prosperity. The joy of being together again was not shared. At midnight on 1 May 2004, fifteen years after this historic change, in Warsaw's main square, thousands of Poles watched with tears in their eyes as the European flag was hoisted alongside the Polish flag. On that day, there was widespread joy in all eight post-Communist countries joining the European Union, but there was little joy in the original EU countries.

Back to the problem of words: the term 'enlargement' belonged to technical discourse, which did not generate any emotion outside the EU's ruling elites. In the East, there was delight at joining a community of countries that defined themselves by their attachment to freedom, the feeling of a common historic destiny and a shared plan for the future; moreover this membership expressed the will of the people (national referendums often confirmed this will). These people did not see themselves as the passive beneficiaries of the 'enlargement' of a common market or of the shifting of the Pillars of Hercules, but the active promoters of European unity. The entry of new countries into the European Union, in 2004 and 2007, is therefore an act of European unification, not an enlargement of the area of operation of European law. It is an event that is historic in its scope. Sixty years after the end of the Second World War, a new European order was formed that broke with the legacy of that war and definitively put an end to it. The construction of the single market, the introduction of the single currency and the accession of the former 'people's democracies', are the decisive stages of European integration.

The horizon of political analysis is by nature a brief stretch of time, and is therefore short term, but the 'European Union's enlargement to the east' poses the question of the long term, to use the terminology of the *'Annales'* school. Beyond the political divisions introduced by the decisions made at Yalta, we also need to see the trends in European development over many centuries that have differentiated the western part of Europe from the eastern part.

Two major borders have become established over the centuries: firstly the boundary of Charlemagne's empire, which marked deep enough cultural divisions that could still be seen in the first boundaries of the European Community, and secondly the border along the Elbe, which historians consider the dividing line in the economic development of Europe. It is this second border that set the deepest division of Europe, well before the international conferences of the Second World War. Since the start of the modern era, an economic model characterised by the freeing of peasants, dynamic urbanisation and the birth of industrial capitalism has taken shape in Western Europe. To the east of this border, a different model is dominant, with societies remaining more rural, a second serfdom developing in most of these countries, the growing strength of the landowning nobility, and industrialisation only emerging long after it did in western countries.

There are also differences in the political and social model. In the West we see a determined march towards freedom, the emergence of the representative system and of political society, whereas in the East these developments appear only sporadically. A particular feature of Central Europe, seen in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, is the coexistence of the two development trends. The fact remains that all the countries in the enlargement to the east were lagging behind the West, in both their economic development and their political evolution. Where the West had urbanisation and capitalism, in the East the rural economy dominated the urban economy; where the West had a strong parliamentary system and civil society, in the East there was a tendency towards authoritarianism and structural weakness of the marketplace. The Soviet regime imposed on the people of the East merely served to strengthen and exaggerate these structural differences.

### **Divergent memories?**

The obvious success of the political enlargement operation stands out clearly against this backdrop. The courageous – though risky – decision in favour of a ‘big bang’ operation in the 1990s, conducted intelligently by the EU institutions and with astonishing efficiency by the national governments, opened the EU's doors to eight post-communist countries (as well as Cyprus and Malta). In

the first phase of negotiations after 1989, only a special association was envisaged, with the prospect of membership only for Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The PHARE programme first of all, then the partnership strategy for membership, prepared for the last phase of negotiations, which began on 30 March 1998 and led to the entry of ten new countries on 1 May 2004.

These negotiations were conducted on both sides by a bureaucratic apparatus – and it probably could not have been otherwise. Sometimes they seemed like a humiliating experience for the candidate countries, or at least that is how their respective public opinions felt – populations, like individuals, never feel comfortable when they have to sit an exam. Communication was not a strong point of the negotiators, and public opinion in both the original Member States and the candidate countries received little information. During the course of this European ‘matriculation’ exam, this ‘baccalaureate for the people’, there was too little room for political dialogue, for questions of culture and education, for the problems of innovation, high-tech industry and centres of excellence, as if these subjects were the sole preserve of the existing Member States and should remain off the horizon and outside the capabilities of the candidate countries. Nevertheless, these negotiations and the support systems set up by the EU deserve a positive assessment – at least as regards the 2004 accession. Behind the negotiations, there was a profound and sincere effort by the candidate countries to progress as quickly as possible towards a market economy. Even the most sceptical – or most cautious – analysts of the economic transition note that the countries of Central Europe, which after 1989 experienced a spectacular fall in GDP for several years, found stability again and until 2004 enjoyed growth rates comparable with that of the European Union. After accession, the economic performance of these countries has improved considerably. Nevertheless, in 2004, a prominent observer could still say that the lyrical illusion that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall was itself followed by the sudden development of a sustained, multi-faceted crisis, and that while ten years before, transition could be equated with freedom, it now seemed to mean mass poverty and threats to the social *acquis* of Western Europe through pressure from relocations, organised crime and mafias. Four years on, it has

to be said that, on the contrary, the negative effects of enlargement have been only fleeting, and that the economic and social difficulties are tending to diminish. Although it is too early to make a proper assessment of the transition and the enlargement, it does seem that it has proved beneficial and positive for both the old Member States and the newcomers.

In addition to poor communication on enlargement, which was responsible for the lack of comprehension of the process by public opinion, there was also manipulation by euro-sceptic political circles (such as the phantom 'Polish plumber') and also a certain amount of opportunism by national leaders. Most of the 'old' countries imposed transitional periods on the application of the free movement of workers within the EU. The few countries that opted for free movement of workers from the point of membership in 2004 have not suffered as a result. The number of Poles who have settled in the United Kingdom since 2004 is estimated at one million, and in Ireland approximately 400 000. Both countries believe this has been very beneficial for their economies. Poland has received substantial transfers of money that these emigrants have sent home or invested in their home country, to which they are now starting to return. Is it too risky to think that time will settle things and make harmonisation and a certain amount of convergence in the development of economic trends possible? The threat of social dumping by the new Member States has proved to be a myth. Europe as a unit appears thus on the horizon of the realities of everyday life for citizens.

On the other hand, strong divergences remain from the point of view of collective psychology. The European East and West have not managed to synchronise their courses of history or to unite their collective memories. In the affirmation of the European nations, an important role was played by the establishment of a homogenous account of the course of history from the legends of Europe's foundation to the annihilation of local cultures and dialects and the imposition of a single State. There is nothing like this at EU level: at no time to date has it sought to refer to its history, to create a historical retelling of its own or to forge a sense of a common destiny. And it has not needed to. The economic community did not need this reference to history, though a political community with a common defence and security dimension is unthinkable without

reference to a common destiny, and to the victories and defeats that have marked people's memories.

We need to be aware that recent history – that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – is a divisive factor. Take the example of the Great War, which constantly recurs in family stories, local places of remembrance, literature and tradition. For the British, French and Germans, it is a traumatic memory. Paradoxically, Verdun brings together the former enemies in remembrance of that shared massacre and lessons about the stupidity of war. The Dutch writer Geert Mak, in his major book on 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, has painted an arresting picture of Verdun as a place of remembrance. In the moral crisis that followed the 1914-1918 war, François Furet saw the origin of the two ideologies and the two totalitarian systems. But for most of the Central European countries, that war is primarily associated with the birth (or rebirth) of national sovereign states. The Poles, deprived of their national independence throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fought on all fronts and in all camps, but at the end of the war regained their national independence. The federal states such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia emerged at the same time. The destiny of the European people was perhaps a common one, but their memory is not: there is a substantial split.

It is the same with the Second World War. For Western Europe, this war was primarily an epic confrontation between Nazi Germany and the Allies, who included the USSR. For the countries of Central Europe, the Red Army remains primarily an invader, acting within the framework of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreements. For Poland, the start of the war was marked by the invasion by Nazi Germany on 1 September 1939 and by the Red Army on 17 September the same year. And shortly afterwards by Katyn. For the three Baltic States, the start of the war meant the Soviet invasion, followed by their forced incorporation into the USSR. It is not surprising that the memory of these countries is marked by these events – and western Europeans know little, if anything, about them.

The work of European integration achieved in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is admirable. But at the same time, to the east of the Elbe, the subordination of other European peoples by a totalitarian empire continued. From the Berlin uprising in 1953 to the explosion of freedom in 1989, resistance to a regime imposed from

outside manifested a constant desire for freedom. This history of fighting for freedom, symbolised by the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968 and Solidarność in Poland between 1980 and 1989, is not part of the common European memory.

Though the end of the Cold War took Europe by surprise, it is true to say that Europe did cope with the formidable challenge of unifying economies, legal systems and administrations. But the work on reunifying memories remains entirely to be done. It is a problem that cannot simply be dealt with like any other feature of the cultural diversity characteristic of Europe: common memory is the basis for a sense of shared identity.

### **Common identity: what can we do?**

The European Union has got into the habit of 'focusing' its march towards the future with the help of different programmes and strategies, successive EU presidencies (the application of the Lisbon Treaty should introduce changes to this), specific policies, and plans thought up by the European Commission and its successive presidents. However, two necessary elements need to be guaranteed: continuity over and above the changes and a dialectic of the relationship between the long-term horizon and short-term objectives. The half-century of the EU's existence proves the admirable continuity of the integration process, provided above all by the application of the Community method, but also sustained by the will of its Member States. This has held up throughout crises and successes, victories and failures, in the succession of national governments – and Commissions – of different political colours and orientations. I would hesitate to say the same about the links between the short and long term. Rarely have European decisions taken account of nascent widespread changes: this was the case with the ECSC, with the Treaties of Rome and with the Single Act. But these examples prove that it is possible to provoke strategic changes by properly establishing the priority one is going to adhere to, for example the objectives of an EU presidency (even greater when the priority takes the form laid down in the Lisbon Treaty). Now more than ever, priorities and objectives must be subject to an analysis of the current character of the European Union and a vision of its future.

The 'enlargement fatigue' observed in European public opinion gives poor counsel for thinking in terms of the future. A pause in the enlargement process has already imposed itself through force of circumstance, but a political philosophy should not be made of it. With the exception of Croatia, no other country will have the opportunity to join the EU in the near future. Next will be Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo, and perhaps also Albania; there is little chance of this happening before 2020. Only then would the issue arise of the membership of Turkey, which opened accession negotiations in 2005, and also of the Eastern European countries that have applied to join. It seems utterly pointless to speculate at this time whether these expectations will meet with a 'yes' or a 'no', because we do not know what the European Union will be like in 2025, and we do not know what the intentions of these candidate countries will be at that time either. On the other hand, we need to realise that the negotiations have a pacifying effect on the regions concerned, and also that they encourage and support the modernisation process within them. Setting out to fix 'Europe's borders' can only feed populist distortions, since these borders are already defined by encounters between geography and history. Meanwhile, the European Union can move its borders by virtue of the principle enshrined in the Treaty of Rome whereby 'any European state' has the right to apply for membership, while the EU's decision depends on the application of the Copenhagen criteria, the positive outcome of negotiations and its own absorption capacity.

There is no need to return to the projects formulated in the aftermath of the Berlin Wall coming down, motivated by the fear of enlargement. The fear that the 'new barbarians' were at the EU's gates was what led to this idea of introducing different circles of integration into the Community, breaking with the principle of equality between Member States: this idea emerged at the time in German Christian Democrat circles, and now seems to have been taken up again by the same circles. This would not serve the interests of the EU in the least; on the contrary, it would weaken it. The European Union can only move forward by taking a pragmatic approach based on a vision of the future. And also based on hopes, not fears.



Confronted by the challenges of globalisation, the European Union must revive its flair for innovation, develop its state-of-the-art technologies, guarantee sustained economic growth and return to its leading role in the world in education and scientific progress. It must also give itself a political dimension that would allow it, and others, to benefit from its 'soft power' (as Joseph Nye put it) – the attractiveness of its political and cultural model and its attachment to democracy and the rule of law, as well as its particular cosmopolitan model of an open society. It needs to give itself a common foreign and security policy, and the necessary military potential. It needs new solidarity policies that can guarantee both its energy security and social security.

One can understand the bitterness of those who deplore the fact that, on several occasions, the European Union has missed the chance to achieve the federalist project. But Europe is by nature a work in progress, and impatience is not a wise counsellor. Let us accept Europe as it is: 'a federation of nation states'. Montesquieu said that Europe is one nation composed of several nations. One might now add that it could become one motherland composed of several motherlands. That would require some work on the European mindset.

It is said that the European project of the founding fathers, of integration articulated clearly and naturally around peace, has lost its appeal among the younger generations, who do not know what war is like. Analyses of public opinion do not support this, however. What people still immediately associate with the idea of a united Europe is peace (the latest report by Dominique Reynié on European opinion in 2008 proves this). That is why the political Europe is not lost!

So what can we do? My answer would be to give priority to European education and to European citizenship. Sometimes deepening is pitted against enlargement. On the contrary, I believe that both can and must go together, and that it is in these two areas that deepening can be achieved.

Ignoring history will make way for populists and demagogues to use it as a message of hatred and discord. The present is – whether we like it or not – rooted in Europe's past. We cannot allow the memories of West and East to remain separate, turning their backs

on each other. The only way of changing this is to introduce these separate and sometimes contradictory accounts into a shared, common education. The gulag should be as well known as the Nazis' extermination camps; the crimes of the Third Reich should not be allowed to obscure the crimes of the Soviet Union. In the account of how European unity was shaped, room should be found for a Lech Wałęsa or a Václav Havel alongside Jean Monnet and Altiero Spinelli. This could be achieved by basing the teaching of European history around its common framework, the European mindset. We have history books prepared by both neighbours and enemies, to ensure education also participates in the work of reconciliation, but we do not yet have history books presenting European civilisation, which could provide a level of knowledge common to all EU citizens.

This educational work should not be confined to schools. It could easily find its way into the media, into films, into the creation of historic monuments in European cities and into the promotion of games about history. The British historian Timothy Garton Ash has, admirably, set up a communication network on European history on the Internet. We need hundreds of initiatives like this, stepping out of the frame and collecting up the entire European memory.

In order that the European identity is not seen as a search for closure in on itself, for separation or for the exclusion of others, we need to feed it from history and seek to understand why the European people want to live together, by bringing the different histories together and by creating a 'European narrative'.

The second area, European citizenship, is obviously of crucial importance for forging a sense of belonging to a political community. An enormous amount of work has already been done in this area. The Schengen system, the abolition of borders and customs, the Erasmus scholarships, the announcement of the setting up of joint EU consulates and missions in third countries, the harmonisation of passports and identity cards – there is already a long list of new attributes of European citizens. The common agricultural policy, so often the subject of criticism, also has its place here, since hand-outs from Brussels persuade farmers that European citizenship brings them concrete benefits. It is in this way, by experiencing solidarity in practice, that the European mindset forms.

It remains the case that the legal definition of the European citizen as the citizen of a Member State does not create a sense of a new state of affairs linked to specific rights and necessary obligations. We need to think about how we can fulfil the notion of palpable content, like the *civis romanus* of ancient times. For this purpose we need to have policies and special European funds that would apply to men and women in the name of Europe. Just one example: there could be a European fund to provide all European citizens with the possibility of learning a trade or studying beyond normal school or university age, to renew their professional skills or adapt to a new type of work – a sort of Erasmus programme for workers.

To promote citizenship, we could also enlarge and deepen the participation of citizens in decision-making within the European Union. At the moment, this kind of participation is much more limited than citizens' activity at national level.

If there is one country that has experience in both areas – national education and citizens' participation – and that could encourage a move in the right direction in the European Union, it is France. Why not try, in 2008, to launch some concrete initiatives that could orientate the general evolution of European integration?

The integration of Europe should not be reduced to the creation of a super-state that would go beyond the national frameworks of Europe's history. It should not be seen as directed against the nations. Europe defines its nature and objectives step by step. As unfinished as it is, against all the winds that would blow it off course Europe is proving to be a 'power' and a 'motherland' and a 'community'.

# “The Word Concentration Camp means different Things to different People”

An interview with Norman Davies

In January 2009, we went to Oxford to interview Norman Davies, emeritus professor of History and an eminent scholar of twentieth century history, whose books reach large audiences. He wrote extensively about the Second World War and the (tragic) history of Poland, where he spends a lot of his time. We asked him questions which are also addressed in most of the other contributions in this book.

*Q: As politicians, we always try to be careful to separate politics from history. Nevertheless we cannot avoid historical questions altogether. How would you define the relationship between politicians and historians? Or how do you see your role towards politicians?*

My view is that it is impossible to get a group of historians to produce a museum exhibit of the truth. They will always disagree, so you may as well take that as your starting point. Let them disagree; let them put forward different viewpoints. Trying to get a group of historians to agree is utopian. I was asked for advice on the establishment of a museum on the Second World War in Gdansk by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who actually is a historian and whom I highly regard. I proposed they make pavilions where each of the nations of Europe can put forward their own exhibitions on the Second World War, including Russia. The ordinary visitor, who is perfectly intelligent, can see the difference. They will understand that the Dutch exhibition is different from the Ukrainian, because their experiences were so radically different. The input of the institution itself ought to be confined to basic factual material, which is not really in dispute.

The Kaczyńskis have been misappropriating state funds for the support of a particular party historical line. It so happens that President Kaczyński, when he was president of Warsaw, was behind the Warsaw Rising Museum. That has turned out very well. But it was such an obvious gap to be filled that it could hardly fail.

I think that quite a lot of the young historians who worked on that project were competent and not preoccupied with a certain reading of history. But if the Kaczyńskis would do a museum on Solidarność, that would be a total disaster. Wałęsa would probably be washed out like Trotsky.

*Q: Is there such a thing as objectivity in history? What do you take as the basic rule?*

I believe in the famous slogan of the Manchester Guardian: 'facts are sacred, interpretation is free'. If somebody wants to write that the Second World War started in 1935 in Albania, most people would say that is not all right. But if you want to analyse what happened in the Second World War you need a bookshelf. It is surprising that sixty years after the Second World War there is no agreed textbook on what happened in the war.

Full objectivity is impossible. We must strive to objectivity, but we can never quite get there. However, a historian should try to be impartial and should try and look at every event from different points of view. The best chances of getting near the truth, is to construct different perspectives before making a judgement. A historian has a duty to make a judgement, but also to state clearly 'this is my opinion and this is the evidence I put before you'. In other words, historians should separate judgement from evidence.

*Q: You say interpretation is free. So if a Romanian colleague tells us a story about his interpretation of Romanian history, which we think is totally absurd, we can conclude his story has no real value, not even politically.*

It depends on why you think it's absurd. If you are talking about an event, for example the participation of the Romanian army in the attack on the Soviet Union and your Romanian colleague tells you no Romanians fought in the Soviet Union you can say 'forget it'. But if we get to the question of why they were there, you are on difficult ground. But usually nationalistic historical propaganda is very stupid. It's very easy to recognise things that are obviously false.

*Q: What do you feel is the position of history in the European project? Should we, as European politicians, deal extensively with history? Or should we look to the future and leave dealing with the past to historians?*

I think history is essential to thinking about the future. If you think of your own journey, you need to know where you come from in order to know your possibilities. It is too big a task to try and sort out all of history. The Second World War is and remains the great event in the history of Europe. It was an enormous impetus to the European movement, and it had a greater impact on the East than on the West. I think all Europeans can see the benefit of a European movement, which is geared towards international cooperation, as opposed to what happened in the lives of our fathers and grandfathers.

Historians indeed have a duty to contribute. One of the main tasks of historians is to learn and to obtain professional knowledge. The ordinary man cannot expend the time to do so. But having obtained that knowledge, they also have a duty to communicate it as widely as possible. It's no good having five historians talk to each other in a closed room. Unfortunately, the historical profession is learning more and more about less and less. And all historians are terrified of the internet. The problem today is that there is so much information. In order to have a professional knowledge of all the sources, books, and journals you have to narrow your subject. A historian deals with the year 1621, but has to excuse himself that 1622 is not his field. When I was a student here in Oxford forty years ago there were something like forty historical journals in the library. A really assiduous student could look at each of those journals and know what was in there. Now Oxford University Press alone publishes five thousand journals. The consequence is that an academic can only read one or two percent of what is available. And on top of that, there is an almost infinite amount of information on the internet.

So to have a broader impact, you have to be courageous. Start with a relatively small subject and once you get more competent you basically have to be courageous and paint the picture, imperfect as it is. Fortunately, in Britain there is a very good tradition of writing history as literature. If you're going to write it, write it well. When I was thinking of doing a doctorate, my tutor here in Oxford advised me to write a book. 'PhDs are for second-raters', he said. It was very good advice. A good book which is reviewed in a respected journal is worth a lot more than a doctorate. The book I wrote was relatively successful and my name became known. I did a PhD later, at leisure.

*Q: Historians like E.H. Carr, or Karl Marx and the philosopher Benedetto Croce interpreted history as a process which took human kind to a higher level. Social democrats often share this kind of Kantian optimism. Other historians say this is rubbish; they don't believe in causality and maintain there isn't so much to learn from history since it never repeats itself.*

A good historian could give you a very interesting hours' long lecture on causality. Politicians should facilitate the participation of historians in the debate on various issues. There is a history of everything. You name it, it has a historical dimension. There is a history to climate change, and also a history to climatology. There is a history to today's credit crunch, a history of earlier banking crises. Take the South Sea Bubble of early 18<sup>th</sup> century England, or Tulip Mania in the Netherlands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

*Q: Does human kind improve or learn nothing?*

As a good catholic I would say humankind doesn't improve. But there is obviously improvement in some fields: technology, the conditions of living, medicine. But I don't think human nature changes. I don't think people become more or less virtuous.

*Q: What is your opinion on anti-denial laws? In most countries Holocaust denial is forbidden, but in France there is now a more general law on genocide denial, geared, in fact, to the Armenian genocide. Historians in France protested heavily against this. Timothy Garton Ash spoke out against it in the Guardian. Even Hrant Dink, the Turkish Armenian writer, objected. Do you feel such laws, which are passed by parliaments, unduly limit the freedom of historians?*

I would be against those laws. But at the same time it strikes me that dozens of historians flourished in Western universities saying that Stalin committed no crimes. In my case as a young historian I was called every name under the sun, because I was convinced that Katyn was a Soviet crime and said so. Yet anybody who dared to say that the Holocaust was not a reality would be out of his job. So there is a lot of imbalance in the way people think about these things. That is where we started this interview: the profound impact of different experiences on our perspective. In the West, Hitler is the sole evil in our century and the Holocaust is the emblem of that. So

denying it is like saying evil doesn't exist. But if you say mild things about Joseph Stalin nobody will object. One of the great tragedies of the Soviet Union is that it discredited the name of socialism. Poles often tell me that for them communism equals socialism. When they say they are right wing, they mean they don't like communism. This leads to a lot of confusion as to what is left and what is right in politics.

In Poland people have no idea what liberalism is, since liberalism was condemned both by the communists and by the Catholic Church. The confusion this caused still continues. Garton Ash organised an excellent conference here at Saint Anthony's, on liberalisms. Not liberalism, I mean the plural. Interestingly a lot of Chinese participated, all very interested in hearing what liberalism is about.

*Q: We are struggling in our political work with the so very different perspectives on European history. In Western Europe, despite broad awareness of the crimes of Stalin, the Russian Red Army is often seen as liberator, but in the countries of Central Europe views are, understandably, completely different. More and more these are becoming subject of political debate, which, as you can easily imagine, is often hard to resolve. How should we handle these differences?*

My latest book on the Second World War, 'Europe at War' gives the background to the problems you have. It deals with why Western Europe developed views on the Second World War so very different from those in Eastern Europe. Western Europe saw a war between fascism, basically the Nazis and the Italian fascists, and Western liberal powers, who because of American intervention, only just survived after being almost knocked down in 1940. Eastern Europe saw a very different war, where there were two enemies. Theirs wasn't a war against fascism, but a war in which the fascists were fighting the Soviets. Several hundred million people were caught in the middle of this double war. The result is that in Western minds, especially from the American point of view, the Nazis – and to a lesser extent Mussolini and Franco – are the apex of evil. Their emblematic crime is the Holocaust. To anybody from Eastern Europe this looks simplistic, because the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe had two great enemies: Nazi Germany and the



Soviet Union, partners in 1939 and afterwards, from 1941 to 1945, mortal enemies.

Different peoples, and in certain cases different groups from the same country, see one or the other of these monsters as the true enemy of civilization. In Auschwitz for instance, there was a large number of Poles. For them Nazism was not only the number one enemy, it was also the chief tormenter of Poland. On the other hand, for those in Poland whose families were killed or taken away to Siberia – and we are talking about millions here – they can't imagine that there is anything worse than a Soviet concentration camp. These different perceptions circulate all the time. But most people east of Germany see the double enemy, and their perspective on the Second World War is fundamentally different from the typical Western interpretation. The whole language is different. For Westerners a concentration camp is a Nazi camp, full stop. If you come from Eastern Europe, it is not so clear cut. To make the difference clear I always ask people 'can you name the biggest concentration camp in Europe during the war?' Most in the West don't know, but the biggest camp was Vorkuta, hundred miles above the Arctic Circle in Northern Russia. Much bigger than Auschwitz, with around thirty sub camps, it was operated from 1929 to 1961. It wasn't an extermination camp like Treblinka or Belzec, a dedicated category of Nazi camps which had no facilities for labour but were simply death factories. Auschwitz was actually a hybrid. Basically it was a concentration camp, but many of those being sent in, especially Jews, never set foot in the camp at all. They were gassed right next to the railway ramp. But this is just to show that the word concentration camp means different things to different people. And there is no better word for what Vorkuta was.

Look at the notion of 'collaborator'. In the West the term is almost exclusively reserved for those who sympathised or worked with the Nazis, whereas in Eastern Europe it is someone who collaborated with either of the great enemies. Or liberation, which in the West means liberation from fascism. In the East it is a joke, because the chief liberators, the Soviets who also liberated Auschwitz, were running an even bigger concentration camp system. My father in law, who is Polish, spent the war in Dachau and Mauthausen. Having survived both he came back a very strong man. He was immediately taken in by the Soviet secret service, the NKVD, and put in a

Soviet camp, not because he had done anything, but because he had survived Dachau. Over the years I've evidently spoken to many Poles about the war and whenever I used the word liberation, a big smile came over them. 'What happened to me at the liberation? I was let out of Mauthausen and taken into a Soviet prison. Do you think that is liberation? Well it wasn't.

*Q: What does this mean for the debate on the comparison of fascism, the Nazi regime, and Stalinism, which is still continuing? Do you mean there is a reasonable comparison to be made?*

There is a big section in my history of Europe on this question. Taking into account something like twenty factors I did identify some very strong similarities as well as some important differences. In terms of evil it's like answering the question 'is it worse to be gassed or to be starved to death in Siberia?' Both systems were inhuman to a degree that is difficult to imagine. Savage and deliberate mass killing took place on both sides. Some aspects of the Nazi genocide, especially the Holocaust seem more intense, but the scale of killing by Stalin was much greater. Stalin killed more communists than Hitler did. He had the entire Polish communist party rounded up in 1938. We westerners are used to thinking in terms of right versus left. One of the similarities of Fascism and Communism was that they were both peculiar mixtures of left wing features and right wing features. Neither of them fit into the scheme of Left versus Right.

Reviewing the history of the Left in Europe is revealing in that sense. The first people Stalin destroyed were socialists. The worst thing to be in a country occupied by Stalin was either to be a Marxist or a social democrat. Not Leninists though. Leninism was a very sectarian view of Marxism. Imagine socialism being Christianity and the Mormons, a sect who claim to be branch of Christianity, takes over the largest Christian country and then that little peculiar sect persecutes all the other Christians for not being Mormons. This is what happened. Leninism was a tiny faction, even within Marxism in Russia. The Mensheviks were actually a majority. But the Leninists, the Bolsheviks, managed to get control over the government and first of all eliminated what they called their left wing opposition: the trade unionists and the Mensheviks. And then of course they started killing communists. So it was not left versus right.

*Q: When discussing the Second World War, in the West we mainly look at the Nazi past and Germany's role whereas, as you rightly note, in Eastern Europe there are two consecutive histories to deal with. But the question remains how singular was the Holocaust? Because even though the Russians killed more people than Hitler did, in debates in Western Europe – and not least in Germany – on the Holocaust and Holocaust denial we maintain that the Nazi crimes stand out. They are incomparable. György Konrád said to us, 'the Nazis tried to kill a complete race; at least Stalin did not murder children.' Being a Jewish kid at the time of the Second World War and actually having his life saved by the Russians there is of course a lot of personal history in his perspective.*

This is a very big problem, because there is obviously a huge political campaign connected with the Holocaust. This extends to Israel and present day politics. Jewish advocates in particular cannot imagine there was anything comparable to the Holocaust. In my view the crimes committed by Nazism and Stalinism were not identical, but they were certainly comparable. A reasoned comparison can be made: both Hitler and Stalin killed millions of people because they were in a category regarded as hostile, not for anything they had done. Nazi ideology laid categories on people by a pseudo-racial system. Jews were classified as a race but so were Roma and Slavs, who in fact are not a race but a linguistic group. These people were killed – men, women, and children – simply because they were in these categories. Stalin did exactly the same. He eliminated millions of people – men, women, and children – because they belonged to the wrong class. Soviet ideology developed from Lenin, and while he was hardly a nice man, it was Stalin who further developed this ideology of which killing people in huge numbers was just part of the practice. Holodomor, the Ukrainian terror famine in which probably more people died than in the Holocaust, was an act of killing people by category. The Bolsheviks formed a cordon around Ukraine – quite an achievement in itself since it is no small country – preventing all regular export of food, which they then confiscated. The Bolsheviks sent in people to take away all food from farms and barns in Ukraine. The result was that 20 million people died. It was an absolutely deliberate act of policy. This came on top of the campaign against the Kulaks during the collectivization of Soviet agriculture, in which an estimated 17 million peasants died. Again this is more than the Holocaust.

*Q: In Germany there is a strong feeling of collective guilt. You don't see that in Russia. The trend is in the opposite direction even: Stalin is presented as a saviour of the country in World War II. Why, in the light of the terrible crimes committed, are the Germans so sensitive, to talk about their guilt and even emphasize it, while the Russians do that much less?*

Very simple, the Germans were defeated and the ideology which fired the Holocaust and other atrocities was completely discredited because it led to the defeat and death of millions of Germans. On top of that, the German population was re-educated. This College, Saint Anthony's, was actually founded by a group of British intelligence officers who had developed the re-education campaign for Germany. In Russia – not the Soviet Union – the Stalinist ideology was victorious. It was the greatest source of pride they had ever had.

*Q: Even though Khrushchev undermined that 'glorious' image?*

Khrushchev's criticism was only a minor setback for this huge reservoir of pride in victory. The other factor is there has never been any form of re-education. The average Russian is completely unreconstructed in terms of history. It is part of the background of the huge problems in Eastern Europe where the Russians are still actively propagating their Stalinist history. In Estonia and the other Baltic States they still vividly experience this. Look at the question of war memorials. Should one regard a war memorial to the Soviet liberators as a source of pride? Since Stalin took away a quarter of the population of Estonia they are not very keen on having a tribute to the Soviet liberators. When the Estonians moved the memorial in the spring of 2007 – mind you, they didn't destroy it, but moved it politely and with respect from the central square of Tallinn to the cemetery – the entire computer system of the Estonian government was paralyzed next day by 'unknown' cyber forces. It was a plain reminder of its large neighbour's looming presence.

*Q: The totalitarian interpretation of twentieth century history asserts Hitler was a one off phenomenon: he was responsible, as was Stalin, while the general population was not guilty. So the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism were not rooted in German and Russian societies. A different historical interpretation says that these regimes grew out of a societal trend to conclude that much broader*

*parts of the population were involved. Many collaborated or passively accepted what was happening. In Western Europe the former interpretation of Nazism is more common. These different interpretations were famously played out in the so-called Historikerstreit in Germany. What is your view on that?*

My view is that the situations in Germany and in Russia were essentially similar: a small political group taking over their countries. The Nazis started off as a little bunch of malcontents who, by pseudo-democratic means, managed to wrest control of the government of Germany out of the hands of democratic parties. Once they had achieved that they were able to find allies within German society, different groups who supported the Nazis for various reasons. Likewise the Bolsheviks, as I mentioned not quite the political mainstream in Russia, got control of the biggest country in the world. Exploiting the problems facing the country they enjoyed some measure of support but also a lot of opposition. There were people in Germany who were actually quite content to go along with Hitler and probably never asked questions about what the SS was doing at some sites. But exactly the same happened in the Soviet Union. If you mention the Katyn massacre to Russians they will invariably tell you it is Polish propaganda and never actually happened. Even today there are Russian historians mounting a sort of anti-Katyn campaign to promote the purely fictional story that the Poles killed sixty thousand Russian prisoners in the 1920s. That is absolutely false. But they come up with papers and photos defending 'Mother Russia', which would never commit such a crime like that.

*Q: But were the Russians and Germans simply as much victims of Nazism and Stalinism as the Dutch or the Polish were?*

No, I think it is quite obvious that both the Nazis and the Bolsheviks, which, I have to repeat, were minority regimes, drew on certain traditions in their countries. And in Russia, alas, there is a long history of oppression, camps, deportations, of destroying peoples. Stalin used different methods than the Nazis. In some cases he shot people, like the million or so that were killed in the 'Great Terror' of 1938. But the traditional method in Russia to get rid of people was simply by wholesale removing communities. Polish history is telling in that respect. The Russians started deporting Poles to Siberia in

the 17<sup>th</sup> century so that the South Siberian city of Irkutsk was at a certain moment a majority catholic town. I should be careful here, but I think this is something Western people have difficulty understanding. The logistics of killing people is quite complicated. A regime that is trying to kill several million people will run into technical problems. The Germans resorted, if you like, to modern technology. They had an actually scientific campaign, a research and development program to find out how it would work. The Soviet Union didn't need such technology. The Soviets simply took people so far away that they were certain they would never come back.

The one thing you are not allowed to do is put ethnic labels on categories of criminals. You will find individuals or groups belonging to every nationality involved in criminality or violence. What do you do about the Jews who collaborated? The police in Warsaw were Jewish. The people who drove Jews from the trains and took them to the trains in the first place, were actually Jews. Were they not collaborators? My view is that none of us, who has never been in such a situation, should be quick to judge. To fully appreciate historical events, a clear understanding of the context is necessary. For example, do you know how the SS recruited their Ukrainian camp guards? In 1941, the *Wehrmacht* captured some two million soldiers in Western Soviet Union, most of them Ukrainians. They were put into camps under conditions far worse than in Auschwitz, no food, no water. They simply put barbed wire around them and waited until they started eating each other. This was standard practice. And then the SS would come in and say, 'Now lads, would you like a decent meal?' These were the people the SS recruited to run the concentration camps which were formed in 1941-42. To say these Ukrainians were 'collaborators' is to neglect the circumstances in which they were forcibly recruited.

*Q: Certain historical interpretations of totalitarianism emphasise the unique character of Stalinism and Nazis. Do you think such horrors could happen again?*

All sorts of things can happen again and I don't know whether there is any truth of history. One lesson of history is that it is full of surprises. One might have guessed that in Russia, with its traditions of cruelty going back to Ivan the Terrible, some horrendous regime might have developed. Much less you would have predicted that it

would happen in Germany, but it did. There are several candidates where it might happen, circumstances that make people desperate. The psychology of why such perversions happen is not simple. I think as it were, all human beings have a potential for ghastly evil.

*Q: The difference between Germany and Russia is remarkable. We can discuss the crimes of the Nazi regime with our German colleagues in all openness. But if we would raise the issue with some of the people around Putin, they would flatly deny Stalin did criminal things. At the same time, we know their attitude has a negative impact on Russia's own development and its relations with Europe. Should politicians nonetheless engage in such a debate and tell the Russians that the way they are trying to rewrite Stalin's legacy is not very helpful?*

Of course, one way to dissuade Russians from even talking to you is to suggest they have not done as well as the Germans have. Russia feels humiliated and they are trying, falsely in my view, to find new sources of respect or to revive old ones. But yes, politicians should, while keeping a smile on their face, let them know that prevailing Russian attitudes to history are a big barrier. You should let them know that you don't believe what they tell us about Stalin. The mass of historical evidence just leaves no other possibility.

To understand the Russian situation somewhat better, it is helpful to know how Soviet public opinion was terrorised much more deeply than in Nazi Germany. All the way through the war, average German citizens were basically safe as long as they conformed, didn't step out of line or show any opposition. Throughout the Second World War there was much greater risk of being killed by the RAF than by the SS. In the Soviet Union the situation was very different. Stalin moved from a program of killing political enemies, to killing social enemies, and then to killing communists. Even though he won 99 percent support at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1934, he had half the communists who had supported him killed. He was starting to kill his own supporters, creating a general fear among communists that they themselves were in danger of their lives. He then moved on to the 'Great Terror' of 1937 and 1938, killing people at random and even by quota. Stalin simply gave orders to the police to kill fifty thousand in this district, twenty thousand there. Three hundred thousand are said to have been killed in the Kurapaty

forests near Minsk. I was taken there in 1991 in the last month of the Soviet Union. The locals were beginning to dig in the forest to find the victims they knew were there. One or two of the pits had been opened containing several hundred victims. This massive forest was full of these pits, thousands of them. Putin closed it all down. Arbitrary killing of this kind and on that scale never happened in Germany. And supporting Stalin was no guarantee that you would prosper or be spared. The level of paranoia and social trauma after Stalin was much bigger than after Hitler.

*Q: If we are honest, we have to conclude that Russia never dealt with its own history in an open and honest way. Do you think there is hope that Russia will confront its history? Will we continue to have this big country as a neighbour and a partner that is unwilling to come to terms with its past?*

In fact, I think Russia will eventually confront its history. They briefly tried to do so in the 1990s under Gorbachev and the early years of Yeltsin. There was a movement to face the truth. Putin is going in the other direction, but I feel he is getting into trouble. Putin is running out of gas, literally. Russia is not producing enough gas to honour the huge contracts it has been signing. Moreover, it is very difficult to continue to maintain such a closed world and exclude difficult facts in our age. This is only possible as long as people are not interested in listening and questioning, as long as everything is, as it were, rosy and a majority of people couldn't care less about history. But once Putin's neo-imperialist regime collapses, Russians will start looking at their past.

*Q: And how has, in your view, Poland been dealing with its past since 1989? It is the country you probably know best.*

Not very satisfactorily, I think. The Poles didn't have any doubts about the major crimes of communism. The killing of the Polish communist party by Stalin before the war outraged every Polish communist. People knew about Katyn and the history of the Warsaw Rising. These events passed quite easily. The dispute in Poland is about Solidarność. These appalling identical twins, the Kaczynski brothers, play a very questionable role in the debate. It is not a dispute between government and opposition, but a dispute between the government and a group of people who are out to obstruct by any means possible what is going on. In particular, the Kaczyńskis



have developed a historical theory that Solidarność was seduced by Wałęsa and by the communist secret police. The transition of 1989, according to that theory, was a compromise, an orchestrated arrangement whereby communists would essentially maintain power and privileges behind the scenes. The communists and their friends would take over big business and the banks and Wałęsa would become president. Honest Poles like Kaczyński, who were fighting for the freedom of Poland, were led astray by Wałęsa and would be sidelined. It's a load of total rubbish. The Kaczyńskis controlled the public media for a time and pursued a very active policy they called historical politics, making out that they were the true heroes and trying to undermine Wałęsa. They seem to have failed. Usually I keep silent on current politics. But I couldn't stand it anymore, so I made fun of the whole thing in a speech at Wałęsa's birthday. I think it had a very salutary effect.

The Kaczyńskis set up the Institute of National Memory. They have been using this institute for their campaign. It has a mixed record, in fact. They are very professional historians and some of the things they do are necessary and very praiseworthy. They have done a lot of good work documenting the killings that went on after the war: judicial murders in which a lot of émigré Poles who returned were killed. That's all very good, but this same Institute of National Memory is also being used to dig dirt on Wałęsa in a very scurrilous way.

*Q: Is Poland, apart from the Kaczyński brothers, getting more at ease with its own past?*

I think they are. They look around Europe and see a lot of other countries who had difficulties about their own past. One big problem, namely the Jewish question, remains. Most Jews in the world, about eighty percent, came from Poland. Because the mission of Zionism was to take people from Europe and to bring them to Palestine, that meant taking them mainly from Poland. Therefore, Zionists, who are actually stronger in America than in Israel, stick to an interpretation of Polish anti-Semitism. Poland was the Babylon where the Jews suffered. If you say, as I would, that before the war Poland had good relations with most Jews, bad relations with some Jews, and a lot of indifference that is no good for the Zionists. The Jewish socialists in Poland, the Bundists, didn't want to migrate to Palestine. They wanted to have a common society in Poland,

harmonious and prosperous, with the inclusion of Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and so on.

*Q: After such a complicated history, do Poles now have a feeling of freedom, independence, of being part of Europe? Or is the past still haunting them?*

It depends on who you talk to. There are more and more enlightened Poles, young people who want to forget about that difficult past. On the other hand, there still is a big group with a chip in its shoulder. These are the people who say someone is trying to cheat Poland, whenever there is some kind of crisis: 'The Germans are trying to use the EU to achieve what Hitler failed to do.' That sort of nonsense. But, in fact, after joining the EU Poland has done very well. The anti-European, euro sceptic propaganda was focussed especially on the peasants. Polish farmers would be starved to death because of cheap food imports from the EU. They even got to saying that Brussels favoured euthanasia for Polish pensioners. Absolutely evil things. But it never happened, quite the opposite. Polish agriculture exports have done very well.

*Q: During the Cold War, many people in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia felt that West European social democrats were too nice to the communist regimes. People like Egon Bahr and Willy Brandt were regarded with suspicion. How, in your view, does this connect to this confusion about what social democrats stand for?*

That was definitely the perception in Central Europe. People like Willy Brandt started from the idea of convergence: if we talk with our East German neighbour, they will get closer to us. But they didn't. So that line was not very popular in Eastern Europe. In addition, Western trade unions had close connections with Soviet trade unions in order to increase their leverage against their own governments. It was common knowledge in Eastern Europe that Soviet trade unions were organs of repression and had nothing to do with workers' rights. Western parties, like the Labour Party which had close connections to these trade unions lost a lot of credibility as a result.

*Q: We asked György Konrád this same question and he said these social democrats had been rather naive. Do you think Brandt's*

*Ostpolitik was totally misconceived? Perhaps they believed that these parties could change from within, but they were certainly not fellow travellers. Moreover, they wanted to have a dialogue on the armaments race, which was very threatening in the 1980s. And they hoped that the Helsinki agreements would create space for the opposition. Were they totally wrong by trying to find an opening for dialogue, instead of fuelling the confrontation like Thatcher and Reagan did?*

The Helsinki accords definitely had a very positive effect because all sorts of underground committees started to take human rights very seriously. People in Eastern Europe had never heard of human rights. I think that did give them some hope. But I don't think American opposition to Soviet communism was just an image, an empty shell. The US was the chief opponent of the Soviet Union. The US was seen as limiting the power of the Soviet Union. Many in Central Europe believed, to put it simply, they would be all dead without the United States. That is part of the background to the pro-Americanism of many Central Europeans. Another important element was the fact that they had millions of relatives in the United States, especially the Poles. They knew jolly well that their uncle in Chicago sent 10,000 dollars a year and drove a car. They had pictures of the houses they were living in, their standard of living. In the 1960s and 1970s the contrast was enormous. While communist propaganda promoted the idea of the prosperous socialist society, it was obvious to everyone that image was false. That was a big element of pro American feeling. I am not the greatest admirer of the US, but in Eastern Europe it remains very difficult to criticise the US, or aspects of its policies.

*Q: Why did the system collapse? Because of the outside pressure, or the armaments race?*

It collapsed because it was brain dead. I usually liken it to a dinosaur that had a heart attack and died on its feet. Nobody attacked it. Few would have believed that the KGB in 1991 wouldn't be able to mend a coup against Gorbachev and save the Soviet Union. But they had just forgotten how to do things. Gorbachev himself was totally unaware of reality. He wanted to save the Soviet Union, but he had no clue how it worked. The whole system just collapsed under its own weight. The regimes gradually lost faith in what they

were doing and why they were doing it. Things got out of hand in the 1980s. There is this story about how Moscow issued free TV antennas in 1980 so that everybody in the Soviet Union could watch the Olympic Games in Moscow. But all over the Soviet Union people turned their aerials in the other direction. In the western part they could watch Finnish and Polish TV. Even though the latter was communist, it was completely different. This was the time of Solidarność, so suddenly these people saw the images of striking Polish workers, while they had been told these were imperialist agents. But it was plain to see from the pictures of the Gdansk risings that not only they were genuine workers, they were Catholics kneeling on the ground in protest. Modern technology had quite an impact. It greatly contributed to the breakdown of Soviet information control. Soviet leaders themselves just lost the will to impose their policies by force. In 1987, Armenia started fighting Azerbaijan and Gorbachev decided not to do anything. That was the beginning of the breakdown. After that every republic in the Soviet Union thought, 'our chance is going to come quite soon.'



# “It Does Not Hurt to Apologise”

An interview with György Konrád

György Konrád visited Brussels in December 2008 for a conference on populism and national minorities. We used that opportunity to ask him about some of the topics that are discussed in this book. György Konrád is a well known Hungarian novelist and essayist who lived through turbulent times in his own country as a dissident. By remaining true to his ideas and to himself, he was able to survive a system in which he refused to participate. He was often in trouble with the authorities and his books were banned. Nevertheless he stayed in Hungary because “He did not want to say thanks all the time while living abroad.” Konrád, now in his seventies, was and is an independent intellectual who is not afraid of controversy. He is a mild man and expresses his opinions without any hint of revenge. Interviewing him is very entertaining but not an easy task as he prefers to ask more questions than he answers. When he does answer, he draws his responses from an enormous repertoire of anecdotes.

To start the interview, we asked him about his opinion on the emerging culture of guilt and apology: many new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe point the finger at Russia demanding apologies for the Soviet past.

*“People did so many bad things to one another and they naïvely believe that words will heal the wounds. Nevertheless, the demand for apologies is not totally absurd and certainly not new. After the Second World War, when Mongolia wanted to re-establish diplomatic contacts with Hungary, a memorandum was sent to the Hungarian government offering an apology for the Mongolian invasion which took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. I can give you another example. When the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs was planning a visit to Hungary, his ambassador in Budapest told me that he had received a request from the leadership of the Hungarian Lutheran church for a meeting. The ambassador did not understand why they were so interested in meeting the minister and asked me for*

*an explanation. I told him that I expected that the bishops wanted to thank the Turks for the protection they gave them in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the Habsburgs' Counter Reformation. However unbelievable it may sound to you, my explanation turned out to be right. I do not understand why some countries find it so hard to apologise. If I step on your foot, I will say 'I beg your pardon'. It does not hurt to apologise. The Hungarians should also apologise for having stood on the wrong side in the war and for invading Ukraine."*

With this last remark Konrád touched a raw nerve, touching upon a hotly debated issue in Hungary. Many Hungarians, especially on the right of the political spectrum, still seem to have a problem with the consequences of the Treaty of Trianon (1920) in which the victors of the Great War carved up Hungary. Many ethnic Hungarians ended up in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Serbia. Whilst the human rights of the descendants of these people must be properly respected, suggesting changes to existing borders is both illusory and dangerous. Konrád does not advocate a return to a Greater Hungary but he does ask for understanding of the position of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries.

*"In the little town where I grew up as a child, the house of my father was nationalised; now it has been bought by a bank. I have no warm feelings towards this house. At least when it was still a hardware shop, the smell was familiar to me, now my old bedroom will be an office. A teacher wanted the synagogue, annexed to this house and used as a depot, to become a music hall with a small room dedicated to the memory of the Jews who had lived in the little town. When I was made president of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, I called up György Ligeti, the now sadly deceased Hungarian-Jewish composer, arguably one of the most outstanding composers of the entire post-war era. Ligeti had been living in Germany since the early Fifties. I was told he was hard to reach. A minute later he phoned back, beginning the conversation with: "I bet you can't guess where I was in early October 1944?" I had to confess I had no idea. "In the synagogue behind your family's house, then a stable, I had to shovel up the horse manure onto a handcart." Ligeti spoke about a Hungarian army officer who, on entering the temple and seeing what was to be seen, shed a tear and asked: "Have we come to this?" He was the only one who wept. There is a marble plaque on the wall of my father's house in*

*the memory of the 670 local Jews killed. When the teacher made her request to the mayor at a public meeting, a gentleman stood up and said that she must have lost her mind while visiting Israel. Instead of dealing with such an unimportant thing, she should be dealing with Trianon. Later she was told that this man had been an informer during the Communist period. This is a characteristic story for the Trianon people."*

Even so, Konrád refuses to dismiss those who ask for respect for ethnic Hungarians living abroad. *"I do understand the concerns of those who still talk about the consequences of that treaty. There were all kinds of humiliations when you wanted to travel, or send packages to your friends and family. People simply did not understand why they suddenly had to speak Romanian and accept different cultural values. One should not forget that many Hungarians in these territories had to carry two burdens: not only did they live under a communist dictatorship; they were also perceived as special, suspicious citizens. Moreover, assimilation was very difficult to achieve in the twentieth century. Successor states like Romania were culturally less developed than Hungary. The situation improved after the collapse of communism. One of the ways to deal with this issue today is by ensuring that the Hungarian minorities are represented in national governments."*

And he concludes on an optimistic note as regards the danger of the present debate in his country. *"The debate about Trianon could become a crazy nightmare, an obsession, but not a danger to democracy. The reason is that there are simply not enough followers. The Hungarian Guard is marginal, with crazy people who like to play military rituals."*

Apart from the story of Trianon, Hungarians are also disputing the role of the Horthy regime that collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. Many say that it was the worst episode in the Hungarian history of the twentieth century, others counter that communism was no better. Konrád has his own thoughts. *"At the time of József Antal, the first prime minister after the democratic transition, there was a kind of right-wing censorship and 150 journalists got fired – the best and most critical ones. We, who criticised this in the western media, were accused of dirtying our own nest. I was one of the initiators of the Democratic Charter in 1992/1993."*



*This movement once had a big meeting against the revival of Horthy. At this gathering I said that Horthy was responsible for the loss of one million Hungarian lives. His defenders, on the other hand, claimed that it was his achievement that just one million lost their lives and not more. They said that the Jews were relatively safe until the German occupation. But in reality they were already in forced labour camps in the Soviet Union and used as mine detectors on the battlefield. In 1990, the then Hungarian minister of foreign affairs said that the ice age started in 1945. For me that was different. I would have been dead if the period before had lasted longer."*

As is the case in many new European Union member states, Hungarians often attempt comparisons between the Nazi period and the communist dictatorship that followed, arguing that both were equally bad. Konrád has difficulty supporting this approach and makes a clear distinction. As a Jewish child, unlike many of his relatives and classmates, he was fortunate not to be sent to Auschwitz. *"For me personally, the Nazi and communist periods were not the same. The communists could not forget that they were also somehow idealists. It was a mixture of good intentions and bad ideological tools. There was an upward mobilisation of the people. The working class and the peasants formed the cadres of the regime. In 1949, all the leaders of the workers' councils were invited to come to the central house of the unions. They had to wait there during the whole night. They did not know what would happen, whether they were being arrested. At four o'clock in the morning a high ranking person of the politburo came out and said: "From now on you are directors of big factories". Every person was given an important business. Their first task was to confiscate everything. Now, it is not hard to imagine that these people suddenly felt very important, but they were also uncertain; they knew they were not competent. Nevertheless, in 1956 these people were prepared to defend their position with machine guns because they believed to have achieved something."*

In the end the difference is, in Konrád's eyes, very simple. *"The communists did not kill children. They killed people because they were considered enemies and not just for what they were."*

Personally he was not threatened in 1956. He was expelled from the university three times, but he did not have the feeling that his life was in danger. But, as he recalls, one never quite knew. *“I remember a literature teacher who was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. He had been active in the French resistance movement. And for the communists it was simple: ‘if he can resist them, he can also resist us.’”*

As an outspoken critic of the regime, Konrád was under constant observation by the secret police. They must have built up quite a file on him. Did he have a look at his file? *“Yes, I did. There were over one thousand pages. It was extremely boring. The most literary element in it was the description of a lecture I attended at the free university: It was characteristic of the atmosphere at the lecture that Konrád was sitting in the first row and slept immediately.”*

We asked him about his experience with Western social democrats and their contact policy in Eastern Europe. In the 1980s, a number of social democratic parties developed contacts with established communist parties in countries like Hungary. This policy was motivated by the belief in the possibility of change from within the system and the wish to build a common front against the deployment of new nuclear weapons in Europe. It has often been criticised as being too soft. Konrád believes that some of these social democrats were heading in the wrong direction but his overall assessment is mild. *“Many social democrats in the West believed that it was extremely important to look at the personal arrangements and formations in the politburo. One could call them scholars in Kremlinology. But I never believed this to be a relevant and adequate approach. In my opinion, there were deeper movements and streams in politics. Behind the members of the politburo, there were people like Gorbachev and his team who brought new developments into politics. This, in comparison with the question whether Gromyko stood nearer to Molotov, was much more relevant.”*

A personal experience illustrates his point. *“Once, late in the evening, the bell rang and there were two gentlemen in front of my apartment. They were prominent members of the German SPD. We had some glasses together. Quite soon I noticed that they were excited. Not because I had offered to invite some members of the democratic opposition, but because the next day they were official*

guests of Imre Pozsgay, minister of state. I knew this man; he was a person with a strong ego, speaking from his belly and he had weak political courage. This was very characteristic and other people had the same experience with social democrats from the West. The dissidents were not taken seriously. In my opinion, it was not the political elite with whom a closer cooperation had to be established”.

Konrád shows an understanding for the position taken by west European social democrats and admits that he shares many of their views. “There were certain developments in Hungary after 1956. There were different factions in the Hungarian communist party. Kádár himself had started as a social democrat in the Unions and did not belong to the Moscow hardliners. There were more people of this non-Soviet type. The main political orientation in my country after 1956 was different from the line chosen in the GDR. Therefore, it was not stupid of the social democrats to seek contact with these people and Kádár himself also wanted a normalised relationship with the western social democrats. Our fear was that the western social democrats were somewhat naïve. Nevertheless, in the so-called democratic opposition there were also local social democrats. I myself once said in an interview with the German paper “Der Stern” that if I had lived in a free world, I would have been a social democrat with some green elements. I was of the opinion that the whole discussion about missiles was leading nowhere because the main issue, namely the Iron Curtain, was not touched upon and not dealt with at all.”

Konrád believes that the way in which social democrats organised their contacts made it difficult for them to find partners after the Iron Curtain came down. “They did not know who their possible partners would be after the change. First they supported some original social democrats but when that did not work out, it was decided that the renamed communist party – now socialists-should become member of the Second International. That was actually reasonable, and I have nothing against it, but it is a bit odd that immediately these people became, without any difficulty, social democrats.”

Konrád ends with an assessment of the Helsinki agreements. *“The Helsinki process was useful because of the third basket which made a little bit more free activity possible in Eastern Europe. And we had an alibi because of the Helsinki agreement. We could say: ‘Look, here is the text that justifies our activities’. But the arms control negotiations about numbers were not really relevant to us. The most relevant negotiations were the ones between Reagan and Gorbachev, which dealt with withdrawal.”*



# HISTORICAL DILEMMAS



# Beyond History and Politics

## The Need for Conceptual and Ethical Dialogue

Pierre Hassner

Can history be objective? Is there such a thing as historical truth? These questions have fuelled debates in Europe among scholars but also the public at large, particularly during the age of national and ideological revolutions. They concern the distinction between memory and history, and the relation or separation between history and politics. What the contributions to this book confirm is that these questions are too serious to be left to historians and politicians alone, or rather that any meaningful answer requires the scholar and the witness, as well as the statesman and the citizen to recognise a number of epistemological and ethical criteria which alone can avoid the intellectual danger of confusion and the moral danger of hypocrisy. Critical self-examination and peaceful debate are equally necessary among historians as well as within and between political communities.

The influence of politics upon historical interpretations and vice-versa can be seen at three levels. It is important to distinguish between these levels even though they often merge into each other and borderline cases are frequent.

The first is that of the founding myth or of the narrative identity of a people. The second is the political exploitation or manipulation of history by one political faction against others. The third is the totalitarian creation and imposition of an all-encompassing historical myth which is forced upon the whole of society and upon the teaching and the writing of history as an official truth, the negation or criticism of which is considered treason.

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## National myths

Every society has a political culture. This presupposes what the French philosopher Paul Ricœur has called a narrative identity which includes a view of its origins and of its past sufferings and accomplishments. There is no political community without a heritage or a tradition. One cannot expect these not to be distinct from, or even contradictory to, those of other countries. Nobody can expect the British to have the same view of Joan of Arc as the French, or Europeans to have the same nostalgia for Genghis Khan as the Mongols. The problem arises when the identity of a society is disputed by its citizens, with conflicting memories or myths struggling for their soul; or when the prevailing narrative implies notions like a chosen people, a hereditary enemy, or claims to foreign territory; or when it hurts or obfuscates the memories, the suffering or the aspirations of others. Both a search for historical objectivity and moral or political judgment must then challenge or reconcile the various national myths. If Germans adopt the same respect or nostalgia towards Hitler, and Russians towards Stalin as the British towards Churchill or the French towards de Gaulle, they must expect to be challenged from within and from outside with arguments of historical truth, of political opportunity and of moral judgment.

The papers in this volume rightly distinguish between cultures of pride, cultures of guilt and cultures of resentment and revenge for past injustice. This was the theme of the German historians' quarrel (*'Historikerstreit'*) in the 1980s. In Israel, a debate around Bar Kobah, the leader of the Jewish revolt against the Romans which led to the destruction of the Temple, was clearly based on a subtext concerning the quarrel of intransigence and vainglory versus compromise and pragmatism in the current Israeli situation. Conversely, the work of the so-called new historians in Israel, establishing the fact of the brutal expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arabs upon the creation of Israel, was essentially inspired by the search for truth: some of these authors drew pacifist conclusions from their work, or spoke of Israel's guilt, but the best-known among them, Benny Morris, justified the forced expulsion as an inevitable condition for the establishment of Israel, itself made necessary by the experience of the Shoah.

Historical truth takes second place, however, to a mixture of tradition, living memory and self-justification or self-interest when people engage in a competition of victimhood and suffering (as between Jews or Jews and Arabs, or the victims of Nazism and of communism) or in anteriority and continuity (as in the perpetual polemics between the Hungarian and Romanian Academies of Sciences as to the continuity of the Romanian people and its direct descent from the Romans, or between Albanians and Serbs as to who came first in Kosovo and in the Balkans in general).

### **Political manipulation**

This leads us to the second case: the manipulation of these historical controversies by one political faction against others within the same country. In Ivory Coast a wave of nativism or autochthonism served to exclude a leading contender for the presidency. Professor Friszke has shown how in Poland, genuine dissidents who had often spent years in prison for their opposition to the communist regime, were accused by right-wing rivals, previously passive in their own opposition, of complacency or complicity with the communists for negotiating a peaceful transition or avoiding a witch-hunt.

Falsifications designed to discredit rivals are universal features of the struggle for power and are ordinarily fought in court or in public before being submitted to the verdict of historians. The really serious problem arises when a regime endowed with a monopoly of political power tries to extend this monopoly to the interpretation of history and to impose a prefabricated total interpretation as a substitute both for the living experience and memory of citizens and for the empirical research of historians. Totalitarian regimes cannot endure without producing a total lie, and, conversely, a total lie can be imposed only by a totalitarian regime.

### **Totalitarian orthodoxies**

Whatever their differences, communist and fascist or Nazi regimes converge in this respect, though with different emphases. Communist regimes insist upon criminalising their predecessors and their opponents, often by fabricating charges and extorting false

confessions. The culmination of this approach was the infamous Moscow trials and their carbon-copies in most satellite states. Any failure of the regime had to be attributed to sabotage or conspiracy from inside or outside. Anybody could become a class traitor. The Nazi regime and more recent genocidal regimes were more concentrated and radical: certain groups – above all the Jews – were seen as enemies defined by their very existence; as the source of all evil that had to be eliminated.

Another difference is that ideologically communist totalitarianism was more oriented towards the future and laid less emphasis on the past. The Nazi regime, and all fundamentalist or revivalist regimes, was oriented towards a mythical past that has to be revived through modern means. Hence the nostalgia for this mythical past commands a greater attention to the elaboration of a religious or quasi-religious fictional narrative. In both cases, however, the independent search for truth is the enemy. This striking quote from a 1933 speech by the Bavarian minister for education and cultural affairs to lecturers at the University of Munich reported by Prof. Martin Sabrow: “From now on it is no longer your task to find out if something is true but if it follows the meaning of the national socialist government”, finds close echo in a speech by Russian leader Putin to history teachers in 2007. Putin denounces those who suggest that Russia should be ashamed of its past and accuses them of being in the pay of foreign countries. He does not deny that acts of violence and brutality occurred in the past, but argues that they were less serious than those committed by other countries, particularly the United States, and above all can be explained and excused by the need to defend Russia against a hostile environment.

This vision is no longer that of communist ideology and the struggle for the liberation of humanity from capitalism. It is rather that of the restoration of past Russian power and greatness. Everything in the Russian past, whether tsarist or communist, that can be presented as having contributed to the national or imperial glory of Russia – including the KGB and Stalin – is to be the object of praise. Russia present and past is portrayed as a besieged fortress, threatened by hostile forces (even the catastrophe of Beslan is presented as the work of “those forces that have always wanted to encircle Russia”). The basic doctrine in Putin’s words is that: “The collapse of the Soviet Union is the greatest geopolitical catastrophe

of the twentieth century. He who does not regret it has no heart. He who wants to revive it in the same way has no brains". Putin's new way is devoid of the messianic ideology of communist revolution. It is entirely centred on power and on the national-imperial ideal with all its ambiguities about relations between centre and periphery, between ethnic Russians and former or present peoples of the empire. One thing is certain, however, historical truth, like political authority, follows the vertical of power, inspired and controlled from above.

Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, there were a few years of opening, inclusive of both history and politics: archives were opened, memoirs were published, a scholarly dialogue with Western researchers was initiated, the names of the victims of repression (although not, interestingly enough, of its perpetrators) were systematically collected, notably by the association *Memorial*. Today the trend is in the other direction: archives are being closed, the work of historians is made more and more difficult, and the work of *Memorial* is impeded (some of its archives have been confiscated). As a result, Stalin's posthumous popularity is spectacularly ascendant. The prevalent view of him is that of a pragmatic leader who not only won the Great Patriotic War but also maintained order at home and Russian prestige abroad. This is portrayed in contrast to the domestic anarchy and international humiliation that most Russians feel followed the fall of the Soviet Union until the arrival of Putin.

## Past and present

This example illustrates the central dimension of our problem: the parallelism between the fate of historical research and the evolution of political regimes, and the importance for both (in the case of post-revolutionary and particularly of post-totalitarian regimes) of a free and thorough analysis and discussion of the past. This discussion cannot be divorced from philosophical and moral considerations. In Russia, as in most post-communist and post-fascist states, this discussion has not really taken place, or at least has not been encouraged by governments and has not penetrated the consciousness of its population deeply enough not to be vulnerable to unexpected reversals. This has to do with the situation of the respective countries, particularly in their relation to the international environment.

First, few countries undertake a thorough self-examination on their own. The country that has most successfully repudiated its past has been Germany (and to a lesser degree Italy and Japan). This happened, however, under the impact of a crushing defeat and under the influence of systematic re-education by the occupying powers, which was perceived as neither oppressive nor exploitative. Even in the so-called *Neue Länder* of the former GDR, the influence of the former Federal Republic was decisive in the reorientation of political and historical education.

But even in these countries – except perhaps Germany – a resurgence of and nostalgia for the past is increasingly apparent. In Italy a lively debate on the nature of fascism has not prevented political unanimity for the *arco costituzionale* and, more recently, the ascent of a populist authoritarianism with fascist undertones.

The second, and perhaps most important dimension, concerns the relation between rulers, nation and society or regime. For a regime which is both autocratic and nationalist, the interests of the rulers, of the nation and of the people necessarily coincide. From the point of view both of historical truth and political freedom, they are distinct and sometimes contradictory. It is difficult to find one's way towards a genuinely democratic regime if one is not able to recognise what distinguishes its blemishes and crimes from the horrors of Auschwitz or of the Gulag, or from the cults of Hitler and of Stalin. Of course this is easier when liberation from political oppression is also liberation from foreign rule and the rebirth of national independence. It is harder when the most criminal dictatorship also coincides with the moment of greatest national or imperial power.

A third connected element is that in Russia and in China the ruling elite and especially the security structures, are the survivors or the direct heirs of the previous regime. Their claim to legitimacy has to be a combination of pragmatism (which may include a de facto conversion to the most unbridled form of capitalism) and of continuity with all previous autocracies in the name of national unity and of imperial power.

In China the circle is squared, with the Orwellian official balance sheet according to which Mao was seventy per cent right and thirty per cent wrong.

## Truth and freedom

This imposition from above can only be challenged by the reaffirmation, individual and collective, of Solzhenitsyn's and Havel's commitment to live in truth, and the theoretical and practical impossibility to separate truth, freedom and pluralism. This can and should happen at the three levels of historical research, of individual and collective memory, and of political and ideological self-reflection and debate.

At each of these levels, there are of course specific limitations.

The critical philosophy of history, or the critique of historical reason illustrated in particular by Max Weber in Germany and Raymond Aron in France, has demonstrated the limits of historical objectivity. The questions the historian asks and the materials he selects are inevitably influenced by personal values and by the concerns, priorities and projects of society at the time. But the same critics have shown that this does not invalidate the rules of scholarly research, both in terms of intellectual coherence and of scrupulous attention to evidence. A constant effort to try to put oneself in the place of the distant actor one studies by reconstructing his view of himself and of the world, or to practice hypothetical or virtual history by asking what would have happened without the role of a given leader or the impact of a given event, can limit the inevitable subjective residue.

At the level of memory, the basic precondition is awareness that the testimony of witnesses and the work of the historian are not the same but must necessarily complement each other. Neither the personal experience of the actor or of the victim, nor the judgment of an abstract entity called history or of future historians can be entrusted with the last word. Here the essential guide is the multiplicity of equally genuine but deeply contrasting memories that must be confronted and put in perspective without ever coinciding fully. The traditional temptation to write history from the point of view of the victors and the current contrary pressures to write it from the point of view of the victims must be heard and taken into consideration, but their respective claims to a monopoly of truth cannot be accepted.

Finally, confronted with the experience of the past century, neither empirical research nor personal or collective experience can substitute for a conceptual clarification and for a reconsideration of our basic political and ideological presuppositions.

As Professor Sabrow suggests, neither the hasty identification of communism and fascism nor the negation of their mutual influence and partial convergence can substitute for a systematic comparison. Indeed, the more one emphasises, rightly, the difference in their ideological aims or in the way that power was taken, the more one has to ask how a universalist, pacifist and egalitarian doctrine aimed at the abolition of class, at the withering away of the state and at an end to national antagonisms could have become the irrational cult of all-powerful leaders and the identification of politics with permanent war (including that of a corrupt elite against its own people) that apparently characterise fascism.

Conversely, the more one contrasts totalitarian movements and regimes with liberal democracy or democratic socialism, the more one has to be aware of their potential, in the face of military or terrorist threat or political or ideological intimidation, to risk their identity and their soul by adopting the methods of totalitarianism or by the struggle against the domination of financial powers.

More generally, one cannot help wondering how victims can become oppressors and inflict upon others the horrors they suffered. In brief, human nature, social and economic dynamics and the structural constraints of political rivalry have to be seen in combination and in perspective. To parody a well-known Kantian formula, philosophical concepts are empty if they are cut off from historical experience; historical analyses are blind if they are cut off from philosophical questioning. Open confrontation between dimensions, approaches and points of view is the key to a fruitful meeting between history and politics.

## **Institutional answers**

I do not wish to end on a purely normative or programmatic note. Some progress has been made in recent years at the institutional level, both national and international, but the task is difficult and exposed to the twin dangers of utopianism and of manipulation.

In Central and Eastern Europe, an experiment is taking place that is known as lustration: the exclusion or punishment of criminals or collaborators associated with the previous regime. Vaclav Havel and Adam Michnik were right to try to avoid a witch-hunt and to look for national reconciliation based on democracy rather than artificially fuelling the fear of an already defeated enemy. It does testify to the need for clear consideration of the nature of communist regimes and for a distinction between leaders, executioners and torturers personally guilty of crimes who should be punished, and the mass of citizens who collaborated with the regime in order to survive and who may or may not be blamed morally but who cannot be confused with the active criminals.

The second quite different experiment is that of the truth and reconciliation commissions based on the South African model. Their approaches and results are varied: sometimes they are just the expression of a political compromise resulting from stalemate; sometimes, as in South Africa, they take on a religious or psychoanalytical flavour with an emphasis on confession and forgiveness. The commissions sometimes lead to mutual dissatisfaction but they do testify to the need for reconciliation that is not simply about forgetting the past.

Finally there is the innovative and fragile progress of international criminal justice through the creation of the special tribunals on Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and of the International Criminal Court. The balance sheet to date is mixed, to say the least. The process is hampered by its dependence upon states for funding and for the execution of warrants and sentences, as well as by potential conflicts with compromises, for example guarantees of immunity to dictators in return for a relinquishment of power.

All these new features of the international judicial scene are imperfect but positive. Whether or not they have succeeded in promoting reconciliation is questionable but in several cases they have certainly helped to establish and make public the truth about a number of dark and disputed episodes of recent wars and genocides. However, it should not be forgotten that these positive results do not represent the main function of these international tribunals – to apply the law according to certain very specific criteria. Judges are



no better placed than governments to replace open dialogue between historians, between historians and public opinion, between citizens and within and between democratic societies. This is why this book is such an important initiative.

Politics is not about the past but about the future. However, one cannot shape the future without taking the past into account, because the past is present. Even the remote and the very remote past are always with us to some extent in landscapes, inscribed into books and written records, visible in paintings and works of art, commemorated with monuments. But, first and foremost, the past is reflected by human beings: in their unconscious reflexes, emotions, gestures, mimics, in their behaviour, in the language they use, in their opinions and their expectations. People are to an important degree programmed by the past. Politicians must be aware of that. One could draw up a long list of measures that were either ineffective or, even worse, produced effects contrary to those expected, because of the neglect of or even deliberate opposition to the past to which people felt strongly attached.

On the conscious level, there are two principal attitudes to the past: memory and history. Memory is based on identification with the past. For a person who remembers, the past he recalls, is his past. Conversely, if one identifies oneself with some past figures or feels oneself involved in some past events, we can say that for him they are objects of memory. History, on the contrary, is based on distance with respect to the past, on its treatment as an external object and not as a part of the self. I cannot describe here all differences between the two which, moreover, changed in the course of time. Suffice it to say that memory, being based on identification, is always incurably egocentric. History tries, with variable effect, to adopt, with respect to the past it studies, a stance, which is supposed to produce results with universal validity. I must add immediately, however, that the difference between memory and history is not clear cut, that they are not placed in watertight

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compartments, and that one must sometimes look closely at a text or discourse in order to allot it to the former or the latter.

The difference between memory and history is of fundamental importance for politics. The former is a legitimate field of political action. The latter must be left outside it. Collective memory is unanimous only in small groups. All national memories are divided. The European memory is divided. It is commonplace to say that workers' memory is different from that of the social elite or that Polish memory is different from the German or the French ones. But it does not seem to be a commonplace to insist that such differences may provoke, what I would call, memory wars. Now memory wars may result in open conflict or may fuel an already existent one. In other words, memory wars often acquire a political significance. They call, therefore, for political action.

Memory wars have at least three dimensions: a cognitive, an emotional, and an existential one. The cognitive belongs to historians who have tools to establish with reasonable certainty what actually happened in the past. The emotional and the existential dimensions of memory wars, however, are beyond the scope of historians as historians. They belong to writers and to artists. And they belong to educators in the largest meaning of the term among whom a prominent role falls to politicians. Useless to say that their intervention into memory wars may intend either to pacify them or, on the contrary, to exacerbate them so as to transform a verbal controversy into a real confrontation. In the last years in Poland, the so called "historical politics" tried to do exactly that. It does not seem to have succeeded. But *Law and Justice*, the political party that promoted "historical politics", is still very active and exerts a harmful influence upon the memory wars between Poles and their neighbours, in particular Germans and Russians.

I presume that the issue here is not how to help escalate memory wars but to see under which conditions one can pacify them. At the cognitive level, historians are entitled to do that because history – as an academic discipline that is in principle different from memory – possesses tools that permit it to conclude a conflict of memories, otherwise insoluble, when it comes to the facts. However, it happens that history shows the past as different from the image of it preserved in memory. This opens a conflict between

history and memory. In such a situation, history must have the last word when we accept that the past can be known and that historians apply rules validated by the intergenerational, supraconfessional and international community of historians – logically connected to rules applied in natural science. This is one of the principal reasons why a parliament cannot legislate the past, the other being the respect for the freedom of opinion. This question was recently debated in France because of the so called *lois mémorielles* (memory laws) which forbid the negation of crimes against humanity such as the extermination of Jews by the Nazis, the genocide of Armenians in Turkey, the enslavement of Africans and the transatlantic slave trade. I would like to mention here the special committee of the National Assembly under the chairmanship of its president, Mr Bernard Accoyer, which auditioned several historians and produced a report on the subject. Its cautious conclusions seem to give the best definition of the relations to be established between politicians and historians or between politics and history.

But if historians can pacify a memory war at the cognitive level, they cannot do the same as far as emotions and identities are concerned. At this point artists, writers and educators, and among the latter politicians, enter the stage. What can they do in order to replace negative emotions by neutral ones, replace mutual hatred by mutual understanding, and modify identities in such a way that a non confrontational coexistence of incompatible memories is made possible? There is no single recipe but they must have this goal in mind when they decide about what to commemorate and how to celebrate memorable events or figures; when they take measures to preserve monuments and generally things that belong to the national, European or world heritage; and when they select the language to describe yesterday's enemies who are today's friends. Politicians do not have to struggle against the past nor should they promote historical amnesia. They must try to frame the assessment of past events so as to make it acceptable for all concerned. Mitterrand and Kohl did not forget WWI and its slaughter. But when, in 1984, they stood with hands joined at Verdun, they modified the meaning of what happened between 1914 and 1918. They showed it as a tragedy of both peoples, the Germans and the French.

Such an approach certainly has its limits. The case of WWII is different. Its end is too recent. In Eastern Europe, it actually ended only in the 1990s when Soviet troops left the Baltic States, East Germany and Poland. So its memory is still very much alive. But WWII is also different from WWI because of its very nature. It was not a war of comparable nationalisms. It was the war of democracy against the Nazi totalitarianism. And the specific character of the Nazi ideology, based as it was on anti-Semitism and racism, caused the unprecedented horror of this war, which we must qualify as ultimate evil – there is no another word for it. Nevertheless, we must somehow try to pacify the memory wars originating from this period.

In order to attain this objective, we have to look at it from a point of view that makes it possible not to carry past conflicts to the present and the future. We must, on the contrary, replace it by a common remembrance of past horrors meant as a step towards an intellectual and moral reconciliation. This is the point of view of the victims of war. We must also try to change national identities by reducing or even eliminating the traditional picture of the enemy, often still an important element. Every European nation has incorporated in its identity an image of the hereditary enemy. This can change in the course of time – for the French, the British were replaced by the Germans – but it plays an important role in the image that a nation has of itself. We must learn to think of WWII not in national, but in ideological terms. We must learn to see it as a war of democracy against Nazi totalitarianism.

When we do this a major difficulty appears, because the ally of democracies like the US and the UK was the Soviet Union. The nature of the political regime of the USSR becomes therefore crucially important to our vision of WWII. Let me, however, restate very briefly my position: I maintain that Lenin's and Stalin's Soviet Union was indeed a totalitarian country and that it may rightly be compared to fascist Italy or to Nazi Germany. But this does not imply that those who chose the side of the Nazis against the Soviets were politically and morally entitled to do that. It does not mean that those who chose the Soviets against the Nazis made the right choice. The only correct choice was democracy. For many, if not for most inhabitants of Eastern Europe, this option was in reality not possible. We have to understand the tragedy of people who were

doomed to make the wrong choice because of their situation. We should, however, also not make heroes out of them.

Stalin's Soviet Union was an ally of Hitler's Third Reich between August 1939 and June 1941. The USSR did not enter the war because of an ideological affinity with democracy. It did so because it was attacked by Hitler. Once at war with Nazi Germany, it fought with undeniable heroism and contributed enormously to the final victory. These are undisputable facts, but they do not exonerate the Soviet Union, its leaders and primarily Stalin himself from the crimes committed. Stalingrad does not cancel Katyn. And the sacrifice of Soviet soldiers cannot serve as an alibi for the massive rape of German women. The totalitarian Soviet Union fought on the side of democracy against the totalitarian Nazi Third Reich. We have to accept the uncomfortable truth that the WWII was not simply a Manichaean struggle of good against evil. Evil was present on both sides. This does not in the least reduce the primary responsibility of the Nazi criminals who started the war and violated all norms of international law. They implemented the politics of extermination of the European Jewry, and enslaved peoples of Eastern Europe.

My final conclusion can be stated in three sentences. Historians should do their research and publish their results, even if they are controversial. They should try to acknowledge that the recent European past is very complicated and ambivalent, and so are the memories of it. Politicians who forget that are doomed to failure.



# History and Politics: Recommendations from a New Comparative Agenda

Wim van Meurs

As the saying goes, under communism only the future was certain, while the past was constantly being rewritten. Today the future of communism is indeed a certainty but the past two decades have demonstrated that the rewriting of history *per se* is not only a communist peculiarity. The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union have certainly given a new sense of urgency and direction to academic debates on fascism and communism as historical phenomena and to comparisons of the two. As historical issues they have also returned to haunt current European politicians.

## Historians and political agendas

It is not only the views of historians that change over time; the understanding that academics have of their own role in national politics and society changes too. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians had a role to play in nation-building: first inventing a synthesis of national history, next imbuing the populace with a sense of a shared national past and a common future, and finally – once the nation state had been created – identifying (ethnic) minorities in society to be excluded from that nation. In that era, historians rarely questioned their responsibility for representing the nation as a good cause in history. As the nation – their own – was considered the be all and end all of the historical process, taking sides was not considered problematic for academic objectivity.

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Communist historians would later use the term *partijnost* to describe this partisan form of objectivity. If the class struggle of the proletariat constituted the prime mover of history, historical truth could only be found in a class perspective. Arguably, the European Union's 50th anniversary celebrations show that it too has made the most of history as a medium of identification, highlighting a shared European past and cultural legacy rather than a history of conflicts and national introspection.

National history – or, for that matter, European history – is inherently selective and one-sided. As Ernest Renan noted, history is not so much about collective memory but first of all about forgetting. He defined the nation as: "... a group of people united by a common hatred of their neighbours and a shared misunderstanding of their past."

After the traumatic experience of the Second World War and in the context of the ideological bipolarity of the Cold War, the role of historians changed significantly. In Western Europe the task of historians shifted from generating popular identification with a national history, its myths, and its heroes to the past and present unity and continuity of the democratic *West* or the Atlanticist *Europe* – *partijnost* in favour of the Western system of market economy and pluralist democracy.

With the end of the Cold War and the ideological stand-off between West and East, a new momentous task befell historians. In the EU of the 1990s, candidate countries of Central Europe reinventing national history and redefining national identity after half a century of foreign occupation and domination became the priority of historiography. Meanwhile, West European historians began to reconsider the East-West division of the continent, thus contributing to the political project of reunifying Europe and preparing the ground for EU enlargement.

We may detest some political agendas and applaud others but, as a matter of principle, reducing history to politically adequate statements always flies in the face of history as an academic endeavour. After all, the art of politics is finding compromises; the essence of scholarship is contrasting diverging positions. As Karl Popper demonstrated, progress in academia is not found in compromise but in polarisation.

The tension between academic history and politics, therefore, is inevitable and essentially irresolvable. Thus any discussion of the role of historians, academic research and history textbooks in relation to politics should proceed with caution, especially when addressing the ideal of objectivity. History itself is objective in the sense that it exists, or existed, even if unknown to us. Yet no objective historical narrative exists – objective' in the sense that the narrative corresponds fully and verifiably to a historical reality.

The problem is not merely one of inadequate sources and the imperfect writing of history. Any historian is responsive to societal demands and may even be part of a political agenda. Some may intentionally champion a particular political cause in their work. Others may become aware only in retrospect of their indebtedness to a certain *Zeitgeist*. Historians are bound to be influenced by the politicisation of their topic, even when they set out to expose political interpretations or demystify conventional wisdom.

Highlighting the role of social democracy in resisting totalitarian ideologies is also part of a political agenda. So is disassembling national myths. There may be an apparent difference between, on the one hand, an ideological pamphlet championing a one-sided truth while condemning all alternative views and, on the other hand, a serious academic study proposing a new interpretation of history after critical evaluation of the historiographical state of the art. The line drawn between academic originality and outright misinterpretation can only be based on a robust degree of consensus within the community of professional historians. This line is bound to shift over time and does not represent objective history or truth. Debates on the use and abuse of history in politics and the separation of objectionable partisan views from historical interpretations that are expected to promote values of democracy, individual freedom, and national identification are inherently political. Accusations of abusing history or falsification are a curse for academic historians, not only because they suggest the existence of objective truth, but also because they may turn against them and against any iconoclastic or unwelcome re-interpretations. The history of the comparative history of fascism and communism bears out this conclusion. In the paradigm shifts of the past half-century in the academic study of totalitarian regimes, political agendas were never far away.

## Comparing fascist and communist regimes

The role of history writing after the traumas and atrocities of the Third Reich, the Second World War and the Holocaust was no longer to create a collective memory of a national past, but to facilitate national amnesia. West European historians in the 1950s excluded Hitler, Mussolini and their fascist cliques from humanity; their accomplices in other countries were portrayed as unrepresentative of their respective nations. The evil genius of the Third Reich had overpowered the nations of Europe, including the German nation. Such a totalitarian view basically exonerated the broader populace, presenting them as victims. Not least because of the ideological confrontation with communism, national history in France or the Netherlands was redefined as an antedated quest for a *democratic* state rather than a *nation* state. Collaborators and fascists were depicted as a small minority that had betrayed the nation – both as an ethnic community and as a democratic community. Thus, in the 1950s, the term totalitarian exonerated one's own nation from complicity in fascism.

This poorly defined concept contributed little to the study of fascism as a historical phenomenon in Europe. Politically, however, it greatly contributed to the consolidation of the East-West divide by equating communism/Stalinism with fascism/national socialism and to the demonization of the Soviet regime and its followers in the Eastern Bloc. Totalitarianism was not an academic theory at all, since it did not allow for alternative explanations or empirical testing. Nor was it comparative as it presupposed the equation of fascism and communism in their dictatorial essence. The core assumption of totalitarianism – total control of the fascist or communist dictatorship over the population – made historical research all but redundant. One evil leader executed a pre-ordained master plan and managed to wreck the course of history almost single-handedly. Why then study a society that experienced total repression, except to testify to its suffering? Why study an allegedly monolithic regime with a premeditated strategy, except to demonstrate the ruthless implementation of this evil plan? Various aspects of totalitarianism as historical interpretation fitted in nicely with the war-time experiences and post-war requirements of West European societies. The perception that fascism had been too overpowering to resist implied

both a collective and individual exoneration from fascism and a clear-cut opposition to Soviet communism. Reconstruction got priority over remembering.

The 1960s were characterised by a reaction to the totalitarianism theory of the 1950s. Revisionists presented an alternative view of communist and fascist regimes on the basis of archival research both in the Soviet Union and in Germany. They rooted the emergence of both regimes in the characteristics, dilemmas and deficits of German and Russian society. Fascism and communism were no longer seen as just the grand strategies of dictatorial cliques, but, in the revisionists' understanding, involved larger parts of society. The revisionists championed academic objectivity, but by condemning the anti-communist and exonerating the instrumentalisation of history by totalitarianists, they too became highly political: opposition to a politicised view of history is by default a political statement. Typically, revisionists were preoccupied with the in-depth study of both regimes and a principled rejection of the totalitarian definition of Stalinism and Nazism: as much as the *Sonderweg* thesis of Germany's road to Nazism irritated totalitarianists, the latter aggravated revisionists. The *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s marked the apex of the confrontation between totalitarianists and revisionists, with the totalitarianists determined to salvage German history and the West from the odium of the Third Reich by emphasising its singularity.

Diverging experiences of the short twentieth century as an *age of extremes* explain the persistence of the East-West divide. In Western Europe, communism dropped off the political agenda with the end of the Cold War and the debate on fascism correspondingly lost much of its political edge. Those who witnessed the atrocities of fascism and lived to tell have been succeeded by new generations. These people were educated to remember the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust, but without the personal experience of those before them. Professional historians are taking over from eyewitnesses. Typically, young academic historians in Eastern Europe today are more interested in the fascist movements and regimes of their countries than in fifty years of communist rule. The dismantling of communist ideology and its elimination from national histories has topped the political agenda over the past

two decades. Ironically, while the political and academic establishments are preoccupied with settling a score with communism, fascism became a non-political field of study by default.

Currently academic historians enjoy a fascinating window of opportunity (even obligation) to revisit the fascism-communism comparison. The constraints of Cold War bipolarity have disappeared and both systems have become historical phenomena. The generation of eyewitnesses and victims has left behind an abundance of research material that is now readily available. Academic research, especially in the new member states of the EU, is exploring new directions and approaches. The functioning of fascist and communist regimes at the micro-level had not been studied before. Due to the politicisation of these issues and the taboos involved, the actual archival sources available had largely remained unexplored by historians in communist times. Research has produced new interesting insights. Firstly, it has seriously qualified the traditional pre-war contrast between democracies in Western Europe and an authoritarian relapse in most of Eastern Europe and, similarly, the presumed strict divide between the democratic majority in each West European polity and the marginal left and right wing extremists. It appears that many liberal and social democratic politicians were attracted to political ideas that we would now hesitate to label as democratic: corporatist parliaments, banning of political parties or arbitrary limitations on the freedom of the press. The struggle of East European politicians to internalise the idea of mass democracy and the consequences of universal suffrage seems more familiar. The democratic track record of most East European countries began with the introduction of universal suffrage in 1918 and ended with some form of royal or military dictatorship in the 1930s. The factors involved and the dynamics of these processes of democratisation and its reversal were too heterogeneous to warrant any simple conclusions contrasting East and West. Secondly, the totalitarian comparison of Stalin and Hitler is back. It is, however, analytical rather than holistic, and it addresses issues that would have been unthinkable in the totalitarianist paradigm, such as disunity within the regimes, popular resistance, those parts of society beyond the control of the regime, and the regime's choice between state violence and other means of managing society. Such analytical comparisons reinvigorate historical research, bypass moral issues and may defy current political agendas.

## Europe's responsibilities

It is certainly no coincidence that academic historians were over-represented among the first generation of post-communist political leaders in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, writers of history are not qualified to provide definitive answers to what are essentially political questions. They may, however, be helpful in rephrasing and reframing some of the dilemmas. The key insight should be that any appeal for the de-politicisation of or removal of myths from history is in itself an essentially political statement. The history of the fascism-communism comparison has demonstrated that history as an academic discipline cannot escape political context and controversy.

The challenge that the new member states of the European Union face is the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* – processes that should have been sequential, happening simultaneously. European integration is supposed to remove the borders separating European nations and to reduce the importance of national identity. At the same time, the memory of what is perceived as fifty years of foreign occupation and communist ideology made the reconfirmation of national identity a top priority in Romania, Slovakia or Estonia. For the countries of Western Europe that faced only one actual aggressor in the Second World War, no moral dilemma between democracy and the nation arose; or at least the dilemma could be contained by downplaying the role of communist resistance during the Second World War. However, in societies that lived through both fascist and communist occupation and dictatorship, the moral dilemma is more strenuous. In the military and geopolitical realities of the late 1930s and the war years, a righteous third option rarely existed for those who fought for the nation and national statehood. That circumstance made them take sides – be it with the Russian communists or with the German fascists.

In retrospect, with the nation state as an historical norm, former opponents may equally claim to have fulfilled their patriotic duty. From that perspective we can understand how the question as to whether communists should be allowed to celebrate the October Revolution near the monument of the Red Riflemen in Riga leads to controversy. Obviously, the new directions in comparative research on fascism and communism will be hard to sell to a broader public.

Academics are not (and should not be) interested in passing moral and/or political judgements. Moral judgements are irrelevant for a better understanding of the how and why of inhuman, dictatorial regimes – as Eric Hobsbawm once noted: “Would Nazism have been half as evil, if it had killed three, not six million Jews?” The ongoing debate in Russia on whether Stalin’s regime caused two or twenty million deaths is irrelevant for our historical understanding and the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, coping with the past in the broadest sense. Typically, the results of academic research and the new fascism-communism comparison take a decade or two to trickle down to school textbooks. The key question today, however, is how to handle these issues on the political level, both in the public debate in the relevant countries and in situations of international contestation.

Consequently, a number of recommendations can be made on how politics could deal with historical questions. In the first place, it is essential to distinguish between nations on the one hand and democracy on the other, both as objective and as norm. By implying that what is good for the nation must also be good for democracy or that the nation takes precedence over democratic values, moral contradictions arise, for instance the apparent need to justify Nazi collaboration for the sake of the nation. Secondly, it is necessary to promote understanding for the peculiarity of the double dictatorial legacy in the new member states in the public debate in Western Europe and to counter Western prejudices of alleged fascist sympathies and irrational anti-Russian sentiments in Eastern Europe. Thirdly, we need to avoid confusing the nostalgia of the last generation of war veterans and ideological outbursts of neo-fascism and national Bolshevism among the younger generations. Finally, middle ground has to be found between the implicit condemnation of an entire nation on the basis of the past strength of and support for totalitarian movements in a country on the one hand, and national amnesia claiming that fascist and communist leanings had always been alien to the democratic national character on the other.

Totalitarianist views are not helpful to this political agenda as they imply a moral either/or. The revisionism of the 1960s and the in-depth study of interaction between society at large and dictatorial

regimes provides a deeper understanding of the grey zones in historical reality and the extent to which totalitarian regimes pervaded everyday life. Last but not least, the more recent analytical comparative approach strongly suggests that, despite the fundamental differences between the regimes and ideologies of Hitler and Stalin, under both the dilemmas of collaboration, aloofness, and choice between nation and democracy had much in common for ordinary citizens.





# The Use of History to Legitimise Political Power: The Case of Germany

Martin Sabrow

Throughout the twentieth century, described by Eric Hobsbawm as an *age of extremes*, claims to historical legitimacy played a pre-eminent role and the relationship between politics and history remained intertwined and delicate. This was very much the case in Germany.

During the Nazi period and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), politics determined the lines of historical interpretation and the ruling political elites prescribed and stipulated which historical narratives were permitted and which were forbidden. The GDR dictatorship based its claim of legitimacy on a so-called scientific approach to politics and the ability to understand and follow the rules of history. The national socialist movement based its attraction and its political triumph on the ideological concept of an organic modernity which would describe the future as a return to a better past and emphasise continuity from Frederick II of Prussia to Hitler and the Third Reich, or from the Saxonian Emperor Henry to Himmler. Hitler seized power deploying a political rhetoric that attempted to regain the past, own national recovery and return the country to Germanic glory and a rebirth of a sense of being German. This programme routinely involved the political instrumentalisation of history. In the spring of 1933, the Bavarian Minister for Education and Cultural affairs, Hans Schemm, declared to lecturers at the University of Munich: "From now on it is no longer your task to find out if something is true, but if it accords with the beliefs of the National Socialist government."

The politically dominated historiography of the GDR established a whole network of institutions to approve topics, theses, findings

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and accounts for professionals dealing with the past. After 1989, most historians passed the verdict that, because of its total domination of ideology, the historiography of the GDR proved to be '*scholarly nearly meaningless*' and '*without any intellectual honesty*'.<sup>1</sup> The really remarkable point is that the direct instrumentalisation of history was not only a feature of periods of dictatorship. It can also be seen in the intense opposition of historians to the Treaty of Versailles which stipulated Germany's exclusive responsibility for World War I. Even in the Federal Republic of Germany there were political attempts to influence historical interpretation. In the early 1960s, the German Foreign Ministry obstructed a planned American lecture tour by the historian Fritz Fischer because of his disputed thesis that Germany was responsible for starting World War I. Also in the 1960s, a sixth volume to an edition about the expulsion of German communities from East-Central Europe (1953-1962) remained unfinished and was never published because of growing differences between politics and history. For more than twenty years a specialist branch of contemporary history and sociology known as *GDR research*, benefited from funding from the ministry of all-German or inter-German relations despite the fact that a number of the annual reports prepared for the research advisory board on questions relating to the reunification of Germany were not authorised for publication.

Taking these examples into account, the message is simple: historians and politicians alike have to fight against the political domination of their discipline. Historians should at all times stick to the principles of scholarly research, and should consider themselves fortunate to be able to carry out their work in the climate of democratic liberalism, and professional autonomy that have prevailed after the end of the Cold War and to withstand attempts to politicise history and use it as a weapon.

## **The timeless distinction between history and politics**

The relationship between history and politics and the demarcation between the two is far more complicated than and not as obvious as it may at first seem.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Es rächt sich, daß wir nie über Europa gestritten haben*, in: *Die Welt*, 26 February, 1996, p.7; also interview with Heinrich August Winkler, *Offen bleiben für die politische Kultur des Westens*, in: *Die Welt*, 29 July 1996, p.7

Historians in Germany have not always been the victims of the politicisation of history; they have oftentimes promoted it. After 1918 many German historians were only too eager to join the *scientific front* in the fight against the *disgraceful* Treaty of Versailles. During the Third Reich, the politicisation of history allowed the setting up of the well funded Empire Institute for the History of the New Germany, directed by the Nazi historian Walter Frank. During World War II, the concept of a *fighting historiography* found much resonance with historians who regarded themselves as soldiers of thought. Even historians who generally stuck to their scholarly principles contributed to the criminal memorandum, General Plan East, which proposed to Himmler a gigantic resettlement of the conquered regions of Poland and the Soviet Union. In the GDR, the regime could count on a large group of communist and anti-fascist historians who declared their approval of the establishment of a new historiographical discipline that would demolish the seemingly outdated wall between history and politics. The intention was to help history find its desired vocation and thereby to enable politics to act scientifically. Even today many of us, at least when working as contemporary historians, serve on commissions and advisory boards with political origins.

Historians may thereby be required to perform as both participants and observers at one and the same time. Historians, for example, may be consulted when memorial sites are being established or they may be invited to join commissions investigating the involvement of the German Foreign Office in national socialist crimes or discovering the origins of gold deposited in Swiss banks. Thus it is not enough to say that at any period there may have been historians who betrayed the essential principles of objectivity and scholarliness. Far more disturbing than personal and professional corruption, is the evidence that the character of the science of history itself has been malleable to the changing politics of the twentieth century. National socialism not only destroyed science by politicisation but also by demanding political utility and even instigating *scientific innovations* in the fields of biology, medicine and historiography. In the Germany of the 1930s, ethnic and even racial concepts with all their immoral implications and even fatal consequences influenced the transition from a history of state and institution to a history of nation history by focusing on ethnic cultural and social phenomena.

This shift later inspired the development of a modern cultural and social history in post-war Germany.

Under communist rule, a completely renewed system of historical thinking was introduced with its own professional standards for evaluation and interpretation. This *bound history* developed its own scientific mechanisms for selecting research questions and its own procedures for verifying and falsifying historical interpretation. Inside the GDR, professionalism and political interpretations of history were not regarded as contradictory, but as harmonious. Belief in the neutral objectivity of historical research was denounced as *bourgeois blindness*. Inside this historiography it became accepted to understand the decisions of the Politburo for example as scholarly considerations, and to interpret political changes of direction as scholarly progress. Historians from the East had to operate within a concept of historical truth that deprived empirical evidence of its status as an autonomous element of the process of historical discovery and understanding, and diminished its meaning by binding it to the criterion of political utility and ideological partisanship.

The communist approach to historical thought declared the *necessity of ideological and political partisanship as a conditional and constituent part of scholarly objectivity*.<sup>2</sup> Historical knowledge that met the basic scholarly standards of research could be rejected as *objectivistic* or *factological* without any room for academic discussion. Even inside the ruling discourse in GDR historiography this approach should not be seen as a mere victory of politics over historical facts, but should be recognised as a fundamental belief in the idea of a structural unification of partisanship and objectivity.

In summary, belief in a basic difference between history and politics has not always been the case. It is not super-historical. It is part of our present mental framework, but not automatically part of historical discourse in the twentieth century as a whole. In my view this means that in times when the danger of politicisation grows, the professional historian has perhaps already lost the means and the methodological instruments with which to recognise it.

<sup>2</sup> Eckermann/Mohr 1966, p.40

## The present danger: consent between history and politics

Bearing in mind the historical legacy of the twentieth century, we should be aware of the danger that historiography might once again be overwhelmed by politics. History does not just repeat itself. The most important danger today is not the well known conflict between history and politics, but a structural and institutionalised consensus.

The generation of historians to which I belong has successfully fought against secrecy and the dismissal of the Nazi past, as well as against a nationalist ideology that sought to suppress the remembrance of political guilt for the Holocaust as a national shame. The remarkable International Stockholm Forum on the Holocaust held in January 2000 with participants from 45 countries, including numerous heads of government, demonstrated that our common historical culture has moved from one of pride and national continuity, to a remembrance culture of shame, of learning, of distance to super historical values of state and nation.

Contrasting a mimetic and a cathartic approach to historical culture, we find the most important cultural border line between those who claim to be Europeans and those who are not Europeans. That is the source of criticism of Putin's view that the task of historians is to encourage Russian pride and Russian identity, and why many consider the question of the Armenian genocide as a benchmark for Turkish membership of the European Union. It is not a question of merging politics and history – Turkish politicians who compare the recently abolished law that they believe stood for so long to safeguard Turkish national honour with the French law against genocide denial argue from a strong position. It is not the alliance between politics and history that makes up for the difference, but the underlying paradigm of remembrance: heroicising versus victimisation, belief in continuity or discontinuity of history, identification with national and imperial traditions or identification with overcoming those traditions. They are the dividing lines that determine the poles of tension, the camps, and the contradictions within historical awareness between the West and East of our present mental map.

In Germany, public historical culture and professional historiography by and large follow the same guidelines and modalities in their approach to representing the past. They are shaped by the demands of the *Erinnerungskultur* (remembrance culture) with its emphasis on contemporary witnesses, their memories of victimhood, and mental compensation for human suffering. It would be wrong to marginalise the great advantages and achievements of this approach that no longer honours the general with a monument of him on horseback, but instead compels us to remember the desperate Jewish citizen deported from his home to Auschwitz with a golden *Stolperstein* in the sidewalk. The conjunction of professional history and the politics of remembrance has helped to lay bare the mechanisms of seduction during two dictatorships. It helped to establish a mental caesura after 1945 and again after 1989, and it has contributed to a historical awareness which privileges the critical questioning of the past instead of the uncritical affirmation of historical myths.

The German term for the unity achieved in coming to terms with the past is *Aufarbeitung*. The term replaced *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which contains a hidden allusion to the Freudian concept of psychological recovery by working through trauma. The era of *Aufarbeitung* has brought contemporary history back to the attention of the public and at the same time has challenged the historians' monopoly on professional expertise. Today historians compete with the mass media, contemporary witnesses and a political interest in sharing the burden of *Aufarbeitung*. Professional contemporary history in Germany is linked more and more to political initiatives in this domain. Instead of following the benchmarks of scholarly discussion there is a tendency towards the demands of a culture of historical events that concerns itself with the anniversary of 1956 in 2006, the anniversary of 1968 in 2008, and of 1989 this year.

We must be aware not only of the open and brutal politicisation of history but we should also fear for its scholarly independence in the context of this friendly political embrace. The basic definition of the science of history is that it has to challenge common perceptions and overcome views. The present paradigm of *Aufarbeitung* tends instead to codify mainstream interpretations and commonly accepted principles of coming to terms with the past. The laws

enacted to protect our societies against the mockery of revisionists who deny the holocaust, the Armenian genocide or even the genocide in the Vendée during the French revolution, represent not only our present level of *Aufarbeitung* but also threaten the freedom of research. This is demonstrated in the recently released *Appel de Blois* by Pierre Nora and Etienne François (October 2008)<sup>3</sup>. I do not wish to recommend a diminution of political interest in the past. However, the relationship between history and politics can develop into a fatal friendship offering the reward of public attention and moral esteem whilst destroying the radical independence of historical research and its disposition to rethink history.

<sup>3</sup> Liberté pour l'histoire: [http:// www.lph-asso.fr](http://www.lph-asso.fr)





# Historical Bias in Poland: Lustration as a Political Instrument

Andrzej Friszke

By its very nature, history, and especially recent history, is a very particular branch of learning. It exists in an uneasy relationship with the memories of those involved in the events concerned. It can play an important role in either legitimising or challenging a contemporary state, its regime and ruling class. History played all those roles during the inter-war period and then throughout the lifetime of the People's Republic of Poland. It continues to play those roles today, although the contemporary situation has its own specific characteristics.

For the last sixty years, history has been involved in ideological and political disputes in Poland. That the state and regime of the People's Republic of Poland have generally been perceived as negative is not disputed. The nature of the condemnation of the state and of the individuals involved is the focus of the dispute. Other factors in the dispute are the extent to which changes of opinion and circumstances are taken into account. Criticism of the communist regime can be so severe that it often overlooks the international context, the economic and social situation and other people's attitudes.

Before moving on to comment on the contemporary situation, I would like to consider the specific features of the Polish left in the country's history over the past decade. Until 1945, leftist ideology was espoused by the Polish Socialist Party; established in 1892, it aspired to regain independence and to gradually form a socialist regime. In the decades that followed, and in particular in 1918, the

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Polish Socialist Party played a significant role in developing the pro-independence movement around Józef Piłsudski and in laying the foundations for an independent state. The Polish Socialist Party was one of the main political parties active during the inter-war period. It took the lead in organising the Polish left. For most of the inter-war period, however, it was in opposition to right-wing governments. Following the coup d'état in May 1926, the Polish Socialist Party became one of the main opponents of dictatorship and defender of citizens' rights and national minorities, in particular of Jews who were the target of attacks by Polish nationalists. During the Second World War the Polish Socialist Party was part of the coalition supporting the Polish government-in-exile in London and the extensive underground structures that grew in Poland itself.

The communist movement had not played a significant role in Poland until that time. The Communist Party was officially established in 1918 to overthrow the Polish state and merge with the so-called socialist homeland, the Soviet Union. Such a revolutionary approach was hardly likely to gain support in a country that had just regained its independence. The Polish Communist Party was outlawed on the eve of the war between Poland and the Soviet Union. It remained illegal until 1938 when it was eliminated by the Comintern during the Stalinist purges. At Stalin's behest, the Polish Communist Party was reconstituted following Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, it remained on the margins of the main opposition movement. It came to power in 1944 when the Red Army seized Polish land and Stalin imposed a communist government on Poland.

During the immediate post-war period, the Polish Workers' Party was the dominant party, not through any wish of the voters but as a *fait accompli* of Soviet domination.

The Polish Socialist Party was reborn after the war as a party that was essentially dependent on the communists, with a new leadership and restricted freedom of action. This period of limited pluralism ended in 1948 when the Polish Socialist Party and the Polish Workers' Party merged to become the Polish United Workers' Party. In terms of its organisation and programme it was identical to other communist parties under Soviet control.

The Polish United Workers' Party had a monopoly on government until 1989. It developed what could be described as a Stalinesque totalitarian or post-totalitarian regime. There is much debate about the use of one or other of these political terms to describe the regime that actually existed in Poland until 1989.

Poland's history would certainly have taken a different course if, during the 1956 post-Stalinist thaw, a number of interrelated factors had not been present that resulted in a profound crisis of the system. Despite the monopolistic system, Poland enjoyed greater freedom after the 1956 crisis than other countries under Soviet domination. Elite groups opposed to the regime gradually began to grow. They advocated far-reaching democratisation and fought for a return to the rule of law, freedom of expression and restrictions on censorship. They also opposed nationalism in the ideology of the ruling party. Members of these groups, few in number, were mostly intellectuals and some students. Nonetheless, effective resistance developed and the movement rose to prominence at the time of the student action of March 1968. A few years later the Workers' Defence Committee was established and became the first consistently active opposition group for decades in Poland. This 1970s democratic opposition cannot be identified with the socialist tradition dating back to the Polish Socialist Party, despite efforts to evoke this tradition. The ideas advocated by the Workers' Defence Committee to inspire and mobilise society were generally democratic rather than specifically socialist. Nonetheless, many of its leaders – Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik – and activists – Aniela Steinsbergowa and Edward Lipiński – admitted allegiance to left-wing ideas and social democracy. The same was true of Bronisław Geremek who had emerged as one of the leaders of the opposition in Poland before the 1980 strikes, and many others.

There can be no doubt that this opposition movement, with its links to the traditions and values of the democratic left, played a significant role in defining the opposition's principles, organisation and strategy. It also established the aims for each stage of the struggle. It was upon the aforementioned aims and principles that the Solidarność movement was founded. As an all-Poland movement, however, Solidarność was by nature pluralist. Following the imposition of martial law these same groups expanded to include workers' leaders and defined opposition strategy until 1989. They

continued to play a dominant role during the first stage of the transition to democracy. This had a number of consequences. The section of the opposition movement with ties to the values of the democratic left decided not to form a separate organisation as it occupied a particularly strong position in the all-Poland movement striving to establish a democratic and independent state within the European Union. The only way the democratic left could hold such a strong position was within the wider opposition movement and as a result it had to dramatically scale-back references to specifically left-wing values. People also felt that a successful transition from the bankrupt communist economic system to capitalism meant putting left-wing economic ideas to one side. The democratic left in Poland thus abandoned its left-wing tendencies and emphasised its general democratic stance, both anti-nationalistic and pro-European.

Consequently the space left for the left-wing of the Polish political spectrum was occupied by former Polish United Workers' Party activists and people linked to the communist regime. Efforts to create a left-wing founded on the ideas of Solidarność failed. The result was a confusion of concepts and discourse. The average citizen continued to associate the left with communism and post-communism. The traditions of the former patriotic left faded into oblivion.

The contemporary right-wing began to develop in the 1990s. It attacked the core of the pre-August 1989 opposition and the leadership of Solidarność for being insufficiently nationalistic and patriotic and therefore labelled it left-wing. Reference was made to the fact that certain leaders of the former opposition had belonged to the Polish United Workers' Party in their youth. Their family members' links with communism were also cited. Essentially, the leaders of the pre-1980s opposition and the advisers of Solidarność were stripped of their patriotic credentials on the grounds that they had held inappropriate positions in their youth or had been associated with the Polish United Workers' Party in the 1950s. Hailing allegedly from an inappropriate – communist – family background was also held against them. These attacks were facilitated by a version of Poland's post-war history in which the communist dictatorship is equated with a betrayal of the nation, support for the communist regime therefore amounting to treason.

The right's criticism of the method adapted to transition from communism is particularly harsh. The criticism relates to the Round Table process; portrayed as an alliance between so-called Reds, people with a communist past, and so-called Pinks, people with liberal left-wing views and links with Solidarność. Accordingly, the history of the opposition movement is also criticised, both by seeking evidence of alleged treason and by attempting to create an alternative version of history. Obviously, particularly strong criticism is addressed at the nature of the Polish transition and at the Third Republic's system of government, described as the Round Table Pact. It is alleged that public debate was dominated by a so-called dictatorship of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* and Adam Michnik. There is also criticism of the alleged desire to inject liberalism into Poland after 1989, particularly in relation to social behaviour, and the lack of a sufficiently emotional and uniform approach to Poland's past, weak anti-communism, a subservient foreign policy and the introduction of obstacles preventing inadequate expression of genuine grassroots national feelings.

The right resorted to all these tactics as it turned to the social groups adversely affected by the economic change of the 1990s, the working class included, whose perceived material and social deterioration was exploited. The concerns of pensioners and the preoccupations of areas that felt condemned to lag behind the major provincial centres were also exploited. The trade unions either allowed themselves to be dominated by post-communists or sought alliances with the ideological right.

In these circumstances, meaningful reference to left-wing values and left-wing heritage is impossible. Major entities within the trade union movement are either pinning their hopes on the right and adopting its approach or, alternatively, are moving towards the then influential post-communist party. The ideological anti-communism of the right has brought a range of groups previously linked to the Polish United Workers' Party and its social organisations closer together. In the current context, recourse to leftist economic projects is unviable and would certainly be ineffective. Left-wing social causes such as feminism and the environment remain on the agenda, but there is no proper understanding or tradition of these issues in Poland. The fact that the average citizen equates the left with communism creates a further obstacle.

Discussion of the real ideological sources of pre-war communism is impossible. The country's right considers such matters to relate solely to the activities of Soviet agents. A prominent nationalist historian and high-ranking employee of the Institute of National Remembrance recently made light of the fact that communists had been tortured in a pre-war jail, even though similar crimes committed during the Stalinist period are still being investigated. Another young historian with a similar political background justified the political murder of senior officers of the Polish underground in 1944 on the grounds that, according to the historian concerned, their left-wing views meant that they would have become communist collaborators after the war. Their murder was therefore considered to be a legitimate preventive measure. Views of this nature are probably aired in every country. In Poland, however, expressed in the influential press, they were not countered as they should have been. Whenever the pre-war, wartime or post-war past is considered, right-wing groups are presented as the only truly patriotic movements. All efforts to settle accounts with the traditions of right-wing totalitarianism and anti-Semitism are countered or rejected indignantly. This happened, for example, in the case of the important debate across Poland at the beginning of this decade concerning the murders in Jedwabne. The nationalists and the right-wing were united in their resistance to accept the truth about Poles' responsibility for these murders. They formed a united front in opposition to the so-called liberal left-wing elite groups.

One of the main indicators of the ideological divide in Poland is the particular interpretation of history espoused, especially with regard to the history of the 1940s. The right has a single vision of Poland during that period: it is of a country subjugated, where suffering and murder were inflicted on the people. The right is reluctant to recall the ideological and political differences that existed in Polish society at the time. It endeavours to create a picture of a homogeneous nation, a nation that suffered and fought first against the Germans and then against the communists. This nation is perceived as having close ties with the Catholic Church and being steadfast in its resistance to communism. According to this interpretation of history, the left, even if it had fought against the Nazis, largely sought to reach a compromise with the communists after the war, thus surrendering all its patriotic credentials. This

represents one more step in the broader effort of discrediting the patriotic and democratic core of Polish socialism.

Investigation, also known as lustration, was an important part of this process. The regime-change model adopted in 1989 aimed to create a state for all citizens, focusing on the establishment of a democratic system, overcoming the economic crisis and taking Poland into the European Union and NATO. These aims were deemed to take precedence over the settling of pre-1989 accounts. It was considered more important to develop consensus around such general aims than to encourage the internal divisions that would inevitably follow a process of settling accounts. This approach was criticised as a result of the Round Table. The emerging right-wing demanded investigation and de-communisation. The *Night of the Files* in June 1992 and the fall of the government that had prepared the operation to unmask informants amongst parliamentarians and individuals holding high national office, were interpreted as acts in defence of informants. This interpretation of events still holds sway today.

For the right-wing circles in question, investigation became the key that would reveal the truth about the lack of genuine democratic opposition in the 1970s and 1980s, its two-faced leaders, and alleged deals and secret conversations between the police and opposition leaders. The outcome would be to undermine and even compromise the widely-held version of events, reveal the so-called secret arrangements and thus throw light on the reasons why the Reds and the Pinks reached agreement at the Round Table. Police records were made available to researchers at the Institute of National Remembrance, established in 1999. No evidence was found to confirm such a vision of the past and yet its proponents were not downcast, arguing that the documents had been destroyed. It is true that in 1989 and 1990 a significant proportion of the records had been destroyed. The scale of the destruction, however, was not sufficient to eliminate all traces of actual collaboration with the secret services of the People's Republic of Poland. Another way of countering the lack of documentary evidence was to maintain that no records had been kept on the main informants. It was also hoped that military service records would reveal what was claimed to be the truth. So far the hoped-for true story has not been realised.



Instead, police records confirm the genuine nature of the Polish opposition and its leaders. Advocates of conspiracy theory still maintain their stance however.

Recently, documents were revealed which state that Lech Wałęsa was registered as an informant at the time of his arrest in December 1970. Wałęsa's accusers admit that all contact ceased in 1974 and are unable to respond to the doubts raised in relation to the nature and intensity of such contacts. Nonetheless, the lack of clarity pertaining to the years 1971-1974 allows opponents to undermine Wałęsa's credibility as the leader of the Polish freedom movement and the genuine nature of his stance in 1989 and subsequent years. It follows that the credibility and genuineness of the Round Table compromise agreement and the transition to democracy are also called into question.

The investigations that have taken place in Poland have certainly not served reconciliation. On the contrary, they have generated pressure for political change and for the replacement of the ruling class – the very things the leaders of the right hope will come about. Despite the adoption of a very broad definition of collaboration with the secret services – the mere fact of being registered suffices – the right has not achieved its aims. The premise that the opposition and Solidarność were manipulated by agents has not been confirmed either. There are extensive records of the activities of genuine agents, but little interest has been shown in them unless they played an important part in the opposition, in Solidarność, in the events of 1989, or had important roles in the Third Republic. No such individuals have been identified. I therefore believe that the significance of investigation as an issue in contemporary Polish politics is declining. Nonetheless, we shall continue to have to deal with theories about plots and allegations against prominent individuals. These attitudes stem from awareness on the right that its role in the struggle for freedom and in the efforts to build a democratic state was secondary. The aim is therefore simply to detract from the merits of those who deserve recognition.

# European Social Democracy and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Totalitarianism

Bernd Faulenbach

My contribution concentrates on Central European and particularly German social democracy which – although intimately bound up with features peculiar to Germany – illustrates many aspects of European social democracy. It had to fight both forms of totalitarianism. This also applied to European social democracy as a whole, albeit in different ways in individual countries.

When speaking of totalitarianism in this context, I am well aware of the problems associated with the term. There were very different forms of totalitarianism, dictatorship, or totalitarian dictatorship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is difficult to distinguish between the terms. There is perhaps an even wider variety of theories of totalitarianism which seek to explain this phenomenon. However, a distinction must in be drawn between the totalitarianism of the Hitler dictatorship, with its unparalleled crimes, and the closely related Italian dictatorship that preceded it, on the one hand, and communist totalitarianism, deeply imbued with Russian Bolshevism, markedly different from National Socialist totalitarianism in certain respects, but equally responsible for crimes against humanity, on the other hand.

All in all, it is quite clear that social democracy or democratic socialism is at the very heart of anti-totalitarian thinking and action, a fact which in my view is of considerable relevance to Europe's cultural heritage.

## The fundamental principles of social democracy

Many documents on German and European social democracy and also on the Socialist International since the Second World War show that these parties were opposed to totalitarian dictatorships on principle.

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Willy Brandt, who was a leading figure in German social democracy and President of the Socialist International, frequently defined social democracy as the 'party of freedom'. However, 'freedom' in this context always denoted freedom of the many, not of a chosen few. He always defined the concept of freedom in comprehensive terms. Freedom, on this interpretation, includes winning the battle against poverty, establishing social security, and opportunities to participate in politics, education, culture and prosperity; meaning that freedom must be associated with the concept of equality. For Brandt, however, it meant above all the unconditional recognition of human and civil rights and guarantees of power-sharing and pluralism. Despite the ambitious political aims of social democracy, which also extend to society in general, there are certain limits to political action from a social democratic point of view: human beings must never serve as means to political and ideological ends.

On these grounds, social democrats are against racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism and imperialism. This means that they recognise the right to national self-determination and that, despite their internationalist leanings, they certainly do not reject patriotism as illegitimate.

Principles such as those briefly outlined here form the basis of social democratic policy today but they are also to be found throughout the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The totalitarian challenges of the interwar period**

German social democracy was engaged in a battle on two fronts in the period after the First World War. It was not the war loans agreed by a majority of social democrats in the First World War that led to the split with the communists – there were many reformists, including Eduard Bernstein himself, in the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, the USPD. On the contrary, it was the issue of democracy and dictatorship that caused what quickly proved to be an insuperable difference between the two branches of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the M-SPD and the U-SPD, and the newly founded communist Party of Germany, the KPD, which was very much against convening the National Assembly and even sought to prevent it by force in the January 1919 uprising. The main difference between the SPD and

the KPD – even now – is not about peace or property but about democracy. The KPD has always opposed the Weimar democracy, which was essentially based on social democratic ideas. The strong stand against Bolshevism in German social democracy, which counted distinguished Menshevik émigrés from Russia among its members, is understandable in this context.

From the early 1920s, German social democracy faced the danger of Fascism in Italy and, soon after, the danger of National Socialism in its own country. Many social democratic views were certainly variations on very simple Marxist interpretations. However, social democrats also produced some very clear exposés of National Socialism. Also, the Social Democratic Party certainly opposed National Socialism as no other democratic party did in the final phase of the Weimar Republic – although there has been some discussion in this connection as to whether it showed sufficient determination.

The double stand found expression in social democratic positions which can be described as early forms of totalitarianism theory. Prominent German social democrats not only spoke out strongly against totalitarianism on both right and left but also emphasised that they had much in common. As the important theorist, Karl Kautsky, put it: 'Fascism is nothing but a counterpart of Bolshevism, Mussolini is simply aping Lenin' (1930). At the party conference in Leipzig in 1931, Otto Wels described Bolshevism and Fascism as brothers and Rudolf Breitscheid explained in a key speech that in the Fascist and communist systems – unlike democracy – supreme power was vested in the state and the right to determine political opinion did not rest with all citizens but with certain individuals or with a privileged minority: 'As regards the effect on constitutional law', Breitscheid explained, 'there is no difference between Moscow and Rome'.

The social democrats were aware that the Mensheviks were being persecuted in Russia and the socialists in Italy, and they duly protested. After the National Socialists took over, they became the preferred target of National Socialist persecution in Germany – next to the communists, oddly enough (both were regarded as 'Marxists'). Social democrats fled abroad, small groups put up some resistance, most party members just tried to survive and keep in

touch with one another. They ceased to represent a threat to the Nazi regime after 1935 or thereabouts, except for social democrats like Julius Leber, Carlo Mierendorff and Theodor Haubach, who were members of the 20 July 1944 resistance movement and went down with it.

The differences between the social democrats and the communists were only partly resolved in exile, even in the concentration camps, and then only because they had a common enemy. It should nevertheless be noted in this connection that socialists and communists worked together in Popular Front alliances in France and Spain in the 1930s – in the specific context of class struggle – making common cause against all conservative, clerical, reactionary and Fascist forces. The left certainly experienced the unscrupulous use of force in the Spanish Civil War by communists who followed the Moscow line. In the Latin countries too, relations between democratic socialists and communists were strained, not least as a result of Stalinist influence.

As far as the social democratic or socialist parties in Eastern Europe are concerned, the period between the two world wars can be described as a period of stagnation for social democracy. In most cases, they were not an important factor. In Poland, for example, they took only 13% of the votes in 1928, leaving them in a much weaker position than the National Democrats or the Peasants' Party. The same goes for Hungary; both were still agricultural countries. The socialists were not even in a strong position in Czechoslovakia, where democracy was established on a different basis from most other countries. The complicated history of the socialists in that area cannot be investigated here and more detailed research is certainly still required in some cases.

The Hitler-Stalin pact was a bitter blow to social democrats and socialists throughout Europe: not only did it divide Central Europe between Hitler's Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union and rob it of all vestiges of self-determination; it also had an expressly anti-social democratic, anti-left side to it.

The situation in the various European countries varied. On the whole, however, it can be said that the social democrats and socialists were among the most doughty defenders of freedom and democracy. They did not support dictatorial regimes anywhere and

resisted them in many cases. The overwhelming majority also distanced themselves from Soviet communism. However, the main opposition to the National Socialist policy of conquest and extermination, which compelled the western powers to form a coalition with the Stalinist Soviet Union, temporarily eclipsed the differences between the socialists and communists in many places.

### **Anti-totalitarianism in the post-war period**

The innumerable sacrifices made by the communists and the peoples of the Soviet Union in the battle against National Socialist Germany undoubtedly established the communist reputation for a time – despite the show trials and the Hitler-Stalin pact. But this only masked the difference between communist dictatorship and democracy. And it very soon became impossible to ignore the dark side of the liberation of Eastern Europe by the Red Army, especially where there were stirrings of national independence.

As far as the labour movement is concerned, there were hopes at first in many places – in Germany and other European countries – that the divisions in the labour movement between social democrats and communists could be overcome once again. But this would have required the communists to make a real effort to come to terms with democracy, and those who followed the Moscow line were not prepared to do so at the time.

German social democracy felt the effects of this at a very early stage. In March 1946, social democrats in the Soviet occupation zone were obliged by a combination of force, deception and intimidation, and with absolutely no choice in the matter, to join with the KPD to form the Socialist Unity Party, or SED. In this context and in the years that followed, social democrats were persecuted in their thousands. Of course, the new party formally brought the communists and the social democrats together but before long – at latest with the SED's transformation into a new kind of party, based on the principle of executive authority among other things – social democrats who sought to retain their identity in the Unity Party were excluded, arrested, deported, or forced to flee to the West.

The social democratic parties in Eastern Europe suffered a similar fate, though it took different forms in some cases – as regards the

mixture of force and free will. Events took a different course in Poland and Czechoslovakia, for example.

The experiences with communist claims to power, communist ideology and communist practice prompted a decided anti-totalitarianism in German social democracy which also included a strain of militant anti-communism – albeit not to be compared with other forms of anti-communism. A protagonist of this attitude was the first post-war Chairman of the SPD, Kurt Schumacher, who was locked up in concentration camps for practically the whole of the National Socialist period but survived, deeply marked by the experience. He regarded the communist parties as mere tools of Soviet imperialist power politics.

German social democracy traditionally tended to look to the West. It saw the Marshall Plan as an opportunity to overcome the poverty of the post-war period. The German Social Democrats, some of whom had emigrated during the Third Reich, also managed to resume relations with sister parties in other countries quite quickly in the post-war years. The Socialist International was re-founded in Frankfurt in 1951, strengthening democratic socialist principles and taking a more resolute anti-totalitarian and anti-communist, anti-Stalinist line.

Remarkably, leading social democrats like Willy Brandt and Carlo Schmid joined the 'Congress for Cultural Freedom', a US-backed European organisation with a strong anti-communist bias, which brought together leftists from various backgrounds. There can be no doubt about it; most western social democrats clearly took sides in the Cold War.

At the same time, however, German social democracy was more energetic in calling for a critical appraisal of the National Socialist system and crimes committed by National Socialists than the middle-class parties, which reflected to a greater or lesser extent the tendency in German society to bury the past. They had taken a resolute stand in favour of compensation to victims and reparations to Israel, and against any statute of limitations on National Socialist crimes outside the Reich. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that they continued to give unqualified support to the anti-totalitarian consensus, complete with all the anti-communist trappings, until well into the 1960s, even though Adenauer among others had

turned some of them against the SPD. And in principle most western socialist and social democratic parties took a similar line.

## **Social democracy, the policy of *détente*, and the defeat of communist totalitarianism**

Totalitarianism theory and its tendency to equate National Socialist and communist totalitarianism has been the subject of criticism from various quarters since the 1960s; Firstly, discussion in academic and journalistic circles began to pay more attention to the unique nature of the Jewish Holocaust. At the same time, the differences between National Socialist and communist systems were investigated. Secondly, the policy of *détente* changed the relationship with the communist systems: it appeared to be impossible to defeat them quickly and it was therefore necessary to seek a *modus vivendi* with them.

German social democracy, with Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr, and also Helmut Schmidt, was the main protagonist of the policy of *détente* in Europe from the end of the 1960s. Recognition of the status quo included the specific aim of changing and eventually defeating it. There was to be more security and cooperation between East and West. The policy had no magic formula for removing the ideological differences with communism but it sought to change the communist systems: it had – as an American historian pointed out – a ‘subversive’ element. In fact, subsequent developments in the GDR and other communist systems led to increasing dependence on the West. Gorbachev eventually attempted to reform the system – as the advocates of *détente* had hoped – but it was too late and it finally fell apart. The collapse of the communist systems was certainly attributable to the growing problems inherent in the system but the growing dissident and opposition movement also played a part, an essential prerequisite being the changes in the European climate brought about by the policy of *détente*.

Social democratic ideas were always opposed to dictatorships and called them into question. As the establishment and role of the SPD in the GDR in 1989/90 shows, they were an important factor in the process of defeating the communist systems. This is not confined to the GDR. However, Willy Brandt's hope that the whole of Eastern Europe would turn to social democracy after the fall of



Moscow-style communism proved to be mistaken. In many cases, they turned to the United States and not to Western Europe, with dubious results.

## **Conclusion**

Social democratic theory since the First World War shows a consistent opposition to all forms of totalitarian dictatorship. Social democrats, for their part, were the victims of both National Socialist and communist terror. The dividing line between social democrats and the various forms of totalitarianism was primarily, both in theory and in practice, the issue of democracy, the issue of recognition of human and civil rights, and the welfare state under the rule of law. The defeat of the totalitarian dictatorships took a very different course in each case. However, social democrats played a considerable part, although it must be freely acknowledged that they occasionally made mistakes.

In the light of this history, I am firmly convinced that social democracy can be regarded as a European liberation movement – possibly the most important liberation movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is in any case a tradition which should not be forgotten in national and European cultural heritages. It should be openly acknowledged as part of the European identity. In my view, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament also has a duty to make it widely known.

# The Interpretation of the Soviet Union's History: The Baltic Dimension

Česlovas Laurinavičius

The history of the Soviet Union will probably always attract very contradictory views depending on the perspective of the observer. The picture can be very dark, but also painted in a lighter tone.

The country went through different phases of development; the period of Bolshevik consolidation was different from that of the Stalin years and again different from the later era. The images will diverge according to the period which is being analysed.

The history of the Soviet Union can be seen as an arena for a contest about how to interpret the communist past. The Soviet Union can also be seen as a camp in which people were physically and mentally destroyed. But anyone who holds this view cannot ignore the fact that many of the victims were admirers of the system that tortured and humiliated them. The Soviet Union may also be interpreted as a special type of social contract or even welfare state that placed little pressure on economic units and had a flippant attitude to work and life in general (which in the end is the very reason that communism collapsed).

An evaluation of the Soviet Union against the background of the national question could represent it as a prison of nations, as an expression of brutal physical and mental '*Russification*' or as an unprecedented model of ethno-institutionalisation, where ethno-cultural or even ethno-political communities were formed.

Specialists have also put forward various interpretations of the way the Soviet Union appeared internationally: in the orthodox version the Soviet Union is portrayed as a militaristic system which posed

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a threat to freedom and democracy, whereas in the revisionist interpretation that same Soviet Union is presented as a country desperately defending itself from the aggressive imperialism of the United States. The post-revisionist paradigm is more balanced. It is no longer trying to categorically label players in the Cold War as heroes or villains and is more interested in delving into the concrete circumstances.

Of course this variety of interpretations does not mean that unrestricted relativism is acceptable when judging the USSR. That the Soviet Union was a closed, economically ineffective, undemocratic state, which produced much corruption and violence, is indisputable. We should, nevertheless, use research undertaken throughout the lifetime of the Soviet system and all the information gathered afterwards to consider the Soviet Union carefully, not one-sidedly, but like a rather complicated phenomenon conditioned not just by very brutal social, political and geopolitical circumstances, but also by very individual psychological and moral motives. The Soviet epoch leaves us with many enigmas and sufficient room for new research and interpretation.

Some time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, public references to the past began to change noticeably. The academic reflex was gradually supplanted by contrasting one-sided a priori standpoints that the Soviet Union was either an evil empire or that its demise was the greatest tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This arouses the suspicion that interpretations of the Soviet Union's history are connected less with academic research and more with colliding political interests.

Rather than trying to comprehend all the problems associated with that political collision, I will concentrate more on those aspects affecting relations between the Baltic States and the Soviet Union. This is a sensitive issue that is becoming the subject of most heated debates.

## **Confrontation over the Baltic dimension**

I will begin with different interpretations of the origins of the Baltic States between 1918 and 1920. According to the version of events promulgated by the people of the Baltic region, independence was

the result of a war of liberation against Soviet Russia. From a historian's point of view, however, this interpretation of history seems somewhat simplistic.

Between 1918 and 1919 there were undoubtedly acts of aggression by Soviet Russia against the Baltic States as part of a process of Sovietisation. On the other hand, it was the Soviet government that was the first to declare its readiness to recognise the Baltic States: no other Russian government – or the countries of the West – had been prepared to take such a step. So when historical interpretation draws attention to Red Army incursions into the Baltic region but ignores the fact that the existence of the Baltic States only became possible as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution it is, at the very least, tendentious. This bias becomes even more obvious when the relative weakness of the Red Army forces is taken into consideration along with the fact that amongst those forces were representatives of the Baltic nations themselves.

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the founding of the Baltic States are processes linked by causation and this cannot be ignored. It is also true to say that events in the Baltic region of 1918–1920 are also sometimes interpreted very tendentiously in Russia as well: the role of the Red Army in fighting the German occupiers in the Baltic region is stressed and the existence of the Baltic States is played down. Russia tended to deny the status of the Baltic nations as sovereign political states. Such disregard is irreconcilable with a responsible approach to history: all the more so as it was Russia itself – its politics and social influence – that played a significant role in forming modern Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

There is an even greater clash of opinion about what took place in the Baltic region between 1939 and 1940. According to the Baltic version, the Baltic States maintained their neutrality whilst the Soviet Union, having signed the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop protocols with Germany, occupied and annexed the Baltic States. The picture painted by the Baltics of the Molotov-Ribbentrop protocols is one in which Stalin seeks a permanent union with Hitler, with the objective of destroying the Baltic States. The predominant interpretation of the pact in Russia is that they did not breach any international law as regards the Baltic States, quite the opposite: Russia liberated the Baltic region from Nazism.

Whatever the different interpretations may be, the fact that the Baltic States were forcibly and unlawfully erased in 1940 clearly stands. Once a crime has been determined, however, historians cannot ignore the circumstances that led to that crime. In this case, the Baltic States, despite having officially declared their neutrality, pursued policies which were inspired by and of benefit to Germany. In June 1940 the Baltic States accepted the Soviet Union's ultimatum without protest, largely because they were gullibly keeping to the recommendations of German diplomats not to resist in the meantime. In analysing the circumstances of the silent break-up of the Baltic States, we must not ignore the rather Machiavellian position of the West on this question: the attempt to portray the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement as one of Stalin's long-term goals is equivalent to trying to turn a particularly complex historical period into a conspiracy theory. Such attempts are not acceptable in the study of history as they contradict entire volumes of historical documents, are provocative and threat-provoking.

## Reparations

In this context, attempts to unilaterally demand reparations from Russia, as scion of the USSR, for half a century of occupation seem particularly provocative to the historian. They seem provocative firstly because today's Russia has not lost a war and there has been no peace conference compelling her under international law to implement acts of reparation. This would mean that any outstanding historical question can in fact only be resolved at a political level and, practically speaking, on the basis of bilateral agreements. As a Lithuanian, I will only give my opinion on what this means for Lithuania and the eventual interpretation of questions raised from her own history.

As certain politicians have taken it upon themselves to demand that Russia compensates Lithuania for the damage of fifty years occupation, I would dare to ask those politicians – only rhetorically of course – if they imagine that they will ever succeed in bringing Russia to court and whether they believe that other questions would not be raised in such a court in addition to questions about occupation and annexation. Examples of such questions might include: What policies did the Lithuanian state pursue between the wars? Why was consideration taken of Lithuanian interests in the infamous

Molotov-Ribbentrop protocol? How did the demographics of Lithuania's main cities change in such a short period and how did Lithuanians become predominant? Who is responsible for the fact that entire national communities disappeared from Lithuania?

And, could it not be that the reparations awarded to Lithuania for any damage done to her will actually be for a smaller amount than the bill presented to Lithuania itself? Who will pay that bill? Perhaps those politicians who demand such historical reckoning are prepared to pay it? Unfortunately, it is more likely that ordinary Lithuanians would have to bear the cost of such a historical settlement and not for the first time. A determined and unmerciful push for reparations from Russia could lead to collapse.

### **The culture of historical memory**

Biased interpretations of history arouse moral and intellectual discomfort and also increase insecurity. Yet, leaving history to the historians is not a genuine or realistic alternative. It is impossible to abstract public life from history, just as it is impossible to take away society's memory. The big question is this: what is memory culture and where is it heading?

Today an undisputed criterion of memory culture is democracy. In this context, it would seem logical to criticise and condemn the criminal acts of various regimes in history. Understandably, attention is focused on crimes involving the largest number of victims, in other words, on the condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian regimes like those of Nazi Germany or the Stalinist Soviet Union. However, when campaigns condemning these regimes are being repeated, the more they seem to satisfy political rather than cultural-humanist goals. Ultimately all the criticism becomes directed against modern Russia alone. In practice, an attempt is being made by a united front, including representatives of territories where Stalin is to this day remembered with the greatest respect, to blame Russia alone for Stalinism. This attack is not so much directed against manifestations of Stalinism in Russia as it is against the Russian state itself. There is a thinly disguised goal – the destruction of Russia. The Russians, of course, see this and, feeling threatened as a nation, unite behind a regime that is moving further away from democracy. This is not for the first time that this happens. From as early as the

17<sup>th</sup> century, there have been external attempts at transforming Russia which were all counter-productive. Despite this, they continue. Of course, someone sitting by the Potomac devising plans to tear Ukraine away from Russia and to undermine Russian imperialism may see this differently. One should realise, however, that such plans are not experiments undertaken under laboratory conditions, but have an impact on those people who live next to Russia.

The consequences are already being felt acutely in Lithuania, right on the frontline with Russia. In the public arena in Lithuania, Russia is presented as the evil empire. The political and moral basis for presenting Russia in this way is often dubious: after all, Lithuania is markedly dependent on this apparently 'evil' empire for energy and culture. Russia, in turn, has put in place a strategy of economic and energy blockades, perhaps even strangulation, with regard to Lithuania. The key threats resulting from this escalating confrontation, that I want to stress here, are not so much economic or even military but rather psychological.

### **National identity games**

Lithuania has become one of the prime movers behind the plan to separate Ukraine from its ties to Russia. In practice this is an essential revision of Lithuanian collective memory and a movement away from the history of the founding of the state, as something of worth. It is an attempt to resuscitate old imperial traditions. Of course, the history of the founding of modern Lithuania is not something we can always be proud of. The painful peasants' revolt at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the battle for Vilnius between the wars – infamous throughout the world – the Holocaust and finally the fifty years spent in the Soviet camp left very deep wounds in our historical memory. It would, however, be complete nonsense to think that no new characteristic Lithuanian national identity took shape in over a century of modernisation.

Lithuanians clearly demonstrated maturity and a powerful sense of identity in their break for freedom between 1988 and 1991 when they demanded the right to self-determination. The result was guaranteed recognition by the international community. But once these events had taken place, some rather strange things started to hap-

pen in Lithuania. The idea was advanced that one should not stop at the national state and that it was necessary to revive the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania which, in its day, included part of the Kievan Rus lands – modern-day Belarus and Ukraine. This suggestion is not simply sentimental nostalgia but is directly linked to a concrete foreign policy designed to spread democracy to the East. In connection with this, it has been argued that had the old Lithuanian dukes succeeded in annexing the whole of Russia, a huge European civilisation would have been founded with Vilnius, not Moscow, as its capital. In other words, the concept seems to be a return to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and to do differently what has already been done. Incidentally, it should be noted, that when the Lithuanian dukes did attempt to annex all Russian territories, they had, in fact, planned to make Moscow the capital of the new empire, not Vilnius: evidently because it was best to rule the Russian territories from Moscow. I would argue that this, and similar experiments, may, in reaction, actually lead to a new Russian empire or to a new version of the USSR.

The main issue, however, is the use of national identity as a means of destruction. This should be unacceptable throughout European civilisation.

## Summary

In public life, interpretations of the history of the USSR often fail to take into account achievements in the study of history or even ignore them. On the other hand, it should be recognised that there is as yet no unanimously accepted methodology to interpret the history of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, this does not justify the tendency to interpret the history of the USSR using methodology reminiscent of the orthodox paradigm of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. From an academic point of view, such a paradigm does not stand-up to criticism; from a political point of view, it presupposes an escalation in international conflict and is as such, fallacious.





# Comparing Fascism and Communism: Approaches and Implications

Constantin Iordachi

The two decades that passed since the collapse of the communist system have witnessed an academic rejuvenation of the scholarly interest in the history of the totalitarian movements and regimes of the twentieth century, due to a combination of factors. First, the collapse of the communist system brought a historical period to a close, making possible comparative historical retrospectives of totalitarian fascist and communist regimes during the “short twentieth century” (1917-1991), with a focus on the triad Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Second, freed from political taboos, scholars in Central and Eastern Europe have applied the totalitarian approach to the study of their countries’ recent communist past, giving birth to a rich (even if uneven and at times uncritical) literature. Third, and most importantly, in the post-communist political context, the concept of totalitarianism served as a major propaganda tool of delegitimizing the communist past and of creating consensus for the consolidation of a new democratic order, being therefore placed at the centre of charged political debates. This paper briefly discusses various comparative approaches to fascism and communism, in an effort to evaluate some of their political implications.

## The Totalitarian Thesis: Fascism and Communism as (Uni-)Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is an “essentially contested concept,” with a long and highly politicized history.<sup>1</sup> Etymologically, the word derives its meaning from the stem “*total*” and its derivatives, such as “totality.” The word was coined in Italy in early 1920s by the Italian journalist

<sup>1</sup> Domenico Losurdo, “Towards a Critique of the Category of Totalitarianism,” *Historical Materialism*, 12 (2004) 2, 25–55.

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and politician Giovanni Amendola to denounce the Fascist “total” monopoly of power as opposed to the previous pluralistic, multi-party political regime.<sup>2</sup> It was soon appropriated by the Italian fascists themselves, due to its extremist as well as modern political connotations, and extensively employed with the sense of “wild radicalism,” “possessed will,” or “ferocity.”<sup>3</sup>

After the post-1925 consolidation of the fascist regime in Italy, the term totalitarianism was invested with a new meaning, denoting the intent of the state to control every sphere of the human life. In Germany, the term was borrowed in the early 1930s by Nazi ideologues from the Italian political debates. It was used to both describe and legitimize the dismantlement of the institutional structure of the Weimar Republic and its replacement with a dictatorial regime, a process euphemistically referred to in the Nazi political vocabulary as “synchronization” (*Gleichschaltung*). With the consolidation of the Nazi rule, the term totalitarianism was soon abandoned in favour of the specific vocabulary of racial utopia that dominated the official political vocabulary. The main objection against the term totalitarianism was its “static” connotations which could not accurately describe the political dynamism of the new regime. The term totalitarianism was therefore rarely employed in the Nazi propaganda, being used mostly as an adjective in the form of “totalitarian” or “total” revolution.

The concept of totalitarianism thus had a passing history in the official fascist political discourse. Soon, however, the concept migrated from political to academic discourses, where it made a spectacular “career.” The “totalitarian thesis” was first elaborated in early to mid-1930s in the United Kingdom and the United States and stressed the similarities between Nazism and Stalinism as dictatorial regimes and as the greatest threats to liberal democracies.<sup>4</sup> Originally applied to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the concept of totalitarianism was later extended to the study of the Stalinist Russia as well, commonly labelled “Red Fascism.”<sup>5</sup> This gave birth to the

<sup>2</sup> Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The inner history of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Halberstam, “Totalitarianism as a Problem for the Modern Conception of Politics,” *Political Theory*, 26 (1998) 4, 459-488.

<sup>5</sup> Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of totalitarianism, 1930’s-1950s,” *The American Historical Review*, 75 (1970), 1046-1064.

theory of unitotalitarianism, the idea that the Fascist, Nazi, and Bolshevik regimes shared a common set of characteristics as an expression of a new political genus, totalitarianism.<sup>6</sup>

Since its elaboration in the 1930s, the “totalitarian thesis” served as an analytical as well as a political tool, its history being interwoven with global geopolitical changes. In political propaganda, the theory was used as a symbolic antithesis of liberal regimes, who defined themselves in counter-distinction to totalitarianism. It has been widely used in the Allied anti-Nazi campaign during World War II, and later became a central anti-Communist slogan during the Cold War. To this end, in the 1950s and 60s, the totalitarian thesis was further developed into more elaborated theoretical models and gained a position of hegemony as an explanatory paradigm of fascist and communist regimes. Dominated mostly by political scientists, the “totalitarian thesis” focused on the exclusivist nature of the reigning official ideology and the repressive character of the political regimes characterized as totalitarian.

One can identify, by and large, three major comparative approaches applied to the study of fascism and communism: 1) Structural approaches to fascism and communism as “generic” totalitarian regimes; 2) Comparative approaches focusing on the similarities and differences among historical case studies of totalitarian regimes; and 3) The historical-genetic theory of totalitarianism focusing on the common intellectual origins of fascist and communist ideologies. In the following, I will discuss these major forms of comparison, in an effort to evaluate their political implications.

## **The Totalitarian Model: Structural Approaches to Fascism and Communism**

Structural approaches to fascism and communism advance a common theoretical framework for the analysis of totalitarian political systems of the twentieth century, notwithstanding the obvious fact that these regimes were otherwise very different in their other social, economic, or cultural aspects.

<sup>6</sup> On a critical evaluation of this theory and its limitations, see Alexander J. Groth, “The ‘isms’ in Totalitarianism,” *The American Political Science Review*, 58 (1964), 888-901.

The most influential analytical models of totalitarianism were put forward by Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)<sup>7</sup>, and by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956).<sup>8</sup> The two books propose markedly different methodological approaches: Hannah Arendt's "developmental" model explains the origins and evolution of totalitarianism; Friedrich and Brzezinski's "operational" or "functional" model of totalitarianism, explains the main features and the functioning of totalitarian regimes. Yet both approaches are compatible in their emphasis on issues of coercion, repression, and terror in defining the nature of totalitarianism, and can even be seen as complementary in their analytical and chronological emphases.

Arendt approached the origins of totalitarianism from the perspective of the emergence of mass politics, and focused mainly on the psychological and sociological conditions under which totalitarian movements and regimes emerged. Her main thesis is that the disintegration of the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century resulted in the transformation of classes into masses, the elimination of all forms of group solidarity, and the "atomization" and "extreme individualization" of society, thus creating the conditions for the emergence of interwar totalitarian movements. Arendt defined totalitarian movements as a new type of "mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals," having as a main goal the creation of an isolated, self-contained, and fully-indoctrinated society.<sup>9</sup> Totalitarian movements which managed to conquer the political power attempted to establish totalitarian regimes, defined by Arendt as a new type of rule striving for "total" and "permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life."<sup>10</sup> The "essence" of the new type of regime was institutionalized terror, while the main instrument of terror was the Secret Police. To implement their utopian ideological goals, totalitarian regimes adopt innovative means of "dominating and terrorising human beings from within."<sup>11</sup> By means of totalitarian indoctrination and absolute terror

<sup>7</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951).

<sup>8</sup> Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship & autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956). See also the second, revised edition by Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Praeger, 1965); and Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism* (New York, Grosset & Dunlap 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 323.

<sup>10</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 326.

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 325.

in concentration camps, they aim “to destroy the essence of man” and to fabricate the “inanimate men,” as a new kind of human species.<sup>12</sup>

In her historical analysis, Arendt used the term totalitarianism “sparingly and prudently.” She argued that, although there were many genuinely totalitarian movements in interwar Europe, most of them “failed” in traditional one-party dictatorships. Only two political regimes in history could be classified as totalitarian: Nazi Germany (1938-1945) and Soviet Russia (1928-1941, and 1945-1953). By discussing Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany under a common theoretical framework, Arendt provides a powerful articulation of the theory of unitotalitarianism. Her comparative analysis is, however, largely uneven: Her definition of totalitarianism is tailored on Nazi Germany, of which she had direct experience and extensive scholarly knowledge. Her views on the nature of communist regimes are less informed, due to the lack of access to archival sources, and to the fact that, at the time of her writing, the Soviet-type regimes in Eastern Europe and South-East Asia were “in the making” and thus difficult to classify.

Arendt’s book explored the origins and evolution of totalitarianism as a political trend, but devoted less attention to the actual functioning of totalitarian regimes. This gap was soon filled by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski who, in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, advanced a complementary analytical model for the study of totalitarian regimes. Friedrich and Brzezinski integrated totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century within the larger family of autocracies. In an explicit comparison, they emphasized the common elements but also the differences between traditional forms of autocracy and modern totalitarian regimes, the latter being defined as autocracies “based on modern technology and mass legitimization.” The novelty of totalitarian regimes was their innovative, technologically-conditioned forms of organization and methods of rule. In order to explain the main features of totalitarian regimes, Friedrich and Brzezinski identified six underlying features of what they called the “totalitarian syndrome” or “model.”

“1. An official ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man’s existence, to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere at least passively.

<sup>12</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

2. A single mass party consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to 10 percent) [...], such party being organized in strictly hierarchical, oligarchic manner, usually under a single leader [...].
3. A technologically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control [...] of all means of effective armed combat.
4. A similar technologically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control [...] of all means of effective mass communication, such as the press, radio, motion pictures, and so on.
5. A system of terrorist police control [...] characteristically directed not only against demonstrable “enemies” of the regime, but against arbitrarily selected classes of the population [...].
6. A centrally directed economy.”<sup>13</sup>

Friedrich and Brzezinski argued that this cluster of “intertwined and mutually supportive” traits should only be considered together, as an “organic” system.<sup>14</sup> In the spirit of the unitotalitarian theory, they also argued that these traits characterized all fascist as well as communist regimes, which were all “basically alike,” not “wholly alike,” yet “sufficiently alike to class them together.”<sup>15</sup> Among them, the two authors listed Soviet Russia since 1917 to the time of their writing (1956/1965), Fascist Italy (1925-1943), Nazi Germany (1933-1945), post-1945 Eastern European and Asian communist regimes, etc.

This descriptive model soon became the standard view on totalitarianism, the received wisdom of the Cold War, widely cited in scholarly or even public discussions on totalitarian regimes. During the time, however, the explanatory value of this analytical model was questioned on numerous counts. The first criticism was that this model lacks both an elaborated theoretical framework to support it, and a “connotative” definition of totalitarianism. Defining totalitarian regimes by means of a set of characteristics was “an attempt to convey the meaning of an automobile solely by a description of its

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich, Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship & autocracy*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich, Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship & autocracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 21.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich, Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship & autocracy*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> For a critical comparative perspective, see Robert Burrowes, “Totalitarianism. The Revised Standard Version,” *World Politics*, 21 (1969) 2, 272-294, here 283, 288.

parts;" the result was "an encyclopaedia of totalitarian politics" rather than a theory of totalitarianism.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars doubted that politics can be visualized in terms of a static "model," arguing that such an analytical construct fails to capture the dynamic nature and evolution of totalitarian regimes. Finally, others argued that this political science model of totalitarian regimes placed too much stress on the nature of the political regime, its official ideology and leader, at the expense of deeper economic and social structures in fascist and communist societies.<sup>17</sup>

In more recent decades, there have been efforts to overcome Friedrich and Brzezinski's "classical" theory of totalitarianism. To this end, political scientists made concerted efforts to put forward a more comprehensive definition of totalitarian regimes; to account not only for the similarities but also for the marked differences between the outlook and main features of fascist and communist regimes; and to insert them into a more sophisticated taxonomy of political regimes. The transition from the unitotalitarian model of fascism to the more elaborated field of comparative politics is best exemplified by the work of the leading political scientists Juan J. Linz, spanning several decades.<sup>18</sup> In his most recent work on the topic, suggestively titled *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*, Linz departed from the simplistic dichotomy between democratic versus totalitarian regimes to also include various forms of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes and thus arrive at a complex taxonomy of political regimes.

## Comparing Historical Case Studies: Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia

The totalitarian approach has stimulated comparative historical analyses of dictatorial regimes of the twentieth century, in an effort to identify in concrete details their common characteristics but also

<sup>17</sup> Groth, "The 'isms' in Totalitarianism," 888-901.

<sup>18</sup> See Juan J. Linz: "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes," in F.I. Greenstein and N.W. Polsby, (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science. Macropolitical Theory*, Vol. 3 (Reading, Mass., 1975), 175-411; "Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism: My recollections on the Development of comparative politics," in Alfons Söllner, Ralf Walkenhaus, Karin Wieland, (eds.), *Totalitarismus, eine Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 141-157; and *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 2000).



their differences. Most comparative works on the history of totalitarian regimes have routinely focused on the case studies of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, the two regimes considered the closed historical incarnations of an ideal-typical totalitarian regime. The main aspects under scrutiny have been the biographies and leader cult of Adolf Hitler and Joseph V. Stalin, the history of the official ruling parties in the two countries, the main features of their “party-state” systems, methods of economic control, the building of military-industrial complexes and their relation to the political decision-making process, political propaganda, rites and rituals associated with the official doctrines of the two systems, political repression, the organization of terror and the history of labour and concentration camps.<sup>19</sup>

How useful is the concept of totalitarianism for the comparative historical study of fascist and communist regimes? Some comparativists fully insert their historical analysis into the conceptual framework of the totalitarian paradigm. As Viktor Zaslavsky argued: “It is undoubtedly possible to compare Nazism and Stalinism while completely rejecting the category of ‘totalitarianism’ but ... the results of such research are too often shallow and banal.”<sup>20</sup> Other comparative historians reject the totalitarian approach as ideologically-charged, searching instead for more politically-neutral and methodologically-viable alternatives. In their introduction to a comparative volume on Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, two prominent students of Nazism and Stalinism,

<sup>19</sup> For the lives of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin in comparison, see Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, 1991); Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (London, 2004). For wider comparisons, including Mussolini, see Frank Owen, *The three dictators: Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler* (London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1940); Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini: Totalitarianism in the twentieth century* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1997). For comparisons between Stalinism and Nazism, see Henry Rousso (ed.), *Stalinisme et nazisme: Histoire et mémoire comparées* (Brussels, 1999); Jean Hurtin, “Retour sur le totalitarisme: Le Nazisme et stalinisme dans une perspective comparative,” *Esprit*, (1996), 101–121. For a larger comparison, including Italian Fascism, see M. Flores, *Nazismo, fascismo, comunismo. Totalitarismi a confronto* (Milano: Bruno Mandadori, 1998). Andreas Wirsching, *Vom Weltkrieg zum Bürgerkrieg? Politischer Extremismus in Deutschland und Frankreich 1918–1933/39. Berlin und Paris im Vergleich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism,” 11.

respectively, explore the “common historical ground” in the evolution of the two dictatorships. Instead of unilaterally looking for sameness, they accounted for striking communalities as well as “crucial differences” in the totalitarian aspects of the two societies. On the basis of a set of historically-informed essays focusing on the cult of the leader, war machines, and the afterlife of these regimes in the historical memory in Germany and Soviet Union, Kershaw and Lewin concluded that “the Nazi and Stalin regimes are *essentially different* despite their superficial similarities.” Their conclusion refutes the main claim of the unitotalitarian approach that fascism and communism are “basically alike.”<sup>21</sup> The two authors contend, nevertheless, that the comparison between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia is heuristically useful because only the comparative approach is able to reveal “the historical uniqueness” of these regimes.<sup>22</sup>

## **Common Historical Origins: Historical-Genetic Theories of Fascism and Communism**

Historical-genetic theories of totalitarianism underscore both the common intellectual origins of fascist and communist ideologies and the multiple interactions between these two ideologies, the movements and regimes they inspired. The proponents of this approach argue that fascism and communism have a “common date of birth,” which is traced back to the eighteenth century Enlightenment, to the cataclysm of the French revolution and its aftermath (1789-1815), to the Romantic age in the first half of the nineteenth century, or to the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the intellectual ferment of the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.

A first genealogical view on the common origins of fascism and communism focuses on their relation to the intellectual matrix of the Enlightenment. Were fascist and communist ideologies a by-product of the Enlightened thought? If so, what is their relation to modernity? Some scholars argue that both fascism and

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich, Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, “Introduction: The Regimes and their Dictators: Perspectives of Comparison” in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds. *Nazism and Stalinism. Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-25.

communism are legal heirs of the Enlightenment, and therefore of modernity.<sup>23</sup> Other scholars see communism as a political phenomenon grounded in modernism or humanism, but regard fascism as an essentially anti-modern phenomenon. A minority of scholars argue that both ideologies should be viewed as forms of anti-modern reactions against the Enlightenment project. Still others point out to fascists' ambivalent relationship to modernity, seeing it as a manifestation of the "dark side of modernity."<sup>24</sup>

A second genealogical view on the common origins of fascism and communism focuses on the role of the French revolution in crystallizing radical modern political ideologies.<sup>25</sup> In a path-breaking trilogy, the Israeli political scientist Jacob L Talmon distinguished between two main ideological trends originating from the political matrix of the French revolution: liberal versus totalitarian messianic democracies. Concerning the second trend, Talmon further distinguished between the "totalitarianism of the right," based on glorifying the collective entity of the State, the nation, or the race, which culminated in fascism, and the "totalitarianism of the left," since it proclaims the goodness and perfectibility of the human nature, which culminated in communism.<sup>26</sup>

A third genealogical view argues that fascism and communism were not only related but also *mutually inter-dependent* collectivist revolts against liberalism. A. James Gregor regarded fascism as a left-wing rather than right wing ideology; in view of the common intellectual roots and multiple cross-contaminations, he characterized the relationship between fascism and Bolshevism as "curvilinear," and described the two phenomena as "the faces of Janus."<sup>27</sup> Other historians credit World War One with a decisive role

<sup>23</sup> See mainly Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 365.

<sup>25</sup> See George Mosse "Fascism and the French revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 224 (1989), 5-26.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob L. Talmon, *The origins of totalitarian democracy* (New York: Norton, 1970), 6-7. See also his: *Political Messianism: The romantic phase* (New York: Praeger, 1960); *Romanticism and revolt: Europe 1815-1848* (New York: Norton, 1979); and *The myth of the nation and the vision of revolution: Ideological polarisation in the twentieth century* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991).

in the crystallization of fascism and communism as major political movements. In a brief but very instructive polemical dialogue, two prominent historians, Ernst Nolte and Francois Furet, credit the historico-genetic approach as being “more convincing,” “of greater interpretative force,” and “more interesting than the structural comparison of Hitlerian and Stalinian totalitarianism”<sup>28</sup> but they interpreted the inter-relationship between fascism and communism differently. Speculating on the fact that the Bolshevik revolution (1917) preceded the advent to power of National Socialism in Germany (1933), Nolte argued that “Fascism was born as a defensive reaction against communism,”<sup>29</sup> a view encapsulated in the catchy phrase “Without-Marxism-there-is-no-fascism.”<sup>30</sup> In his view, Marxism was “an original movement, the product of very old roots,” while fascism was “a reaction of a secondary order, artificial in large part, based on postulates.”<sup>31</sup> On this basis, Nolte established a “causal nexus” between the Gulag system in USSR and the Nazi Holocaust, seeing the second as a defensive reaction to the first.<sup>32</sup> This controversial thesis stirred a heated debate in Germany over the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the place of Nazism in German and European history, called the “historians’ quarrel” (*Historikerstreit*, 1986-1989). The controversy started with a polemical exchange between Ernst Nolte and Jurgen Habermas, and was soon joined by major German and foreign historians.<sup>33</sup> During the debate, Nolte’s view on Nazism as a mere defensive reaction against Bolshevism was denounced as an attempt to shift the blame for

<sup>27</sup> A. James Gregor, “Fascism and Bolshevism,” in *The Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 128-148.

<sup>28</sup> See the exchange between François Furet and Ernst Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, with a preface by Tzvetan Todorov (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>29</sup> These theses were elaborated on in Ernst Nolte, *Marxism, Fascism, Cold War* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Nolte, *Three faces of fascism*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Furet, Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, 25

<sup>32</sup> Furet, Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> See *Forever in the shadow of Hitler? Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the controversy concerning the singularity of the Holocaust* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993). For a critical evaluation of the *Historikerstreit*, see Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape the Nazi Past* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1989).

the world war and to exculpate the Nazis of responsibility for their atrocities.

Furet acknowledged the common intellectual “matrix” of communism and fascism and argued that “the only serious way to approach these two original ideologies and political movements is to take them together as the two faces of an acute crisis of liberal democracy.”<sup>34</sup> Yet he rejected “simplistic interpretations through linear causality,”<sup>35</sup> contending instead that fascism and communism were in a *dialectical relationship*, marked by “mutual endangering and reinforcing.” Furet also objected against the relegation of fascism to a secondary role, as a “purely reactive, anti-Bolshevik” movement.<sup>36</sup> Fascism was not a counterrevolutionary but a genuinely revolutionary movement which proved potent enough to take the European Right out of its political impasse.<sup>37</sup> Both ideologies, fascist and communist, were related yet distinct attempts to solve “the political deficit” of modern democracy by integrating the masses in novel political regimes.

## **Beyond Totalitarianism? Critical Perspectives on the Totalitarian Approach**

During the time, the application of the totalitarian model to the analysis of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe came under concerted attacks in social sciences and humanities, being successively challenged by new social, cultural, and anthropological approaches. The first critical perspectives against the totalitarian approach were put forward after the death of Stalin, the political changes set in motion in the communist block since 1953 questioning the validity of the concept of totalitarianism as an overarching label to designate what appeared to be an increasingly diverse set of political regimes. Criticism mounted in the 1960s and 70s, when more and more North American and Western European scholars undertook research visits to the USSR and various other socialist countries; faced with the complexities of communist societies, they began to question cliché views on totalitarian

<sup>34</sup> François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The idea of communism in the twentieth century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Furet, Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Furet, Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Furet, Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, 62

societies and the resulting “black-and-white” dichotomy between “free world vs. totalitarianism” characteristic of Cold War political discourses. In this context, a new generation of social historians rejected simplified accounts of the Soviet society as being made up solely of the ruling communist elite and the working people or, in moral terms, of “victims” and “victimizers,” with no intermediary social strata or interest groups in-between. In an attempt to “bring the society back in,” in their study of communist regimes the new “revisionist” historians focused on the Stalinist “revolution” as a form of forced social mobility induced “from below” as well as “from above,” and emphasized the complexity of the social structure in communist societies and the possibility of autonomous action by various social or professional groups.<sup>38</sup> Methodologically, they promoted an “interest group approach” and an “institutional pluralist model” which they found more suitable to analyzing post-Stalinist communist societies than the “directed-society model” characteristic of the totalitarian approach they openly rejected.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990, the totalitarian approach was further challenged by a new generation of anthropologists and cultural historians who conducted fieldwork in the Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe.<sup>40</sup> Informed by original primary research, the new generation of researchers refuted the idea of a monolithic and almighty totalitarian state, based on the omnipotence of party and state agents and the complete dependence of the local on central agencies.

<sup>38</sup> For the new revisionist trend, see Ronald Grigor Suny, “Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics,” **Russian Review**, 53 (1994) 2, 165-182; Stephen F. Cohen, “Stalin’s Terror As Social History,” *Russian Review*, 45 (1986) 4, 375-384; William Case, “Social History and the Revisionism of the Stalinist Era,” *Russian Review*, 46 (1987) 4, 382-385.

<sup>39</sup> See H. Gordon Skilling, “Interest Groups and Communist Politics,” *World Politics*, 18 (1966), 435-451; H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and H. Gordon Skilling, “Interest Groups and Communist Politics Revisited,” *World Politics*, 36 (1983) 1, 1-27.

<sup>40</sup> For the political implications of field research in communist societies, see Steven L. Sampson and David A. Kideckel, “Anthropologists Going into the Cold: Research in the Age of Mutually Assured Destruction,” in Paul Turner and David Pitt Hadley, eds., *The Anthropology of War and Peace* (Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvery, 1989), 160-173.

They also criticized “revisionist” historians for their tendency to “normalize” the working of the Soviet system, by explaining its stability solely in terms of a social pact between the ruling elite and lower strata of the society interested in new opportunities for social mobility provided by the regime. Cultural historians and anthropologists attempted instead to “bring the ideology back in,” by using new theories and methods—such as oral history—for studying discourses, political languages, and ritual practices in their original environment. Informed by this direct and unmediated access to sources, anthropologists and cultural historians were thus able to uncover multiple forms of legitimization of power, mass mobilization, and consensus-building in communist societies, underscoring, for example, the capacity of the official utopian-ideological discourses to politically activate the population and instil allegiance to the regime, resulting in novel forms of “participatory totalitarianism.”<sup>41</sup> In the long run, cultural historians and anthropologists advanced new interdisciplinary perspectives on the complexities of communist societies but without going as far as to de-ideologise them.

The end of the Cold War stimulated comparative studies on totalitarianism.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, consecrated Sovietologists

<sup>41</sup> As main representatives of this trend, I mention selectively: Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds. *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> See, among others, Robert Conquest: *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet collectivization and the terror-famine* (New York: Arrow Books, 1988); and *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1990); and Achim Siegel, ed., *The Totalitarian Paradigm after the End of Communism. Toward a Theoretical Reassessment* (Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1998). For the revival of the concept of totalitarianism in former Eastern Europe, see the activity of new research institutes, such as the *Hannah Arendt Institute for the Research on Totalitarianism at the Technical University of Dresden*, Germany, *The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism*, Bucharest, Romania, and the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung* in Potsdam. For an overview of neo-totalitarian approaches in the former Soviet Union, see Viktor Zaslavsky, “The Post-Soviet Stage in the Study of Totalitarianism. New Trends and Methodological Tendencies,” *Russian Social Science Review*, 44 (2003) 5, 4-31.

attempted to reassess the analytical validity of the totalitarian approach and to document the Stalinist terror in the light of novel archival evidence previously inaccessible to researchers. On the other hand, after decades of political interdictions, scholars in East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union are actively engaging with the vast literature on totalitarianism, trying to adapt existing theoretical offers to the study of their own societies. Departing critically from “classical” theoretical models of totalitarianism put forward during the Cold War, and informed by recent theoretical and methodological perspectives, numerous scholars have reiterated the heuristic advantages of the concept of totalitarianism, proposing new interdisciplinary approaches to the comparative study of fascism and communism. Instead of simply focusing on the allegedly static nature of totalitarian regimes, new studies focused on totalitarian political *movements*, their integral view on politics, their attempt to exercise a “totalizing” form of power, and their evolution into political regimes. In order to account for the functioning of totalitarian regimes, new studies have redirected the academic focus from issues of coercion, repression and resistance to new technologies of rule and practices of legitimization and consensus-building employed by fascist movements and regimes.

Is the comparison between fascist and communist ideologies, movements and regimes a valid historiographical enterprise? To be sure, from an analytical perspective, most forms and units of comparison could be successfully justified. That is because comparison is a fundamental method of research in social sciences;<sup>43</sup> it has always been an integral part of the scientific inquiry, as a core operation of reasoning. Indeed, as Guy Swandon pertinently remarked, “Thinking without comparison is unthinkable.”<sup>44</sup> Seen from this perspective, the comparison between Nazi Germany and Soviet Union can be a useful intellectual exercise, since it can assist researchers in better understanding the main features of the phenomena under investigation. Yet one has to be very clear in pointing out that comparison per se *does not* presuppose sameness; as

<sup>43</sup> Arend Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method,” *American Political Science Review*, 65 (1971) 3, 682-693, here 682, 683.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Charles C. Ragin, *The comparative method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1.



seen above, after careful scrutiny the verdict of many historians is that the two regimes are essentially different despite certain similarities.

The problem thus is not with the comparison per se, but with how comparisons are conducted and for what purposes. Too often, instead of being informed by up-to-date theoretical and methodological perspectives in the field, recent comparative works on fascism and communism reverted uncritically to a Cold-War definition of totalitarianism, as if it has not been superseded. Moreover, in the post-communist political context, the politicized Cold-War concept of totalitarianism was transformed into a major tool of political propaganda meant to settle scores and to eliminate enemies from the political scene. The comparison between fascism and communism thus served as a form of anti-communism, of demonizing the recent past by associating it with Nazism, the greatest evil in history.

# HISTORY IN PRACTICE



# The Real Problem Latvians Have with History

Viktor Makarov

The twentieth century was a century of birth and hope for Latvia as an independent nation. It was also a century of suffering and division. Hopes were fulfilled as Latvia re-surfaced on the world map two decades ago, but these were decades also marked by a fall-out between the two major ethno-linguistic groups of Latvians. Contentious issues between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking Latvians are many, but history has emerged as the most emotional and deeply rooted. When Russian-speaking Latvians, many of them young, gather in growing numbers in the Soviet-era memorial park near the centre of Riga on May 9th each year to celebrate Victory Day, the majority of ethnic Latvians feel very differently. The way they see it, Soviet troops brought not liberation, but renewed occupation for their country. Historical passions have hardly calmed as time goes by, and they shape relations between the two major ethno-linguistic communities. The significance of this seems to be obvious: the problem that Latvians have with history is that history itself is divisive and cannot be changed. This is not untrue, but my argument is different: more than history itself, it is the divisive political use and abuse of it that is the real problem. This is something that can and should be changed.

But first, how deeply do Latvians actually disagree over history? There is a mainstream narration of twentieth century Latvian history that focuses strongly on a number of touchstones: the creation of an independent state in 1918 as a culmination of centuries of historical national development; the involuntary incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940 with its tragic effects for the country and its people; and the re-establishment of the pre-Second World War republic in 1990-1991. These touchstones are hardly contested today: even the most vehement detractors of the re-established Latvian republic of 1990-1991 seem now to have accepted

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it as the normal state of affairs. Neither is there much disagreement about the tragic effects of the events of June 1940.

The historical perceptions of ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking Latvians diverge considerably on more specific issues, two of which are particularly seen as symbols of the irreconcilability of the two historical narrations, but on closer examination are nothing of the sort. One such issue is the occupation of Latvia in 1940. While mainstream historiography and the majority of Latvians do not hesitate to qualify the June 1940 events as occupation, many Russian-speaking Latvians object to that description. They do, however, while protesting at the use of the word occupation, more often than not accepting the basic idea that Latvia's destiny was decided by its neighbouring superpower and that its incorporation in the Soviet family of nations was a result of brutal power politics rather than the free expression of popular will. In the related discussions over the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, one side sees the pact as the epitome of superpower predation, while the other seeks to explain the predation as part of the larger pre-war picture. Even the latter argument, though, is based on the acknowledgement of the existence of the pact and of its effect on Latvia – notable progress on twenty years ago. All in all, what ethnic Latvians assert explicitly and enthusiastically, the Russian-speaking Latvians recognize tacitly and reluctantly.

Along with occupation, the notion of the Soviet victory in the Second World War has been a burning political issue. To most Russian-speaking Latvians, Victory Day is the climax of their historical pride that shines especially bright against the dark background of Soviet history. They see the war as the moment when the Soviet/Russian people were subjects of history, not objects of domination by the Soviet regime. Ethnic Latvians, who tend to look at the war from a national vantage point, see it as a series of alternating enslavements. From their perspective the idea of two equally evil regimes seems reasonable. As with the issue of occupation, this is not a matter of acknowledging basic historical facts, but of different historical narrations. The difference is not as intractable as many, Latvians included, tend to believe. It is asymmetrical rather than clashing. The idea of the 1940 occupation seems to be very relevant for the historical identity of ethnic Latvians. Yet even those Russian-speaking Latvians who are unsympathetic towards it do

not see it as something important enough to resist. Their own historical identity touchstone is different: victory in the Second World War. Again, although this may appear dubious to most Latvians within a narrow national context, few consider it entirely illegitimate if seen through the prism of European history as well as the family history of many Russian-speakers.

With a little generosity of mind, these historical perspectives can be, if not fully reconciled, at least made mutually intelligible. Unfortunately, there is little such generosity of mind to be found today. The annual controversy surrounding the SS Legion veterans is a sordid example of how painful history is being exploited for political gain. It would be hard to reconcile those who see the SS legionnaires as heroic freedom fighters with those who consider them unrepentant Nazis and fascists. Yet these are neither the only, nor indeed the best interpretations possible; just the ones most suited to feed populist politics. An earnest debate over the issue would still leave Latvians in serious disagreement over the actual role of the Latvian SS legion in the Second World War, but at least it might reach a common understanding of the tragic nature of this page of Latvian history. Such debate is hardly conceivable today.

When history is a contentious issue today, it is not because of history itself but because of how it is being used. History structures Latvian politics and is one of the few issues that can still be used to boost the support of an increasingly apolitical citizenry. It is for this reason that historical disagreements have been an object of demonization along with the demonization of the ethno-linguistic other. For the last twenty years, the whole construction of the Latvian polity has been predicated on history and the apportionment of historical blame. The non-citizen status of a large share of Russian-speaking Latvians is the most well-known example. Historical arguments are employed to legitimize or delegitimize all kinds of policies and policy demands concerning cultural and linguistic diversity – an area where ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers do have diverging interests and attitudes.

When Latvia ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in May 2005, it applied a definition of national minority "... which is quite narrow, includes the citizenship criterion and refuses the national minority status not

only to non-citizens, but also to naturalized citizens” (LCHR 2006, 249) – a clear demonstration that history makes a difference when cultural rights are apportioned. In the legal arena, the Constitutional Court’s decision on the issue of the 2004 amendments to the Latvian Law on Education (mandating increased use of Latvian as the language of instruction in minority schools) the all-important conclusions of which include a reference to the occupation of Latvia in 1940, is another example (LR Satversmes Tiesa 2005, 23-24). Linking multicultural policies to historical arguments is not unusual, but in the Latvian case, has been counterproductive. It has neither bridged the gap of historical perceptions nor helped create a more inclusive and consolidated society.

While the tradition of critical thinking about history has been dormant, politicians and leaders of public opinion have come to the fore as the most influential interpreters of the past. Political actors have been profiting from this device, but not the two ethno-linguistic groups themselves. For two decades they have lived under the influence of discourses on existential insecurity that feed on divisive and self-victimizing interpretations of historical facts. The Russian-speaking Latvians’ slow and reluctant identity transition from Soviet to Latvian citizens and denizens has been matched by the ethnic Latvians’ reluctance to accept them as compatriots – both in legal and political terms. Within this framework, what is perceived as occupation denial on the behalf of many Russian-speaking Latvians stems not so much from a principled refutation of this historical event as from a fear of being held culpable. A 2007 report describes this history trap well. Focusing on the young generation’s entanglement with history, it acknowledges that even today, Russian-speaking young people are associated with the political heritage of the Soviet occupation and held responsible for the events of the past. “Compared to older generations, the young people may have less difficulty in accepting a shift in the dominant interpretation of history. Still, they do not wish to take upon themselves the political heritage and the responsibility; nor do they accept scornful labelling.” (Golubeva et al. 2007, 152)

In the contest of historical narratives, Russia is a significant third player: first, because it is a major and increasingly powerful source of Russian historical narratives often at odds with those shared by the majority of Latvians and second, because the Russia factor

structures Latvian domestic political space, discourses and identities – the context within which historical narratives are shaped and transmitted. Rogers Brubaker's (1996) famous triangle (nation-state, minority and homeland) was employed by the nation-state (Latvia) and the minority in domestic politics long before the homeland (Russia) became aware of its instrumental value. Bracketing out the Russia factor is something both sides have been unable to do so far. Ethnic Latvians have had difficulty taking a healthy distance from Russia as the "significant other", while many Russian-speaking Latvians have immersed themselves in Russian media, information and cultural spaces, shutting themselves off from the respective Latvian spaces – a process helped a good deal by the exclusionist policies of the Latvian state. Legal restrictions on broadcasting in minority languages, just one example of such policies, were abolished all too late, when Latvian electronic media in Russian were already outcompeted by the media stream direct from Russia. As a result, today's internal Latvian debate over history is entangled with the birth throes of Russia's own nation-building. Latvia and Russia are mutually entangled in each others' domestic politics of identity – a boggy area which is easier to get into than to get out of and in which rationality and political responsibility are usually not the strongest of considerations.

To sum up, ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking Latvians do see history quite differently; their typical historical narratives do at times compete with or contradict each other. Yet the difference is one of perspective rather than a fundamental one. It is bridgeable rather than irreconcilable. That it is often constructed as fundamental and irreconcilable is another matter.

What, then, are Latvians' options with regards to history? One option is that of collective remembrance: to force one particular notion of historical narrative upon a reluctant citizenry. In any open society, historical identities are not easily manipulated; in a society that is open and diverse, even divided, hostile attempts at tweaking identities and narratives would be not just impracticable, but also destructive.

The second option is collective oblivion, forgetting the divisive pages of history as Renan would have it. Although sociologists and education professionals may be right in pointing to the decline of



historical knowledge among the younger generations of Latvians, twentieth century history is still too rooted in identities and personal histories to be entirely forgotten. A lapse in the knowledge of historical facts would be easily replaced by history myths – most likely of a nationalist kind. Just like collective remembrance, collective oblivion presupposes tweaking historical identities and that is bound to add to the problem instead of solving it. Both making people remember correctly and making them forget are unsustainable social engineering projects in an open society.

The third option is that of collective reflection. This would not, in the foreseeable future, lead to a broader and universal notion that incorporates the different personal histories and identities of Latvians. One can indeed hope that, at some point, Latvians of various extractions may come to see their histories as common history. There is a vast array of themes where a sense of commonality can be created naturally as a common present becomes a common past. But for a long time to come, diversity management is the order of the day: accept the diversity of perspectives, encourage their interpretation in a compatibility mode. Let there be multiple histories – multiple histories are not necessarily irreconcilable. Refusal to use the word occupation does not amount to political disloyalty; unwillingness to celebrate Victory Day in Riga does not make one a Nazi revanchist. This can be a frustrating and discomforting exercise at times, but the alternatives are worse. Along with learning history, Latvians have to learn to live with seeing it differently. Any collective reflection over history should start with mutual acknowledgement of the initial historical perspectives. Just as importantly, history should finally be decoupled from today's ethno-linguistic issues and differences. Such differences should be addressed through direct negotiation of interests and positions without seeking to undermine each other's legitimacy with historical arguments.

This option is only likely to work if Latvian society recognises its real problem with history is not historical identities, but political practices. Latvians need to become a civic nation, and they can only do so by taking the multicultural step. Put very simply, this would mean recognising not just the obvious diversity, but also the legitimacy of the different political interests it brings about – be it

the language of instruction in schools, use of language in public space or the symbolic issue of inclusion in government of parties supported by Russian-speaking voters. Such a multicultural approach will not by itself solve conflicts but it is a useful framework for conflict-solving. In fact it is more than that: the political interaction it creates helps foster the trust and feeling of commonality that underlie a sustainable civic nation. Latvians and their political elites have yet to take this decisive step towards multiculturalism. Among many other things, this would presuppose tackling history in a new manner. Although Latvians cannot change their past, they can still choose what to make of it.

## Postscript

A recent survey study looked at how Latvian schoolchildren perceive the thorny historical issues, comparing schools where teaching is in Latvian and those where Russian is the main language of instruction (this largely coincides with the schoolchildren's ethnolinguistic identities). The results support the suggestion that radical differences only concern some aspects of history, but not others. Young Latvians from the two ethnolinguistic groups disagree on the role of the Soviet troops, but not so much the role of the German troops in Latvia during WWII; while the two groups have opposing views of the Soviet period, there is no radical difference in the assessment of the first Latvian Republic (1918-1934) etc. In both surveyed groups, the majority did not recognize the name of Konstantīns Čakste – a leader of the Latvian resistance who fought against Soviet as well as German occupation. Ignorance about the past, even those parts of it that can reconcile and soothe old grievances, is, perhaps, Latvians' greatest problem with history per se.

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# Diversity in Historical Education: A Balkan Example

Hannes Swoboda

Nowhere else in Europe is the clash so intense between nationalities, ethnic groups, religions and cultures as in South East Europe – and all connected to different interpretations of history. In the Balkans it is not only a question of one state against the other, neighbour against neighbour; lines of difference and confrontation run through every country of the region.

Christina Koulouri starts her introduction to the resource *Alternative Educational Material* with the sentence: “The development of alternative educational material for the teaching of history in South East Europe is an ambitious and challenging venture given that the interpretation of the collective past and the content of history as it is taught in schools cause heated disputes, not only between neighbouring countries but even within the same country.”<sup>1</sup>

The wars that raged after the breakdown of Yugoslavia clearly showed that stabilisation of the region cannot succeed without a non-orthodox approach to history. These wars were arguably civil wars – any new approach to the history of the region must therefore include all the different ethnic and religious groups inside all Balkan states. To strengthen the new states and to make them stable requires an examination of common history from different angles. That does not mean that there are no established historical facts, but there are always different interpretations of those facts – in other words, there are different truths.

Beginning the joint history project just a few years after the wars had ended was not an easy task, especially as there were no clear winners able to enforce their interpretation of history on the losers. Different nations and ethnic groups inside the new states relied very much on their own histories to justify their attitudes, actions and sometimes atrocities. The project had to take into account two

<sup>1</sup> *Teaching Modern Southeast European History: Alternative Educational Materials*, edited by Christina Koulouri (Thessaloniki, 2005).

basic facts: different history curricula with strong ethnocentric bias and political influences from ministries of education. It is hardly surprising that the authors of the project thought "... it is not possible to compile a uniform, homogenising history of South East Europe in a single textbook which could be used in all countries".

Taking an open attitude towards these different interpretations must not, however, lead to historic relativism. When writing history the facts come first, followed by cognitive and moral aims. An enlightened approach basing moral judgements on facts and figures is not in contradiction with making space for different interpretations, but it is important to underline the responsibility that the historian has to come to fact-based and individual conclusions.

The authors of the alternative textbooks intended to change the approach to the study of history. They argued that national history taught in schools should not be nationalistic history; the history of the region should be understood as part of European and world history; and instead of trying to paint a false picture of harmony, they preferred to teach students about difference and conflict.

This reasoned approach was essential in a region emerging from horrific wars, hardship and extreme nationalism that had, since the end of the Second World War, been a model. It was and still is the precondition for a process of nation building capable of reconciliation with European integration. "Whether in its true, tragic aspect or in its idealised, heroic image, war was indeed a core event in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and haunted the memories of all generations."

The authors are right to start their first workbook with the history of the Ottoman Empire. Not only did much of the region belong for hundreds of years to this Empire but until today, different interpretations of that period influence the teaching of history and politics: "The views about the Ottoman Empire waver between progress and retrogression, multi-cultural heaven and oppression, liberation and disaster." In an examination of the Ottoman Empire alone, it is clear that different meanings are given to the concept of liberation. This is even more obvious when dealing with the liberation by the Soviet forces in Eastern Europe from Nazi occupation. To some extent the same can be said about the role played by partisan groups in ending Second World War occupation. Reactions in the region to the Ottoman Empire were sometimes expressed in resistance

and sometimes in adjustment and adaptation. The result can still be observed today. It is interesting to note, as the authors rightly declare, “Loyalty to the dynasty was, as in most medieval and early modern states more important than any ethnic affiliation”. The European Union and its member states are still struggling with this.

In teaching the history of the Second World War, the Balkan region is often neglected or at least treated with in passing in a few paragraphs. As the authors of Workbook Four – dealing with the Second World War - state: “A Western perspective has marginalised the part played by South East Europe in World War II and has sometimes subordinated it to long- lasting stereotypes about the region.”

German and Italian occupation of the countries of the Balkans reinforced and exploited on-going disputes. The nationalistic elites of the different countries used the opportunity to settle some of their disputes with their neighbours and with some ethnic groups inside their respective countries. The enemy of the enemy often became a tactical friend: hence the *Ustasha* forces of the puppet state of Croatia, led by Ante Pavelić, included units of Bosnian Muslims which they even called the flowers of the Croatian people.

What was clear from the start was the fact that the occupation did not unite the peoples of the region against their foreign occupiers but rather reinforced historic divisions and led to additional hardship and atrocities. The formation of Yugoslavia could only heal these wounds in a very superficial way. The death of Josip Broz Tito was an opportunity for genuine healing that instead was used to re-open traditional conflicts and to forcefully settle disputes of the past.

European integration means settling disputes by peaceful negotiation. It would, though, be naive to think that the European integration process automatically erases the past or generates one single interpretation of all the disputes and wars. Every state, every ethnic and national group has to confront itself with its own history and its own behaviour. To do that in an honest and forward looking way requires taking into account of the views of others – both the neighbours across the border and the neighbours inside the border.

Alternative Educational Materials are valuable contributions to the history of South East Europe and to anyone looking to see history from the perspective of others. Of course the selection of events

and materials is open to criticism. There is not one truth. But there are enough truths to enable us to form our own opinions and to formulate fact-based and differentiated moral judgements. This is exactly what is needed for anyone who wishes to learn from and overcome past tragedies and create the conditions for the integration of the Balkan region into the European Union.

# For the Record: PSE MEPs react

Helmut Kuhne, Miguel Angel Martinez,  
Justas Paleckis, Józef Pinior

The interpretation and understanding of history has, mainly by representatives of the right wing, been turned into a political battleground in the European Parliament. Some clear examples of this have already been mentioned in previous contributions. Unfortunately, these members of parliament are not the only ones who are trying to abuse history – take the example of Poland mentioned elsewhere.

Although we are of the opinion that legislators should not impose interpretations of historical facts by way of drafting resolutions, we were challenged to respond. We formulated the following considerations and a number of questions on the topic in preparation of a parliamentary debate on the hearings demanded by the European Council of Ministers. Evidently it was not meant to be a formal resolution but it gives an idea of the debate and the arguments used when dealing with the history of Europe and its various interpretations and how we would try to put the record straight.

## **The group of European social democrats and socialists**

- being aware of a council request to the commission to hold hearings on “crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by totalitarian regimes” at the council meeting on April 19/20, 2007;
- being aware that until today in Europe historical consciousness is influenced by collective perceptions, mainly of national entities;
- being aware that political bodies and political parties have no monopoly on the interpretation of history and that it is even questionable whether governments and parliaments should attempt do so because of the potential conflict with the results of scientific debate with majority decisions of parliaments;



- seeking the broadest possible consensus as to the assessment of the tragic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century accepting different interpretations on the basis of empirical facts;
- mourning the millions of victims deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, and especially those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe;

## **Whereas**

**A.** from the perspective of relatives and friends of the victims it makes no difference which regime killed a father, a mother, a brother, a sister or other relatives for whatever reason, it is nevertheless necessary to have a value-led empirical approach to the systematic characteristics of European totalitarian and authoritarian regimes;

**B.** the foundation of what is now the European Union was the answer to decades if not centuries of national hatred, to the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to the millions of lives and the destruction that the Nazis and their allies brought about;

**C.** the accession by Spain, Portugal and Greece to what is now the EU meant ending years, in some cases decades, of military and fascist rule, violation of human rights, imprisonment, torture and of the killing of thousands of political opponents and opening the way into a future of stable democracy;

**D.** in Central and East European countries millions of people have been victims of violations of human rights, of imprisonment, torture and killing much longer than in Western Europe which is another source of historical consciousness of the fight for human rights and democracy in the EU;

**E.** historical debate during the development of the EU has been a source of learning and consciousness fostering reconciliation between former enemies; whereas this process should be extended to the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe; history will be abused if it is selectively turned into an instrument of revenge against political parties, sectors of society or other countries;

F. especially the Nazi- and the Stalinist regime of the Soviet Union are responsible of murdering millions of people in an organized way; whereas the holocaust ( the murder of millions of European Jews, in close connection with it the murder of the Sinti and Roma carried out by the Nazis – being the two cases in which the United Nations officially speak of genocides) makes clear that the extinction of human beings on the basis of so-called race was the *raison d'être* of the German state; whereas, as far as crimes against humanity and war crimes are concerned, the specific groups of victims, events and locations both in the case of the Nazi- and the Stalinist regime are too numerous to be able to avoid the danger of neglect when making incomplete lists;

G. other regimes in Europe, mainly based on ultranationalist, anti-democratic, anti-liberal and antisocialist ideologies are responsible for suppression and mass murder as well, though the number of victims and the degree of organisation of the Stalinist and Nazi-regimes where on a much bigger scale;

H. the Stalinist and the Nazi-regimes were active accomplices, with the Molotov-Ribbentrop-pact, of the division, the occupation and suppression of Central and East European states while the Western communist parties were ordered by the Comintern, as a power instrument of Stalin, not to criticise the pact and stay neutral when the Nazi-regime started World War II with the invasion of Poland until the Nazis also invaded the Soviet Union;

I. European democracies had illusions and made false assessments about the character and the goals of the Nazi-regime, thus giving in at Munich 1938 which lead to the occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1938 and further preparations for war on the side of the German Nazi-government.

J. in some countries occupied and suppressed both by the Nazis and the Stalinists there had been authoritarian regimes immediately before;

K. widespread anti-Semitic and racist ideologies, ultranationalist attitudes in significant parts of the population lead to the involvement in the Holocaust of sectors of the societies of the Nazi-occupied countries (in Western European countries through active help by police forces to round up the domestic Jewish population

for transport to the extermination camps and by railway systems transporting them without questioning; in the case of certain Central and East European countries the involvement took place by killings of thousands of Jews at first without orders by the occupants, later by involvement in the Nazi terror apparatus);

L. for a number of years the social democrats were considered by the Stalinists of being their enemies, branded as “social fascists”; whereas social democrats in a number of countries were among the first victims of the Stalinists;

M. no communist regime was democratic but that there are substantial differences in the use of the terms “Stalinist”, “soviet” and “communist”, that the character of the Soviet Union was different over time and that there were differences between communist regimes in other countries as it has been the case concerning communist parties in Western European countries;

N. communists in a number of countries were among the first victims of authoritarian, fascist and Nazi-dictatorships; in some cases, though only after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Nazis, they fought in close cooperation with the allied forces against Nazi-occupation giving thousands of lives; deploring that many of those resistant communists were among the first victims of Stalinist regimes installed in their respective countries;

O. the struggle of communists after World War II who fought together with all kinds of democrats against the dictatorships in Portugal, Spain and Greece – many of them being imprisoned, tortured and murdered- should be remembered;

P. the decisions adopted in Tehran and Yalta give tremendous and shared responsibility to the allied leaders in World War II for the division of Europe into two blocks with as a consequence that millions suffered from suppression in both blocks for several decades; paradoxically those suppressed in the West were told that they were part of the “free world”, while those being suppressed in the East were told that they were living in a “world free from exploitation”;

Q. political forces on the right in certain countries collaborated with the Nazi-regime and supported its ideology; nowadays right wing political forces in the same countries portray themselves as

having always been victims, trying to create taboos concerning certain aspects of their country's history;

R. these forces are trying to monopolize the struggle for freedom on their side and to portray themselves as the true defenders of the 'national' interest while some of them even today openly defend the Spanish dictator Franco as the saviour of catholic religion from communism and others revitalize ethnic conflicts of the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;

**Requests of the Europe Commission that future hearings shall – notwithstanding other issues – cover the following items:**

1. Criteria to compare and to distinguish between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, their dimension and the intensity of repression.
2. An investigation into the different ideologies of the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the differences and similarities in executing power and treatment of political opponents as well as social entities defined as "enemies" or "racially inferior".

**Questions to be answered:**

2a. What were the ideological specificities to define "enemies" or "racial inferior" groups inside or outside society? Is there a "totalitarian way of thought"?

2b. What are especially the similarities and differences between the Nazi- and the Stalinist system with reference to

- the roles of the communist and Nazi party organization
- the extent of control of everyday life
- organizing mass loyalty
- the modus operandi of the respective terror apparatus
- the treatment of political opponents
- the treatment of national minorities

- the extinction of human beings on the base of race and the “class categories”

- anti-Semitism

2c. Did especially the Nazi- and the Stalinist terror-regimes learn from each other and if yes, how?

2d. Did Nazi-anti-Semitism influence the Stalinist anti-Semitism with reference to ideology and/or techniques of discrimination and persecution?

3. There should be an investigation into the connection between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in certain European countries.

### **Questions to be answered:**

3a. How did the failure of democratic systems until World War II in certain European countries weaken the potentials of these societies to resist the seizure of power by the totalitarian Stalinist (in the case of the Baltic States) and the totalitarian Nazi-regime (in the case of Germany and Austria)?

3b. To what extent was there forced and on the other hand voluntary involvement of sectors in certain societies with the occupants, especially with the Stalinist terror apparatus and on the other hand with the Holocaust executed by the Nazis?

4. There should be an investigation to the extent there was resistance to occupation and suppression.

### **Questions to be answered:**

4a. What were the political grounds and reasons for resistance and what kind of actions were taken?

4b. Were there significant differences in the levels of resistance against Stalinist and Nazi-occupation in those countries that were occupied by both and if yes, what were the reasons?

5. There should be an investigation as to how the consequences of the allied agreements of Tehran and Jalta helped to introduce and stabilize the Stalinist regime in Central and Eastern Europe and the Franco- and Salazar-regimes in Western Europe.

**SPECIAL REPORT:  
SLOVAKS AND HUNGARIANS**



# The Historical Dimension of the Relations between Hungarians and Slovaks

The Editors

In the years before Slovakia joined the European Union, there were primarily two minority issues it had to deal with: The huge problems of its large Roma population and the further integration of its citizens of Hungarian origin. The Roma, victims of social exclusion and discrimination, had much difficulty in coping with the social economic transformation and were the first to be hit by cuts in social spending. The Hungarian minority, represented by the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK-MKP), was in a stronger position because of its participation in the centre-left and centre-right Dzurinda governments, especially since the SMK-MKP occupied the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs and Minorities. Commitments made by these governments to improve the situation of the Roma were never really followed up. That being said, this special report concentrates on the historical dimension of the minority debate within Slovakia and how this affects the bilateral relations between Slovakia and Hungary.

Tensions with the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia and between the two neighbouring countries arose after the parliamentary elections in 2006 when the Social Democratic Party (SMER), with Robert Fico as Prime Minister, formed a coalition with the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS) and the nationalistic People's Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), and left the SMK-MKP in the opposition. The Party of European Socialists (PES) suspended SMER's candidacy in October 2006 and the internal situation in Slovakia also affected the social democratic and Socialist Group in the European Parliament. The Group leadership decided not to remain passive but brought the members of the Slovak and Hungarian delegations together in a working group. Hannes Swoboda, who was appointed chairman, and Jan Marinus Wiersma, former EP rapporteur for Slovakia's accession to the EU, were given the task of organizing the work.



Much has happened in the last two years. We have organized several visits to both countries and had many discussions with politicians of the governments, representatives of the Hungarian and Slovak minorities, academics and NGO representatives. In early 2008, we held an expert meeting on the rise of populism in Europe and the region. It was the basis of the publication "Democracy, Populism and Minority Rights". We feel that our efforts have contributed to a better political climate and helped to overcome some of the outstanding issues in Slovakia. With the support of the SMK-MKP, which in this case lined up with SMER, the opposition against the Lisbon Treaty was defeated. Another controversial issue was the language to be used for geographical names in school books. In February 2009, an amendment to the School Act was adopted by the Slovak parliament, with SMER and SMK-MKP voting in favour, putting geographical names in minority languages in front of Slovak names in textbooks for minority schools.

It was obvious from the beginning that the tensions in Slovakia could not be reduced without taking into account the relationship between Hungary and Slovakia and especially the historic dimension of that relationship, because the mistrust of today has roots in the past.

In October 2007, the Slovak Parliament adopted a resolution put forward by SNS Chairman Ján Slota reconfirming the post-WWII Benes Decrees. These decrees imposed collective guilt on the German and Hungarian population of Czechoslovakia for the roles played by their motherlands during the Second World War and deprived many of them of their citizenship, rights, and property; they were also victims of forced deportations. Last year November, 28 members of the extreme right National Guard marched on Slovak territory in uniforms to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the First Vienna Arbitration, in which the Axis Powers compelled Czechoslovakia to return southern Slovakia to Hungary in 1938. Ironically, they were able to walk across the border without problems since both Slovakia and Hungary joined the Schengen-zone the year before. Also in November 2008, after Slovak police clashed with Hungarian supporters at a football game leaving 60 injured, far-right extremists protested in front of the Slovak embassy in Budapest shouting slogans such as "Slovaks, you don't have a

homeland”, and, “Down with the Trianon agreement”, while burning the Slovak flag.

Whereas the Prime Ministers of both countries are looking for ways of better cooperation and made a joint statement in November, 2008 in which they expressed their strong and unequivocal opposition against *‘any radical ideologies, movements that follow such ideologies, and against any kind of extremism, xenophobia, intolerance, chauvinism, nationalism and every manifestation of violence’*, the extremes on both sides of the border are concentrating on ripping open old historical wounds.

One of the initiatives taken by the two Prime Ministers was to intensify the dialogue with historians from both countries. They expressed their willingness to develop the work of the Mixed Committee of Historians with the aim to publish joint publications dealing with the sensitive issue of the common history.

Often the same historic event is very differently interpreted. Still the subject of much controversy is the Peace Treaty of Trianon (1920) which drastically downsized the area and the population of Hungary. One can understand that most Hungarians consider this to have been unfair and a contradiction to the principle of self determination which was promoted by the then US president Wilson. But those whose ancestors suffered from ill treatment under the Hungarian Monarchy also have a point when they refer to that earlier ‘darker’ part of the common history. The other happening, that is still being discussed, is the “fascist” Vienna Arbitrage of 1938 which brought a good part of southern Slovakia back to Hungary, something that was reversed again after the Second World War. A recent research shows that Slovaks are rather indifferent to the Trianon issue, while Hungarians living in Slovakia do not seem to be bothered by the Vienna Arbitrage.

Our working group organized in February, 2009 a seminar with Slovak and Hungarian historians, including the co-chairmen of the Mixed Committee of Historians, on the topic *“History, National Identity and Reconciliation”*.

The conference concentrated, as the title already suggests, on the broader issue of national identity and its connections to the common past of Hungary and Slovakia. Some high level politicians from both countries were also participating in this event. We have printed below two of the contributions that in our view give a fair representation of the views expressed at the seminar, and one article that contains the analysis of a very interesting 'historic' opinion poll in Slovakia.

There seems to be quite a gap between the more nationalist public expressions of politicians and the moderate approach of the historians. Many Hungarian officials tend to idealize the thousand years of common Hungarian and Slovak history, while Slovaks often describe this period in terms of having been oppressed. Historians reject these black and white interpretations that are used to underpin the separate national identities. These concepts, they say, were developed only after the abolition of the feudal structures of the old Hungary which were replaced by the civic concept of the nation. To interpret the common history from before the 19<sup>th</sup> century in these terms is unhistorical. Only later statehood became the vehicle of the nation and part of political history, which had and has a divisive impact. Recent historical studies that concentrate more on cultural and social history show that Hungarians and Slovaks often had a lot in common. The work of the Mixed Committee of Historians should certainly be continued because whatever the merits of the debate, one thing we would like to emphasize is that indifference towards each others histories is an unacceptable form of denial.

# History – A Fundamental Pillar of National Identity

Milan Zemko

Before I deal with the relationship between national identity and history, I will make some statements about national identity itself. We are discussing the identity of our two nations: the Slovak nation and the Magyar nation, which now represent two modern Central European collective entities, both of which have taken shape over rather more than two centuries, that is, since the French Revolution in the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – though of course the intensity and quality of this development has varied in different historical periods. However, in considering Central Europe and our two nations, we should also recall the other significant landmarks that have to a greater or lesser extent influenced the formation of our national identity: 1848/1849, the Year of Revolution, when the historical system based on feudal Estates was formally abolished and civil society was born; 1918, with the fall of the Habsburg monarchy, the end of the old Hungary and the creation of successor states; 1945, which saw Europe divided for almost half a century, with communist regimes in the East; and finally, 1989, which brought the fall of totalitarian regimes and opened up new possibilities and perspectives for East-Central Europe and, indeed, for the whole of Europe.

When we talk about a modern nation, we also have to remember that it is a constantly developing collective entity and that in the context of this continual motion, the meaning of its individual characteristics can change or shift. I think it is also important to look at two centuries of definitions of nation and national identity because, in the more distant past, the semantic content and meaning of the concept of nation and national identity differed from those in the modern period. Specifically, as far as the history of our two nations is concerned, I have in mind the way in which the concept of an

aristocratic, Estates-based '*natio hungarica*' determined the nature of Hungarian society practically up to the Year of Revolution, 1848/1849. However, this older understanding of nation has, in a certain sense, also remained part of modern historical memory. Whether manifest through acknowledgement or denial of Hungary's historical constitutional law, this understanding has played and still plays a role in forming the modern national consciousness of Slovaks and Magyars, as well as of other nations in Hungary's pre-Trianon territory. I shall return to this question later in my paper.

Nowadays we most frequently think of a nation in the political, the civic or the cultural and ethnic sense. A political nation is generally understood to be all the citizens of a given state; to paraphrase the words of the French man of letters, Ernest Renan – understood in this way, a nation submits to daily plebiscites about its own existence. Such a political, or civic, understanding of a nation has asserted itself in France, Great Britain and practically the whole of Western Europe, as well as, of course, North America. On the other hand, in Eastern Europe, the concept of a nation means an ethnic nation; a nation is understood primarily as a cultural and ethnic entity with a common language. At the same time, emphasis is placed on cultural, linguistic and ethnic individuality, on deep-rooted traditions, particularly about the character of the people, and on history, often expressed in a shared historical mythology.

The factor that could be viewed as the most important in an ethnic and cultural conception of national identity is a subjective one: ethnic awareness, which the Slovak ethnologist Michal Kaľavský has described as a sense of the originality of one's ethnic group – a feeling which cannot be reduced to that of any other social group. It is a strong belief on the part of an ethnic community in its own uniqueness, a shared desire to live together as an ethnic community with its own aspirations, which differ from the aspirations of neighbouring ethnic groups.

According to the Slovak ethnologist Gabriela Kiliánová, apart from a sense of differing from other nations, national identity also includes a feeling of belonging to a nation – that is, identification with one's own nation on the basis of deep-rooted criteria: shared values, symbols and representations. Those who belong to a given nation have a personal awareness of a lived process of self-reflec-

tion – a reflection of their relationship to their own nation and to other nations. National identity represents a dynamic system of elements that may be both compatible and contradictory. They may change in the historical context of the existence of a nation and in the context of the life of an individual. People who are considered to constitute a nation or a certain ethnic group must feel, or must be viewed as, similar to each other and at the same time somehow different from others; members' identification with a national community is very important.

There are both positive and negative factors connected with identifying (oneself or others) with a nation. The positive ones may be embodied in patriotism and national pride, in feelings of shared identity and of being allied; they may help to overcome the internal conflicts of national communities and may be particularly strongly expressed at times of threat from outside. Negative manifestations of national identity may be radical nationalism, or chauvinism, where external authority is expressed in categories such as, the overtly dominating, 'in the interest of nation and state' or 'the soul of the nation'; this may take the acute form of attitudes towards other nations centred on the idea that 'we are enemies', or suggest notions of one's own national exclusivity. This external authority can come to dominate the internal authority of reason, morality and autonomous individuality, and in some situations could clearly repress or even, in the end, stifle it.

Although national identity is a collective identity, it is always present in all individuals, in their consciousness, because it forms part of the development of each individual's personal identity. Identification with an ethnic group, or a nation, is a lifelong socialisation process. People care most about their identity during key periods of life – for example, in adolescence, when identifying oneself ethnically or nationally may be part of the formation of many different values. National identification continues in adulthood, with broadening awareness of one's own nation and other nations or ethnic groups, with authentication and deeper absorption, but also with possible changes in ethnic attitudes and stereotypes. Over the course of a lifetime, when faced with an environment that contains other nationalities, identification with one's own nation can become stronger or weaker, according to the pressure exerted, or may even voluntarily shift to another identity.

A person's identification with a given social organism, with a given nation, is conditioned by many societal, socio-psychological and economic factors. Here I am thinking of the national make-up of one's family, the social structure of one's ethnic group, the spatial distribution, age and education of individuals, as well as the effects of institutions and organisations that aim to cultivate national identity. Sociological researchers have confirmed that people who originate from nationally homogeneous families, those who live close together in a given ethnic territory, those in the older age groups and those with higher education play a decisive role in the formation and development of national identity. Members of the intelligentsia are the most involved in issues relating to nation or to nationality. And members of the intelligentsia who are primarily oriented towards the humanities (not just professional historians or history teachers), in the course of their own engagement with nation and in the impact this has on the broader strata of their national community, have relied and still rely on their nation's past, re-cast as history, from which they draw arguments for the formation and strengthening of their community's national identity.

In our East-Central part of Europe, the fall of privileged, Estates-based aristocratic society and the birth of civil society raised the question of nationality and national identity as an ethnic and linguistic entity, and did so very sharply; this, alongside cultural, linguistic or denominational markers, was also decisive in characterising or forming a state's political point of view, substantially supported by historical argumentation.

Coupling the civic principle with the principle of a nation was not a 'misunderstanding', as is nowadays asserted by some ardent defenders of the 'a-national' civic principle, who take the view that everything national – in the sense of ethno-linguistic or ethno-cultural – is purely anachronistic. After the ending of the old feudal regimes, which were based on Estates and on the dynastic principle expressed symbolically through the 'holy crown', in favour of formal freedom and equality of individuals, national consciousness – modern nationalism – was increasingly and insistently brought to bear as the integrating principle for the whole of society, more or less successfully merging the tradition of the 'glorious historic past' and the historical constitutional law rooted in it with the current and increasingly strong factor of ethnic or cultural unity based on lan-

guage. And if there was something missing from that tradition, or if it was too narrow, it could still count on emphatic support from the leading strata of society, even from the state itself. This aspiration was found – obviously to varying degrees and with varying levels of success – in all the nations and nationalities of the old Hungary, and was one of the fundamental factors influencing internal conditions in the Kingdom of Hungary from the era of reform in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in 1848/49 with revolution and the subsequent battle for independence. This national ambition was later to continue throughout the whole period of fifty years from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867 to the demise of the old Hungary in 1918. Yet, only the Magyar ethnic group, in forming a modern nation, was able to fully exploit the Hungarian state and all its structures during the process of national integration; other ethnic groups (with the exception of the Croats) did not have any such opportunities.

From the point of view of numbers, the Magyar ethnic nation was merely the largest ‘minority’ ethnic group; nevertheless, its social and political elite dominated the country even before the start of the modern civic era, acting as the defining element of the Estates-based aristocratic ‘nation’ and going on to mould the civic nation from what were clearly the remains of feudalism. Thus, to all intents and purposes, they ‘naturally’ appropriated the whole history of the Hungarian state, along with historical constitutional law and other state traditions stemming from it. Smaller ethnic groups in the country, or rather, their leading strata, were compelled to struggle for ‘a place in the sun’ for themselves and their ethnic group; their awakening into modern nations was from a much more disadvantageous position. Thus, through its ruling elite, the Magyar ethnic group made itself into the dominant ‘state nation’. Other ethnic groups, smaller and weaker from every point of view but with ambitions to mature into a modern nation or nationality, strove to acquire at least autonomous constitutional legal status; but until 1918, only the Croats – whom I have already mentioned – with their constitutional legal tradition from the old Kingdom of Croatia, managed to do so. This struggle could not fail to connect with historical or ‘historicized’ arguments on all sides, arguments that were nevertheless directed towards planned political goals and strengthening one’s own national identity. It is first and foremost a matter for Hungarian histo-



rians to evaluate the extent to which assertion of the official 'idea of the Hungarian state' in political practice formed the Magyar nation's relationship to non-Magyar nations living inside the old Hungary and also to ethnic minorities living in the post-1918, reduced Magyar state.

I shall attempt to outline briefly the changing fortunes of Slovak historical argument, or arguments, which did not end with the demise of the old Hungary in 1918, but continued during the period of the two Czechoslovak states (1918 - 1939 and 1945 - 1992) and the wartime Slovak state, and still persist today in the Slovak Republic, founded in 1993.

When considering the historical arguments of Slovak scholars in the old Hungary, the vital point is that in the Middle Ages the Slovak ethnic group was not a separate national Estate, '*natio slavica*'; the ethnic Slovak nobility always formed part of the Hungarian, or Magyar, national Estate, and in the modern era, especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great majority of Slovak aristocrats assimilated – Magyarized – thus linking their fate with that of the modern Magyar nation. And when, politically, economically and culturally, the history of the Hungarian national aristocratic Estate began to be perceived as the history of the Magyar civic nation, the Slovaks remained, as it were, outside history – even though in fact they shared historical experience with the other inhabitants of Hungary. The few 19<sup>th</sup>-century Slovak historians unintentionally linked themselves with this '*historylessness*', since they highlighted as 'Slovak' only certain epochs in the thousand-year existence of Slovaks in the Hungarian state. So the history of the Slovaks lost any clearly visible continuity, which is an important factor contributing to the effect of history on the formation of national identity, and became a kind of 'underground stream'. We see it come to the surface again chiefly in relation to the beginnings of Slovak history, especially the 9<sup>th</sup> century (in the period of the Great Moravian Empire – that is, before the Kingdom of Hungary was established); it then 'waxes rhapsodic' about the Hungarian Middle Ages and the Early Modern period; it was rediscovered on the threshold of the Modern period, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has remained continuously visible up to today. And it was only with difficulty that this interpretation of history became a solid constituent pillar of Slovak national identity.

The situation relating to the perception of Slovak history became even more complicated after the creation of a new state – the Czechoslovak Republic. On the one hand, Slovaks again acquired their own Slovak educational institutions, which had been almost completely liquidated in the old Hungary, and gradually – with Czech help – built up a complete educational system, as far as university level. Professional Slovak historians were also educated in the Czechoslovak Republic between the Wars, and began to have some influence. On the other hand, ‘Czechoslovak history’ was created as an artificial construct in the Czechoslovak state, and this powerfully enforced the image of the supposed, age-old shared history of Czechs and Slovaks; the same thing happened with the equally artificial – and thus anachronistic – ‘Czechoslovak territory’. So, within this framework, the history of the Slovaks and of Slovakia was relegated to a kind of appendix to Czech history.

This remained the position during the first decades of the re-established post-Second World War Czechoslovakia, only now the thousand-year continuity of Slovak history was rewritten through the officially enforced Marxist interpretation of history as an unremitting class struggle between the oppressed classes and the exploiting classes. At the same time, social oppression was linked to national oppression – on the part of ethnic German ruling classes in the Czech lands and on the part of ethnic Magyar exploiters and oppressors in Slovakia. However, from then on, in Czech synthetic works of ‘Czechoslovak history’, the history of the Slovaks and of Slovakia was still only a kind of appendix to Czech history.

From the 1960s onwards, Slovak publications on the history of Slovakia did not balk at treating the history of the Slovaks from the early 10<sup>th</sup> century to 1918 – that is, an entire thousand years – as part of the history of the Kingdom of Hungary. This understanding of Slovak history during ‘the Hungarian millennium’ is also found in Slovak historiography after 1989, when the ideological dominance of the Marxist, or supposedly Marxist, interpretation of our history came to an end.

All these changing fortunes in the interpretation of Slovak history were manifested in the course of just one century: the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when, thanks to education as well as to the press and the electronic mass media, history could – and perhaps did – play a

more intensive part in forming the national identity of Slovaks than it had done in the more distant past. But at the same time, it was also in a position to effect a more sensitive and more differentiated perception of the Slovaks' relationship to their neighbour, since the nature of the attitude that members of one nation have to their neighbours – as well as to any more remote nation – is a part of their national identity. It determines, for example, whether or not these attitudes form or deform a tendency towards xenophobia, towards a feeling of dominance or, in contrast, towards an inferiority complex, or whether an open, accommodating attitude towards a neighbour is formed – partly also thanks to mediated historical experience.

The main impact of Slovak relations with their Magyar neighbours on Slovak national identity has been through the historical experiences of the last two centuries – that is, the time when both nations were forming into modern European societies. Also, for the reasons mentioned above, older historical periods have to a significant extent been ousted from Slovak awareness of history – when in fact it is precisely in these older historical epochs that much more proof of non-confrontational co-existence between the Slovak and Magyar nations can be found. It cannot be denied that historical experiences with the Magyars in the last two centuries have been interpreted very critically on the Slovak side, both in inter-war and post-war Czechoslovakia and in the new independent state; only rarely has there been greater empathy towards the Magyar understanding of shared history. To this day, this critical view of Slovakia's southern neighbours is one of the elements of our national identity.

First and foremost, there is the perception of the fate of Slovaks in Hungary from the start of the reform era in Magyar society, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to the demise of the old Hungary in 1918, first with what can be described as illegal Magyarization and subsequently – especially after the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which handed all internal political power to the Magyar political elite – with legalised, escalating Magyarization. Whatever success it may or may not have achieved, this deliberate assimilation of non-Magyars in the old Hungary was systematically organised and instigated by the state and was to an overwhelming extent also accepted by Magyar society. At that time it represented a persistent threat to Slovak national identity and to the very existence of

the Slovak nation. Slovak historical consciousness also has a very critical, negative perception of inter-war Magyar revisionism, signalled by the slogan 'We want everything back!', which resulted in the loss of Slovakia's southern territory, a decision made by two totalitarian powers – Germany and Italy – in the Vienna Arbitration of 2 November 1938. And Slovakia has an equally critical perception of the behaviour of the Hungarian authorities towards the Slovak ethnic minority in the 'arbitration territory' from 1938 to 1945.

These are the main historical reasons why, to this day, little empathy is felt from the Slovak side towards such sensitive Hungarian concerns as the loss of a large part of the territory of the old Hungary after its disintegration in 1918, an experience that remains painful and hard to stomach. Nor is the Slovak side particularly responsive to the grievances of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia about their experience of collective retribution by the re-established Czechoslovak state in the post-war period (1945-1948). On the other hand, it is true that atonement for the second of these was made immediately after the incriminating years, in particular with education, by re-establishing Hungarian language classes, and with the gradual renewal of Hungarian cultural institutions. We should not conceal the fact that, for a significant number of Slovaks, lack of empathy towards Hungarian memory of historical injustices is combined with misgivings about potential Hungarian territorial revisionism, however much these anachronistic misgivings may be fading.

Surely feelings of misgiving or fear, as well as insensitivity or indifference in neighbourly relations, are not in any way a positive, constructive factor in awakening and cultivating one's own national identity. The starting-point is, or could be, true mutual empathy and appreciation between our neighbouring nations – or, more precisely and realistically, between the widest possible number of members of each nation, since it is only dynamic people, or people who are collectively dynamic and open towards one other, who represent the decisive element. But in creating empathy, first and foremost an open discussion must take place about a shared history that, paradoxically but understandably, has up to now divided Slovaks and Hungarians more than it has united us.



# A Common Past, a Divided History

László Szarka

One of the recurring themes for Central European intellectuals is that in the area around the Danube several nation-based societies have for many centuries developed in the closest co-existence. In common states, under the power of identical rulers and bureaucracies, they established their linguistic and cultural independence within similar or even identical educational, cultural and religious institutional systems. The Austrians thus lived together with regional communities of five or six other nations in Transleithania, as seen from Vienna, in other words on the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. Romanians, Serbs, Croats, Ruthenes, Germans, and Slovaks lived there with the Hungarians, who were first the absolute, then the relative majority.

Right until its dissolution, these common states – the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy – and the identical economic, social and political conditions of the region of East Central Europe defined the connection between the Slovak and Hungarian peoples. They have been connected by blood ties through many hundreds of thousands of mixed marriages. Through common regional and local conditions, common institutions – schools, churches, counties or the army – and the years spent there together, most of our ancestors had comparable individual experiences, life stories and therefore a shared historical memory.

Common knowledge was accumulated in shared towns and areas of ethnic contact, which developed across linguistic borders. Common historical symbols have very clearly been present in thousands of Hungarian and Slovak families throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and still are today. I am thinking of bilingualism, borrowed customs, and the complementary ethno-social structure that became clearly visible in centres of trade between the highland counties and lowland regions.

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In spite of all this, ever since the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the creation of nation states in East Central Europe, Hungarian-Slovak relations have mostly been shaped by conflict, historical legends of their struggle for existence, everyday prejudice, national interests and selfishness, and political disputes. Attempts at rapprochement, which are well intended but never win over the majority of the national elites and are therefore for the most part poorly received, have failed one after the other. Few initiatives reach the stage where both sides consider them on their merits. Efforts at reconciliation have similarly foundered on historical phobias and the nationalist slogans that resound on both sides. A mutual sense of historical superiority similarly continues to encumber frank dialogue.

The relative freedom of the last twenty years has resulted in very important breakthroughs in the way we deal with historical discourse of state nationalism. However, this has not led to common historical values as a point of reference for the common fate of small nations. The opposing histories are still present, expropriated by the nation states and their educational institutions and nationalised historiographies. The situation today is still that the canonised history that appears in school books has remained a source of divisive, opposing opinions. As a result, the *avant garde* of intellectuals and the illustrious representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and the Slovak minority in Hungary, who are indicative of the two countries' sensitivity towards each other, are still not able to attain widespread support for attempts at rapprochement and mutual recognition of the common values and traditions of their shared history.

Nevertheless, the annual coronation celebrations in Bratislava, the Rákóczi cult in Košice, and the Slovak plaques and memorials that have multiplied in Budapest and elsewhere in Hungary, show that there is some movement towards acknowledging historical incidents – which are important to either or both sides – and celebrating them together. Despite the asymmetric positions of both minorities, they are affected in a similarly elementary way and have done their bit to improve relations.<sup>1</sup> The trouble-free contact along

<sup>1</sup> Slovaks in Hungary have built up regular contact with the official and civil Slovakia, including with organisations for Hungarians in Slovakia. The system of links with Hungary for Hungarians in Slovakia is richer than in former periods, but nonetheless Hungarian-Hungarian contact continues to leave its mark on the poor relations between the two countries.

nearly seven hundred kilometres of the Hungarian-Slovak border perhaps signifies the only real success of diplomacy, although we should consider this as the absolute minimum for two member states of the European Union.

### **A shared history in a multi-ethnic state**

Both Hungarian and Slovak nation-based societies have used contemporary romantic and nationalist historiography to trace their national historical narrative back to the early Middle Ages for the sake of their own national self-image. Thus, historical processes in which opposition and conflict are evident have a place in the national historical narrative. While the ethno genesis of the Slovak nation is tied to Great Moravia, Hungarian national history is tied to the conquest of Hungary's territory, in which the trade and cultural differences between the Hungarians arriving in the Carpathian Basin and the Avar and Slav peoples that lived there feature prominently.

There are significant differences between Slovak and Hungarian historiography of the medieval Hungarian state that developed from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. These concern the benefits and consequences of the Hungarian dynasty, its ethnic and power-based nature, and the relations between the ethnic groups living on the country's territory. Especially regarding the age of the kings of the House of Árpád, who ruled until the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century as well as the century and a half before and after the 1526 Battle of Mohács, Slovak historiography clings to three points of reference. Firstly, it stresses the ethnic and political continuity between Great Moravia and Slovakia. Secondly, it involves great efforts at 'de-Magyarisation' of Slovak history, rejecting Hungarian dominance. These were most pronounced in the 1980s and 1990s. Thirdly, it maintained the contradictory myths of a thousand years of Hungarian oppression and a thousand years of happy co-existence, in stubborn persistence of a variety of versions: plebeian, class based, and regional.

Essentially, four kinds of discourse can be distinguished in the historical interpretation of the struggles between Hungarians and Slovaks. Firstly, there are the Hungarian and Slovak historiographies that evaluate the nature of their common history in a critical manner. Clashing with the nation-state view of history, they try and



uncover the capillaries of common history at regional level or within the framework of cultural history. Sometimes they mystify and at other times they simply register attempts to create a common framework for interpretation. This idealised common history is mainly found in Hungarian interpretations.

Secondly, there is the narrative that emphasises the permanent conflict during the many centuries in which Hungarians and Slovaks have co-existed. This is more typical of Slovak historiography. The military liquidation of Great Moravia by the conquering Hungarians, the suppression of the Slavic population's land and power, anti-Slavic behaviour by the noble and bourgeois elite, and later the assimilation are recurrent themes in this discourse. The fight for language and schooling, the political fight for autonomy, and then efforts aimed at independence and self-determination, all come under this umbrella, which excludes compromise, dual identity or inter-ethnic contacts.

Thirdly, the expropriated 'palimpsest' history overwrites the other's interpretations. Such historiography, both Slovak and Hungarian, tries to make the Slovak region of upper Hungary its own in an intellectual sense.

Finally, both sides sometimes espouse a history of suspicion, which marks out the borders of national history and looks with mistrust upon those who cross those borders or are inclined towards assimilation.

In the monumental historical summary of Marxist Hungarian historiography, published in the 1970s and 1980s, the volumes for the 18th and 19th centuries devote a great deal of attention to the history of non-Hungarian national movements. On the Slovak side, first Anton Špiesz and then Dušan Kováč tried to write Slovak history in a multi-ethnic way. In spite of these sober endeavours, the endgame of communist state historiographies was characterised by head-on defiance. Slovak historical self-determination and their efforts to distance themselves from a common Hungarian-Slovak history started with the Slovak transliteration of Hungarian surnames and continued to the wholesale announcement of so-called 'de-Magyarisation' of Slovak history.

It is extremely important to note, however, that since 1989 the most important academic workshops of Slovak historiography generated a process of self-revision. Slovak historians now consistently dismiss earlier efforts of de-Magyarisation. They no longer point to the attempts at Czech and Slovak unification, from the Přemysls and Bohemians up to Masaryk, but rather to the Kingdom of Hungary as the real, original context of Slovak national history.

## Thousand years together

The theme of a thousand years of common history and the Hungarian and Slovak myths surrounding it merits a short digression. The Moravian and Slovak theory of continuity is linked to the Christian traditions of Saints Cyril and Methodius. More recent folk and official memory, as well as Slovak archaeology and historiography, regard the Slavic population of the Carpathian Basin as the bearers of Christianity. Slovak historiography regards the baptism of the Slavs as conclusive proof of the cultural, political and economic superiority of the Slavs over the Hungarians. Asserting the destructive consequences of the Hungarian conquest, their arrival in the Carpathian Basin in several waves during the 10<sup>th</sup> century is to have liquidated Slavic culture in Pannonia.

The most stubborn and most common Slovak historical stereotype relating to the Hungarian state is the myth of a thousand years of oppression. This theme can be traced back to the philological struggles of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the book *Mýty naše slovenské* ('Our Slovak myths', 2005), Andrej Findor contends that it can be proven that 'the myth of a thousand years of national oppression was the product of the special historical circumstances and sharpened national conflicts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This kind of chiliastic approach to history was consistent with the language struggles that developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries'.

For Hungarians, the myth of a community of brother peoples under Hungarian leadership in the spirit of Saint Stephen conflicts with the theme of 'a thousand years of oppression'. While the leaders of the Hungarian age of reform, the Hungarian Revolution and the Compromise period – Wesselényi, Kölcsey, Kossuth, Deák, Eötvös and the two Tiszas – basically aimed at reinforcing Hungarian positions and the Hungarian nature of the country, the idea of a community

of peoples became the ideological counterbalance to 19th-century Hungarian nationalism. It did not, however, have any real impact on the nationalist practices of Hungarian governments before 1918. The Hungarian feudal and civil nationalism, that pitted itself against Habsburg centralisation, wanted to free itself from the predominance of Latin and German, and to replace them with Hungarian. At the same time it defied similar linguistic desires of the non-Hungarian peoples in the country. Furthermore, it also demanded the restoration of Hungary as it was before the age of the Turks. Such Hungarian national hegemony was impossible, however, because of the radical changes that had taken place in the country's ethnic composition.

The conflicts between Hungarians and Slovaks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century concerned the language laws approved by the feudal parliament of the Kingdom of Hungary, but also the armed battles that took place at the time of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-1849. This period is crucial for the development of both modern Hungarian and modern Slovak nation-based society. However, while Slovak historiography usually refers to open, armed conflict, Hungarian historiography stresses the military acts ordered by the Slovak National Council but also, in contrast, the thousands of Slovak soldiers who fought in the Hungarian army.

The 1848 Revolution is still a central historical point of reference for Hungarian identity. It is the focal point of the annual commemoration of the age of political reforms. Remembering the birth of an independent Hungarian government, the creation of an independent army, and the whole array of civil laws, it also commemorates the battles won and lost in the fight for freedom and the heroic gesture of the deposal of the Habsburgs, the failed fight for freedom, and the retaliation of the Austrian government. For Slovaks, this period produced the 1848-49 political program, which underscored the significance of the military efforts of Slovak troops.

The myth of a thousand years of oppression constitutes the historical frame for the historical interpretation of the Compromise of 1867, the rejection of the Nationalities Act and the loss of some half a million capable Slovaks to emigration and three hundred thousand to assimilation respectively. This virulent component of Slovak

historical public opinion and self-image is complemented by the opposition of the noble Hungarian and the plebeian Slovak nations, and by the traditional myths of sacrifice and survival that small nations have. (These latter themes are also clearly evident in Hungarian public opinion). The most striking concept of the plebeian approach to history has been provided by the Slovak writer Vladimír Mináč, He asserts 'If history is the history of kings, thieves, bloody battles and pillaging, then the Slovaks really do not have a history. If, however, the essence of history is everyday hard work, cultivation of the land, and building towns then our history is one of the most illustrious'.

In Hungarian historical public opinion, the idea and cult of Saint Stephen has not been translated into a tolerant and inclusive nationalities policy. The defining stratum of the myth has been nation-building and the adoption of Christianity. In contrast to the thousand years of oppression, Hungarian stereotypes regard historical Hungary as a place of ethnic peace. 'If the Earth is God's hat, Hungary is the posy of flowers on it'.<sup>2</sup>

## Contemporary Hungarian and Slovak historiography

In the last two decades three main trends can be observed in Hungarian and Slovak historiographies and public historical understanding. In the first place, new discursive approaches and alternative social historical narratives, which strive to put into perspective exclusivity in reading national history, have appeared in both historiographies. One of the most important consequences of gradually pushing research on political history into the background is predictably that historiography for the sake of proving the legitimacy of the nation state and the majority nation – the historical right to exist and the right to exclusivity – is thoroughly questioned. Such history writing is replaced by historical narratives of society, culture and everyday life and deconstructs national borders and conflicts.

Secondly, there is a manifest strengthening of interest in 'common history', partly as a result of demands for justice and partly as a

<sup>2</sup> Or, as another well-known song from 1848 goes, 'Let it be as it was a long time ago, let it be as it was a long time ago/may the Croat and the Wallachian and the Slovak unite with the Hungarian/unite with the Hungarian.'

result of the hope of concluding endless debates. These efforts are equally guided by the inspirational effect that 'a history we have lived through together' – and which we therefore hope we can write together – can have on a wider audience. Thirdly, while the conflict-based, nationalist approach to history continues to have a significant mass impact in both countries, it is being pushed to the margins of the field.

While highlighting the ongoing debates, we are also looking for an answer to the question why our common history is still a source of national conflicts rather than something which underlines the need for rapprochement. In spite of the indisputable historical fact of multilayered co-existence, the common Hungarian-Slovak history is an ambivalent inheritance. For nearly a thousand years, the traditions and values of our common statehood have been the subject of polemics and debates. To a large extent they still are: there is no teachable, comprehensive historical interpretation of the nature of our common history.

The picture has changed only very slowly, after 1989. When treating our common past, the acknowledgement, recognition and promotion of public awareness of our common inheritance, co-exist with the alienation from everything that is Hungarian and the denial of everything that was demonstrably not Hungarian within historical Hungary. Accepting or rejecting, teaching or misconstruing our common history, or using it for political goals in a blinkered approach to history – based on linguistic and cultural differences – are central to the survival of national prejudice and stereotypes.

## **Mutual minorities**

The difficulties of dealing with their history in a framework of nation states are paralleled in the complications of managing national minority issues. Building exclusive nation-states in this region could only have been possible by accepting ethnic cleansing and homogenisation. During periods of dictatorship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century actual opportunities for such practices arose. Both states applied the principle of collective punishment of communities of non-Slovaks and non-Hungarians respectively, along with non-Christians. The result was the destruction of many hundreds of

thousands of Hungarian and Slovak citizens of the Jewish faith, the persecution and forced settlement of Germans and Hungarians in Slovakia, the expulsion of a significant proportion of Germans in Hungary, and the resettlement of Slovaks from Hungary by population exchanges.

The Treaty of Trianon and the Paris Peace Conference that drew the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border, created minority communities of Hungarians and Slovaks in the two countries. From Hungarian and Slovak specialist literature on ethnic conflicts, a number of approaches to dealing with the question of minorities can be identified during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These can be distinguished from each other to varying extents and were applied either mutually or unilaterally by the leaders of each country. In the first place, assimilation was most persistently present in the policies of both Hungary and Slovakia.

The ethnic, economic and historical revision of borders was the defining endeavour of Hungarian foreign policy between the two World Wars, and for the Slovaks or Czechoslovaks after 1938 and 1945. The reciprocity principle of 'an eye for an eye' frequently cropped in minority policies. After the Second World War, the Czechoslovak state in particular threw all the tools of the homogeneous nation state at the Hungarian question. By signing the population exchange agreement, however, the Hungarian government also bore responsibility for the reduction of the Slovak community in Hungary and the decrease of its cultural force.

Of the positive approaches to minority issues in both Hungary and Slovakia, the greatest tradition is that of attempts at integration. In many cases this led to assimilation, when emancipated minorities became involved in the exercise of power at local, regional and national level. Finally, the principle and practice of minority self-government is only gaining ground very slowly. Autonomous minority government of Slovaks in Hungary has been restricted to reorganising local Slovak communities that are small in number and live in the hallway of assimilation anyway, in addition to developing Slovak cultural society at the national level. In Slovakia, on the other hand, in the absence of a similar cultural, regional and community-building strategy, local autonomous government of Hungarian settlements have mainly been based on beginner's luck.

## Way forward

The idea of the nation state, which in public opinion since 1989 is commensurate with national exclusivity, is also present in both nations but to differing extents and manifesting itself in different ways. In a region of European integration and the gradual abolition of the prohibitive nature of borders, economic, cultural, and everyday contact and common regional development still collide with obsolete nation-state reflexes and rules. In such circumstances promising cultural cooperation between Hungary and Slovakia and the mediatory power of the two minorities will only slowly break down the barbed-wire fences of uncertainty. It can help develop the political atmosphere that is necessary for cooperation between the two states, but only gradually. It is extremely important to encourage steps towards mutual acknowledgement of the value of the respective minority languages. Their prestige needs to be enhanced, by abolishing restrictive language laws and encouraging and institutionalising education in both languages.

As can be seen from the above, Hungarian-Slovak relations at the beginning of the 21st century paint a very odd picture. There are almost limitless opportunities for regional, cross-border, economic cooperation. In practice, the main obstacles for cross-border contacts are the financial constraints of individuals and institutions. By restricting and rejecting especially the self-government rights of minorities, the current Slovak elite approaches the integration processes – which are unstoppable within the European Union – with fear and uncertainty. On the other hand, many Hungarians are inclined to regard the integration process as a kind of historical reparation and the modern version of national unification. Hungarian and Slovak analyses and the behaviour of the cultural, scientific and political elites on both sides still indicate the distance rather than the direction of their approach. The age difference between the two states is doubtless a very strong element of this, while the governing elites can hardly be said to have equally well developed systems of contact.

Historical research in both countries must confront the failure and counter-productivity of historical interpretations that lead nowhere. Bearing a realistic history of the nation in mind, it is possible that a

renewed historiography will also be capable of preparing and seeing through this great split. The analyses and recommendations of a historiography that has played an important role throughout the last two hundred years and was present at the birth of the modern civil nations, has now outgrown national frameworks and must target another dimension and interdisciplinary fields in international scholarship. Many internal questions and problems relating to national development, national frameworks and national society will continue to be a legitimate field of research for history. Its task is no longer the creation, reinforcement or validation of a nation, but analysis of the historical context of social movements that is independent of states.





# History and National Identity

Štefan Šutaj

Inhabitants of Slovakia – whether of Slovak or of Hungarian nationality – have differing opinions about a large number of events in the history of Slovak-Hungarian intra-state relations. This is caused by several factors. Despite the existence of a common school system, there are differences in the readings of history that pupils encounter in their history lessons, because teachers often interpret historical events loosely.

Historical memory is formed individually, and all individuals store up traces of various events that have affected their lives. For example, family upbringing plays a significant role. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has left its impressions – a stamp of the past – on every Hungarian or Slovak family. Members of Slovak, Hungarian and mixed families 'struggled' not only in organisations alongside one another, but also in opposing ones. There is also inter-generational dialogue about these events, and this has significantly influenced the formation of opinions on individual historical events.

A further element that has left its mark on the formation of opinions and attitudes among the inhabitants of Slovakia is societal environment. This means social environment, including affiliation to a religious denomination or to interest groups; the nature of the milieu in which the individual lives is also important (town or village – size of municipality). Just as there are different types of communities, their prevailing atmosphere leaves its mark on the formation of attitudes to historical events.

At all these levels, however, we also encounter the important role of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation. The degree or measure – the strength – of an individual's identity plays a significant role.

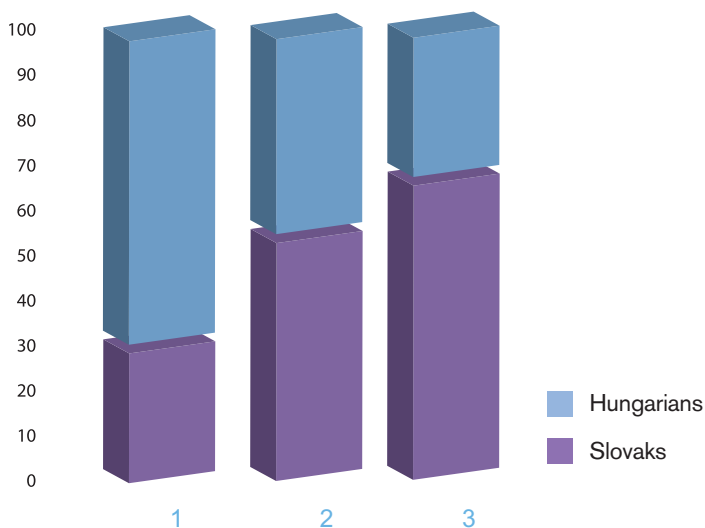
Since 1986, the Institute of Social Sciences has conducted a great deal of research, in which we have obtained the opinions of respondents on the history of Slovaks and Hungarians. In this article,

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we shall turn our attention to two research projects of the Institute. In 2003-2005, we asked a sample of 1 280 respondents whether there have been events that have had a negative influence on the mutual relations of Slovaks and Hungarians. Our results are presented in the following chart.

**Figure 1**

Opinions on the existence of events that have had a negative influence on the inter-ethnic relations of Slovaks and minorities (Slovaks about minorities, minorities about Slovaks).



Legend:

1 – yes, and the event was ...

2 – don't remember any, but such events do exist

3 – no, because none exists

Hungarians often mentioned a specific historical event (53.75% of respondents), of which their perception was negative and which had considerably influenced mutual relations. The majority mentioned repressive measures taken against inhabitants of Hungarian nationality after the Second World War. The events they most frequently defined in this way were the expulsion of populations or the Beneš decrees, the removal of citizenship, the confiscation of property, the years 1945 to 1948, and 're-Slovakisation'. Slovak

respondents (25.5%) were able to mention events that had adversely influenced inter-ethnic relations. They listed among such events, for example, claims made by the Hungarian side, conflicts over Hungarian national policies, Hungarians' intolerance, the policies of the Hungarian Coalition Party (the SMK), the founding of a Hungarian university, Hungarians' expansionism, i.e. events linked to the present rather than the past. As far as historical events were concerned, they mentioned the Vienna Arbitration and the period of forced assimilation towards the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as the most significant injustices.

For the purposes of this article, we have selected a question about the 'Beneš decrees' – a term used, although somewhat inexactly, to describe what we consider to be a whole set of measures taken against the Hungarian minority, without regard to whether these were issued by Edvard Beneš, by Parliament or by the Slovak National Council, or followed on from international legal treaties or resolutions. The issue of the Beneš decrees is further complicated by the fact that expert interpretations of them are complex. To be precise, the decrees promulgated by President Edvard Beneš did not relate solely to issues concerning Germans and Hungarians, but also tackled many other problems in the running of Czechoslovak society.

Because we were aware of this aspect of the Beneš decrees, we formulated response variables reflecting how they are treated in Slovakia and perceived by Slovak society.

The questions were distributed to respondents of various nationalities, but in this article we will focus only on Slovaks and Hungarians. We asked: 'What is the opinion of most members of your minority on the Beneš decrees?'

We offered the respondents various statements directly or indirectly connected with this set of issues. The question aimed to discover the prevailing opinion of members of the given minority about the Beneš decrees and the Vienna Arbitration. They could respond positively or negatively to the statements given in the questionnaire. For the purposes of this article, we are focusing on only two statements:

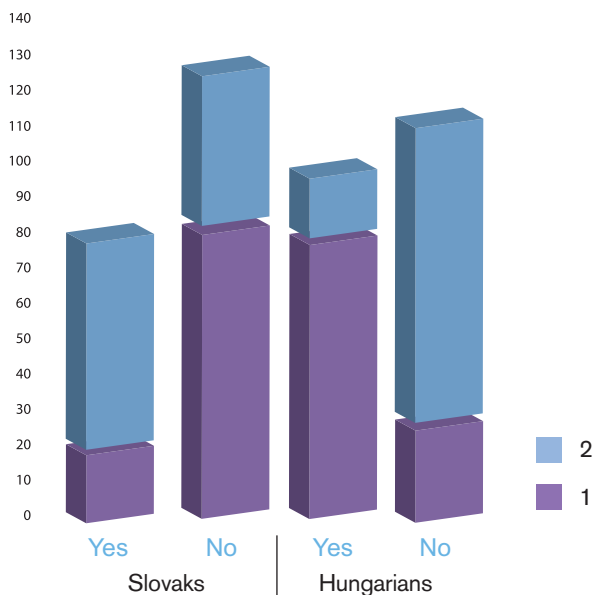
1. Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees.
2. Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration.

In response to these questions, two groups of contrasted opinions emerged. Slovaks thought that the Slovaks should not apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees (Slovaks – 79.31%). Hungarian respondents were convinced that the Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees (Hungarians – 71.61%).

A clear majority of Slovak respondents (50.35%) thought the Vienna Arbitration was significant and felt there should be an apology for the fact that part of the territory of southern Slovakia had been split off and annexed to Hungary, while respondents of Hungarian nationality disagreed markedly with this statement (80.26%). In order to illustrate this better, the following chart represents, in percentages, respondents who agreed and disagreed with the statements, by Slovak and Hungarian nationality.

**Figure 2**

Slovak and Hungarian respondents' opinion about the Beneš decrees.



Legend:

1 – Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees.

2 –Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration.

These diametrically differing responses from Slovak and Hungarian respondents suggest that their responses to these questions are clearly influenced by their ethnicity. This very marked fact implies that there is still a long way to go towards convergence of opinions on this set of issues, and that the key to tackling this lies in perceiving history from a standpoint other than the ethnic one.

One of the more important factors influencing the responses was the respondents' age. Dividing them into age categories enabled us to analyse the issue from an inter-generational point of view. In this case, we considered whether individual age categories of respondents were in any way influenced by the times in which they lived. For example, the generation aged over 55 had lived most of its active life during the period when the Communist regime was in power, or in the wartime or post-war period, while the group of respondents aged under 34 had lived most of their active life after 1989, and so they were influenced by other attitudes, whether at school, in society or in their families. The results of this research implied to us that, when it came to these historically loaded questions, the age of the respondents played a significant role. This is illustrated in the following table.

**Table 1**

Age-specific opinions of respondents of Hungarian nationality about the Beneš decrees. Data in %.

Age Categories	1		2	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Under 34	82.93	17.07	10.26	89.74
35-44	71.43	28.57	23.53	76.49
45-55	46.51	53.49	20.93	79.07
Over 55	88.89	11.11	25.00	75.00

Legend:

1 – Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees.

2 – Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration.

While more than 80% of the oldest and the youngest generations of respondents of Hungarian nationality thought that the Slovaks should apologise for the Beneš decrees, only 46.51% of respondents in the generation aged 45 to 55 thought this – a marked contrast with respondents in the youngest age category, where the percentage of positive responses was close to that of the over-55s.

When it came to evaluating the Vienna Arbitration, age did not have such a significant role: surprisingly, it was not in the older categories of respondents that the highest percentage of negative or positive responses was obtained, but from respondents under 35. The results of our analysis of age-specific responses showed that the opinions of the youngest generation of respondents of Hungarian nationality, who had completed their schooling after 1989, were not convergent with the opinions of Slovak respondents, but that the figures came strikingly close to – and in the case of opinions about the Vienna Arbitration, even exceeded – the evaluations made by respondents over 55. Nor, in cases where we had thought that Slovak respondents' opinions on the issue might come close to those of Hungarian respondents (for example, acknowledgement of the unjust nature of some of the legislation stemming from the principle of collective guilt) was there any convergence from the Slovak side either.

In the context of our project, 'The Hungarian minority in Slovakia during the post-1989 transformation of society' (2006-2009), we carried out further sociological research, this time in the form of a representative survey of the Hungarian minority, focusing on the issue of how history is perceived. A total of 800 respondents of Hungarian nationality took part in this research.

Drawing on experience from our previous research, we wanted to confirm or disprove the accuracy of our research findings and also try to identify the internal factors influencing responses from people of Hungarian nationality.

The respondents answered the question using a seven-point interval scale where the individual numerical values meant: 1 – *definitely not*; 2 – *not*; 3 – *not really*; 4 – *don't know*; 5 – *yes, more or less*; 6 – *yes*; 7 – *definitely, yes*.

The wording of the question was: 'If you had to express your opinion about reconciliation between Slovaks and Hungarians, would you say that...':

**A** – Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration: average score 3.39 – i.e. between *not really* and *don't know*

**B** – Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees: average score 5.07 – i.e. *yes, more or less*

**C** – Slovaks and Hungarians should apologise to each other for past wrongs: average score 4.66 – i.e. between *yes, more or less* and *don't know*

**D** – No apologies are necessary; a line should be drawn under the past: average score 4.22 – i.e. between *don't know* and *yes, more or less*

**E** – Apologies are a matter for the Hungarian minority and Slovak representatives: average score 3.78 – i.e. between *not really* and *don't know*

**F** – Apologies are a matter for Hungary and Slovakia: average score 4.53 – i.e. between *yes, more or less* and *don't know*

We should draw attention to the fact that, unlike our previous research, this question was formulated so that the respondents would know we were interested in differing perceptions of aspects of history with a bearing on possible reconciliation.



**Table 2**

Opinions of respondents of Hungarian nationality about reconciliation (data in %)

Statements	Scale variables		
	1 – 3 Negative area of the scale	4 Neutral area of the scale	5 – 7 Positive area of the scale
A	42.5	42.4	15.1
B	12.6	23.3	63.9
C	20.4	23.4	56.2
D	34.5	20.7	44.8
E	33.9	41.4	24.7
F	20.3	28.2	51.5

Legend:

- A – Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration  
 B – Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees  
 C – Slovaks and Hungarians should apologise to each other for past wrongs  
 D – No apologies are necessary; a line should be drawn under the past  
 E – Apologies are a matter for the Hungarian minority and Slovak representatives  
 F – Apologies are a matter for Hungary and Slovakia

Before we start to look at the internal dependencies of these responses, we shall examine the responses from the point of view of our quantitative results.

We focus first on the statements that in some way affect the respondents themselves or their affiliation to the Hungarian minority, or which mark this minority or the Hungarian people as the one that should be apologising. Overall, respondents selected the don't know variable as their modal response (the response that appeared more frequently than any other): this was how they responded to the questions of whether Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for

the Vienna Arbitration and whether apologies are a matter for the Hungarian minority and Slovak representatives. However, another point emerges when we look at the responses to certain questions. For the question of whether apologies are a matter for the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Slovak representatives, 33.9% of respondents chose variables in the negative area of the scale (with 41.4% unable to express a view and 22.4% giving responses in the positive area of the scale). When it came to the question of whether a line should be drawn under the past, the negative response rate was similar, though with a lower number of don't know responses and a preference for the positive area of the scale: 34.5% of responses were in the negative area of the scale, 20.7% of respondents could not say and 44.8% gave responses in the positive area of the scale.

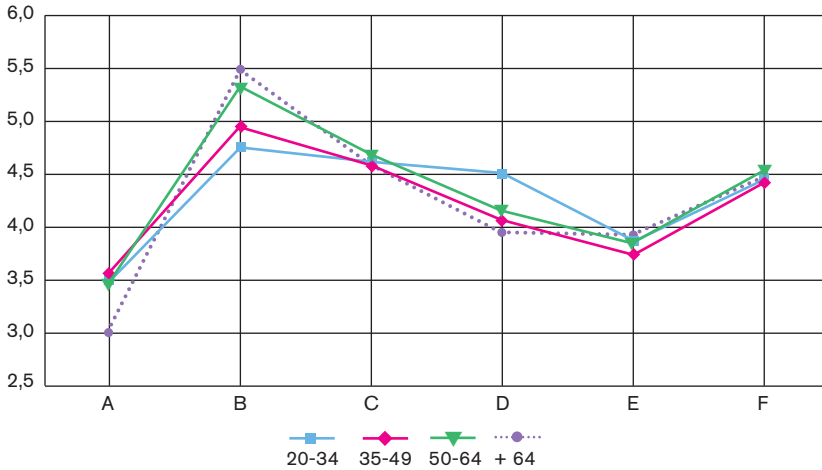
Our respondents, who were all of Hungarian nationality, unambiguously responded in the positive area of the scale when considering questions of whether Slovaks should apologise for the Beneš decrees (63.9%), whether apologies for injustices should be mutual (56.2%) and whether mutual apologies are a matter for the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary (51.5%).

As regards Slovak apologies for the Beneš decrees, the modal response was yes (29.1%), while only 12.8% of respondents did not agree that apologies should be made.

In this article, we are trying to demonstrate several age-related factors that influenced their responses. In contrast to our previous research, here we had set a lower age boundary of 20 and moved the upper boundary delimiting the oldest group to over 64, thus obtaining a clear-cut group whose opinions were already formed in the post-war period. The graph on the next page gives an overview of the results.

**Table 3**

## Age-specific opinions about Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation



Scale: 3 – not really; 4 – don't know; 5 – yes, more or less; 6 – yes; 7 – definitely, yes

Legend:

A – Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the 1938 Vienna Arbitration

B – Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians and Germans for the Beneš decrees

C – Slovaks and Hungarians should apologise to each other for past wrongs

D – No apologies are necessary; a line should be drawn under the past

E – Apologies are a matter for the Hungarian minority and Slovak representatives

F – Apologies are a matter for Hungary and Slovakia

The differences in the whole table possessed the highest degree of significance ( $p = 0.000$ ). Responses to Statement A (Hungarians should apologise to Slovaks for the Vienna Arbitration) were clearly situated in the negative area of the scale. The opinions of respondents over 64 were significantly different statistically from those of all other age groups. In contrast to our previous research, here we demonstrated that the group aged under 34 ruled out any apology for the Vienna Arbitration to roughly the same degree as other age groups did (apart from the oldest generation). The reason for this could be that they view it as an international political document, a settlement based on international agreement, and therefore see no

reason for any apologies. Another possible explanation would be that they view the Arbitration as having arisen from the way the border was established after the First World War, as righting a wrong that had occurred with the Trianon Peace Treaty – meaning that they do not consider it to have been unjust. A 1992 research study, conducted using a sample of teachers, demonstrated that as many as 41% of respondents of Hungarian nationality thought that the border created after the Vienna Arbitration was fair; 26% of respondents could not answer and 22% did not even want to respond to what was, at that time, a 'provocative' question. Only a minimal number of respondents indicated that they viewed the post-First World War (Trianon) border, or the post-Second World War border based on the 1947 Versailles Treaty, as fair. On the other hand, the majority of respondents of Hungarian nationality thought that Slovaks should apologise to Hungarians for the Beneš decrees (Statement B) – that is, for events that took place after the Second World War, leaving visible scars on the fate of Slovak Hungarians. From the point of view of age, statistically significant differences were revealed for this statement. We can say that the higher the age of the respondents, the greater the extent to which they called for apologies from Slovaks for the Beneš decrees. This involves a clear shift away from the results of our 2003-2005 research, which was conducted on a smaller respondent sample. We can also say that the younger generation is calling for apologies from Slovaks to a lesser extent than the oldest generation; here the research results are clearly influenced by the fact that, in this representative research project, we raised the age boundary of the fourth group to over 64.

We also found statistically significant differences, from the age point of view, for variable D – No apologies are necessary; a line should be drawn under the past ( $F = 2.71$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Only respondents over 64 gave responses in the negative area of the scale; the most marked responses recorded in the positive area of the scale came from respondents in the 20-34 age group. Thus, the younger generation would to a greater extent prefer to put an end to discussions of historical traumas and atrocities and to build a new relationship between Slovaks and Hungarians, unencumbered by the past. In assessing the other statements, no statistically significant age-specific differences were revealed. From the point of view of the process of reconciliation between Slovaks and Hungarians,

we consider the trends suggested being clearly positive and, as far as the perception of history is concerned, we can describe them as a good basis for mutual co-existence.

The results of our research may indicate a trend that could offer a basis for society's executive organs to work in the direction required for reconciliation. However, finding a road to reconciliation also means having to admit that there have been injustices, express regret about what has happened in the past and seek a way for the Hungarian minority and Slovak people in the Slovak Republic, as well as for the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary, to relate to one another in peace and without conflict.

Since a great deal is currently being written about policy on historical topics, we can also assert that the politicking and pragmatic behaviour of political parties is not good for the future of Slovak-Hungarian relations. Public opinion surveys, like our academic research, indicate the direction in which public opinion is set, and politicians – who are interested in winning over certain population groups – do not want to risk changing their policies towards the politics of historical traumas or on the issues involved in tackling the legacy of history. At present, moreover, for political reasons, the SMK and some strongly nationally-oriented organisations in Slovak society, as well as parties that are – or wish to be – in government, do not want to alter their basic strategy on key questions relating to Slovak-Hungarian problematic issues, so as not to lose the support of their voters. Only the joint influence of politicians, civil society and experts can alter the view of the shared – or at least, parallel – history of these two peoples.

# MEMORIES



# Resistance and Exile

Miguel Angel Martinez

The topic of my contribution is resistance and exile: the resistance I experienced against Franco's dictatorship in Spain and the exile was the price that many of us had to pay – perhaps one of the less dramatic prices – for being part of the resistance.

To put this experience into context; Spain went through a terrible war between 1936 and 1939. Fascists had mounted a revolution against the democratic and constitutional order. Thousands died, and when in 1939, they were finally victorious, many other men and women were forced into exile, in many cases for the rest of their lives. The outcome of the war brought great disappointment to democrats and to Spanish socialists in particular. Pavel Kohout described Hitler's 1938 takeover of the Sudetenland as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia by Western democracies. We suffered a similar betrayal, abandoned as the Nazis and the Italian fascists helped Franco to impose his enormous military superiority.

Dreadful repression followed; many thousands of democrats – most of them socialists – were executed by the victors, and many hundreds of thousands imprisoned or exiled. This repression played out against the backdrop of the Second World War. While Franco constantly demonstrated his sympathy for the Nazis, many of our comrades were fighting alongside the Allies or in the resistance in the countries in which they had sought refuge. The struggle ended with the Allied victory and we thought that Franco would be treated like any other fascist leader. This was the second time the Western democracies betrayed us, and our second great disappointment: we were told that our country suddenly belonged to the *free world*. Ironically, nobody seemed to care that the prisons and cemeteries were full of men and women whose only crime was the defence of freedom.



There is an operation afoot to re-write the history of the second half of the twentieth century in Europe, laying the blame for all the evil that occurred at the door of Stalin and of communism. Yet Stalin was not alone at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam; he was there with the leaders of the main Western Allies. They all, by mutual agreement, took the decisions that resulted in the situation that arose in Europe, and they were all responsible for the suffering that many people endured as a result of those decisions: all of them – Stalin and the others – and as far as Spain is concerned, the others even more than Stalin.

The terrible repression in Spain of anything that smacked of resistance, freedom, social justice or socialism continued after 1945 and the end of the war. My party, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), suffered some of the worst repression. Year after year successive PSOE executive committees – seven of them – were taken prisoner, and in 1953 our Secretary General, Tomás Centeno, was murdered whilst being tortured. This was a heavy blow and resulted in a decision that had two significant outcomes: the party leadership was to leave to join other exiles in the French city of Toulouse, the closest of the major French cities to the Franco-Spanish border; and party activists remaining in Spain were to go underground, which meant that practically nothing was heard of us for a number of years.

This period underground was to last five years. At the end of the 1950s, a group of young people emerged and began to stir things up in the University of Madrid, expressing disagreement with how things were operating. I was one of these young people. Right from the start, this group of about a dozen young men and women were united by the idea of Europe. We did not accept that our country was somehow different. We did not accept our lack of freedom, democracy and respect. For us Europe was a model for all the things we were demanding for Spain. We always felt that we needed to organise ourselves, attaching great importance to a structure that would go beyond mere protest and agitation. We were in favour of a spontaneous movement but felt that behind it there should always be an organisation to give meaning, coherence and continuity. We also felt that we needed to consolidate an ideological foundation on which to base the organisation that we wanted to build. Criticising the regime was not enough. We felt that

it was necessary to formulate socialist alternatives. Perhaps the most important thing for us was the importance of emerging from secret underground activity, opening up to some extent and making ourselves known at least within university circles, proselytising and aspiring to grow. Even at that stage, when there were no more than twenty five of us, we were aiming to be an organisation of the masses.

We were aware of risking a great deal. The punishment for belonging to an organisation was much harsher than for simply protesting and even harsher for acknowledged socialists. Emerging from underground was going to have serious and immediate consequences. Some people branded us naïve, reckless or even worse, but the very fact of beginning to operate a little more openly was something new and original and something which, for a few months anyway, disconcerted the repressive apparatus of the dictatorship.

Of course the inevitable happened and our actions led to arrests, torture, conviction and imprisonment. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that our emergence from underground and our subsequent treatment generated interest in the activities of young socialists and inspired others who came after us. The thread that the dictatorship had broken a few years before had been restored, and in the best possible way; opening the way for a new generation of resistance, people who had been born around the time that the war in Spain ended. That was when we began to win the battle that would take another twenty years to come to an end.

This was the background to my experience in exile or more precisely to the three different exiles I experienced.

The first stage of my journey took place not long after we had started to make our initial plans for organising a socialist student resistance. Almost automatically we sought to establish two types of contact: the main socialist youth organisations in the various countries of Europe on the one hand and on the other, the leaders of PSOE. We had been unable to link up with PSOE leaders through their underground structures within Spain so we went to look them up in the cities where they were living in exile – Paris, Brussels, Geneva and most particularly, Toulouse.

Our contacts with the socialist youth movement in Europe were very satisfactory and we learned a great deal from them, establishing relationships that would later become very important. Conversely, our contacts with the PSOE leadership-in-exile were quite disastrous and highly frustrating. We were received with a great deal of suspicion and mistrust. Who were these students? Were we crazy or just reckless troublemakers? Or even worse, were we agents from Franco's police? As far as the leadership-in-exile was concerned, we could have been anyone! They were also scandalised by our intention to cooperate with other anti-Franco activists in fighting against the dictatorship – with communists and Christians, whom they saw as our greatest enemies!

We met a number of exiles who had been living cut-off from the reality of a changing Spain in a bubble for more than twenty years; a bubble in which time moved rather slowly. They were living in some sort of microcosm, negotiating and battling with other exiled organisations. That is not to downplay the role these leaders had been playing in keeping ideas alive and above all, keeping the symbols alive. They had been maintaining an important presence in the structures of international and particularly European socialism. In addition to their stagnation, however, they had rather taken possession of these symbols, ideas and relationships and were extremely resistant to sharing them, least of all with apparently untrustworthy young upstarts. It was only at a much later stage that I began to understand that there were many very good people among those leaders whose loyalty to the ideas and to the organisation was extraordinary. Maybe we were also too young and inexperienced to approach them with sufficient tact, intelligence and humility to gain their trust. It took us time to recognise their great merit.

But at that time, those relationships were frankly disappointing from a personal point of view and unsatisfactory from an organisational point of view. Fortunately our disappointment turned to joy – in the period that I call my second exile – when we met a group of young people, almost all children of PSOE leaders in exile, who were in turn the leaders of the Socialist Youth in Exile. Many of them had arrived with their parents as very small children in France, Belgium and Mexico; others had even been born in exile. Although some spoke Spanish with a foreign accent, they showed an extraordinary

degree of generosity, activism and nostalgia for a country they had never known.

Their reaction to us was very different from that of their parents. They opened their arms, their hearts and their organisation to us. It was not easy for them: the party itself made things very difficult. Yet these men and women remained firm, and together we even succeeded in removing from the name of the organisation the words in exile. This meant that half of the leadership of the Spanish Socialist Youth would be based in Spain and half would continue to be based *in exile*; a tremendously important step which the party was to follow only a few years later.

This organic link was a determining factor in the growth and consolidation of the organisation in Spain and beyond, and encouraged young working people as well as students to join. The initial group of activists, of whom I was one, was only active for about a year and a half before Franco's political police caught up with us. We never really knew whether it had taken them that long to work out what was happening or whether that had in fact left us to our work so that they could arrest us in greater numbers.

In the meantime there was a conference of the party-in-exile, held in a suburb of Paris, which we attended as delegates from what was called the *internal organisation*. It caused a real stir when we openly stood up at the conference and asked for the floor on behalf of the comrades operating underground in Spain. Half of the delegates thought that we were mad and some thought, once again, that we must have been agents of Franco's state machinery. However, almost all of them understood that we were entering a new phase in the life of the party and of Spain. Many people cried, and those days provided a tremendous injection of enthusiasm and confidence in our future for everyone. We had entered the world of reality, moving on from political fiction.

When we returned to Spain the inevitable happened. In a couple of weeks we were arrested, ill-treated for several days at the State Security Office, imprisoned and then tried by special courts and given harsh sentences. This was the first time in almost two decades that young PSOE activists had been convicted and it caused a great surge of protest in Spain and the rest of Europe. Key figures like Willy Brandt, Olof Palme and Bruno Kreisky spoke out.

Prison was to be another stage in our learning and comradeship. Our incarceration had a deep impact on us and on young people throughout the country.

Luckily, and in quite a bizarre fashion, I managed to escape to Toulouse where I lived for about two years. My memory of life in Toulouse has two quite different facets. On the one hand there was the asphyxiating world of old exiles and on the other, the total generosity of my young companions with whom it was easier to overcome pressure and misunderstanding. Working first as a builder and later as a teacher, I held roles in the leadership of the PSOE Youth Organisation and succeeded in very clearly defining the mission of the Socialist Youth from its structure outside Spain. This task involved three complementary elements: the first was mobilising the solidarity of the organisations affiliated to the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY); the second was managing the growing support for the (illegal) organisation within Spain and the third was beginning to operate amongst the group we called *third exiles*. In a year time, almost one million workers had left Spain, the majority young people who had settled in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland – these people were our so-called *third exiles*. Among them we began the systematic work of winning support and proselytising, made possible by the massive support we received from socialist youth in our host countries. Their support enabled us to establish a network of young Spanish socialist comrades in their respective countries – often housed in the headquarters of their organisations and paid for by their movements.

I had been elected Deputy Secretary General and then Vice-Chairman of the International Union of Socialist Youth and moved to Vienna, home of the IUSY Secretariat, where I continued to coordinate solidarity with the Socialist Youth of Spain and to help numerous Latin American youth organisations join our International Union. These were exciting years, coming into close contact with people such as Bruno Kreisky, and working alongside Heinz Fischer, now the President of Austria and former Socialist Students' leader, as well as Heinz Nittel and Peter Schieder, successive Chairmen of the Austrian Socialist Youth organisation. After nine years in Vienna, I spent the next three years of my exile in Brussels working at the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions,

the ICFTU. There my work focused on re-establishing unions in Spain.

Meanwhile in Spain, the Franco dictatorship was breaking down, in part because of the work we and other opposition groups were undertaking. During the same period, PSOE representatives-in-exile split. The majority decided that the entire party leadership should move back to Spain with Felipe González as Secretary General. The minority opposed this move, split off and gradually disappeared, losing their international relationships.

I returned to Spain, and for a year and a half we worked tirelessly to extend the structure of the party and of its sister union, the UGT, while the Socialist Youth continued to grow independently. A process of negotiation followed, involving some of the forces that had emerged from the very structures of the dictatorship. The opposition as a whole, including some of these forces, succeeded in getting free elections called. Held on 15 June 1977, they were the first free elections to have taken place since 1931. Spain's time in the desert had lasted 46 years. In the elections PSOE won 30% of the votes and was able to impose a commitment to a democratic constitution. I was one of the 116 socialist members of parliament elected then and I was to retain my seat for 22 years. This, and the nine years that I have spent in the European Parliament, are things of the present. My country's accession to the European Union, fulfilling a long-held aspiration, under the leadership of Felipe González's socialist government is also a thing of the present.

During my years in Vienna, I was able to get to know many young socialists from across Europe and the wider world. Some of those who made the greatest impression on me were representatives of organisations that were also operating in exile: Madli Kurdve from Estonia and Radomir Luza from Czechoslovakia. Thanks to them I learned that there were other dictatorships in Europe and other peoples who were struggling and suffering under totalitarian regimes. That was such a profound lesson, and so profound was the solidarity that was always shown by comrades like Radomir and Madli. I would also like to thank them, in an acknowledgement from Prague, for their companionship and hope.



# Remember August 23, 1939

Marianne Mikko

When the Prague Spring happened, I was six years old. My world was free of unpleasantness and summer was spent in the idyllic Estonian countryside. The focus of my attention was an extraordinarily big bag of sugar kept in the pantry. As a consequence of my curiosity I ended up in some serious conversations with the adults that left me with a distinct sense of uneasiness. I was given no valid reason why 50 kilograms of sugar should remain untouched and thought that was strange enough but there was something else: the way the grown-ups talked and the stockpile of matches, salt and candles next to the infamous bag of sugar.

It was some years before I realised that these were the supplies people put aside in case of disaster. In 1968, many people in Estonia expected war to break out. We knew that the Soviet Communist Party would not accept the Prague Spring. Less than thirteen years earlier, the Budapest revolution had resulted in death sentences for its revolutionary leaders, the deaths of 2,500 freedom fighters and 200,000 refugees. In the German Democratic Republic, over hundred people involved in the 1953 uprising were executed.

Of course the Stalinist apparatus was doing everything possible to prevent this sort of information spreading. The USSR tried to avoid sending conscripts from the occupied territories to suppress the Budapest uprising and the Prague Spring, but the information spread nevertheless.

These were the issues we were dealing with, when, in the West, the German *Wirtschaftswunder* was in full bloom. On one side of the Iron Curtain there was abundance, on the other side scarcity. In the West there was confidence, in the East fear. In Paris, students were demonstrating against capitalism; their contemporaries in the occupied Baltic States had witnessed the deportation in unheated cattle carriages of ten per cent of the population to Siberian labour camps and Arctic settlements.



After Stalin's death, most of the deported were allowed to return and were officially *rehabilitated*. Stalin's crimes were partly acknowledged, but not entirely. Rehabilitation was more of an amnesty, implying at least some wrongdoing on the part of the innocent victims. Whilst some of Stalin's crimes were acknowledged in the East, many representatives of the 1968 generation in the West failed to recognise that the twentieth century had seen not one but two inhuman tyrants divide what is now the European Union – a division that is felt to this day.

It should not be forgotten that the Stalinist atrocities carried out in the countries that now constitute the European Union's new member states were the extension of purges conducted in Russia and Ukraine, where around twenty million people are estimated to have been killed or starved. It should not be forgotten that Stalin was the initiator of the Cold War which tore Europe apart for over sixty years.

The significance of the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin Pact is practically unrecognised. Yet August 23, 1939 was the moment when the crimes of these two dictators converged. The Nazi invasion of Poland and the first Stalinist mass deportations in the occupied territories followed closely on the heels of this pact.

In the protocols, Stalin and Hitler divided Europe into zones of influence. Stalin gave Hitler free reign over Western Europe and most of Poland. In return, he got the Baltic States. Europe was divided for sixty-five years. Only the European Union accessions of 2004 and 2007 really created the conditions necessary for the healing process to begin.

The Cold War was preceded by World War II and that in turn was preceded by Stalin's purges in Russia and his pact with Hitler. It is for us to shape what is to follow the Cold War. Cold peace between the European Union and Russia is what most people predict yet it is not in Russia's real interests to be on unfriendly terms with its biggest customer and potentially greatest friend.

It is up to us not to give those who want to split the continent again the chance to do so. We can only really unite East and West when we understand them and their histories. This means that we must face and deal with this unexplored part of our common history.

The European dimension of Nazi and Stalinist crimes has not yet been properly addressed. Mass murders are just as much facts of our history as the great achievements of culture and trade and the treatment of the perpetrators should not be differentiated.

Preventing any repetition of the horrors of the twentieth century was the central motive of the founding fathers of the European Communities. A common European vision should be a solid base for common goals. If these goals are to be pursued, the traumas of the past must be healed. We must recognise and analyse not only the history of Western Europe but also of Eastern Europe.

By acknowledging the significance of August 23, the European Union will acknowledge the equal standing of its new member states in the common history of East and West, both the post-communist states and the long-established democracies, both Stalinism and Nazism. That is why I would like to add to the dates we commemorate in Europe a day of remembrance for the victims of Nazism and Stalinism.



# Moscow versus Prague

Boris Orlov

I had the opportunity to see the Prague Spring coming when, at the beginning of 1968 at the invitation of *Rude Pravo*, I visited Czechoslovakia as a correspondent for the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*.

Later that year, as special reporter, I returned to Czechoslovakia on August 21 with a tank division. Arriving in Prague, I witnessed a tragedy unfolding right in front of my eyes. It seemed like the whole city had taken to the streets: people with anger and tears in their eyes addressed the Soviet soldiers as they moved slowly with their tanks into a city unfamiliar to them.

I belong to the disappearing generation of youngsters active in the early 1960s, the short period of *Khrushchev's thaw*, who soon found themselves in the stagnant period of Brezhnev's rule. The shortcomings of the communist system became more and more obvious. Some came to the conclusion that change, based on the experiences of western democracies, was an imperative. They were called dissidents – those who think in a different way. Others believed that the idea of socialism – a just society – is good but cannot be realised through dishonest means and that it was necessary to create better rules for socialism, first of all within the communist party, and to develop the outline of a viable and humane system. I belonged to this second group. I believed that if the communist party would only be courageous enough to recognise Stalin's criminal actions and publicly condemn them, it would be capable of further reform.

So imagine how I felt during my first visit when I got to know the representatives of the Prague Spring – journalists, writers, economists – who embodied the idea of reform of the party and of society. Stimulated by meetings with free, independent and critically thinking people, I returned to Moscow and shared my impressions with friends.

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Some months later I went on my second trip. Under the tracks of Soviet tanks, the hopes of the Prague Spring, as well as our own expectations of change, were crushed. Heavily disappointed, it went against my conscience to use official terminology and describe the events in Prague as the suppression of counterrevolutionary forces.

I have often wondered what might have happened if the aspirations of the Prague Spring had not been destroyed by the Soviet army. History cannot answer this question but as soon as I had returned to Moscow, I was convinced that the Kremlin did not care about preserving the foundations of socialism. The only thing our rulers cared about was maintaining their own power.

Forty years ago, wandering along the streets of Prague, I was overtaken by mixed feelings. I felt ashamed for the acts of my compatriots who had arrived in tanks to visit friends. I felt bitter about the communist doctrine that promised an earthly paradise. I had disturbing thoughts about the situation my country was in and about my own destiny. Those events in Prague symbolized the destruction of hope and ideals, and the world appeared to be as black as night.

It was hard for me to imagine that forty years later I would return to Prague in such totally different circumstances. The communist system has collapsed. Instead of Czechoslovakia, there are now two countries, each of them following its own democratic way and Europe is undergoing a unifying process.

My country, the former USSR, took a different path. Almost twenty difficult years have passed since the beginning of perestroika. In those years, people placed their hopes and expectations in the ability of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to reform and follow its *democratic platform*. Many hoped that in the autumn of 1991 a split would take place leaving the conservatives in one party and the reformers in another. The August putsch eliminated these hopes. The CPSU was banned and several months later, the Soviet Union collapsed. The country entered into a period of difficult psychological perestroika, characterised by my *Izvestia* colleague Otto Lacis as *lomka* – a period of cold turkey.

Of all the problems that my country has encountered, I would like to select just one, in my opinion the most important: society and democracy. Russian industry was developing apace at the beginning of the twentieth century. A legal and institutional base, first of all in the form of the State Duma (national parliament), was put in place. In February 1917, the tsar abdicated and the country was on the way to becoming a democratic republic. Eight months later, however, the Bolsheviks took over and a remarkable social experiment began – an experiment that turned out to be unsuccessful. During the following decades, a process of negative selection took place. The most intellectual and productive strata of society – aristocrats, businessmen, the most active peasants, officers, clergymen – were destroyed. Moreover, during the *big terror*, those members of the CPSU most devoted to the ideals of communism – the administration of the Red Army, notable scientists, writers, and cultural representatives – were exposed to prosecutions. At the same time, opportunities for social mobility for the poorest strata of the peasantry and the working class were created. They formed the base of Stalin's regime.

When freedom arrived in 1991, for the large majority it fell more or less from the sky and people did not know what to do with it. The period of privatisation, during which a rather small group of people grew very rich, was perceived to be the logical outcome of democracy. People characterised this process as *dermocracy* (*dermo* meaning 'filth' in Russian) – as something alien and not necessarily leading to improved welfare.

Nevertheless, during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, the legal base necessary for a democratic society was created, with a constitution and the freedom of the media. Society gradually got used to life under democracy until circumstances began to change in 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power. Within eight years, he had created a system which put all instruments of democracy – parliament, the courts, the mass media, and regional governors – under the constant control of the Kremlin. Putin overcame the chaos of Russia's initial democratic period and, using the large amount of income generated by energy sales, increased the population's standard of living. He embodied the strict but fair ruler who in traditional Russian fashion, takes responsibility and creates prosperity.

But there is also another side to this picture. Business and bureaucracy have in a way merged. Never before did officials have so much influence. During the last eight years, the political process has been frozen. There has been no competitive struggle among the various parties which would allow a new generation of politicians to appear. There is also no appreciation of the fact that the enormity of the Russian territory means that only decentralised, democratic self-organisation will allow Russia to avoid the stagnation into which it is being pushed by its current bureaucracy.

In forty years since the Prague Spring, my personal life has also seen many changes. I have not drunk myself to death, broken down, or, as the Russians say, loved too many women. I have reassessed my values. Forty years ago I went to Prague as a communist and returned as a social democrat, a person who had come to believe that without social justice, a society turns into a menagerie, into a game of egoistical instincts; That justice should be embodied in a framework of freedom and democracy.

This year I turned 78. At this age, one feels an even stronger desire to sum things up, to put an emotional full stop. For me the full stop is this visit to Prague: an important chapter in the book of my life has now closed and with great satisfaction, reminding me of the wise phrase – never say never.

# Social Democracy and the Prague Spring

Jiří Paroubek

This year we commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the 1968 Prague Spring and the Czechoslovakian Communist Party's attempt at renewal, prematurely stymied by the course of events. Sixty years have passed since 1948 when, following the February Communist putsch, our party (the Czechoslovakian Social Democratic Party) was merged – contrary to its constitution – with the Czechoslovakian Communist Party (KSČ). Seventy years have passed since the Munich Agreement was signed precipitating the withdrawal of our party from the Socialist Workers' International. And finally, this year is also the 130th anniversary of the founding of our party.

All of these events had a significant influence on the democratic left in Czechoslovakia. Without them and without the experience of a democratic past, the popular uprising in the spring of 1968 could not have taken place. These events also influenced other parties of the democratic left. We live in a context of world interconnectedness.

The beginnings of the Czech workers' movement reach all the way back to the 1860s. It was at that time that the first trade unions and educational associations for Czech labourers were established. Cooperation between Czech workers and workers in other parts of Europe began in the same period. In 1870 Czech and German workers held a mass demonstration in Ještěd. From there, it was only a small step to the birth of the Czechoslovakian Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) which had been an offshoot of the Social Democratic Party of Austria. ČSSD subsequently became an independent political party in 1893. Some four years later it already had seats in the Austrian Imperial Parliament.

In the second half of the 1930s, the ČSSD supported the struggle of Spanish democrats against the pro-Franco putschists and they, for their part, were significantly involved in efforts to protect the Czechoslovak Republic, supporting Beneš' concept of collective

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security. In the spring of 1938, the ČSSD organised a great demonstration in support of a May mobilisation that was held to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the party's founding. Altogether some 400,000 people took part in this event in Prague to demonstrate their support for democracy and peace.

1938 was a difficult year for Czechoslovakia. As a result of the political events in Munich in autumn 1938, the public's antipathy towards parliamentary parties was increasing. A non-parliamentary government had been installed and nationalist political parties joined together to create two blocs – the Party of National Unity and the National Labour Party. It was an attempt to replace the system that had failed in Munich with an utterly different system based on two large parties along the lines of Great Britain and the United States.

After the war, the ČSSD was re-established as one of four post-war parties but the communists' populist rhetoric was, at that time, enjoying success and the Czechoslovakian Communist Party quickly became the greatest political power in the country. The democratic left, represented by the ČSSD, was too great a threat to the communists and they had to destroy it. The ranks of the ČSSD were infiltrated by communists and a very strong pro-communist wing was created within the party which then helped the communists take power in 1948. As early as the first week after the coup in February 1948, several social democratic leaders went into exile and in May of that year established the ČSSD's Central Executive Committee in London. Several months after the communist putsch, the Social Democratic party had, against the wishes of a clear majority of its members, been absorbed by the KSČ.

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia, especially before Stalin's death, inflicted immense material and moral damage upon our society, the consequences of which are still evident today, fifty years later. At the same time, this turbulent and tragic period was midwife to the intellectual rebirth of many people, without which the events of the Prague Spring would not have taken place. Many people gradually became aware of the monstrous nature of communism and their original enthusiasm gave way to opposition and scepticism. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's 1956 congress, at which Khrushchev heavily criticised Stalin, helped many to

comprehend the overwhelming contradiction between communist ideals and everyday life.

After 1963, Czechoslovakia experienced escalating levels of liberalisation. It became possible to speak relative openly in the media, an unmistakable sign of change. Czechoslovakia began to steer unambiguously towards democracy and plurality, not only politically but also economically – with one exception: criticism of the Central Committee of the KSČ and criticism of the Soviet Union were not permitted.

Nevertheless, the events of 1968 could never have happened without the support of left-wing intellectuals and high level officers of the party. Support which was not simply opportunistic in the way it often was after November 1989 but which for many was the result of an often very painful process of reflection and transformation. These people confessed their previous errors, confessed that they had allowed themselves to be intoxicated with the drug of ideology. Admitting to this is never a simple matter. I would particularly like to remember two important protagonists of this turbulent period who in their mature years entered the ranks of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic movement. Their names are Alexandr Dubček, the first secretary of the KSČ Central Committee, and Věněk Šilhán, who represented him in the agitated August days of the KSČ Vysočany congress.

The Prague Spring also inspired an attempt to re-establish the ČSSD in Czechoslovakia. Renewal of the Social Democratic Party in 1968 would have signified a radical rupture in the communists' monopoly of power and a fundamental change in the post-February political system. The KSČ recognised this danger and these attempts met with immediate opposition from the conservative and, to some extent, progressive elements in the KSČ. The wider populous, including many well-known personalities, closely followed and supported social democrat activity. The social democrats were of course aware that the attitude of the KSČ leadership towards their efforts to re-establish was determined in part by increasingly tense relations between Moscow and its satellites. They did not want to endanger the democratisation process and in this spirit the preparatory committee of the ČSSD suspended its activities, at Dubček's request, prior to a meeting of the chairs of the

Czechoslovak and Soviet Communist Partys in Čierná nad Tisou. After the Soviet invasion in August, all activities were ended on September 2, 1968. In this short period, our party had, however, been renewed in all of the Bohemian and Moravian territories. Local renewal commissions had spontaneously formed, and thousands of potential members and sympathisers had come forward and endorsed them.

That the ideas of the Prague Spring of 1968 were very dangerous to totalitarian communist power is unambiguously underlined by the reactions of Brezhnev, Ulbricht, Gomulka and Zhivkov who did not hesitate to unleash the largest military operation Europe had seen since the Second World War. The Prague Spring significantly disrupted the international communist movement. Andrei Sakharov described the Prague Spring and its repression as a turning point in his life and as the beginning of his engagement for civil rights and the fight for a change to the communist system. The mighty repression of the events that took place in Czechoslovakia meant a marked international turn away from the Soviet communist system. In this way, Czechoslovakia influenced the trajectory of the entire world – not, as we would have wished, by replacing communism with socialism with a human face, but by discrediting cooperation with the USSR and its satellites, and by discrediting communist parties.

# Renaissance of Socialism

## Observations of a Former Dissident

Józef Pinior

In 1968 the socialist bloc rediscovered democracy in Czechoslovakia. The process of destalinisation, which started in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1950s, implied more individual liberties, the emergence of political groups, important publishers, interesting newspapers, creative unrest in literature, film and artistic life. We witnessed a liberalisation of politics, of the debate inside communist parties and a return of academic freedom. Civic society appeared in communist Europe and the Prague Spring was the crown on that process.

Democratic socialism was first of all based on freedom of discussion, liberty of creation and commitment of citizens. Many different forms of direct democracy became manifest in those years: Workers' Councils in Polish factories in October 1956, new youth organizations, autonomy of research, independence of universities, unions of writers and artistic and intellectual circles. Freedom was found in avant-garde theatre, in films and books, and in discussion clubs. Jerzy Grotowski's theatre or the Czech film school are examples of artistic achievements which earned their place in world culture.

The Prague Spring was suppressed by the military intervention of Warsaw Pact forces – an experiment of democratic socialism failed. However, that spiritual and intellectual turning point changed communist parties in Western Europe and became the political basis of dissident movements in the Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe. Reformers in communist parties turned to social democracy. After the Prague Spring, democracy became the main political task of the left all over Europe. The defeat of authoritarian regimes in Portugal, Spain and Greece initiated a great wave of

democracy which led to the emergence of Solidarność in Poland in 1980, to the democratic revolution of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe and to the alliance of Western, Southern and Central and Eastern Europe in the form of the European Union.

Liberal changes in Poland reached their peak in the late 1950s. March, 1968, saw repressions of students and intellectual movements and the dogmatic wing of the Party and State institutions, represented by Mieczysław Moczar, resorted to anti-Semitism. Under these conditions the Prague Spring was a symbol of hope for democratic reforms in Poland. For my generation, the Solidarność generation, the year 1968 was the time of political initiation, the choice of rebellion against dogmatic institutions of the Party and State, the rejection of chauvinist propaganda, the protest against censorship and suppression of academic liberties. We all loved Czechoslovakia then; we were aware of the common fate of our societies.

In the 1980s Solidarność continued its political contacts between the Workers' Defence Committee and Charter 77. Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity was founded to bring together the opposition in both countries. Anna Sabatova became spokesperson of the Czechoslovak side in 1987. Oppositionists held – illegally! – long meetings on the mountainous border in the years 1987-1988. Books and political programmes were translated, strategies agreed, and joint actions decided, first of all aiming at setting political prisoners free. Underground publications were smuggled across the border but people were not allowed to visit the other country, telephone conversations were stopped by the special services and people were detained in Poland and arrested in Czechoslovakia. In the late 1980s, Peter Uhl and Anna Sabatova's flat in central Prague became the headquarters of the democratic revolution, the contact point of oppositionists from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the former German Democratic Republic. Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity demanded the release of Andrei Sakharov, its members welcomed Gorbachev's reforms with hope, and were preparing democratic revolutions in their countries. The rest is history.

# My Personal Encounters with History

Hannes Swoboda

We all have our different encounters with history. The times and places in which we grow up and live are steeped in history. Perhaps it is very Eurocentric of me to assume that Europe, and Central Europe in particular, has been especially shaped over the past hundred years by conflicts that have subsequently become historic. I was to some extent a conscious witness of this for around half of the twentieth century.

I was born in 1946 in a small town on the Danube, closer to Bratislava than to Vienna. Part of my family on my mother's side came from Hungary and my father's family from Moravia. My father's job brought them to the region in which I was later born. The area was once home to a famous Roman military and civil encampment and this fact has also contributed to my sense of historical awareness. We visited the excavations and museum which today still bear witness to this Roman past.

My home town was in the Soviet occupied zone until the withdrawal of occupying forces at the end of 1955. The troops were part of our everyday lives. Wartime tales of the advance of the Soviet troops were not unusual at home. One consequence of the war was, of course, the Iron Curtain which hung not far from my home town. Ironically crossing this border during the occupation was easier than it later became. I remember well a school trip organised by the Russians, as we called the occupying forces, on the Soviet Danube steamer *Caucasus*.

Although Bratislava – which we knew by its German name of Pressburg and which for many years bore the name of Pozsony, capital city of Hungary – lay only a few kilometres away, it was inaccessible to us after the strengthening of the Iron Curtain. There were two district capitals. The principal capital was Vienna, about 45 kilometres away, divided into four zones until the withdrawal of

occupying forces. Leaving the Soviet zone of occupation to the west of Vienna, however – as we often did on our trips down the Danube – required an identity document.

The State Treaty of 1955 and the withdrawal of all allied forces at the end of October that same year brought independence and neutrality. The Neutrality Act did not formally become law until the day after the last troops had withdrawn and was deliberately not included in the international treaties. The Act was rather an implicit precondition for the withdrawal of troops, particularly Soviet troops.

I directly and immediately experienced the consequences of the Second World War in my home town and its surrounding area. My upbringing and education were firmly anti-Nazi. We were exposed to films and exhibitions that attempted to impart the terror and brutality of the Nazi regime and the horror of the Holocaust. I think I absorbed these dramatic historical events more than many others through first-hand experience and through my education. They have continued to leave their mark on me to this day.

Bruno Kreisky, who first became Secretary of State then Foreign Minister and subsequently Chairman of the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and Chancellor, had a formative influence on me. Together with Olof Palme and Willy Brandt, he was one of the pillars of international and European social democracy. I am not alone in my fascination with his belief in the policy of détente without accommodation with Communism and also by his Middle East policy, revolutionary for that time in accepting the Palestinians as partners in dialogue. At a time of increasing, albeit not uncritical, movement towards Bruno Kreisky's active foreign policy, various crises and wars were taking place.

The wars I witnessed in the media in Algeria, Congo and Vietnam have had a great impact on me, but I would like to concentrate in this contribution on the European conflicts that have directly affected me. A year after the withdrawal of allied forces from Austria, an uprising against the occupation in neighbouring Hungary was crushed by Soviet troops. Many refugees came to Austria and some of them stayed on. Two refugee children joined my class at school and I was asked to learn German with them.

Over a decade later, political changes were taking place to our north in Czechoslovakia which culminated in the Prague Spring. This attempt at political emancipation was in turn also crushed by Warsaw Pact troops and once again refugees streamed into Austria. I remember driving to Prague with a friend to collect and bring back to Vienna personal belongings from the apartment of a refugee family I did not know. Years later, during a public debate, a young woman came forward and thanked me on behalf of her family for this act of solidarity.

The Soviet-dominated world was separated from the West but for Austrians it was relatively easy to travel there. Visas were unproblematic to obtain and in some cases, East Germany for example, not required at all. As a keen student of politics, I was a frequent visitor to East Berlin and many of the Eastern Bloc countries, the Soviet Union itself and Uzbekistan. By this stage, I was representative for the City of Vienna in the Community of the Danube Countries and in this capacity I also visited Odessa. In a sense, we grew accustomed to the division of Europe although we hoped for a gradual process of transformation. Convergence theory – the hope that there would be gradual rapprochement between the two systems and with it the reconciliation of a divided Europe – became the modern idea.

One country that did offer such hope was Hungary. The *Goulash Communism* of the later Kádár period and subsequent years promised a greater opening up to the West than in any other country in the Eastern Bloc. So it was that we tried to develop links from Austria with our eastern neighbours, particularly from Vienna. The idea of a joint world fair in Vienna and Budapest was born. The plan was to hold the fair in 1995 based on the twin city concept. After some discussion, both countries and both cities agreed to the plan and submitted a bid to the appropriate international organisation in Paris.

As the responsible member of the Viennese Provincial Government and the City Senate, I was commissioned to plan a site in Vienna and assigned to represent it to the outside world. Together with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, today European Union Commissioner for External Relations and at the time working at the Austrian Embassy



in Paris, I represented Austria and Vienna in the international bid. Contacts with Hungary grew stronger. I still well remember a journey through Vienna with Gyula Horn, Hungarian Foreign Minister, who outlined quite openly in the car the plans for a fundamental transformation of the Hungarian political scene. Subsequent developments in Hungary as well Viennese wariness of such a major event prevented the joint world fair ever taking place. The plans were, however, useful for the further development of the area of the Danube around Vienna.

At the same time the Hungarian Communist Party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, was also establishing its contacts in the West. So it was that I represented the SPÖ at a meeting in Budapest where the leading reform Communists, chiefly Imre Pozsgay, put forward new ideas for a liberal multi-party system. Valentin Falin, a prominent Soviet foreign affairs politician, was also present. Only the representatives of the German Democratic Republic lived up to their reputation as unwavering supporters of the pure doctrine of Marxism-Leninism.

Things then began to move faster than even the reform Communists wanted. During one of the public inquiries I led on primary and strategic planning alternatives in the Festival Hall of the Vienna City Hall, my press officer gave me news that brought tears to my eyes. After the events at the border between the two Germans and between Austria and Hungary, the Iron Curtain had now also fallen in Czechoslovakia and in its place a normal border was created. A short time later I drove through my native country to Bratislava as a guest at one of the country's first post-Soviet open discussion events, organised by an Austrian newspaper. We needed a police escort to get us through the queue of cars returning from a trip to the West! When I introduced myself to my Slovakian discussion partners, they said: 'We know you from Austrian television, because we have always watched the Austrian news'.

In my role as the member of the Viennese Provincial and City Government in charge of town planning and urban design, I was involved in erecting two memorials commemorating the horrors of the Nazi regime. Immediately after I took office, the long-awaited Monument against War and Fascism was erected in the centre of the City of Vienna despite an intense media campaign against the

monument, its location and particularly against the artist. Alfred Hrdlicka was and is an acknowledged sculptor but has always described himself as a Communist. This did not make matters easy and a few of the monument's original supporters bailed out in the intensity of the media campaign. I, however, supported the City's decisions and we were finally able to go ahead with the memorial. There was many a dispute afterwards however – not least from representatives of Vienna's Jewish population. The 'pavement-scrubbing Jew' sculpture, an integral part of the memorial, was considered by some at the time to be degrading although today there is no fuss about this at all. Criticism from the Jewish community ultimately led to the erection of a specific memorial to commemorate the Holocaust. I was given the task of finding an appropriate site and sat on the panel that selected the artistic design and supervised its subsequent construction. A location was chosen right in the heart of the city, on the Judenplatz, and the panel selected a design by the British artist Rachel Whiteread. Once again there was intense public debate and once again we stuck by our decision. I truly believe the memorial to be a success and, in artistic terms, nothing short of a companion piece to Alfred Hrdlicka's memorial. Both, however, have their political and artistic legitimacy.

This combination of town-planning and political/historical issues and the structural residue of Communism confronted me once more when, at the invitation of the German Federal Government and the Berlin Senate, I became chairman (at that time I was already an MEP) of a committee on the renewal of the historic centre of Berlin. In practical terms the question at hand was whether the Palace of the Republic, home to the parliament of the GDR, should be demolished in order to rebuild the castle that had once stood on the site and had been destroyed by the Walter Ulbricht. There were intense discussions throughout Germany, especially in Berlin. After intensive and painstaking deliberations and hearings lasting over a year, our committee recommended the partial reconstruction of the castle and the demolition of the Palace of the Republic. I voted for this recommendation. There were no compelling reasons for preserving the Palace as a reminder of the GDR, but there were some very good planning reasons against it. Conversely, Berlin's Castle was not associated with the darkest chapter in German history and

therefore no political considerations were voiced against its partial reconstruction. The committee further recommended preserving the GDR Council of State building situated in the immediate vicinity and with it the headquarters of the head of state. Interestingly, the GDR authorities had a gate from the castle they had demolished built into the Council of State building – even they had not wanted to remove all sense of history. After some time they also re-erected the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great on *Unter den Linden*, not far from the demolished castle.

While transformation in the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the break-up of the Soviet empire was largely peaceful, the break-up of Yugoslavia ironically proved to be considerably more difficult and led to terrible wars that once again caused streams of refugees to flow into Austria, particularly Vienna. In our attempts to provide support to these refugees, we considered how we could help the Balkan region itself. We organised aid shipments, specifically to the heavily affected city of Sarajevo – a multicultural, multi-faith city whose very essence was under siege. Our support for Sarajevo was no doubt in some way influenced by its tragic role in Austria's history.

On the thousandth day of the Serbian siege, I flew out in a military aircraft from Zagreb to Sarajevo. It was snowing heavily and rifle volleys fired by the besieging Serbian forces greeted us on our arrival. We drove into the city in armoured vehicles. At the Holiday Inn, which I was later to visit frequently, there was hardly any light, little water and plastic in place of window panes. The next day I handed over a sum of money on behalf of the City of Vienna to support social objectives and, symbolically, tram engines and a few buses. What impressed me most was a meeting with a young female journalist who we could not persuade to eat anything. Forced by food shortages to eat only one meal a day, she did not want to make an exception to this pattern that would upset her psyche and her body.

Alongside my activities for Sarajevo, I was also building up my contacts with other countries in the region – this included with contacts in Serbia itself. Together with the Mayor of Athens, Dimitris Avramopolos, and the Mayor of Ljubljana and many-times Foreign

Minister, Dimitri Rupel, I founded the Conference of the Mayors of the Capitals of South-Eastern Europe. Even during the war in Yugoslavia, we managed to bring on board both the Mayor of Sarajevo as well as a representative of Belgrade – quite literally bring on board: the Mayor of Athens had invited us to found this loose association on a ship!

For me and for the work that I now do for the European Union, these – and many others – were formative events that I experienced directly. I was therefore never able to see any alternative to or contradiction between deepening and enlarging the European Union. The family and the region into which I was born, with their roots in, and connections with, the neighbouring areas to the east and south-east, marked out a certain path for me – most notably my commitment to social democracy.

Politics without any historical background is unthinkable. My personal experience of these eventful times has taught me to steer clear of ideologies and fanaticism. I have always regarded even the student movement of 1968, a movement which politicised me and drew me to the left, with a touch of scepticism. I took part in the '68 movement without ever indulging in its ideological glorification. Zeal and emotions are necessary in politics and politicians but we must also continue to learn the lessons of history. Learning those lessons equips us with a healthy dose of pragmatism and scepticism.



# Witness, Not Victim

Jan Marinus Wiersma

Who would have thought that after so many years in politics, I would become involved in a debate about the role of history in my work. I was educated as a historian but I never professed the trade. Nevertheless, it did of course have a significant impact on my intellectual and political development. I belonged to the optimistic 1968 generation; we did not select our faculty for career reasons but out of interest and sympathy for a subject. We studied what we liked. I took an interest in political theory, did courses on philosophy, wrote about regional history and did research on the diplomatic relations between Emperor Charles V and the Ottomans. I believe that my historical training helped me become a politician with a certain intuition and a feeling for nuance, but it also turned me into an adherent of the European rational tradition, given my specific interest in the role of 16<sup>th</sup> century Humanism and 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment.

My first historical recollection dates from when I was five years old. For some weeks in 1956 my parents were glued to the radio, anxious to hear the latest news about the uprising in Hungary. I was only aware of the tension, not knowing what it was all about, but I can still remember the sense of uneasiness.

But what was my historical outlook before I actually went to university? What made a lasting imprint? I am from a country, the Netherlands, with a long – more or less – continuous history. Small but well respected. The historical reality, as taught in schools during my youth, was dominated by the independence struggle of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Golden Age following it. It is still an important part of Dutch collective memory. The town where I was born, Groningen, celebrates every year the battles of 1672 when the Seven Provinces were attacked from all directions. Now I live in Leiden, where there the magic year is 1572. It was then that the founding father of the independent Low Countries, William of Orange, broke the Spanish siege of the city. I doubt whether many

people exactly know what actually went on in those years, but in both cities the commemorations have turned into real annual festivals. There is much more in the Netherlands that reminds people of its glorious past.

My country has often been described as a satisfied nation with well established cultural and democratic traditions. Whether this still is the case, is another matter. And, I have to admit that during my school years the colonial past of the Netherlands and the oppressive methods used in Indonesia were not really debated, which would of course have created a less heroic picture.

I grew up in freedom and this was the essential ingredient of the historical awareness my generation developed. This was strengthened by the attention devoted in our education to the horrors of Nazism and the communist domination of Eastern Europe that followed it. We became very conscious of the dangers of the Cold War and the nuclear Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads made a lasting impression.

A lot changed, at least for my generation, with the Vietnam War which showed that not only the Soviet Union was imperialistic. Although I was not personally engaged in the anti war movement, that episode changed my view of the world and made me believe that not only Russia was responsible for the tensions in the world and that both the Warsaw Pact and NATO were a problem. It was the confrontation between these two military alliances that became a dominant theme in my work and activities. I became adviser to the Labour Party's national parliamentary group and worked on foreign affairs and security issues. In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and this military aggression became a turning point in Cold War relations. Many countries boycotted the Olympics in Moscow; there was a lot of discussion about the need to rearm in the light of Moscow's aggressive policies. Détente seemed over. I found it all frightening. History took a wrong turn with proposals to deploy new missile systems on both sides in Europe. After some hesitation my party took a leading role in the opposition against these deployments and the issue dominated our work. We were not alone as hundreds of thousand people protested in Amsterdam and The Hague against the missiles.

Many sister parties in North West Europe took the same line and a coordination mechanism called SCANDILUX was set up to promote a common position. As the acronym suggests, it brought together the parties from the Benelux and the Scandinavian NATO countries. But also the British and, in particular, the Germans played an active role. I attended many meetings and remember the very important contribution of Egon Bahr, architect of the German *Ostpolitik*, to our work. One of the initiatives of SCANDILUX was to enter into a dialogue with some of the ruling parties in Eastern Europe in an attempt to develop a joint policy on the missile issue. These conversations were interesting but we were not in control of government policies and it was official diplomacy that eventually found a way out of the threatening armaments race. However, the contacts were maintained. I was sceptical about this continuation because many discussions between the two sides ended up in Orwellian confusion, in particular when talking to our counterparts in the GDR. My impression did not change when later I participated in discussions between the SPD, Western German social democrats, and the SED, the ruling party on the other side.

After having been elected International Secretary of the Dutch Labour Party in 1987, I followed the approach of my predecessor, Maarten van Traa, who while being a partner in the above mentioned dialogue was at the same time an active supporter of the dissident movements in Eastern Europe. We used our official contacts to get into countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia where we smuggled books and medicine or gave lectures at dissident gatherings in obscure apartments. I have to admit that for some time we had the illusion that we could build bridges between the communist parties and the opposition movements. This in the end only happened when the collapse of the system had already begun.

The events of 1989 came as a complete surprise and drastically changed the historical perspective. Instead of wondering how we could improve the situation in Europe step by step and change the system from within, we now had to deal with something quite different; the communist bloc had suddenly fallen apart and the new independent states entered a period of radical transformation. Whilst everybody had to get used to the new situation – this took a while –, I started working on the role of the left in the recently es-



tablished democracies. What was there to do? We celebrated the new freedom but had to wait and see what kind of political landscape would develop. In most countries, parties originating from the opposition movements took power. The situation on the left was unclear. We started to identify possible political partners for cooperation. This was mainly done through our party foundations. But it soon became obvious to us that the new democracies did not copy the Western European model, with strong social democratic parties able to govern. With the exception of the Czech Republic, none of these parties had really survived communist times.

There was little political space for parties promoting social democracy. The name turned out to be tainted by the communist past of Central and Eastern Europe. Radical free market ideologies added to our woes. Whole segments of the population were underrepresented at the political level and there existed little sympathy for the losers of the transition. For that reason we turned our efforts to the post communist parties, of which most were prepared to fuse with remaining original – but marginal – social democratic parties. I was personally involved in a number of these mergers as Vice President of the Party of the European Socialists. We were often criticised for involving post communist parties. But not having done so, we would have probably denied the representation of new member states in one of the most important and largest European political family.

In the European Parliament, I was for many years directly involved in Slovakia's accession process to the European Union, as parliamentary rapporteur. It was an exciting job with a high profile in that country. Slovakia's ambition to become member of the EU made it very sensitive to advice from the side of the European Parliament. I visited many parts of the country and one could see the changes taking place. In 1998, the voters ousted the authoritarian Mečiar government that had developed a bad relationship with the EU; this opened the road towards negotiations with a new and democratic administration. Slovakia developed quickly afterwards with high growth rates and I had no objections to it becoming a member of the EU in 2004. Although some doubts remain. The governments that eventually took Slovakia into the EU were of the ultraliberal type, to the detriment of many ordinary citizens and especially the

Roma population. Promises to help improve the living standard of this minority group were after accession soon forgotten and this is shameful given the terrible inhuman conditions many Roma still have to live in.

The nineties of the twentieth century did not only bring freedom; in the former Yugoslavia war broke out and Europe failed to stop it from happening. It was a tough lesson about the limitations of the EU. While I was driving through the destructions in Bosnia, after the Dayton Agreement signalled the end of the hostilities, it was difficult to remain an optimistic Kantian. It was not the best time for Europe and it showed us that, unfortunately, freedom could also unleash civil war and ethnic cleansing. Freedom as such means little; it all depends on what people do with it.

My work has brought me to strange places that have already gained historical significance. At my home in Leiden, I hung on the wall the picture of a fair attraction seeming frozen in time. It was taken in Chernobyl. The fair had stood there untouched since 1986, the year of the disaster. I asked one of the experts when children would be able to play there again. 'In a thousand years', he replied. The concrete shelter hiding the imploded nuclear reactor is a symbol of the irresponsible political system of the Soviet Union and I am very glad that at least that period now belongs to history.

I believe that Europe is a better place than it was more than twenty years ago. The transformation is not complete and history is still very much alive, but we hopefully have learned from our mistakes. Like other personal memories reproduced in the book, also mine are coloured and are far from complete. I have described what impressed me most and I have been very lucky to be a witness rather than a victim of the events that have been mentioned.



# Memory is a Loaded Gun

## An Epilogue

Hannes Swoboda  
and Camiel Hamans

Coming to Gdansk is coming to terms with the past. That is why the Socialist Group in the European Parliament decided to organise the last of its meetings in a series of seminars on the use and abuse of history in politics in Gdansk.

Gdansk is the place of Oskar Matzerath, the little drummer in Günter Grass' novel *The Tin Drum* and at the same time the place of that other Nobelprize winner Lech Wałęsa and the Lenin Shipyards, but also the place where the 18<sup>th</sup> century physicist Fahrenheit, still better known in the Anglo-Saxon world than on the European continent, was born and the place where in the Hanseatic times merchants from Lübeck, Hamburg, Bruges, London and even Bergen, Norway, met to buy amber and their yearly supplies of rye, wheat and timber, which was brought to the harbour city from so far remote as the Ukraine. The empty vessels were being loaded with red bricks as ballast on their way from the Low Countries to the East Sea and that explains why the whole of Gdansk has been built with brick stones.

Gdansk, called Danswijck in Dutch texts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, feels in its centre like Amsterdam and Brussels at the same time. Architects such as the Flemish and Dutch engineers Anthony van Obberghen, Cornelis van der Bosch and Tylman van Gameren shaped an international atmosphere of elegant renaissance city towers, Hollandish canalside houses and Brabantine market squares with huge and rich guildhalls.

But all this beauty is a reconstructed artefact just as the memory of the Castle of the Teutonic Knights who once ruled over what they used to call Danzig. The end of the Second World War saw Gdansk completely ruined; 90% of the buildings was bombed, demolished and literally fallen into pieces. And from these pieces a new Gdansk was reconstructed in the following twenty years. This was done by

communists who usually were not that fond of the remnants of the bourgeois culture they had just besieged and were not that subtle to do jigsaw puzzles. And by Poles, most of them taking over the places of their German speaking compatriots who had been living here until they were swept westwards by the forces of history.

Gdansk is one of these numerous European cities that show what the effects of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism have been. Having been open before to a variety of influences and having flourished as a consequence of this openness, these cities felt the effect of the upcoming nationalism, which brought animosity and hostility to the foreground and caused decline. The city of Gdansk shows that it was nationalism which brought bad things to the place itself and to Europe.

## **Poczta**

Gdansk is a city where history is tangible. Therefore it was the right place for the Swiss journalist and politician Andreas Gross, who took part in our conference, to claim, winking at Francis Fukayama, that it is a caricature to believe in the end of history. Such an end will never come. We only have to hope that we do not have to live through that many catastrophes again as to learn something from the past.

Gdansk is a city where even the sidewalks tell a story. Walk around for only half an hour and you will come across all kinds of symbols of revolt and oppression, of the fight against Nazism, Stalinism and communism. The Post Office, *Poczta Polska*, is not only a place where stamps are being sold, it is also a Museum. At the same time as the German battleship Schleswig-Holstein, officially being at a visit of friendship to the Free City of Danzig, fired at the Polish garrison of the peninsula of Westerplatte in the dawn of 1 September 1939, SS-troops attacked the main post office of Danzig. Fifty eight Polish civilian postmen defended the place with their hands, rubber stamps, desks and the bars from their windows for fourteen hours. Only when the dirty minds of the SS troops got the cruel idea to pour oil into the building, they had to give up. The few postmen who survived the fire were either shot immediately after or ended up in a concentration camp.



Post office, Gdansk

In front of the post office a plaque in the form of a grave stone commemorates the victims of this first day of the Second World War. A few meters from the entrance a huge shining steel heroic statue produced in the heydays of social realism signs the praise of these patriots.

The shipyards, less than a few hundred meters away from the post office, tell another story. There an even more enormous monument asks to be listened to. And it is the name of Lech Wałęsa that is whispered by the wind blowing through the 40 meter tall steel crosses erected on Solidarity Square. The monument remembers the forty four victims of the 1970 strike of Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin, but also the peaceful uprising of 1980, which marked the starting point of Solidarność, since it was one of the main issues in the list of demands at the 1980 negotiations between the communist authorities and the protesting workers that there should be a memorial erected for the victims of that massacre.

The foot of the monument shows a series of bronze bas-reliefs, one of these plates quoting a poem by another Polish Nobel prize winner, Czesław Miłosz, that reads:

You, who have wronged a simple man,  
Bursting into laughter over his suffering  
DO NOT FEEL SAFE – another will be born  
Words and deed will all be written down

This first monument, constructed in a communist country during communist times to commemorate the victims of this same communist regime makes clear that Stalin's saying 'quoted by Wałęsa himself quite regularly) "fitting communism onto Poland was like putting a saddle on a cow" turned out to be correct in the end. Even the strongest oppression, even the killing of people could not stop the Poles from aiming at freedom, freedom of speech, belief, and assembly.



Solidarność Memorial



## Loaded

At the wall demarcating the square and at the now almost empty shipyards, plaques ask attention for the fate of other victims; Father Jerzy Popieluszko, murdered by the regime in December 1984 – now widely appearing on billboards in Poland, announcing a movie documenting his life and death – victims from the period of Martial Law under Jaruzelski and so more.

Less than hundred meters from this historic place, history can be seen on a building from which the last white paint is peeling off. In faded letters, the façade tells that this place was once a German delicatessen shop where in better times precious and expensive colonial goods were sold. Another fifty meters from there a hoarding announces in airbrushed graffiti letters ‘memory is a loaded gun’, just making clear why the PES-group gathered in Gdansk.

Gdansk may read as a history book, but everybody with some experience in reading knows that between the lines another truth may be found. Each reader is inclined to fill the gaps between the words and lines with his own experience, his own memory. From memory to history, however, leads a path which is only passable with difficulty.



Krzysztof Pomian, a well known Polish philosopher and historian who for political reasons had to leave his country in 1968 to continue his studies and academic career in France and now serves as chair of the Scientific Committee of the coming Museum of Europe in Brussels, made very clear in his contribution that one should make a distinction between memory and history. We all have memories and we all have a history and so we feel tempted to equate the two. But memory is subjective, as Jan Marinus Wiersma, Dutch member of the European Parliament and one of the organisers of the event, commented. History should become at least intersubjective, as impartial as possible.

Memory, as Pomian said and as the inscription already forecasted, works emotionally and thus has a relation with daily political life and action. Memory does not belong to the field of professional historians, but to artists and maybe to educators. It is their task to show how memories can be pacified to play their role as political factors, disembarassed of their emotions and too subjective connotations and arguments.

## Victims

This was exactly the moment where Józef Pinior joined into the discussion. Pinior, Polish social-democrat and member of the European Parliament, has a past as a Solidarność leader, activist and prisoner. He was even twice Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. He made his name saving the trade union's moneybox containing 80 millions zlotys from confiscation by the Service a few days before Martial Law was imposed in Poland. Wanted after this day of 13 December 1981, he lived in hiding until he got arrested.

Józef Pinior, for whom as a left winger it was self evident to join Solidarność and to be in opposition to the communist regime, keeps raising his voice to what he calls the colonization of history. Conservative forces try to use, or it is even better to say abuse, history to show they are right. They claim it was only their group that had always fought against dictatorship and totalitarianism. Just as the extreme rightists around the Kaczyński brothers in Poland claim that they are the only heirs of the opposition against communism and in this way implying not too silently that all the others were at

least collaborators. The extreme right in the whole of Europe is rewriting history, which should clearly be called a modern form of the colonization of history.

From his own experience, Józef Piniór testified that it was a working class resistance supported by intellectual forces that decided about the democratic future of Poland. For that reason he invited the group of European social democrats, the political family with the closest ties to the working classes, to come to Gdansk, the home ground of the organised opposition against communist dictatorship. This meeting, the first visit of a political group of the European Parliament to the native soil of Solidarność, should be seen as a symbol against the manipulation of the public opinion by partisan history. History should be taken away from politicians and be given back to the hands of historians and there should come an end to the degradation of the public debate.

As there are again and again accusations against social democrats as having been soft on communism and its suppression of democracy, we should defend ourselves. First by making clear as Bernd Faulenbach, professor in history at the Ruhr University in Bochum and chairman of the Historical Committee of the SPD, did during the debate by showing there is one essential and principal difference between communism in all forms and social democracy: the fight for democracy. That is why Hitler sent the German social democrats to his concentration camps and why from the early Soviet days on, the Bolsheviks persecuted the social democratic Mensheviks. Communism aims at people's dictatorship whereas social democracy's highest priority is democracy.

Secondly, we should stress the role social democracy had in the fight against fascism, Nazism and communism. It may be true, as professor Pomian said, that Western European social democrats with their *Ostpolitik* of detente and rapprochement tried to keep good relations with Moscow where the key for the German question was to be found. In consequence, one tried to have also reasonable relations with the ruling communist parties of Eastern Europe and for this reason they felt at unease in contacts with dissidents movements. But at the same time their policy, professor Faulenbach stressed, was really instrumental in weakening the ties of the oppressive systems and in this way turned out to be a very

effective and positive factor in giving room to the opposition. Furthermore, it is reducing the role of Willy Brandt, who himself was persecuted by the Nazis, and Egon Bahr, father of the *Ostpolitik*, to describe them as only working towards appeasement. Social democracy was after some hesitation in good contact with dissident movements and supported them. Take for instance the role of the great Dutch social democrat Max van der Stoep, later first High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE, who fought the Greek fascist colonel regime and was the first Minister of Foreign Affairs to support Charta 77 openly.

On the other hand, one should not forget how the extreme right tries to reduce the role of fascism and Nazism and sometimes even hurrahs this dramatic episode.

There is one more reason why the left must protest against the rewriting of the history, as Viktor Makarov from Latvia explained. In his part of Europe, but also in other places, conservative and nationalist groups claim the role of eternal victims; they have been prosecuted by the successive occupiers and their human sacrifices have not been recognised properly. Nowadays they still claim to be victims, just as their political friends in Western Europe, because the central powers do not want to give them the floor. As victims are sacrosanct in these times, they are always right. You can only defend yourself against this image by showing that the picture of the past they sketch is incorrect and unjust.

## Prologue

Gdansk, this place of history, is the right town to start a discussion how the unification of memories has to begin, as the great Polish historian and politician the late Bronislaw Geremek, to whose memory this book has been dedicated, expressed it.

Gdansk, the place of Johannes Hevelius, the 17<sup>th</sup> century astronomer who was the first to draw a map of the moon, is not only a *lieu de mémoire* for wars and oppression but also a symbol for respect and tolerance. Hevelius for instance is also known under the Dutch, Platdeutsch, German and Polish names of Hewel, Hewelke, Höwelke and Heweliusz and in the city of Gdansk of these days he

is even better known as a brand name of good beer. His mother's family, coming from Bohemia, consisted of famous brewers.

Gdansk, a city where three major ethnic groups used to live together peacefully for ages, Poles, Germans and Kashubians (Günter Grass is one of them) – a small group of Pomeranians speaking their own West Slavic language – was not only a place where foreigners were accepted because of commercial reasons, the names of a few streets still show where the Scots had their own quarter; Gdansk really showed the climate and the atmosphere of a metropolis. Commercial activities, intellectual life, and freedom went hand in hand. Jews felt at home, just as Swedes, some of them decedents of people who once had occupied Poland, Italians who imported their pasta to become *pierogi* in the Polish cuisine and Mennonites from Westphalia and the Low Countries who started to reclaim and impolder the wetlands around Danswijck. From the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Danzig was a protestant city but the authorities had no problem giving back a Franciscan church and monastery which had served as accommodation of the local Academy to the Roman Catholic church when in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the number of Polish speaking Roman Catholics started to raise again.

Gdansk is the birthplace of the great German pessimist Arthur Schopenhauer, who considered women as inferior. Maybe that was the reason why he stayed a bachelor until the end of his days. Nevertheless, he experienced the good influence of women on mankind regularly, albeit in secret. Just as his ideas about equal rights appeared to be nonsense, social democracy tries to prove that his pessimistic ideas on the organisation of mankind are incorrect as well.

Starting from Gdansk, is one of the best places in this respect, Gdansk being a symbol of war, occupation and oppression but at the same time also of heroic protest, civil courage, respect and tolerance, should become a symbol of honnêteté, honesty, in political debate.

Martin Schulz, leader of the PSE Group in the European Parliament, quoted in his dinner speech the text written at the entrance of the Library of Congress in Washington '*past is prologue*'. This phrase, taken from the second act of *The tempest* by William Shakespeare, offers a program for the future. We should come to terms with our past, learn from history and use the good things from it in the future. Gdansk once was a landmark of harmony; it could become it again.

During the visit of the Socialist Group it was extremely cold and windy. Maybe the weather should be seen as a symbol of the horrible times the city had to live through and at the same time of the difficult economic times we experience nowadays. This financial and economic crises and the unemployment we are confronted with makes it especially important to be reminded of the depression in the thirties of the last century which contributed to a big extent to the rise of totalitarian – fascist – regimes and weakened democracy in many countries. This is a reason more to rethink our use of historical facts.

Let a city such as Gdansk become emblematical for a new Europe, in which politicians learn from history instead of using it as a loaded gun to shoot their opponents.







