The Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans

Framing Regional Identities
Andrássy Studien zur Europaforschung

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The Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans

Framing Regional Identities
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The editors,
Budapest, June 2020
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Introduction –
All Happy Regions are Alike

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“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”: so the overquoted phrase goes. When it comes to the regions of Europe, it is clear that Central Europe and the Western Balkans are not exactly alike, certainly not in the way Scandinavia and the Benelux might look similar.

This collection of essays explores identities at the regional level in the countries known as the Visegrad Four (V4) and the neighbouring Western Balkans (WB). The authors, coming themselves from these two regions, examine the ways in which the very sense of belonging might surmount – or not – the shortcomings and deadlocks of national identity. The essays in this book focus on common regional denominators and propose a set of answers to the following question: is there a sense of regional belonging in the V4 and the WB beyond the often contrasting or antagonistic national narratives?

Or is regional belonging merely a patchwork of national identities? As we will see throughout this collection, identities coexisting both in the V4 and the WB tend to weaken regional cooperation by putting emphasis on their divergences rather than on the common or shared components. Sometimes inane efforts are invested in finding contrasts by all means to differentiate a group from its long-time neighbours. New-born national or linguistic specificities are often constructed in a suspiciously retrospective fashion to evade the very fact of regional similarities.

In other cases, regional diversity is praised as a trademark of long-passed glory but, interestingly, such nostalgia seems to substantiate rather than criticise the rightfulness of present-day ethnonationalism. In both cases, nation-states dictate an order of priorities through arbitrary distinctions that no objective description of regional contrasts could possibly support.
The regional plot of this collection presents identity as a strongly territorialised concept. Whether the regional level might help surpassing ethnonational blockings or not, identity appears as a given spatial reality, as a distinctiveness contained within geographical borders. The question is whether the limits of identity are those of the nation-state or whether belonging can be extended towards the boundaries of historical-cultural areas assembling several nation-states. Another question is whether the fragmentation of a region such as the Western Balkans into conflicting national narratives is itself a genuine regional specificity. If there is more to regionalism than the mere depiction of regional, i.e. idiomatic characteristics, then is there anything the WB might learn from the neighbouring V4 and its progress as a regional entity?

Identity between Crisis and Regression

The idea that identity means a territory indicates a major touchstone of the contemporary obsession with the notion. Indeed, the belief that everyone has a reified identity, given by and inherited from national history as some sort of almost material, ready-made artefact denotes a serious lack of reflection on the very concept. Identity is perceived less as a synonym of belonging than as a personal belonging itself. The tautology is obvious but quite hard to surmount in the contemporary context where “I” tends to become a major political concept.

Even if labelled as “national”, identity and its politics are more akin to individualistic or libertarian conceptions than to any communitarian framework. The identity recipe is always the same: opposing a population to others and claiming the priority of its ethnic homogeneity is a flagrant way to control it and judge and exclude its reluctant members. National identity is almost undistinguishable from crisis mongering. In the 1970s, when the extreme-right National Front party reached its first electoral successes in France, Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed an interdisciplinary criticism of the very notion of identity. According to the French anthropologist,

“When secular habits collapse, when lifestyles disappear, when old solidarities crumble, it is indeed frequent that a crisis of identity occurs. Unfortunately, the characters invented by the media to convince of the phenomenon and underline its dramatic aspect have rather, congenitally, an empty brain: their suffering identity appears as a convenient alibi to hide us, and to hide from their cre-
ators, an outright nullity. The truth is that, reduced to its subjective aspects, an identity crisis does not offer intrinsic interest. It would be better to look directly at the objective conditions of which it is a symptom and which it reflects. We avoid it by evoking ghosts straight out of a cheap psychology.¹

In other words, the political “heroes” who promise to save the nation’s identity from an outside threat often happen to be among the constructors of the pretended threat and the very mongers of the crisis they feign to solve. Most probably, the migration issue in Europe in 2015 would not have become a crisis, had some European leaders not done everything to make a crisis out of it – instead of anticipating the problems and seeking sound strategies to deal with the upcoming situation in agreement with their European partners. Unfortunately, the “libertarian” spirit of ethnonationalism ignores cooperation and other forms of constructive approach. Instead, it is always in high demand of unsecure contexts to rescue the people it wants to control. Contexts come and go, “empty brain” politics of “outright nullity” repeat themselves. Lévi-Strauss is bitterly topical nowadays given this everlasting “identity” of ethnonational tricks. The migration issue has invented a new “other” – the so-called “migrant” – for identity politics. For this reason, migration has been included as an identity topic in this collection: xenophobia and other forms of hatred do have regional specificities, twistedly related to minority and diaspora issues.

May these initial comments on the abuse of the notion of identity serve as a warning sign. What Lévi-Strauss pinpointed in the 1970s tends to become a largely accepted practice. National saviours grow like mushrooms strangely obsessed with the foolish metaphor of “roots”.² Without indulging in dry conceptual frameworks, let us propose a handy distinction for when it comes to an identity issue: the difference between the same and the self. In Oneself as Another, Paul Ricœur proposes a “grammar” for identity, a conceptual syntax and vocabulary to reflect on the way the self can be conceived as a landmark of continuity. I is not the tautological repeti-

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tion of an unaltered same, but the recurring signature of an evolving character.\(^3\)

We invite the reader to consider this distinction throughout the essays of this collection and beyond: whenever an identity issue is raised, it might shift the idea of belonging towards the reflected construction of the self but it can also make it regress towards the idiosyncratic statement of sameness – metaphorically, towards the delusive one-letter-sentence “I” that tolerates no verb, object or complement.

Nowadays, the idea that nations are constructions, as Eric Hobsbawm conceived them, sounds like an ivory tower fantasy. Let us stress that a construction does not mean an *ex nihilo* invention nor an arbitrary machination. Hobsbawm argues that nationalism gained its modern meaning through the American and the French revolutions. The new, systematic use of the notion was a political – in fact, revolutionary – project of unification through citizenship, beyond local ethnic or linguistic identities.\(^4\)

The nation was not about “ethnicity, language and the like, though these could be indications of collective belonging also”.\(^5\) Ethnic and linguistic belonging became components of nationalism only later on, for mostly economic reasons that exceed the frame of this collection. The historian’s aim was certainly not to deny local senses of belonging but to show that these identities are not essentially inherent to nationalism. Through a zoom on what he called the “age of revolution” in Europe,\(^6\) Hobsbawm fought first of all against the retrospective projections on the very origins of nations – and these retrospective delusions are still those of our times.

A construction is not an artificial or unlikely montage. We do live in the complex set of *acquis* of the past and these were all new-born constructions at a certain time, freedom and equality not less than nationalism – and not more. The essentialist conception of nations, i.e. the idea that nations have grown out of mystique roots predetermined by providence, is much more an idealised montage following retrospective fictions. The share of fiction in our contemporary forms of nationalism is open to debate. What is sure is that the “imagined” part of our identities does shape even the most criti-

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5 Ibid., 20.
cal observer’s sense of national belonging. Neither the authors nor the editors of this present collection could be exempted from this rule. The important point is to relentlessly criticise the confusion between national constructions and the arbitrary and/or retrospective abuses Lévi-Strauss has highlighted.

Regions as Narratives and Concentric Circles

The age of revolutions was a historical occasion to build up a new cohesive political concept. In the same way, one might wonder how the no less historical collapse of the Eastern bloc after 1989 has been seized to implement new constructions and how it has shifted the distinction between construction and machination. In this regard, the contemporary political landscape in the V4 and the WB is not exactly reassuring.

Nevertheless, if the regional pictures that emerge from this collection involve more predicaments than other, “happy families” in Europe, it is certainly a first step to highlight problematic issues. Political science, on its short-term scale, can emphasise the very challenges on the run that will later on be addressed on the long-term scale of regional studies. Paul Ricœur’s aforementioned framework of the self and the other does not only reflect on the classical theories of the self’s continuity and permanence; the framework proposed by the author of *Time and Narrative* aims at a definition of the “narrative self”, i.e. the subject of historically accurate narratives.

To denounce current abuses of identity politics is thus a way to create space for sound political perspectives in the V4 and the WB. The idea is to start clearing the path and create the ability to weave new narratives on the regional level, beyond the national scale and its idiomatic tendencies. Without the detection of symptoms, regional narratives would lack reflection on the topical issues to overcome. The obstacles happen to be erected by the national scale of politics, while regions lack the space to emerge as independent actors of European construction.

This does not mean that the local-national or the continental level are outdated. As Jacques Le Goff said, we “belong to a humanity that lives and fulfils itself in concentric circles: the local […] , the national, the European and the universally human.” For the medievalist, deeply engaged into

framing objective, long-term narratives for the Old Continent, we live in
times “when the European circle needs to emerge”.8 We could add that
further European integration cannot disregard the importance of the re-
gional circle – as a category of political action in Europe.

As a “concentric circle”, the regional dimension is halfway between the
national and the European one. By region, we do not mean cultural or his-
torical areas within countries, but groups of nation-states: macro-regions.
However, the intranational scale shares a goal with our supranational re-
gions: the idea that further integration in Europe requires other concentric
circles than the national one – smaller or larger. The European Commis-
sion’s regional – cohesion – policy bets on local circles to build a sense of
European belonging within nation-states – circumventing the national cat-
egory with more or less success. Our present collection focuses on the com-
plementary circle of supranational regions gathering nation-states that
share some common history and geography.

Central Europe’s Intermediate Deadlock

The Visegrad group is a loose alliance of four Central European countries
based on shared regional continuities. It is a regional cooperation of na-
tion-states within a somewhat broader region, Central Europe. Even
though the alliance has clear outlines – the outer borders of its member
states, “V4” is often used as a suspicious synonym for “Central Europe”, in
the sense of the cultural and historical continuity the V4 is meant to be a
part of. As a revival of Central European politics, the V4 carries on the con-
tradicting definitions of this part of Europe, which is neither the West nor
the East, but a problematic intermediary.

In the wake of the structural geopolitical changes of the early 1990s, the
regional similarities between the then three countries – Poland, Czechoslo-
vakia and Hungary – were perceived as a historical key to reboot Mitteleu-
ropean9 cooperation. With the dismantlement of the Eastern bloc, Central
Europe seemed to regain its contours. The alliance was an old-new concen-

8 Jacques Le Goff, A la Recherche du Moyen Âge [In Search of the Middle Ages] (Paris:
9 Eric Hobsbawm uses this expression based on the German Mitteleuropa, i.e. Cen-
tral Europe. We let the reader decide whether it is snobbish or whether it accurate-
ly indicates something snobbish about Mitteleuropean ways. Eric J. Hobsbawm,
“Mitteleuropean Destinies,” in Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the Twentieth
tric circle that appeared on the smoking ashes of the USSR’s Eastern European group of satellites.

In fact, during the Cold War, Central Europe as an effective region had ceased to be. As a geopolitical entity, it was “erased from the map” in 1918-1920 in a way that was praised until then as a Polish speciality – at least in Europe. Throughout the Interwar Period and World War II, Central Europe had been a land lying fallow between Germany and Soviet Russia. Reintroduced (Poland), redesigned (Czechoslovakia) or reduced to what it effectively was without imperial support and make-up (Hungary), Central Europe as a united region had lost the world's recognition. Easy preys for their powerful neighbours but also pitiful amateurs when it came to their own foreign affairs, the late empire’s successor states indulged in some of the worst crimes in the region’s history. The Soviet invasion reframed the broader Eastern area and diluted the Mitteleuropean destiny within a wide heterogeneous bloc where both local and historically regional identities appeared even more microscopic than they actually were.

It was not before the end of the 1970s that the political idea of “Central Europe” emerged anew. Throughout the 1980s, dissent and emigration combined efforts to show the outside world that the Soviet expansion had achieved a process triggered by the fragmentation of the region after World War I: Central Europe was “erased from the map” but its Eastern provinces kept struggling for the acknowledgment of the region’s historical contours and cultural-political right to exist. Heroic dissenters (Václav Havel, György Konrád), engaged emigres, worthful writers and consistent historians (Czesław Miłosz, Danilo Kiš, Ferenc Fejtő) and some others (Milan Kundera) retraced a regional circle lost between the imperial past and a hopeful future.

It seemed to be a good idea. The timing was salient as well: let’s make Central Europe great again would have remained an empty catchphrase without the Cold War’s quickly evolving geopolitical context, i.e. the political and economic plunge of the Soviet Union and its eventual collapse. Neither before the 1980s nor ever since has the Central European area identified its means and interests with such accuracy as in that period. Aware of the region’s exposure to powerful neighbours both to the East and the West – and somewhat nonchalantly profiting from this set of de-

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pendency, i.e. the lack of sovereign responsibilities both in dissent and in emigration – the Mitteleuropean narratives of the Cold War’s dusk were in balance between the objective analysis of pastime glory and the normative reframing of regional perspectives. The region’s given in-betweenness seemed in command – and full of promise.

It was not necessarily a good idea. With the end of Soviet dependency and the clearing of the path to Western integration, the Mitteleuropean narratives of dissent and emigration were put to the test of national independence. Since the 1990s, these narratives were confronted with the task of sovereign political implementation. The international context was brand new and changing but the maps used by Central European governments seemed to be those of the World of Yesterday.

As Hobsbawm points out, it “is always dangerous when geographical terms are used in historical discourse. Great caution is needed, for cartography lends an air of spurious objectivity to terms that often, perhaps usually, belong to politics, to the realm of programmes rather than reality”.\(^{11}\)

Since the end of World War I, the maps of imagination have indeed unfolded in contrasting ways, with blurred boundaries between geography, politics and culture, without too much caution.\(^{12}\)

Hobsbawm then comes to the specificity of the Central European region and its problematic borders: “Nowhere is geography more indivisible from ideology and politics than in Central Europe, if only because, unlike the western peninsula of Eurasia known as the continent of Europe, the region has no accepted borders or definition”.\(^{13}\) With the end of the Cold War’s bipolar establishment, the Central European idea of in-betweenness has lost its bearings in terms of East and West. Old-new boundaries came to the limelight with the “spurious objectivity” of cultural borders, defining the region as in-between the disdained East – or Orient, starting with

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12 Fejtő, at the end of his *Requiem* and its thorough analysis of the end of the Habsburg Empire, comes up with the idea that the dualist Monarchy could – or should – have been reformed in depth to become a social-democratic federation. Wishful thinking upon the map might be tolerated at the end of such a long piece of objective criticism. However, the idea of a federation remains akin to nostalgia, for instance to the idea that “Central Europe begins where one is served an espresso on a silver plater with an ice-cold glass of sparkling water and where one can undisturbedly […] read through the international press”. Fejtő, *Requiem*, 377, 442.
the Orthodox neighbourhood⁴⁴ – and the misunderstood West that simply
does not want to look as it used to several decades ago.

It appeared that without the context of Soviet yoke giving them contem-
porary topicality, the Mitteleuropean narratives were overwhelmingly
tainted with nostalgia. Behind the mist of cultural demand for regional tra-
ditions, it is a craving for long-gone imperial structures that seems to
emerge. When the late Austrian empire’s multicultural population is
praised, nostalgia for domination over others is never far away – domina-
tion, or the comfortable lack of responsibilities under the yoke – or a bit of
both.

The V4 countries’ behaviour towards asylum-seekers carries symptoms
of this twisted nostalgia. The “migrants”, as imagined by political discourse
and propaganda, resemble ethnic, religious or national minorities in a con-
text where the majority is not fully sovereign. This majority can virtually
relive its former domination over neighbours or compensate for the way it
used to be under a neighbour’s yoke by nonchalantly mongering hatred
against the weak. The problem is that these majorities do have sovereign
governments and words somehow always turn into deeds.

In Central Europe, nostalgia for empire is not a demand for regional re-
sponsibilities (the only successor state of the late empire that could be nos-
talgic about such responsibilities is Austria – and it is not). It would rather
be the opposite: a craving for political provincialism where identities are
framed by a centre (“Brussels”) such as they used to be (“Moscow”, “Vien-
na”), hence are exempted from considering themselves as selves, i.e. actors
with the ability to reflect on their situation and take their destiny in hands.
What remains is sameness, i.e. national identities that evade the real tasks of
sovereign nation-states. When national identity, with the required political
cynicism, becomes the synonym of sovereignty, the very idea of becoming
what we are gets lost. What remains is the self-serving increase of control
over a population and a territory in the name of the newest identity outfit.

⁴⁴ “Orientalism” in Central, Eastern and South-East Europe is quite different from
the Western tool of control of far-away lands. In his preface to the French edition
of Edward W. Said’s Orientalism, Tzvetan Todorov notes that Said’s framework
could easily be adapted to other contexts than the West’s overseas imperialism.
However, in the two regions we examine, Orientalism seems to be reduced to the
disdain of direct neighbours, otherness being first of all of all regional itself. The two
regions’ common specificity might be the regional dimension of their past and
legacies. Tzvetan Todorov, “Preface” in Edward W. Said, Orientalisme: L’Orient
créé par l’Occident [Orientalism: The Orient created by the West], French trans.
To what extent is Central Europe a mere extrapolation of such arbitrary national identities and how often is “Visegrad” or V4 used as a synonym for Mitteleuropean sameness? In theory, the V4 is an alliance of national selves who realised at the right place and the right time that their future depended on regional cooperation. In practice, the alliance being quite loose, i.e. highly depending on actual intergovernmental constellations, “Visegrad” might corruptly refer to national groups proudly unwilling – and stubbornly unable – to adapt to our times, ignoring Europe’s most contemporary challenges or deliberately undermining common strategies.

A deadlock is a path or alley where it seems to be a good idea to engage. When it becomes clear that it was not, it is already too late to turn back. The V4’s current deadlock is a Central European one: a highly conservative idea of Europe that tends to scorn the region’s eastern neighbourhood and nurtures reciprocal misunderstanding with the West, claiming to be more “European” than the Western part of the continent. The fact that the V4’s current leaders do not realise that such a rejection of neighbouring societies, combined with an economic dependency on the theoretically disdained “East” is a political dead end, makes the situation even worse.

It might be high time to redefine the very sense of the V4, abandoned as it is to more or less rotating governments and their nostalgic obsession with identity as the given sameness of regional provinces. What is at stake in Central Europe is less the exact circumference of the region than the political status it craves. In this context of an intermediary deadlock, to remain the “same” means to accept the status of an imaginary province – an area of self-defeated lands that comfortably point at the actual “centre” to denounce their own failures.

\textit{The Western Balkans: Powder Keg or Paradigm}

All happy regions are alike. In the Western Balkans, each and every country and nation and religious and linguistic group is first of all proud of being different from the neighbouring others.

\[15\] Is it really necessary to recall Kundera’s definition of being European and the way it extrapolates the Mitteleuropean deadlock to the continental level? “European: the one who feels nostalgic about Europe”. Among other political issues at stake in this phrase, there is the idea that Europe has no future. Is the Old Continent supposed to feel at ease with such a deadlock between past and future, like Central Europe between East and West? Milan Kundera, \textit{L’Art du Roman} [The Art of the Novel] (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 154.
Alikeness, common denominators and shared legacies are perceived as threats, potential excuses to undermine the integrity of local communities – to invade or dismantle the neighbourhood. There are some sound historical reasons for such opinions, though no sound historical reason can fully justify the counterproductive fragmentation of the Balkan Peninsula, and first of all the disadvantaged patchwork of the Western Balkans. There are good reasons not to form a greater entity, but no reasons to scatter the region’s resources and capacities into isolated wastelands. Such a contradictory situation is called a predicament.

The major difference with the Mitteleuropean deadlock lies in timing. In its contemporary form, Central Europe took its run-up at the end of Communist times and entered into the somewhat chaotic 1990s with what at first glance looked like a fresh spirit. The Visegrad Group was established the same year the Ten-Day War launched a long decade of fratricide conflicts in the close, southern neighbourhood.

A region is not only defined in space but also in terms of time – chronology, sedimentation, timing and rhythm. “Western Balkans” is not only a label that, in high contrast with V4 or “Central Europe”, tends to be rejected as a pejorative, offhand geopolitical term basically meaning “the rest” of the Balkans; it is also the name of a wounded aftermath, of a heavily injured posterity – that of the horrors of internal war. The near past – perhaps even more than the close neighbourhood – prevents naming common goals and interests. Interestingly, the near past and the close neighbour seem to be distinct objects of thought. The set of proximities that outline regional belonging are as much a matter of chronology as effective neighbourhood connections and disparities.

As an aside, and to show the link with the abovementioned alike-ness-otherness issues and “unhappy families”: only relatives can hate each other in the horrifyingly intimate way that characterised the internal wars of former Yugoslavia. As Joan Borrell put it in a Western European context, it is not the other, but the “almost-other” who bothers and disturbs, the “mixture of the same (the native) and the other (the stranger)”.16 Whether we are dealing with postcolonial resemblances between colonised and coloniser in the West or regional families and their linguistic and cultural similarities in the present case,

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the fear of otherness is always about proximity – and not merely about physical vicinity. Proximity, like the near past, stresses otherness in the very contrast of similarities, distances in the light of closeness. In short, alikeness might be more “frightening” than difference. Perhaps, religious differences between Bosnians would not be as sharp without their common ethnic origin.

Timing certainly plays a significant role in this balance. However, time is not omnipotent. For how long can we pretend that it is “too late” in Bosnia and Herzegovina to overcome family issues? Sooner or later, it will actually be too late to regret wasted opportunities to build up a politically sustainable country. The same goes for fixing the problematic Serbian-Albanian relationship and North Macedonia’s current flight forward into Greek Antiquity.17 “Balkanisation” has a bitter aftertaste of insignificance: local conflicts are only contained due to their lack of importance in the eyes of the outside world. But geopolitical turning points do occur and what was insignificant yesterday might become tomorrow’s bomb wick.

The regional level is a set of proximities in time and space, a network of historical continuities and geographical sedimentation. In a region such as the Balkans, the time and space of national politics need to be reframed within wider areas and longer durations. To have an objective grasp of proximities, it is highly important to conceive the regional scale in its multiple spaces and temporalities, starting with the long-term realities of the whole peninsula, this “miniature continent” as Fernand Braudel characterised every headland around the Mediterranean.

At the end of the day, writes Braudel, a region is “as it is shaped by men”.18 In other words, the regional scale goes far beyond short-term politics and constructions or identity machinations. Yet, these do affect the way

17 In this collection, the North Macedonian and the Albanian part of the Western Balkans have been left aside (yet they do appear in the quantitative synthesis proposed in the theoretical subpart). The Albanian world spreads through several countries and has its own diversity in its own regional context. This complexity shows how arbitrary it is to gather significantly different countries, from the North and the South of the Peninsula and label them as one regional reality. However, this arbitrary aspect might be seized as an opportunity for further deconstruction of the WB label and objective analysis of effective regional ties behind it.

we model our regional landscapes. If a region is scattered into isolated lands, the refusal to cooperate marks the ensemble. The regional scale ought to be more than a patchwork of insulated nations, and it would be absurd to make up that a peninsula is the sum of disconnected islands. In the Balkans, the high potential of the peninsula is wasted if short-term national priorities smother the resources and the very logics of geography.

The idea of regional identities remains somewhat artificial without the dimensions, in space and time, of geography. If there is one thing the WB might wish to learn from the V4, it is that maps tainted with nostalgia and/or identity lead to political deadlocks. The Mitteleuropean tendency is to project history, politics and belonging on the map without taking the measure of geography – in short, to replace reality with maps instead of depicting it. This is certainly not exclusive to Central Europe. However, as a region without clear borders, it has been historically more prone to replace the slow time and the very logics of geography with sudden and often arbitrary political decisions, us-and-them type of “cultural” projections that undermine the praised region’s development and its connections to the neighbouring regions.

The WB are confronted with a similar risk but for the opposite reason: they are embedded in a region where the key for success is apparently to be recognised as something other than a “Balkan” country. In this case, national imagination does not only fragment the region into a patchwork: it comes to deny the region’s geographical integrity – and all sound political perspectives with it for the peoples who are supposed to share its resources. Braudel claims that we can “ask anything from geography”, as we do ask everything from history19 – except not being history and geography anymore, which is a tendency of nostalgic maps and reinvented identities in both the V4 and the WB.

Perhaps Yugoslavia – a sound yet late regional designation – could not exist without Bosnia. The question is whether there can be a sustainable country called Bosnia and Herzegovina without a larger ensemble around it and in which it plays a key role. This larger ensemble is not necessarily a federation or any political construction that would raise immediate and simultaneous suspicion from all concerned peoples. It is the Balkans themselves, far beyond short-term interests and intrigues, a miniature continent following Braudel’s exceptionally large conception of the Mediterranean civilisation and its European, African, American and Asian ramifications, Philip II of Spain has most probably more to do with North Macedonia than any other Philip he could inadvertently be confused with.

19 Ibid.
on its own, shared by its populations. The peninsula is the main character of the story, not one or another old-new national construction. And the story is about the Balkans integrating Europe or its nations disintegrating themselves or each other.

Europe – this one-bit larger peninsula – needs to keep an eye on the Balkans, especially the disadvantaged and ill-designated Western Balkans. All major European questions are formulated in this peninsula as in a paradigm, from the coexistence of monotheisms to ethnic and cultural diversity through memory, close and long-term history, integration and neighbourhood, not to mention ecology. Moreover, its latest ethnonational constructions offer an uncomfortably distorted mirror to Western Europe and its own constructions. The Balkan Peninsula, yesterday the “powder keg” of Europe, remains the best argument against the wishful theory of the end of history. It is up to its peoples to decide to restart history by lighting, again and again, the infamous wick, or to reboot present-day history by identifying common goals and a regional sense of belonging instead of redefining, again and again, microscopic realms of regressive sameness.

Even when the current pipedream is about a greater territory for a greater nation, the targeted region actually tends to shrink into insignificance due to daydreaming cartography. A region cannot be “reduced to one discourse, one equation, one formula, one image, one myth”; its identity “is a process, a struggle against ourselves”, a sedimentation of “residues, amalgams, additions, mixtures”.  

It is indeed a struggle not to yield to the temptation to divide and isolate lands, fracture fields of research and complex realities. Thinking through regional identities thus means to enlarge the very frame of the self, to keep it away, despite harsh resistance, from the delusions of exclusive origins and constricted localities.

No region is doomed to disintegration unless disintegration becomes the only common regional credo. Every region has more potential than that. The very idea of concentric circles is that facts and events are not constrained to one exclusive circle. For instance, Slovakia’s independence could not be restricted to the country’s national circle. It has a meaning on the regional and the continental level as well – unless the national circle retrogresses to national sameness with retrospectively introduced traditions and historical continuities. Nowadays, disintegration is not a regional specificity of certain parts of Europe, but rather a global tendency each na-

tion and region has to resist – the tendency being to turn in on one’s local circle against the outside world.

Without any pretence of coming full circle, this collection of essays proposes a political mapping of the V4 and the WB. Highlighting regional issues regarding otherness and resemblances is a first step towards an eventual sketch of sound perspectives for these two regions. Xenophobia and anti-migrant hatred in Central Europe, ethnonationalism in the Western Balkans despite, sometimes, an evident lack of ethnic differences, religious contrasts and origins, reinvented traditions and memory as well as more theoretical considerations on regionalism and identity give a first framing on the two neighbouring puzzles. The pieces of the jigsaw are kept somewhat scattered to underline the regional diversity to which this collection aims to contribute. The field is open, and pieces are put next to each other more by affinity than by tight correlation. Proximities are supposed to trigger ideas and enlarge the landscape instead of narrowing topics down to their immediate context. What is true within each region remains hopefully valid in their shared contrasts: resemblance is more disturbing than otherness.

All happy regions are alike from the point of view of unhappy regions. In reality, “happy regions” are teeming with contrasts and otherness. What makes them successful is that priorities come first – priorities, i.e. common goals that put differences at their service to shape regional selves, with the ability to reflect on their singularities rather than sticking to the pipedreams of immovable, stationary yet crumbling identities.

Let us hope that happy regions are not just chimeras projected by less alike ones.

**Selected bibliography**


Theoretical Approaches
Region and Identity. The Perspective from Central Europe and the Balkans

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Abstract:
The chapter focuses on the region-identity nexus in the social sciences and humanities. Identity is among the most important characteristics of regions, while regions often serve as generators of identity. The first part of the contribution presents a state-of-the-art analysis of the scholarly debate about regions as geographically, culturally, economically and socially determined organisational units, as well as the two ideal-typical approaches to identity studies in the social sciences and humanities: the essentialist and the constructivist. In the further analysis, the constructivist approach is preferred, as applied to the region-identity nexus. The analysis rests on a distinction between three regions created in the territory of Europe’s “historical East”: Central, Balkan, and Eastern Europe. In my perspective, these three sub-regions constitute East-Central Europe, a new region constructed as the “zone of big transformation” after 1989 and the fall of the Communist regimes. In the analysis I present Central Europe as a long-term semi-periphery catching up with the European West, while the Balkans and Eastern Europe represent the peripheral European regions bordering “non-Europe.” Specific characteristics related to identity are ascribed to all these regions as auto- and hetero-stereotypes. In the analysis I focus on both types of stereotypes and their interconnection with specific legacies. The metaphor of the “bridge” represents an important motive for the present analysis. As the alternative development strategies bringing the three regions closer together, I present the discussion about abandoning regional identity and merging with the West. In the final section, I turn to a discussion of the auto-stereotype, stressing the positive role of East-Central Europe for potential European revitalisation as an important part of contemporary identity construction in East-Central Europe.

Keywords: region, identity, Central Europe, Balkans, Eastern Europe, semi-periphery, periphery, Westernisation, bridge
Introduction

The term “region” is undoubtedly one of the most frequently used in contemporary social sciences as well as in political discourse. Regions represent important historical, political, economic, social or cultural units with a distinct influence on political processes. In political debates within Europe and/or the European Union, as well as worldwide, the region has become one of the most discussed units for the organisation and analysis of contemporary political, economic, security or cultural developments.¹ Let us stress that integration studies, international political economy or political geography have for many decades preferred the region over the state as an analytical frame;² the same tendency can also be observed in cultural and literary studies, as well as in postmodern approaches in many other social sciences.

Compared with more traditional organisational units such as empires and, above all, states, the region is still a relatively new term and analytical category. This may undoubtedly be at least partly called into question in view of the development and existence of many historical regions, predominantly but not exclusively in the European context. Also nowadays, the map of Europe is structured not only based on the states, but also as the puzzle of regions. In this sense, political geography in particular offers well-developed typologies of regions including macro-region/pan-regions, transnational regions and trans-border region;³ for both historical and contemporary reasons the category of the intra-state region should also be included. In the scholars’ opinion, Europe presents the real laboratory of regionalism at lower than macroregional level.⁴

The region-identity nexus is one of the most interesting and important topics in both the contemporary social sciences and in the public debate. The modernisation and democratisation of Western societies and of soci-

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³ Bořek Hnízdo, Mezinárodní perspektivy politických regionů [International Prospects of Political Regions], (Prague: ISE, 1995), 64.
eties with Western features over the last two centuries has led to the formation of the national state as the most important geographic, legal-administrative, political and cultural unit, yet regions were able to withstand the centralisation tendencies. In many cases the historical regions representing pre-state or proto-state forms of organisation in Europe were transformed after World War II and incorporated into new forms of political organisation, such as the regionally-based or regional state in Italy, Spain or the United Kingdom, or the new federations of Germany, Austria and Belgium. The regional structure also became an important tool for the implementation of the subsidiarity principle within the European Community and later the European Union. In Western Europe the processes of post-War, bottom-up regional revitalisation and of regionalism (with the top-down approach urged by the EC/EU) created pre-conditions for the shaping of a new regionalism in both the praxis and the scientific debate.

Along with the above-mentioned processes focusing on intra-state regions, other types of regions were also identified: 1) trans-border regions (comprising parts of territories from at least two states, often divided during the national state-formation process and demarcating new borders between or among the states); 2) transnational regions consisting of at least two states sharing important common characteristics (Benelux, Northern Europe etc.); and 3) European macro-regions resulting especially from Europe’s division during the Cold War between West and East (with Central Europe as another alternative). Many cases clearly show that the EC/EU and its regionalisation activities (through the setting-up of the Euro-regions) became a decisive stimulus for the moderation of tensions and for reconciliation (as with Tyrol, Frisia etc.). As regards transnational regions, their importance has been highlighted throughout the different waves of EC/EU enlargement. This was already indicated by the semantics and the metaphors used for individual waves, with parts of the European North (the UK, Ireland and Denmark) first joining the “core” of an enlarged West, later followed by the South (Spain, Portugal, Greece). For the purposes of the present analysis, the Eastern enlargement is of especial importance, opening as it does the discussion about the European East, the modalities of its relation with the West and its own internal arrangements.

All the regional types are characterised by a plethora of important internal bonds and similarities, one of the most important being identity. My analysis of the region-identity nexus will focus on two transnational regions located in the Eastern European macro-region: Central Europe and the Balkans. For the purposes of the analysis I will use the classification de-
veloped by Bianchini, dividing Eastern Europe delimited by the Cold War into three subregions or transnational regions: Central, Balkan and Eastern Europe. While Central and Balkan Europe will feature at the core of the analysis, I will use Eastern Europe as a “non-European” comparison for these regions. My most important theoretical frame is presented by the centre-periphery approach, which can be used at every level of analysis, from the micro- to the macro-level, not only in political science, but in other social sciences as well. Furthermore, original studies of Europe’s centre-periphery cleavage, focusing on both the macro-regional and national level, have been supplemented by many other studies that also incorporate the mezzo-category of the “semi-periphery” as well as the debate about the plurality of centres (political-administrative, economic, cultural).

Two main hypotheses frame my research. Firstly, I assume long-term disbalances in West-East relations in Europe, based on the combination of auto- and hetero-stereotypes. The European West traditionally approaches the East as an underdeveloped periphery and the incorporation of this region or of its component parts into the West is envisioned as part of the process of enlargement of the West (Westernisation). Regarding the European East, the situation is more complicated insofar as two very different auto-stereotypes can be observed. One is fully comparable with the West’s hetero-stereotype presented above. In contrast, the second rejects Westernisation and presents the East as a unique region with its own values and norms, superior to those of the West. Reconciling these two ideal-typical stereotypes seems impossible without changes on both sides. For the purpose of our analysis, the most important issue is the tension between these two stereotypes shaping Eastern Europe as a region as well as the domestic societies of individual nations.

The second hypothesis is rooted in the centre-periphery concept. I assume that the centre-periphery cleavage represents the most important impulse for the debate about regional identity on all the levels included in my analysis: (pan-)European (both the East–West and the North–South divide); East European (differences among the three internal subregions), and national (internal debates about the macro-regional identity in individual states). I also assume that the mezzo-category of “semi-periphery”

plays an important role on all the levels of analysis. Furthermore, I believe that the concept of “semi-periphery” can serve as a very useful tool for differentiating between the two analysed transnational regions of Central and Balkan Europe, based on both the auto- and hetero-stereotypes. Last but not least I reflect the centre-periphery cleavage in full agreement with Knight’s reflection on the disparity between the centre and periphery as a *conditio sine qua non* of regionalism. Nonetheless, for a more comprehensive impact I also present the opposite approach, presenting the “semi-periphery” as a bridge between the two poles.

In the first part of my contribution I present the scientific debate and operationalisation of the two basic terms for my analysis, region and identity, concluding with a discussion of their mutual relation. Based on the so-called macro-perspective method, I focus on the typology of regions presented in political geography. One of three basic categories, the transnational region, will later be presented in-depth, including the selected approaches towards the structure of transnational regions in Europe. I subsequently present the development and structure of European transnational regions combining approaches from political geography, development and cultural studies. I devote special attention to the development of East-Central Europe during the 19th century and after World War II, stressing the creation of small modernised (cultural) centres and the preservation of significant peripheries with pre-modern values influencing the identity debate. For the presentation of the two ideal types of identity in East-Central Europe, I use the concept of *Ruritania* introduced by E. Gellner, based on the fictional land in Anthony Hope’s novels.

In the last part of the contribution I apply all the presented concepts – transnational regions, region-identity nexus, modernity, centre-periphery concept – to the situation in East-Central Europe, comparing between the positions of Central and Balkan Europe. Let me stress that I make a distinction in my chapter between two terms: the Balkans as a historically rooted European transnational region with a specific regional identity, and the Western Balkans as a more or less technical term referring to one part of the region, on the basis of developments in the last decade of the 20th century. Such a technical division of the historical region of the Balkans into two or even three parts (with Greece) may be justified for technical rea-

sons (such as regionalisation related to the implementation of EU-related policies, security issues etc.), but it does not provide any positive impetus to regionalism as a bottom-up initiative leading to the development of a regional identity.

My main research question stresses the parallel existence of several identities, defined in my analysis as national and regional/transnational identity. The focus of my main question is on whether the two types of identity can co-exist as mutually enriching and strengthening complementary concepts, or whether they contradict each other in such a way that the strengthening of one logically means the weakening of the other. Such a debate is permanently present in both politics and the social sciences, as witnessed by the discourse of anti-EU actors that prefer national identity over European identity as the only “natural” one. In this sense, the majority of authors address European identity as the primary transnational identity within the EU, yet this does not open much space for research into other transnational identities. Indeed, if we consider that these authors are convinced of the possible co-existence of national and European identity, we can surely also assume that national and regional identities rooted in units below the Pan-European level can also co-exist.

A second research question addresses the relation of the two transnational regions under study towards other European transnational regions and/or macro-regions. Central Europe and the Balkans are nowadays often presented as regions evincing different characteristics in comparison with the European West/EU-core: such a difference is often used as a negative hetero-stereotype emphasising the alleged limitations of the “new” democracies of East-Central Europe, but also as a positive auto-stereotype focusing on the “healthy” and “natural” regional identity of East-Central Europe in comparison with a “decadent” postmodern Western Europe.\(^\text{12}\)

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11 Both are sub-regions of East-Central Europe, the contemporary terminology for one of the two constructed ideal-typical European macro-regions of “West” and “East”. Alongside these two sub-regions, the Baltic region (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and the East European Region (Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia) make up East-Central Europe; Russia may be understood as part of Eastern Europe or as a “non-European” actor – cf. Cabada, “Uvodem” [Introduction], 10–14; Hnízdo, *Mezinárodní perspektivy politických regionů*.

My constructivist position means that I do not question the existence of historical regions and identities, but I primarily suppose that identity, as collective consciousness, is constructed. Such an axiom includes also the conviction that “identity has an element of choice and as such a region [as well as any other territorial unit] does not ‘produce’ a clear-cut and well-defined identity.” In this sense, “identity is not some kind of zero-sum game: individuals can and do ‘have’ multiple identities that are complementary and subject to the discursive spaces that are being created. This not only holds for national and sub-national identities, but also for supranational regional identities.”

State of the Art Analysis and Operationalisation of Terms

The major approach in contemporary regional studies distinguishes between “old” and “new” regionalisms. Old regionalism refers to developments between the 17th and 19th centuries and the transformation towards a unified and centralising model of national state. New regionalism, by contrast, focuses on developments since the 1960s and is interconnected with the decentralisation processes in (Western) Europe.

Within the old regionalism, the functionalist and neo-functionalist approach dominated with the latter presenting to a certain extent a transition theory between old and new regionalisms. Reflecting on Rosamond’s classical work on *Theories of European Integration* (2000), Wunderlich stresses that while functionalism was primarily the theory of post-territorial governance, neo-functionalism represents the early theory of regionalism. Many authors of the first wave of new regionalism stress the role of economic actors and markets as the driving force of regionalism. Kratochvíl and Waisová reject such an approach, emphasising the multidimensional nature of new regionalism and including in it the growth of a regional civil
This means that the new regionalism overcomes the state-centrism originating from the Cold War and the bipolar division of the world. The new regionalism therefore primarily strives to address regionalism and/or regionalisation as a dynamic and holistic process, while observing political processes from a perspective other than the state-centric.\textsuperscript{18}

In this sense, regionalisation as a decentralisation approach, and regionalism based on the bottom-up principle, can easily be differentiated. This leads to one of the most important issues for the analysis of contemporary European regionalism: whether regionalisation provokes regionalism through a boomerang effect, or in other words whether political centres, through regionalisation processes, revitalise a more traditional regionalism.\textsuperscript{19} A positive answer to this question would mean that regionalism might also develop in the contemporary European context as a “defensive” activity directed towards a regionalisation based on technical approaches, as well as the revitalisation of a traditional, historical regionalism with a distinctively essentialist background. Both segments of regional revitalisation and identity can also be assumed in Eastern Europe.

According to Hueglin, European regionalism was initiated by the French Revolution, even though the particularism of local cultures was one of the main characteristics of European civilisation already in the earlier periods and was eliminated neither by absolutism, nor by the centripetal character of the modern national state.\textsuperscript{20} The reference to the French Revolution as the starting point logically leads to the question of whether regionalism in the European context represents the “only” parallel type of collective identity-creation alongside nationalism. Knight, for example, argues against such an interpretation by emphasising the importance of the relation of conflict between centre and periphery. For him, the tension and disparity between the centre and periphery constitute the \textit{conditio sine qua non} of regionalism. The region, with its peripheral position, needs the centre as its own antipole and could define itself in opposition to it. The centre, by contrast, can only function as a centre with the existence of peripheries dependent on it.\textsuperscript{21} The peripherality can naturally be enhanced by an ethnic composition different from that of the centre, and is also strongly bound with economic factors. I perceive all the factors laid out by Knight as being also identifiable in the transnational regions included in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{17} Kratochvíl and Waisová, “Teorie” [Theory], 59–61; Hettne, “Globalization,” 17.
\bibitem{18} Cabada, “Úvodem” [Introduction], 8.
\bibitem{19} Cabada, “Úvodem” [Introduction], 12–13.
\bibitem{20} Hueglin, “Regionalism in Western Europe,” 445–446.
\bibitem{21} David B. Knight, “Identity and Territory,” 514–531.
\end{thebibliography}
our analysis: 1) Central Europe and the Balkans are often stereotyped as less developed or even underdeveloped regions, i.e. the semi-periphery (Central Europe) or periphery (the Balkans); 2) a clear tendency to understand the Eastern part of the continent as ethnically different (Slavic tribes and nations being usually presented as symptomatic of settlement in this European periphery) can be observed not only in the German geopolitical and geocultural concepts of the 19th and first half of 20th century. I further develop this discussion below.

After this presentation of the basic conceptualisation of regions, the second main term of the analysis, identity, needs to be operationalised. Identity studies differentiate between two main basic typologies: 1) essentialists understand identity as given and unchangeable. Such unchangeable, “natural” identity has a fundamental importance for each individual. The thinking and behaviour of each individual reflect their identity; 2) constructivists conceptualise identity as something that is “constructed” on the basis of direct external effects. Essentialists understand identity as permanent, constructivists as malleable; essentialists stress the primacy of national identity, constructivists also emphasise other types or levels of identity creation. As Johansson notes: “an ethnic group can exact some form of non-territorial cultural autonomy, particularly if its habitat is geographically diffuse; this proved important to the internal debate in the Habsburg monarchy.” In the process of creating European national states, the “identity formation on the pre-existing elements,” states, but also regions, could be observed. Johansson provides the following summary: “in the political sphere, ethnic and regional identity are often bound together, with political consequences.”

Slocum and Van Langenhove differentiate two “cluster of meanings” about identity in social sciences. One refers to “what constitutes the individuality of something, that is what makes a single individual entity distinct from another one,” the second “is focused upon what kind of common characteristics a class of entities might have, that is to what extent there are similarities between members of a group.” We can think of identity “when talking about people, but also when referring to groups of people, to societies, objects, geographical regions and so on.”

23 Slocum and Van Langenhove, “Identity and Regional Integration,” 137.
Cerutti identifies two main moments of identity: the mirror-identity and the wall-identity. In the mirror-identity “people look on themselves in an internal mirror and find in the shared ideas, values and principles something that gives a meaning to their communal as well as to their individual life, which are to an extent interconnected.”24 The wall-identity “is marked by the ambivalence of having two faces: the wall is a boundary, but it is also load-bearing.”25 With its clear “geographical” aspect, wall-identity is more important for my analysis.

I understand the ethnocultural component of identity as the “constructed past.”26 With its reference to a common cultural identity and common cultural heritage, the idea of the homogeneous “We-Society” is constructed with a strongly accentuated demarcation towards other nations and collective identities.27 As Hauswedell emphasises, “in recent years, the binary model ‘Self’-and-‘Other’ has become a key operating concept in academic fields ranging from philosophy, psychology and anthropology to social sciences, literary studies and critical theory.”28 “Other-talk” is then the tool for self-definition: “Proximity and presence of the Other acts as a mirror held up to ownSelf.” Gifford evaluates the historical, traditional, “Darwinist” identification of ownSelf as the “essentialized and demonized version of the excluded Other.”29

Nevertheless, “there are a myriad of elements which contribute to identity and place may be one of these, reflected in a sense of belonging in a certain place or of a feeling of affinity with a place. For some there is a sense of attachment to land linked to ideas of home, locality and region [...] It is apparent that people form

26 Beata Thomka, “Dekonstrukierung der Geschichte und narrative Identität” [Dekonstruierung der Geschichte und narrative Identität], Primerjalna književnost, Special Issue (2007): 173.
bonds with place and this attachment may serve as an integral component of self-identity.”

On this issue Neumann rather cynically mentions the “readily observable reality, in which certain people inhabiting certain lands happen to share certain cultural traits.”

The traditional/historical “placism” was challenged and often suppressed in modern times with the emergence of the Westphalian state. In the process of constructing the modern state, the “ideological belief emerged that people born and living within the boundaries of a sovereign state have a ‘shared identity’.” Gifford labels the national state the “sponsor of officially promoted ‘top-down’ Identity”. During the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, the European states pointed to the “negative Others” and even “Demons” among themselves. Such demonisation is strongly interconnected with the romantic view of the terrifying alien. Only after World War II and the launch of the integration process was the space for de-demonisation opened. Naturally, such processes of de-demonisation did not appear in the Communist countries, where all the historical animosities were located in the “fridge” and the traditional demonisation of otherness was even enriched by the totalitarian, class-based ideology.

In contrast, with the post-World War II “processes of regional integration, other territorial identities – such as Europe – have gained importance [...] Concomitant to globalisation, regional integration has been seen as a process that challenges the concept of sovereign nation-state and, along with it, these corresponding ‘national identities’.” Nevertheless, post-modernity also brought the de-territorialisation of new political actors and identities. In view of the processes of globalisation, Europeanisation and the creation of international and European institutional frameworks and (quasi-)polities, “the coincidence of governance and territoriality is being questioned. While some of the new actors can simply be identified with a

31 Iver B. Neumann, Uses of the Other. “The East” in European Identity Formation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 144.
35 Slocum and Van Langenhove, “Identity and Regional Integration,” 139–140.
different geographical scale, others defy geographical borders or are completely non-territorial.”\textsuperscript{36} \textsuperscript{37}

(Post)modernity presents a challenge for identity, as the individual is placed in a situation of changing and/or different identities. National identity itself is challenged by other types of identities. Some authors stress the importance of integration processes (Europeanisation, globalisation) and describe not only the positive, but also the negative influence of such processes on the national states and/or the undermining of the national state.\textsuperscript{38} Other scholars emphasise the regionalisation processes and local contexts.\textsuperscript{39} A combination of both these phenomena, described as glocalisation, can often be observed.\textsuperscript{40}

Regarding the new regionalism and the weakening or alternating of the territorial component of identity, Galtung differentiates between three types of integration: geographic, functionalist and associative. The first is based on the interconnection of two or more actors located in geographical proximity. As regards the two other types, the actors share some relation already before the advent of integration.\textsuperscript{41} For our purposes, associative integration plays the cardinal role, insofar as in this case “the states unite based on their affinity in the sphere of values.”\textsuperscript{42}

Another influential author, Joseph Nye, distinguishes between three types of integration: economic, social and political. He further singles out subjective integration, rooted in the existence of joint identity and mutual responsibilities, as one of four subtypes of political integration.\textsuperscript{43} Kratochvíl and Waisová provide the following summary: that both the spatial

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 141.
\item \textsuperscript{37} This might be the case of global terrorist or environmental networks, but also of structures created on an identity basis. The broadly discussed and politically promoted Anglosphere, Francophonie or Lusophony are among the most visible.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Keating, \textit{The New Regionalism in Western Europe}.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Habibul Haque Khondker, “Globalisation to Glocalisation: A Conceptual Exploration,” \textit{Intellectual Discourse} 13, no. 2 (2005); Roland Robertson, “Globalisation or glocalisation?” \textit{The Journal of International Communication} 18, no. 2 (2012).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Kratochvíl and Waisová, “Teorie” [Theory], 41.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Joseph Nye, “Comparative Regional Integration: Concept and Measurement,” \textit{International Organization} 22, no. 4 (1968).
\end{itemize}
and the value closeness represent an important impetus for regional integration. Whereas in some integration processes only one of these incentives dominates, in other instances both motivations can be seen to intersect.\footnote{Kratochvíl and Waisová, “Teorie” [Theory], 43.} Similarly, Slocum and Langenhove stress that “regional integration and identity construction can be mutually influential. Changes in governance can lead to changes in how we think (and talk) about ourselves.”\footnote{Slocum and Van Langenhove, “Identity and Regional Integration,” 148.} We can see that, for the (neo)institutionalists and constructivists, the territory/region-identity nexus represents an integrative part of contemporary regional integration processes.

\textit{Development and Structure of European Transnational Regions}

There is a long tradition in Europe of clustering nations into transnational regions. Historically, the reverse phenomenon, whereby the contours of transnational regions were formed already before the creation of the state’s structure, could often be observed. Political geography labels Europe as the grouping of several transnational regions that are so striking that their existence can be confirmed at a glance, especially when focusing on the “peripheral” islands and peninsulas such as the Apennine, Balkan, Pyrenean and Scandinavian peninsulas and the British Isles.\footnote{Hnízdo, \textit{Mezinárodní perspektivy politických regionů}, 81.} Naturally, the geographical approach must be supplemented with an analysis of historical, cultural and political factors. In this sense, the majority of geo-culturally rooted analyses of the development of European subregions focus on the distinction between the historical regions of “South” and “North” as well as on the “West” and “East” regions that emerged during the Enlightenment and after the Napoleonic Wars.

Kroll identifies three European regions based on the dissemination of Christianity as well as on development patterns: Eastern Europe as a Byzantine-Orthodox cultural space; Central Europe, which was Christianised from Rome during the 10\textsuperscript{th} century; and Western Europe, Christianised substantially earlier than the rest of the European continent. In comparison with the other two regions, Western Europe showed the most dynamic internal development, while in contrast Eastern Europe was completely ruled over by non-European external powers (Mongols, Ottomans)
in the 13th and 14th centuries, a fact which caused the exclusion of this region from active participation on all-European issues.\(^{47}\)

Central and Eastern Europe are often discussed and analysed together, both because of the external observer’s perspective (the West emphasising its own difference compared with the “East”) and because of the internal perspective from Central Europe, stressing the different development and nature of this region \(\textit{vis-à-vis}\) Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Over more than a millennium, its geographical position at the margins of Charlemagne’s Empire, and the influence of Rome and Byzantium as the two centres of medieval Christianity, gave Central Europe its very unique shape.\(^{48}\) After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the region served as Christian Europe’s border fortress against the Ottoman Empire, and became a buffer zone between the two civilisations (one could also add the rising Russian Empire as a third civilisation). By contrast, Eastern Europe as well as the Balkans became part of an extra-European space, components of Russian Tsarism and of the Ottoman Empire.

The legacies of Europe’s two important geopolitical and geocultural axes may still be observed in the structure of the European transnational regions. If we understand transnational regions as the result of the combined influence of cultural, historical, political and socio-economic factors, we can define five important European regions:

1) Mediterranean (Southern Europe), created by the states of the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Malta, Cyprus, and probably some nations located on the Balkan peninsula: Greece, (Dalmatian) Croatia and parts of Slovenia;
2) Northern Europe, formed by the Scandinavian nations (Norway, Sweden, Finland), Denmark, Iceland and the coastal parts of Germany and Poland (the Nordic membership of the Baltic states will be discussed later);
3) Western Europe, comprised of two separated parts: the “Isles” and the continental part (France, Benelux); authors focusing on the Roman and Catholic identity also include in this region the Iberian Peninsula and Italy;


4) Eastern Europe, often identified with Russia and its influence (the concept of “Third Rome”). Alongside Russia, this zone also includes (Eastern) Ukraine, Belarus and Northern Kazakhstan, as well as countries with important Russian-speaking minorities (the Baltics, the Caucasus, Moldova). Large areas of the Balkans could also be included in this region through Christian Orthodoxy;

5) Central Europe: political geography usually also divides this region into two parts after World War II. The Western part is formed by Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and in some cases Northern Italy as well (these countries could all also be assigned to Western Europe); the Eastern part consists in nations that belong neither to Eastern Europe nor to the Balkans: this region typically includes the V4 countries, Slovenia, Lithuania, Croatia and Western Ukraine.49

All mentioned definitions take historical events and legacies as their basis, and the modularity of each nation or even part of the nation between or among regions can often be observed. Furthermore, self-defined allegiances often clash with identifications ascribed from outside. As far as European transnational regions are concerned, alternative approaches can naturally also be observed, usually offering several other regions next to the five mentioned above: German speaking countries (i.e. the Western subregion of Central Europe, or the Eastern subregion of Western Europe); the Baltics (but Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are territorially as well as in demographic terms very small) and of course the Balkans/South-East Europe as the region singled out from the South and/or East European transnational regions. As a politically defined region, the Western Balkans surely also represent such an alternative option. Nevertheless, it is exactly this region which we must understand primarily as ascriptive, without any clear common identity.50

Indeed, Kostovicova and Basic rely on legacies to distinguish between East-Central Europe (ECE) and the Balkans. While ECE nations experience “only the legacy of communism, the Balkans faces a second important legacy, namely the ethnic conflict.” Based on these determinants, “the Balkans was defined as the region comprising the countries and territories created in the wake of former Yugoslavia’s disintegration, but excluding

49 Hnízdo, Mezinárodní perspektivy politických regionů.
50 Helena Bauerová, Hana Hlaváčková and Ladislav Cabada, Politika rozšiřování a země západního Balkánu [Enlargement Policy and the Western Balkans Nations], (Prague: Metropolitan University Prague Press, 2014).
Slovenia and including Albania, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria.” Here we can see how the authors combine two approaches: the technical (Western Balkans) and the historical, giving to the term “Balkans” new connotations.

While political geography most often defines transnational regions as a complex of three and more states, social-constructivist as well as geocultural approaches see the region as a functional unit that might comprise both states, and sublevels of a state. In other words, in new regionalism the transnational region is non-state based. As Ole Wæver notes regarding the Baltics, the “Baltic region takes the appropriate form for a European region – it is non-state-based. It has to be. If it were to contain enormous units like ‘Russia’ or ‘Germany’, it would be not attractive to the small Nordic countries. But with St Petersburg, Estonia, Schleswig-Holstein, it is perfect.”

I assume that such a definition is also valid for Central Europe and the Balkans. Within Central Europe, it is the role of Germany that most needs to be discussed, alongside the role and self-perception of Poland. I see Central Europe as containing also the southern parts of Germany (with Bavaria in the first place), while Germany’s northern parts traditionally tend towards a Nordic regional identity (Nordicity). The debate about Poland’s internal differences similarly needs to be addressed, especially as regards the Baltic/Nordic characteristics of the coastal parts. Regarding the Balkans, the Central European affiliation of north-western Romania/Transylvania is often discussed, as well as the situation of Slovenia (currently rarely labelled as a Balkan country) and above all of Croatia (suffering from the Western Balkan identity ascribed to it before 2013 and which it strongly rejected). Greece’s relation to its regional identity (Balkan vs South vs West) certainly needs to be addressed as well.

The development of the regional identity of Central, Balkan and Eastern Europe can generally be evaluated as fluid and fuzzy, with important and often contradictory auto- and hetero-stereotypes. In some historical periods all these regions were understood as part of one unit, Eastern Europe. This was the case before and during the Christianisation initiated by Charlemagne, as well as after the Vienna Congress and within the system of the

anti-revolutionary and anti-liberal Holy Alliance. Indeed, the most visible period of understanding the European “East” as one region is the Cold War. This is valid for both the auto- and the hetero-stereotypes. The USSR and its leadership understood Eastern Europe as a cluster of like-units. Similarly, a one-dimensional and even ignorant equating of the nations located to the East of the Iron Curtain with Russia and/or labelling them as “Slavs” can often be observed in the West. It is exactly such sweeping statements which provided the impulse for Central European thinkers to stress the difference and distance between Central Europe and the “East” and to underline the traditional “European” orientation of Central Europe.

Central and Eastern Europe Over the Last Two Centuries: Between Tradition and Modernity

Changing borders are one of the most important characteristics of Central Europe as well as of other regions in Eastern Europe. From the 8th century till the beginning of modernity this was true predominantly of Central Europe’s eastern borders, understood also as the boundaries of Germanness. Modernity and the idea of nation represented new and key challenges not only for the region but also for its fuzzy and fluid borders. All the changes of the last two centuries – societal, political, cultural and economic changes, in many cases profound and fundamental – also symbolise the strong impulses for the (re)formation of regional identity. In fact, in this region not only the national programmes but also the regional configuration projects proposed by the national movements were influenced by the romantic takes on the nation that they grew up with in the 19th century and beyond. National and “regional” programmes could often also be observed to coincide, with the German geopolitical school playing a prominent role with its concepts of Mitteleuropa and Drang nach Osten. Indeed,

other national movements also developed an influential intellectual background for the conceptualisation of Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe: different types of pan-Slavic programmes were developed in response to the pan-German perspective, and Hungarian, Italian and Romanian intellectuals and politicians also presented a plethora of projects for the architecture of the region.\textsuperscript{56}

In the period of the Spring of Nations, for instance, Adam J. Czartoryski had broad visions for the creation of two federations in East-Central Europe: a restored Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth including Czech lands (“Central Europe”) and a “Romanian–Hungarian–Yugoslav union” (“the Balkans”). Giuseppe Mazzini’s thoughts followed similar lines.\textsuperscript{57} In Hungary, Lajos Kossuth and Oszkár Jászi dreamed of a “United States of Danube Nations”;\textsuperscript{58} Illryism gave way to the idea of Yugoslavism; and the Czech philosopher Tomáš G. Masaryk developed two important ideas of regional configuration in Central Europe: Czechoslovakism and the project of a Mid-European Union integrating the “Europe in-between,” i.e. the territories between Germany and Russia.\textsuperscript{59}

Nevertheless, the regionalist approach was often used only as camouflage for the approach Bianchini describes as “hegemonic federalism.” The author’s analysis rests on the Polish case (Czartoryski’s above-mentioned project as well as the interwar idea of Intermarium with Poland as the regional power),\textsuperscript{60} but similar approaches can also be observed in many other instances: Yugoslavism vs Greater Serbia or Greater Croatia; Czechoslovakism; Greater Hungary; Greater Romania, the Greek program of Énosis/unity etc.

Any discussion of (regional) identity in Central, Balkan and (to some extent) Eastern Europe naturally needs to stress the development and role of the Habsburg Empire. After 1804, interesting attempts to recreate East-Central Europe into one state with a trans-ethnical Austrian identity could


\textsuperscript{59} Cabada and Walsch, \textit{Od Dunajské federace} [From the Danubian Federation], 47–55.

\textsuperscript{60} Bianchini, \textit{Liquid Nationalism}, 30.
be observed. Nevertheless, this attempt failed and Johansson compares the Habsburg Empire with the USSR or Yugoslavia as examples of a “failed attempt at state-nation formation.”

Ethno-national movements from within as well as from without the state undermined such an Austrian identity. The borders of the new or recreated states of East-Central Europe after World War I cannot be seen as “fair” from either a historical or an ethno-national perspective. After the collapse of former empires, regionalisation came as the only solution to this situation. The attempt to establish a Mid-European Union “from Finland till Greece” under the leadership of T. Masaryk soon failed and the whole region was overrun by nationalism. The Little Entente (security cooperation among Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania) represented a small-scale prolongation of the Mid-European Union idea and included a project to transform the cooperation into a confederation in 1940. A second “integrative” project that emerged from the region was the Polish Intermarium project, which aimed to give Poland a hegemonic role in the region. World War II saw the last attempt to regionalise Central Europe before the Cold War, with negotiations between Czechoslovakia and Poland on the subject of a confederation, but this project was clearly rejected by Stalin. Similarly, the Soviet dictator strongly opposed Dimitrov and Tito’s joint activities regarding a Balkan Federation, as well as the Yugoslav Army’s unilateral military activities in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula (Albania and above all the engagement in the Greek civil war).

The wars, the “Balkanization” of Central Europe, Kleinstaaterei and the “Misery of Small Nations,” and finally the reality of totalitarian Communist regimes in East Europe led many thinkers to reminisce about the “good old days of peace.” While there was only a limited idealisation of the Habsburg Empire in the interwar period, a wave of nostalgia can be observed in Central Europe after 1955. The Czech historian Miloš Havelka

sees this intellectual movement as determined by Zeitgeist, with the Habsburg past being used as a compensatory theme against the Communist canon.68

Such a one-dimensional approach does not reflect the important challenges Austria-Hungary faced which were, from a sociological and cultural perspective, predominantly connected with the question of modernity. As already mentioned, Central and Eastern Europe can be understood as the semi-periphery and/or periphery of the Western “core.” In this sense, according to Wandycz, Central Europe, though belonging to the West in religious and cultural terms, was identified with the East as far as economic, technological and generally civilisational development was concerned. Indeed, the border between the West and the East was not very clear in Central Europe, and the author singles out the blurriness of this border within Germania and later Germany as the most important reason for this, while also emphasising Central and Eastern Europe’s relatively low population density. He saw these factors as turning this region into a European semi-periphery with visible internal differences, Bohemia being close to the centre while the eastern Polish or Hungarian provinces represented the periphery.69 It should also be emphasised that this “internal” periphery was, geographically, located directly on the border with Eastern Europe/Russia and the Balkans/Ottoman Empire.

The issue of development and modernity in the formation and identity of different European regions is one also raised by other scholars and observers. Hugo von Hofmannsthal labelled the Central European population and the citizens of the Habsburg monarchy “semi-European and semi-Asian nations.”70 At the end of the 19th century, the British writer Anthony Hope expressed a similar idea with the imaginary land of Ruritania: a German-speaking, Catholic land in Central Europe, an absolute monarchy riven by deep social conflicts where the most important tension was between the (almost) western urban elites and the rural ethnics settled as the (semi-) peripheries. Hope’s book presented a mocking picture of the “exotic Central Europe that bordered the Balkans and was populated by wolves, Count Dracula, Gypsies, illiterate peasants, orthodox Jews, and notorious Polish

70 Kożuchowski, The Afterlife, 86.
and Hungarian nobles.”
Similarly, the Czech and British anthropologist Ernest (Arnošt) Gellner places the Habsburg monarchy at the epicentre of the decisive modernisation conflict between the cosmopolitan liberals (“the Viennese”) and the representatives of “post-feudal obscurantism and authoritarianism.” This phenomenon of a “clash of cultures” creating the background for a regional identity can also be observed in South-East Europe. The Balkans is then “the ‘buffer zone’ between the East and the West, in which demographic, cultural and religious differences have accumulated to the extent that they represent a focal point of a possible explosion rather than a zone of dilution of oppositions.”

Such an approach goes against the clear region-identity nexus: urban modernists might be found outside Vienna as well (in Prague, Budapest, Krakow, Zagreb etc., but also as representatives of a small modernisation-oriented “oligarchy” settled outside of urban areas) while rural traditionalists might also be represented outside the countryside (the conservatism of Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I being a case in point). A different approach often dominated within the Habsburg Empire – some nations were categorised as modern and others as traditional. As mentioned earlier, taking a macro perspective on Europe, a grand European narrative was formed already at the end of the 8th and beginning of the 9th century regarding the “reconciliation of the old Latin-German world with the new European World of Slavs.”

Such a distinction between Latin-German and Slavic is the result of long-term prejudice. Such prejudice was also used within the Habsburg Empire by the pan-Germans (whose role was to be to modernise the other ethnic groups or Ostleute, perhaps with the exception of Hungarians), but also by other liberal-national movements. In this sense, German-speaking as well as Czech, Slovenian or Hungarian liberal-national intellectuals perceived themselves as fighters against anti-modern actors. Debates after 1989 also featured reminiscences of these internal divisions of Central Europe with, on the one hand, Austria’s “separation” and auto-stereotype towards “East-Central Europe,” and on the other the internal divisions within the post-Communist area rooted in positive auto-

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71 Kożuchowski, The Afterlife, 177.
and negative hetero-stereotypes. One of the most visible is the self-evaluation of the Visegrad Group (V4) as the nations best fulfilling the preconditions for EU membership in comparison to the other post-Communist states. Similarly, the “Central European identity” is usually understood as more positive than the “East-European” or “Balkan” identity.

As Martin Brusis noted shortly before the EU’s Eastern enlargement in 2004, these auto- and hetero-stereotypes still survive in Europe and were reformulated as the modernisation narrative was transformed into a Europeanisation narrative. He, again, observes two important and completely opposed positions, namely that of the liberal modernists supporting the Europeanisation as the last phase of Westernisation on the one hand, and the traditionalists emphasising the necessity to protect autochthonous national cultures on the other. Such an assessment again presents East-Central Europe as a region of transition between the West and the East. Nevertheless, the contemporary institutional framework clearly divided the East-Central European region into three sub-regions: EU-members, candidate states, and Eastern Europe. Thus, the identity-region nexus received a new impulse in the Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe that can – but does not necessarily have to – be equated with these groups of nations newly conceptualised from without: by the European West or in other words by “old” Europe or the “EU-15.” These groups formulate their own perception regarding the West (EU members as part of the West or the “New” Europe) but also among themselves.

Central Europe and the Balkans – Regional Identity in the 21st Century

As previously mentioned, Central Europe has often been labelled a transitional region between the West and the East, with the limited presence of certain “Western” characteristics (welfare, technological development, Enlightenment, modernity, high population density etc.) presented as proof of this in-between status. Compared with Central Europe, these characteristics should be either completely missing or present to an even more limited extent in Eastern and Balkan Europe. In this sense, regional identity

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76 Cabada and Walsch, Od Dunajské federace, 41–47.
was and still is often connected with the partial or full absence of some “Western” characteristics, a limited presence being understood as a challenge and a full absence as the cause of a different identity.

Nevertheless, the more assertive auto-stereotypical approach to regional identity in Central and Balkan Europe emphasises the identity difference, usually *vis-à-vis* the “more eastern” region/s. In this sense, one of the most often used metaphors is that of the “bridge”. This was traditionally a motif in Czech political thought (F. Palacký, E. Beneš), but Tito’s Yugoslavia after the mid-1950s and later Austria in the 1980s, within the framework of the Helsinki Process, also performed the role of a “bridge” between the West and the East. The recurrent image of the Visegrad Group after 2004 as a “role model” may also be understood as bridging the gap between the West/EU and the Western Balkans, as well as some East European states. Indeed, the bridge role may also be accentuated by other actors: in this sense, Mustafa Kemal-Atatürk also understood Turkey as a bridge between the West and the East, “giving up Turkey’s previous role as the leader of the world Islamic community.”

Aleksić notes the role of the bridge as the “distinctive crossing point […] The bridge is a liminal edifice, fixed in a position of nonbelonging and in-betweeness in geographical or spatial terms.” In this sense, Central Europe acts as a bridge between the West and the East, between Germany and Russia: as a Europe in-between; the Balkans, located between Europe, Turkey and Russia, are in a similar position. The relation between Central Europe and the Balkans presents specific characteristics. Central Europe may be the bridge between the West and the Balkans, but another possibility exists, whereby the Balkans (or at least part of the Balkans) are understood as an integral part of Central (or East-Central) Europe and together they form a bridge between the West and the East, be it Russia, Turkey or other “Eastern” actors. Applying the auto- and hetero-stereotype approach to the issue, Central Europe usually tends to understand the Balkans as a different, and usually less developed region. In this sense, Central Europe projects itself as a bridge that connects the Balkans with the “core”. By contrast, the nations labelled as “Balkan” often tend to present themselves as Central European so as to escape the negative image of this

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region. With this in mind, the artificial term “Western Balkans” has further complicated the identity issue, giving Romania and Bulgaria after 2007 a different or better image than that of the Western Balkan nations. In other words, membership of the EU has here been clearly understood as an escape from the Balkans. Nevertheless, such an escape ultimately cannot be related to the switch towards the Central European identity, in the same way that inclusion into the Western Balkans cannot ultimately be seen as the exclusion from Central Europe (Croatia).

Geographical proximity, combined with Christian and European values, may be seen as common features of the positive self-image of Central Europe and the Balkans. Polish, Hungarian and Croatian politics and historiography often emphasise the important roles played by these nations in protecting Europe from non-European invaders, be they Ottoman, Russian or Soviet. Similarly, one often sees the Balkans described as “the last bastion of Europe, standing as a bulwark in a defence of true European (Christian) values.”

If we observe the contemporary political discourse in both Central Europe and the Balkans, this historical role is often stressed and combined with criticism towards the “ultraliberal” Western Europe/EU and presented as “overall disillusionment with European values.” This brings us back to the Ruritania concept and to the conflict between two different cultures and societal groups in this region. In my opinion, there is in East-Central Europe a tendency to accept only the “technical” part of modernisation (industrialisation, welfare), and not the “ideological” part (liberal democracy). The proponents of such “limited modernisation” often stress the higher quality of East-Central Europe in comparison with the West.

This brings us to the “limited modernisation” of Russia or Turkey, direct neighbours of the analysed regions with an influence on the development of East-Central Europe until this present day. After 1837, Turkey underwent partial modernisation, following the example of the West. “Westernization implied nothing more than controlled translation of Western cultural elements into the Eastern tradition. Islamic culture continued to provide the moral compass, and was preserved in order to dictate the boundaries of the emerging East-West relationship.”

The agenda of national-conservative actors in Central Europe and the Balkans includes an expectation that only part of the West European modernisation rulebook can be implemented. This expectation also brings them closer to the previ-

82 Ibid., 70.
83 Ergin, “Otherness within Turkey,” 246.
ously mentioned non-European actors or, in their own view, leads to another division of Europe into two or more parts. In their perspective, East-Central Europe is once again the protector of Europe, but this time against West European states that have abandoned the “European values”: for them, the East-Central European identity is about being better than the rest of Europe. If we compare Central Europe and the Balkans, the main difference regards the issue of EU membership: while Central European political actors present their “regional difference” within the EU and call for a balanced influence of “old” and “new” Europe within the Union, the national-conservative and anti-modernist politicians of the Balkans reject the idea of EU membership, stressing the quest for protecting the “moral quality” of their nations from a “decadent” Europe.

We should not forget that the founding fathers of post-Cold War Central European regional integration also gave importance to the “specific quality” of their visions as well as nations. After 1989, “the Central European project continued to operate as a political project in the way it always had: as a moral appeal and reproach addressed to Western Europe.” Soon, the arguments of the “discourse on Central Europe have become part of the armory of official foreign policy.”

Central European identity offered “a way out of Soviet-type homogenization in emphasizing the European qualities of the local cultures [...] but by offering individuals a second, higher tier of identity, it can help them to escape the threat of reductionism encapsulated in political nationalism.” As Schöpflin optimistically concluded, “the Central Europe project is potentially a viable way of re-Europeanizing the area, of recovering some of the values, ideals, aspirations, solutions and practices that were eliminated by Soviet-type systems”.

In this sense, it is important to note the preparedness of important political actors for cooperation on the issue of identity convergence. Usually, such a convergence was presented as a form of socialisation into the EU and the West, in other words as Europeanisation. Nevertheless, if we focus on the regional identity level, the question of identity convergence vs identity divergence became even more important and challenging. Central European countries’ EU membership might be understood as the confir-

84 Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, 156–158.
86 Ibid.
mation of a basic identity convergence between this group of states and the West. Furthermore, V4 states also understood this process as showing convergence in their regional identity. After 1989, important Central European actors – not only the top-level politicians, but also civil society, media and influential epistemic communities – referred to a Central European regional identity. There were periods of more intensive cooperation, as well as opposite situations, i.e. less intensive cooperation, but the V4 achieved a stable form as a body where the partners put forward their common characteristics and interests, while only very carefully addressing the problematic issues.

The same necessary conditions apply for the creation of a regional identity as for the creation of national identities: a first, main condition is the existence of a collective consciousness, fixed through a shared emotional experience of history, culture and art, but also through common suffering and sin. This first condition is closely related to a second one, namely collective oblivion, meaning a cleansing of negative memories and historical experiences that could bring about conflict or even the disintegration of a region, while positive memories and experiences are emphasised. In this sense, we can talk about readiness to forgive.\(^{88}\) It certainly cannot be said that all the problematic issues of the past have been discussed and “forgiven” in Central Europe, yet Central European countries have shown over the last 30 years a preparedness to emphasise common characteristics and interests.

In this sense, it has been said that Central European cooperation

“is a project radically different from national projects in the region, since it unites where national projects divide. This, however, is not necessarily so. Since nation-building and region-building projects are both instances of identity politics, they will necessarily have a unifying as well as a divisive aspect. […] Since region building can be seen as a kind of identity politics, in which participants try to forge an identity, it unavoidably involves accentuating similarities between self and other. Identification is as much about what one is not as about what one is […] The differentiation from the other outside […] those lines is, however, potentially of the exact same kind as that involved in any nationalist project.”\(^{89}\)


\(^{89}\) Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, 144–148.
Here, Neumann perfectly depicts the initial distance of the Central European countries towards the rest of post-Communist area, i.e. Eastern and Balkan Europe. The Visegrad states thus used the same labelling strategy they had criticised the West for using against themselves.

Subotic presents two examples, Croatia and Serbia, for the above-mentioned ideal types of identity convergence vs divergence. For him, Croatia is an example of identity convergence with the EU, presenting itself as a Central European nation, while Serbia is the “paradigmatic Balkan state.” “Croatian state identity [...] rests on a specific Balkan/European dichotomy. The further away Croatia is from the Balkan dungeon, the closer it is to Europe. The specific collective meaning of ‘Europe’ was then juxtaposed to the meaning of ‘the Balkans’. Europe was everything the Balkans were not: liberal, democratic, capitalist, progressive, and Catholic. It is Europe that Croatia wanted to join.”

90 Croatia’s membership of the EU is then a logical result without any alternatives or doubts; it is the institutional confirmation of identity belonging to (Central) Europe.

Serbia, in the author’s perspective, is the opposite case, with an identity gap between society and (part of) the political elite. “In Serbia, Europe was understood to be a punisher, a bully, an arrogant force [...] Europe came to be constructed in Serbia as an other, not quite a foe (that would be the United States and NATO), but never a friend (that would be Russia).”

91 Europeanisation, then, is not a tool of socialisation based on identity convergence with the EU/West, but a form of pragmatic accommodation without fundamental change in the deeper structures of society: it is “fake Europeanisation.” Aversion to socialisation, Westernisation or Europeanisation (taking also into account the degree reached by this process) can of course also be understood as another factor constructing the (different) identities in particular European regions including Central Europe and the Balkans. Starting with the results of the first competitive elections after 1989, political science took note of the fact that a distinct borderline separated those where the anti-Communist movements were successful (Central Europe) and those where citizens opted for post-Communist successor parties.92 Despite frequent mergers, split-offs and changes in party names, in many of these countries the same politicians are in power even today, sharing specific post-Communist characteristics and often gaining support with populist anti-EU rhetoric.

90 Subotic, “Europe is a State of Mind,” 316.
91 Ibid., 326.
Important segments of Balkan societies and political elites do not share or accept the main values of the EU or of the West, yet other segments do. There, the creation of a shared regional identity is only a myth. The question then is whether the identity of the region would be weakened if important Central European political actors and currents were not to follow the position of anti-EU movements in the Balkans. This attempt to re-formulate Central European identity perhaps provided the impetus for initiatives to define a new regional institutional framework, such as the Slavkov Triangle, for a “better,” anti-populist Central Europe.\(^93\)

When discussing the differences between Central Europe and the Balkans, we should also not forget the important differences in state-building. Central Europe is characterised by stable polities with clear institutional frameworks, relatively capable welfare states and policy-implementation capacities. In the Balkans, weak states, including absent domestic institutional structures, are the rule rather than exception. As Kostovicova and Basic argue, state-building and by extension region-building can only be very limited without such structures, “be they state, local or non-state.”\(^94\) Furthermore, 1989 and the start of major transformations in East-Central Europe were followed by the collapse of transnational identity in the Balkans, and some nations and ethnic groups’ development of post-Yugoslav identities “in profound isolation from Europe,” Serbia being the first such example.\(^95\) Such a deconstruction of regional identity has never happened in Central Europe where, on the contrary, it was changed into the official (foreign) policy. While Central European states tried to cooperate and coordinate their road to the EU, “the state in the Balkans has been a contradictory actor on forging transnational relations. It has played a crucial role in promoting transnational links with the EU, while at the same time diminishing the potency of emerging transnational links with the Balkans.”\(^96\)

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95 Subotic, “Europe is a State of Mind,” 311.
96 Kostovicova and Basic, “Transnationalism in the Balkans,” 585.
Conclusion

Over the last two centuries, Central, Balkan and Eastern Europe have gone through innumerable changes regarding polity construction, demographic structure and depopulation/repopulation fluidity, and socio-economic conditions. Naturally, all these changes have also presented a permanent challenge for the discussion on identity. “Under the framework of the time-space compression characteristic of modern times, the relationship between political systems, state borders, identities and security has taken on a new appearance, particularly for the people living in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans during the arch of the twentieth century.”

Bianchini distinguishes between three regions in Europe alongside the “West”: “Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe,” a typology of the European “East” which I have included in my analysis. In Bianchini’s perspective, Eastern Europe is above all a security complex producing an identity constructed on a shared security dilemma. As he notes, “the interdependence of Eastern, Central and Balkan Europe from its multilateral geopolitical contexts has historically played a key role in the region’s development.”

To belong to the European East means to experience the “permanent” insecurity caused by geographical “destiny”. Joining the West (or the North, as Wæver proposes for the Baltic part of East-Central Europe) is a means of escaping such pressure, but such opportunity is mostly afforded to Central Europe as a semi-periphery, while Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as peripheries, do not usually benefit from such opportunities.

Small Central European countries, “although many of them were packed into the Habsburg empire for several centuries, suffered from the pressures of Western modernised and industrialised states on one side and the Eastern empires (Russian and Ottoman) on the other. They have been swinging through history between long waves of Westernisation and Easternisation.” 1989, the “year of miracles”, opened once more to them the perspective of Westernisation. Furthermore, despite the problematic legacy of ethnic violence, such a perspective is still offered to the Balkans as well.

In this sense, we should assume that the collapse and demise of the Communist Eastern bloc, the democratic transition in East-Central Europe...
and the Westernisation and Europeanisation processes also brought new changes and re/constructed the imaginary borders. Such re/construction also includes the search for a new identity, national as well as regional. Every major actor, both in the West and the East, was aware that Central Europe could eventually join the West, but that the prospects for Eastern Europe and the Balkans were more complicated and unclear. This led to very active debates within the societies and intellectual circles of the Balkans and of Eastern Europe regarding their affiliation with Central Europe and whether it should be cultural (Croatia, (West) Ukraine, Georgia) or institutional (the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) also became important markers of “quality” alongside EU membership).

As regards the identity issue, the most important question for Central Europe and the Balkans is whether some form of regional identity can be developed, or can survive, alongside an all-European identity. Such a question is further complicated by the fact that any “all-European” identity is often seen as “Western-dominated.” Czech philosopher Břetislav Horyna is not the only scholar to have stressed the unilateral nature of the Europeanisation processes: “The aim is to integrate Western Europe, which Eastern countries could join by fulfilling some mostly technical pre-conditions. An easy equation has an even easier result: Europe will be accomplished through the diffusion of the West to the East.”

101 Similarly, Waisová assumed that, with its accession to NATO and the EU, Central Europe would merge with the European West, a perspective the author saw as a historical opportunity to overcome the centre-periphery opposition.

102 Central Europe is often understood as a transitional region between the European “West” and “East.” Other ideal-typical perspectives can be defined for this region: 1) inclusion of the region into the West or the East; 2) division of the region between the two European macro-regions; 3) continuation of “betweenness.” Naturally, all these ideal types take into account geographic (geopolitical and geocultural) as well as identity proximity. Nevertheless, the processes of Westernisation and Europeanisation launched after 1989 in the former Eastern bloc include also the quest for a new identity debate, including in its regional dimension.

The hesitation and shifts among all these ideal types can easily be noticed in the contemporary development of Central Europe and the Balkans’ regional identities. Furthermore, all the nations in these regions include actors that support dominantly or completely only one of these options, which means that we must include also the changing modalities (electoral processes in individual countries and changes in foreign policy vis-à-vis regionalisation, different understanding of “membership” in the region/s etc.) into the analysis. Generalising from the basic assumptions and outcomes, my conclusions are that:

1) Some of the Central European nations show a strong tendency to join the West or the North, thereby (partly) abandoning their regional identity: this is the case of Slovenia, Estonia, as well as (at least rhetorically) Slovakia; Croatia’s case presents unique characteristics. These nations have not played an important role in Central European cooperation formats after 1989, with the exception of Slovakia, a minor actor within the V4 that has been overruled by three other member-states competing for leadership.

2) All the nations of the former Eastern bloc seek to avoid being labelled as part of Eastern or Balkan Europe. They use different strategies, stressing either their belonging to Central Europe, to the European North, the European South, or their uniqueness (Romania). Different branding strategies are used for these purposes. In this sense, membership of the EU is still understood as a “Central” or “East-Central” European identity marker.

3) Central Europe is the only one of the examined regions to actively try to develop its own identity. One of the important characteristics of the Central European auto-stereotype was, already before 1989, the image of a “better Europe.” As mentioned above, post-Cold war activities towards the creation of a regional identity (with the Visegrad cooperation as the first such instance) also operated with this self-image. This approach was continually weakened in the group of first-generation leaders in V4. The contemporary leaders in the group slightly moderated this self-image – Central or East-Central Europe should be better exactly in those issues where it rejected Europeanisation. An important component of the reformulated regional identity vis-à-vis Western Europe is the rejection of a semi-peripheral or even a peripheral position for this region within the European regional architecture.

4) We do not at the moment see strong actors or even nations that, in East-Central Europe, show an interest in “revitalising” the concept of a Europe in-between. Such tendencies are, in part, visible among those
actors that prefer a pro-Russian orientation. These pragmatically stress their Europeanness in asking for EU-provided financial support, but geoculturally they tend to reject the liberal democratic orientation of the contemporary EU, which brings them closer to the non-European actors at Europe’s eastern border – Russia and Turkey.

Without any doubt, the question of how to overcome the centre-periphery proximity is one of the important challenges for the processes of European integration and regionalisation. To prevent the misuse of this proximity, Europe should not be comprised of a “core” (which is permanently equated with the “West”), a semi-periphery and a periphery, but of transnational regions that are created not only technically, but mainly on the basis of a shared identity. The second option would be the dissolution of the transnational regional identities and the transformation of Europe/the EU into a fully integrated unit with a preference for a European identity alongside the national one. In view of the legacies and technical limits caused by territory and population size, such a solution does not seem realistic.

As the examples from Western and Northern Europe indicate, regional identity can be developed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. In Central Europe, regionalisation as a top-down process still dominates. However, and this might be a regional specificity, a distinct form of civil society seems to emerge as scholars, political actors, but also bureaucrats and foreign policy commentators present the V4 as a quasi-institutionalised ensemble, thereby promoting the idea of a region-wide identity.103 This is not the case in the Balkans, where political actors have not shown a tendency towards top-down regional integration. Paradoxically, this could create a space for grassroots activities in the direction of regional cooperation, although these activities have so far remained limited to small groups of pro-Western activists.

Bibliography


Eastern Europe’s Orientalised Identity

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Abstract:
The aim of the paper is to show how Orientalism might impact identity-building in Eastern Europe. Based on the concept of oppressive performative identity, and through an exposé of the different theories on how and why Europe is divided between East and West, we will focus on the way Orientalism, a critical framework originally aimed at understanding Western imperialist mechanisms, needs to be adapted to grasp identitarian issues in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Balkans, Orientalisation, Easternalisation, oppressive/ascriptive performative identity

Orient– An Exhibition

In 2018, an exhibition travelling across the Old Continent proposed a collection of works expressing the contemporary identity of the Eastern European area. The artists, coming from Eastern European countries, focused on the “suppressed inferiority complex” of the European East as a possible cause of the recent outbreak of nationalism and of anti-democratic trends. This means that certain frustrations internalised by Eastern European identity could act as a cause of contemporary political defects. Instead of highlighting scientific cause and consequence relations between bittersweet self-mockery and the political degradation of Eastern Europe, Orient offered a subjective journey inside the region’s identitarian pathologies. The curator, Michal Novotný, and the artists were guided by the conviction that, despite pathos, irony and subsequent contradictions, the exhibition would help “Europe’s recalcitrant children” to finally find their way back to their European home and accept this residence as more “joyful” than complacent and conceive of their Western neighbourhood as more “fraternal” than “condescending.”

Orient did not consider defining Eastern Europe’s exact borders as important. As Novotný pointed out, the exhibition’s main goal was “inclusion”: it was not a “mapping, nor a survey,” but a set of intimate immer-

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visions into the Eastern European homeland, a “celebration” of regional belonging.¹

The contributing artists did not address the conceptual framework of identity; rather, the stress was on the way the notion of identity is commonly used. They highlighted the most stereotypical occurrences of the notion in a diverse and heterogeneous region that suffers from arbitrary divisions between East and West, given that such dichotomies tend to exclude the East from a West perceived as civilised, progressive and democratic. The exhibition’s title was deliberately provocative: Orient suggests that Eastern Europe is one of the West’s constructed others. This approach puts the spotlight on the idea that the victims of Western Orientalism are not only to be found in faraway lands outside Europe but might very well also exist in an “Orient” that lies inside the Old Continent’s approximate borders.

In the scholarly literature dealing with Eastern European identities, one can easily find approaches that echo the insights of the exhibition: blurred boundaries, harsh stereotypes and constructed otherness within Europe are recurring topics. Larry Wolff reminds us that “as late as the eve of World War I, French scholarship still alternated between two seemingly similar terms, l’Europe orientale (Eastern Europe) and l’Orient européen (the European Orient).”² Such terminological hesitations only underline how labelling aims to exclude the capriciously named regions: labelling Eastern Europe as an “Orient” means shutting it out of Europe. Geographically, this makes no sense, for such an exclusion would move the region to Asia and no scientific cartography could possibly support this conception. Lexical indecisions have played a decisive role in the emergence of Eastern Europe as we know it, i.e. a region balanced between exclusion and inclusion, reluctantly accepted as European yet fixed in an imagined and constructed otherness.

For stereotypes and the effects of constructed otherness, there is a more technical expression based on existing literature: oppressive performative identity.³ This expression extends the common meaning of stereotype because it underlines how identities forced into a label react to the very pro-

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³ Performativity is a concept used in Gender Studies, introduced by Judith Butler to put a name on the socially constructed differentiations within gender relations. See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990).
cess of identity constructions imposed from the outside. At the crossroads of art and scholarship, blurred geographical boundaries, identity-labelling and reactions to nonchalant stereotypes beg the following questions: how does the very practice of oppressive performative identity affect Europe’s wishful unity? How has it contributed to the rise of hostile attitudes towards the European ideal and the West in Eastern Europe? Can we assume that reactions to constructed labels are a mere matter of self-mockery in a region used to disdain itself in the direct yet distinct neighbourhood of the West? Does not self-mockery rather translate into an inability to get out of the trap of inflicted constructions of identity and otherness?

The aim of this article is to offer a theoretical overview of the literature around the concept of oppressive performative identity and to show its specific relevance to the Eastern European case. Given that the blurred boundaries of this European East are inherent to identity-labelling and otherness-constructions, the contours of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Western Balkans (WB) will be left somewhat vague throughout the overview. However, following the aforementioned exhibition’s main message of inclusion, spelling out the theoretical framework with all its inconsistencies should lead us to a constructive standpoint where the side effects of arbitrary labelling can be overcome. First, we will define the concept of oppressive performative identity, highlight the potency of labelling as an instrument of exclusion and underscore how it turns into a trap for the ones forced into an identity imposed by others. Second, we will frame its significance in the V4 and the WB as parts of the constructed European East. Third, we will show that this construction is an orientalist one. In other words, Orientalism has made unexpected victims within Europe, and not only in the “Orient,” traditionally conceived as extra-European.

**Oppressive Performative Identity**

The invention, construction and far-reaching effects of stereotypes call for an elaborate theoretical framework. Oppressive performative identity is a comprehensive concept that gathers and orders the wide-ranging aspects of stereotypical structures and thinking.

First, oppressive performative identity follows the basic outlines of identity-building. As Wolfgang Welsch puts it, the basis of all identity is
The experience of difference. The contrast of otherness highly contributes to creating a sense of belonging to a given group, and this process involves labelling other groups. Identity is not formed on the basis of rational motives. The us-and-them agenda is often a practical way to articulate projects and experiences, to frame a story for the given group. In fact, the construction of identity takes place through narrativity: boundaries, images, community, social roles are articulated around a plot, i.e. a linguistic object, as we will see below.

Such plots and frameworks tend to be unstable and fragmented. In fact, identity-building is much more about practical application than about theoretical structures. Fred Dallmayr notes that a process of interlacing construction – between identity and difference, inside and outside, familiarity and strangeness – has been operating since the dawn of civilisation. The need to construct an image of the self in contrast with others’ perceived sense of belonging is the most basic structure of identity-building. Theoretical frameworks as such result from a reflection on identity-building in action throughout history. As stated by Walter D. Connor, the conception, for instance, of an East-West cultural/historical divide within Europe “has been a part of most historians’ intellectual equipment. It has come under attack in more recent times, mainly in an academic sphere where ‘critical theory’ and postmodern language have their home, and has been pushed in some cases toward the edge of political incorrectness.” In other words, theoretical frameworks have their own history, not to be confused with identity-building as a historical process. Oppressive performative identity is one framework among others, based on the outlines of identity-building as an ongoing historical process that relentlessly mobilises the categories of the self and the other to reinforce a group’s sense of belonging.

Second, oppressive performative identity highlights the inherent power of naming groups, the ingroup as well as the outgroups. Indeed, the very

act of naming oneself and the others plays a decisive role in identity-building. Labelling is the scaffold of identity; naming is a practice that gives meaning to a group’s integrity, which is always, to a certain extent, a construction based on a verbal practice.

However, naming is not a mere linguistic device. Yi-Fu Tuan underlines the role of language and naming in characterising places built by humans, including regions as constructed entities. He claims that there are places created by the casting of a linguistic net, and continues: “The telling itself [...] has the power to endow a site with vibrant meaning.” The sense of belonging hence depends on the power of a given name. As an example, Yi-Fu Tuan underlines how “modern Western people felt the need for a collective name to designate their own society and culture.” “Europe” used to be a proper noun well before the Old Continent started to conceive of itself as a geographically united area.

Moreover, naming supposes collective and public experiences. Identity is constructed through interaction: individuals belonging to a given group find out who they are in the public forum. They receive a name to which they must respond. Performative identity is the product of an endless repetition, of quoting a particular model, which is created not only by the subject itself, but by the whole group, that is to say by a social structure. To put it differently, the “others” are first of all the other members of the in-group, constructing the self through reflection. However, the issue of individual identity in such a process becomes secondary. The determination of “I” takes place on the principle of “I according to the others.” By performance, we thus mean the interactive aspect of identity-building: the self reacts to the way it is addressed and perceived by the other members of her group.

The social or performative identity of the group is sometimes played subconsciously. It is a project, a game, but also an illusion. Between the self and the others, i.e. in the space where the group’s identity takes shape, fiction does have its share. The tool for identity’s elaboration is repetitive verbal expression, language as a relentlessly reused tool. The act of naming can, to paraphrase John Langshaw Austin, be called actions with

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8 Tuan, “Language,” 687.
9 Ibid., 689.
Words have the power to make given elements stand out and transform what is incomprehensible into something that is meaningful. By speaking and naming the group, its members determine who they are, their place in the world, and they make manifest the features that determine the belonging to a given communitas. Hence, identity is a collective matter, in other words a political one. If words are actions, identity-building joins Hannah Arendt’s conception of politics based on human plurality and publicity rather than the private and the individual sphere.11

Last but not least, oppressive performative identity puts a name on how the very victims of stereotypical structures react to the imposed label. This is the oppressive component of our concept.

Labelling is an instrument not only for systematising and confirming divisions that are objectively required for understanding a given group’s situation in the world, but also for valuing the essence of its members. Naming hence results in the establishment of hierarchies, within the ingroup as well as between the ingroup and outgroups. To the social ladder of dependence structuring the ingroup corresponds a vertical conception of its place in the world, the ingroup conceiving of itself as superior to others. That is the shift from sound social structuring to the domination of others through the use of naming, from performance to oppressive stereotypes within the group or in power relation to others.

The use of the social scaffold of names turns into the construction of stereotypes. Naming and the narratives in which it is practiced frame a powerful tool of oppression. To define another group as “different,” “inferior” or “backward” establishes a relation that justifies the domination of the coercively labelled group. Orientalism, as Edward W. Said explained, is about an “Orient” invented by the West in order to keep vast and heterogeneous lands under control. Said showed how a priori innocent narratives such as novels and other literary works have contributed to the West’s imperialist ideology without having been produced on the explicit order of this ideology. Their narrative power has been absorbed by the imperialist framework, often without any consent from the authors.12

Stereotypes are artificially fixed narratives or narrative fragments used to control those who are forced into them. As a result, we see how exclusion

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from an ingroup actually results in dependence from it. But there is more to this well-known agenda in the way the victims of oppressive performative identity incorporate their stereotype and build their identity in reaction to it. Stereotypes, especially in postcolonial contexts, become the very tool of emancipation: the oppressed group seizes hold of the imposed narrative and turns it against the oppressor. In this case, we can talk about a form of “auto-stereotype.” The fine line between the imposed stereotype and its performative use to turn the tables remains one of the main issues of postcolonial studies.

Our Eastern European context is of course different and requires a careful shift from the orientalist background to the intra-European setting. Before mapping out Eastern Europe’s historical situation, let us sum up the definition of oppressive performative identity, as it is the conceptual tool we will use to grasp the specificities of our context. Oppressive performative identity is a process of identity-building based on the traditional self-and-the-other structure that mobilises naming not only to put order within a group but also to label others as stereotypes. Oppression, however, does not end with control. Stereotypes remain active and harmful in the very process of emancipation in the form of auto-stereotypes, leaving the emancipated group in uncertainty: if the group seized the very tool of oppression to free itself, is it not still under the yoke, given the analysed power of words and labels?

Eastern Europe: Itinerant Names, Wandering Borders

Now that we have the appropriate conceptual tool to show how akin Eastern Europe’s situation is to orientalised areas outside Europe, we still need to give an approximate frame to the region we are dealing with. As mentioned above, the V4 and the WB countries may be somewhat lost within Eastern Europe but, in a sense, that is our very point: not only is there an ongoing debate on exact boundaries within these regions but, what is more, labels and distinctions have been blurred on the long term. Let us see how and why, keeping in mind that these two questions are almost interchangeable when it comes to the geopolitics of Eastern Europe.

The concept of Central and Eastern Europe referred formerly to the territories between Germany and Russia, and between the Baltic and the Adriatic. The region’s diverse populations were considered as living in the transitional in-between formed by this “isthmus.” The concept of Central Europe included Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, i.e.
the countries known today as the V4. The concept of Central and Eastern Europe is clearly more recent than other concepts such as “Eastern Europe” or “Central Europe.” In the interwar period, stakes increased in Central Europe in view of the “geopolitical revolution” after World War I and the end of Central Europe as an empire, i.e. the erasing of a clear geopolitical entity.

The concept of “Central Europe” defended, among others, by Milan Kundera and popularised in the West by the Czech, Polish and Hungarian intelligentsia of the 1980s, was meant to be an identitarian remedy for a region lost inside the Eastern Bloc. Although “Central Europe” is now an accepted term in political and scientific discourse, it was, forty years ago, a reinvented concept aimed at denouncing the purported homogeneity of the Bloc under Soviet control. “Eastern” and “Central” are thus labels depending on and triggered by geopolitical conjectures.

The division of Europe between the East and the West is not the only possible one. There was an attempt to divide the continent between the North and the South, as well as in four parts (West, North, East/Orient and South), as discussed by Larry Wolff. However, the East-West division proved to be permanent. Walter D. Connor notes that this division is more historically and culturally fixed: according to him, the West has the Latin alphabet, Roman Catholicism, has been through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and is in command of the dynamic development of culture and science, politics and economy; the East, on the other hand, uses the Greek and Cyrillic alphabets, is based on Byzantine culture, the Orthodox church, and is characterised by stagnation and a poor economic system.

A significant part of Eastern Europe, the East-Central region, does not confirm this dichotomy in terms of culture and religion, calling for yet an-

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15 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*.
other division. Besides, we see how geographical divisions tend to be metaphors of normative statements on development. Attila Melegh states that Eastern Europe has “never been fully integrated into the first modernizationist ‘transition’ discourse. [This region has] been relegated to an intermediate category of ‘almost developed.’” Eastern would be a synonym of “almost.” Connor adds that the East-West dimension is nothing new, pinpointing that historians tend to insist “on the difference between Eastern and Central Europe, careful to stake out the latter turf as theirs, or to use the term East-Central Europe – sometimes without real specification of what West-Central Europe might be.” Naming is confusing indeed, but the value judgement is clear. Van de Kaa even wrote about Europa Major (including the non-Muslim Soviet territories), Europa Minor (including the European Union and Central Europe in a large sense), and Europa Unita (including the European Union and the Central European states soon to be members of it). The use of Latin does not dissimulate judgements behind geographical terms.

East and West also translate into Centre and Periphery. According to Tomasz Zarycki, the Centre-Periphery relation on the European level is primarily associated with the capital of culture, ideas, knowledge, skills and objects with cultural value that people must possess in order to be active and efficient in social life. Cultural capital is a differentiating factor. Once again, the division generates in-betweenness: Central and Eastern Europe turn out to have the cultural capital but lack political and economic development. Zarycki sees it as a key dimension of inequality in the region, where culture is “a kind of substitute for deficit economic capital.” The idea of a cultural capital tries to mask economic and political shortcomings compared to the West. The conviction of high cultural resources

conceived as bearing moral significance is meant to compensate for the lower economic status of the Eastern part of Europe.

There are several different ways to divide the East from the West, but there are three recurring elements: 1) a moral dimension is projected on the geographical notions; 2) divisions create in-betweenness, as there is no clear-cut line between two supposedly hermetic ensembles; 3) divisions depend on the geopolitical context. The fact is that “Eastern Europe,” whatever its precise contours are supposed to be, is a name meant to divide Europe in a vertical way. Coming back to the power of words as actions, to designate the East means to assign to it an inferior status compared to the West. In short, it is a label for the European other, constructed as such and fuelled with the stereotypes of underdevelopment. Its Western borders are first of all the Eastern borders of the West, i.e. the more or less extended boundaries the West consents to have, following the actual geopolitical conjecture and the spatial limits of Western performative identity.

Eastern Europe as an Orientalist Construction

In the previous part, we mapped Eastern Europe as an uncertain in-between, a region so to speak “easternalised” by political aims and geopolitical contexts. It is important to note that only a weak and exposed region can become prey to such a process. It involves a strong player, namely the West, and a power relation between it and the “easternalised” area. Although Eastern Europe cannot be compared to the West’s former overseas colonies, the procedure is quite similar: the other is constructed by the (Western) self to reinforce its superiority, a stereotypical identity is assigned and, eventually, the other seizes the stereotypical construction to define its own sense of belonging and character. In a word, Eastern Europe is nowadays an example of oppressive performative identity.

Eastern Europe can therefore be understood as an otherness constructed by the West. Bo Stråth writes that historically, the idea of European civilisation had three specific “Others”: the Orient, America and Eastern Europe. In this sense, and according to Joshua Hagen, the East can be understood as “a product of Western imagination.”

23 Joshua Hagen, “Redrawing the Imagined Map of Europe: The Rise and Fall of the ‘Center,’” Political Geography 22, no. 5 (2003), 489-490.
A particular need exists to separate what is European and not European, what is more and/or less European. Eastern Europe is certainly not “different” in the way the Orient is: the principal object of Orientalism stands in a high civilisational contrast with the West, while the Eastern side of Europe swings on the mental map as a more or less European area. Nevertheless, if its function as an Other is not comparable to the Orient, Eastern Europe does bear symptoms of Orientalism: “It had no independent reality,” writes Tuan; “and yet in the course of time, people who lived in this European creation began to accept it and to exploit the name.”\textsuperscript{24} In other words, Eastern Europe shares some identitarian aspects with former colonies. The geopolitical history being substantially different, it is in the naming practice, the construction of stereotypes and the phenomenon of auto-stereotyping that we can grasp how orientalised Eastern Europe is: identity is the key here, much more than geopolitics.

It is in the European, i.e. continental context that Joshua Hagen highlights the importance of naming in discussions about identity.\textsuperscript{25} Ezequiel Adamovsky also addresses an intra-European case: the construction of the “Slavic other” on the borders of Europe. Similarly to Tuan, albeit in the European context, he points out that “[t]he counterpart of the liberal-bourgeois narrative of Western civilization is the narrative of its ‘others.’” Adamovsky then explains that “in every binary construction of identity the excluded ‘other’ and the self that gained consistency by means of that exclusion depend on each other.”\textsuperscript{26} Though Eastern Europe does not depend on the West in the way the former overseas colonies do, the structure of mutual dependency is comparable and deserves further comparative research.

The framework is orientalist, given that the narrative is not based on the observation of those Slavic populations, but rather on an idea of European civilisation from which they are excluded. When it comes to the Balkans, a similar stereotype is at work: the region is often described as uniform, as is the supposed identity of the \textit{homo balkanicus}. This is only, as outlined by Pavlos Hatzopoulos, a “frozen image,” which tries to determine collective identity on the exclusive basis of geographical location.\textsuperscript{27} As Dusan Bjelic emphasises, the aim of “the European nation-states’ hegemony of cultural

\textsuperscript{24} Tuan, “Language,” 689.
\textsuperscript{25} Joshua Hagen, “Redrawing the Imagined Map of Europe: The Rise and Fall of the ‘Center.’” 489-490.
\textsuperscript{26} Adamovsky, “Euro-Orientalism,” 591.

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representation, has constructed the Balkans as its dangerous exterior, as the
dark side of the collective Europe.” Labelling serves a certain ideal of
European civilisation, but in the close Eastern neighbourhood instead of
the Orient.

The East-West division within Europe is not about the Eastern popu-
lations’ sense of belonging. It is an invention that seems more and more
“real” through the repeated act of labelling. Derek Gregory defines this
type of construction as “discursive formations” that build “constellations
of power, knowledge and spatiality.” Naming has the ability to increase
power, transforming what is on the Eastern side of Europe into an imagi-
nary land. As Tuan notes, “naming is power – the creative power to call
something into being, to render the invisible visible, to impart a certain
character to things.” Hagen also claims that the discourse of naming “re-
flects social and political relations of power and knowledge, in addition to
territorial control.” Further research on the Eastern European case
should combine geopolitical perspectives and cultural production: if East-
ern Europe is indeed an orientalist product within Europe, then this pro-
cess not only has straightforward political aspects, but might also be
strengthened by culture.

Eastern Europe as an orientalist construction sets “ways of perceiving
spaces and places, and the relationship between them.” It imposes a per-
ception of the area as a uniform mass, as “complex sets of cultural and po-
litical practices and ideas defined spatially” but in an even way. Thus, it
moves away from the analysis and classification of individual countries.
The division of Europe into East and West, although increasingly present-
ed as politically incorrect, used to highlight hegemony, privileging certain
attitudes or perspectives, though Eastern Europe was never colonised by
the West, unlike the Middle East. Nevertheless, as Connor points out, de-
pendency is based on “the superiority of Western-style democracy and

28 Dusan Bjelic, “The Balkans’ Imaginary and the Paradox of European Borders,”
979_The_Balkans’_Imaginary_and_the_Paradox_of_European_Borders (accessed
April 11, 2019).
29 Derek Gregory, “Between the Book and the Lamp: Imaginative Geographies of
Egypt, 1849-50,” Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series 20
01c57008b0b2b3c6942663.pdf (accessed April 4, 2019).
31 Hagen, “Redrawing the Imagined Map,” 491.
32 Ibid., 490.
33 Ibid.
Western-style capitalist markets,” the specificity of Eastern Europe being the direct proximity of the model.

The use of fiction is inherent to the orientalist framework. “East” does not refer objectively to the geographical location of Eastern Europe, its cultural entities, language, or history. It is an idea, a form of thought and a creation with almost no matching reality. Said writes that “the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away.”

How does this translate into the Western political discourse on Eastern Europe? Larry Wolff shows that the discourse on Eastern Europe and the Balkans is constructed to cover the immaturity, aggressivity, insecurity, underdevelopment and inconsistencies of the common European social, political, cultural and economic standards and to justify Western colonialism. In other words, it is the Western model’s own shortcomings that are projected on the Eastern part of the continent in order to be dissimulated.

How powerful are words when it comes to labelling stereotypes? Within Europe, the Balkans offer an unfortunate example for naming practices and their devastating effects. After World War I, a conflict that symbolically started in Sarajevo, Central and Eastern Europe was said to have become “balkanised,” as the contemporary French notion of l’Europe balkanisée indicates. Concerning the Balkans themselves, Maria Todorova states that Balkanism is a notion modelled on Edward Said’s Orientalism. “Balkans” is a name for a confused land of transience and its menacing diversity of cultures, religions and nationalities not found in other parts of Europe. The name expresses the idea of a transition between East and West, between Europe and Asia. It is also another name for underdevelopment, used as a synonym for semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilised, semi-oriental. On the borders of Europe and Asia, the “Balkans” mean “stuck halfway.” Balkanism and Balkanisation (for instance in “a balkanised country”) are used as convenient substitutes that cleanse the West of accusations of racism, colonialism and Eurocentrism. The widespread use of “Balkanisation” shows how Orientalism can concern regions and populations

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34 Said, Orientalism, 5.
35 Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe.
37 As Gérard Delanty notes, “the Balkans were caught in a double bind. On the one hand they were divided between Islam and Christianity and on the other hand there was an abiding division between Roman Catholicism and Christian Ortho-
within Europe, even such Eurocentric ones as, for instance, Central Europe as redefined in the 1980s.

The constructed East is based on the stereotypes and prejudices traditionally used to describe the Orient. Adamovsky calls it “Euro-Orientalism.” He states that “Euro-Orientalism not only provides a style of talking about Eastern Europe but also performs a normative function – that is, it endeavours to establish norms for a good society and to punish deviations from those norms.”

Edward W. Said writes that “the Orient was almost a European invention” and considers the Orient and the Other as synonyms. This points to the naming and orientalising of the East as a politically reflected process. For Said, “to speak of Orientalism [...] is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself.” The intra-European application of the orientalist framework adds a new layer of understanding to Said’s critical legacy.

The key difference between the European East and the North-African or Middle Eastern Orient is, for Zarycki, the ambiguous position of Central and Eastern Europe regarding the very idea of Europe. Culture might be European or even Eurocentric, but political and economic shortcomings make this inner East dependent and exposed to stereotypes. Europe’s Eastern borderland could not be orientalised as overseas territories were, given the direct geographical continuity between the Western centre and its Eastern periphery. The borderland is not “fixed” in stereotypes like geographically distant and separated lands.


Despite the differences in terms of location, cultural proximity, and the active sense of belonging to Europe that could not possibly concern the realities behind the constructed Orient, we are dealing in Eastern Europe with an Orientalist set of cases. “Easternalisation” is the intra-European practice of Orientalisation. The geopolitical and historical basis of the orientalist construction deserves further elaboration if it is to be criticised with objectivity, but we can already highlight the dramatic repercussions of the framework on Eastern European identities.

Attila Melegh proposes a comprehensive summary of the way in which Orientalism was translated into the context of Eastern Europe. First, he reminds us of the potency of words and narratives: “Narratives are texts that create temporality. They are devices through which we, individually, are able to ‘weave’ our lives into discursive structures which are the materialization and reproduction of power arrangements.” We pinpointed, with Hannah Arendt, the collective aspect of identity-building. Melegh emphasises the power relations this type of collective performativity easily shifts to. He stresses the performative aspect of identity-building by claiming that “nonetheless, narratives are not constructed by us but are social constructs which belong to the ‘relational’ field of social life. From a given stock of narrative patterns we create our stories with regard to the social context in which we find ourselves.” Performance is indeed about designing stories through reflexion on given social constructions. Melegh then comes to the East-West construction in the European context: “Thus at an institutional or collective level the East–West dichotomy and the East–West slope not only offer patterns for identifying East–West differences (rational versus irrational etc.), but also prescribe our position on an East–West slope and thereby set the ways we utilize East–West discourses.” The “slope” indicates the hierarchical aspect of naming. Melegh puts our self-and-other pattern in the “easternalised” context of Eastern Europe before calling it explicitly an Orientalist framework: “The Orientalism of Western actors will be different from the downward perspective of Central or Eastern Europeans because they themselves are considered to be ‘Eastern’ or to be at a lower point of the East–West civilizational slope, which in itself leads to some kind of frustrated Orientalism.”40

Melegh defines the oppressive component of our identity-building pattern as a “kind of frustrated” internalisation of the stereotypes assigned to the East by the West. In fact, what is oppressive in the case of the colonised and reinvented Orient in Said’s theory becomes a frustration in the case of

[40 Melegh, On the East-West Slope, 127-128.]
Eastern Europe: the European East cannot reject its own geographical location like the constructed Orient has to in order to emancipate herself from the Western yoke. Eastern Europe is part of Europe and, in a sense, does not have the choice but to make a story out of the “East” – while the “Orient” might very well well rid itself of its constructed location in relation to the West and reposition itself as a centre of the global stage.

There is so to speak “no escape” in Eastern Europe from the oppressive/frustrated performative identity assigned by the West. The price to pay to belong to Europe is to internalise this constructed identity and to seek to neutralise its stereotypes, thereby emancipating the East as it is, i.e. the East of the Europe. On the theoretical level, we might consider replacing the oppressive/frustrated component with a more neutral term: ascriptive performative identity should be more accurate from now on to analyse the intra-European Orientalist phenomenon as distinct from Said’s context, yet in the continuation of his legacy.

As we saw, the key difference between the “Orient” as a set of oppressive performative identity cases and the “East” as an ascriptive one is the geographical and cultural proximity of the latter and of the West to which it craves to belong. The Eastern borderlands tend to “duplicate” the ascriptive performative identity imposed by the West when they project it on their Eastern neighbours. As Milan Ristovic colloquially put it, “‘Balkans’ is a word of contempt; for Vienna, the Balkans begin in Hungary, for Hungary they begin in Belgrade and Bucharest; Greece considers that the Balkans refer to her Bulgarian neighbour.”41 Sven Milekic confirms that “no one wants to be part of the Balkans – for Croatians, the Balkans begin in Bosnia; in Bosnia, the Balkans begin in Serbia; and in Serbia, they begin in Romania.”42 We know how a similar slippery slope characterises the “East,” especially in the way “Central” Europe projects on its Eastern neighbours the very same stereotype the West assigns to it.

Such repercussions are not solutions and passing on the stereotypes will not help overcoming them. Reversing the ascriptive performative pattern and turning it against the West will not dissimulate frustrations either: the West becoming the “Other” might justify nationalist and anti-democratic movements in Eastern Europe under the banner of Euroscepticism. However, that would not be called emancipation, given that it is still built on

41 Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snalpostem, Malmo, September 28, 1942, quoted in Ristovic, “The Birth of South-eastern Europe.”
the very same stereotypes and actually pushes the East of Europe more to the East, closer to the “Orient,” as some kind of ironic “self-orientalisation” of countries frustrated by their very proximity to the West and seeking relief by creating more “distance” – within the Orientalist construction. Verbal repetition is required for the shaping of identities; repeating the stereotypes by projecting them on others is destructive.

Conclusion

Based on the fundamentals of identity-building, we have shown that the swinging dichotomies between East and West in Europe constitute an intra-European case of Orientalism. These dichotomies depend on the actual geopolitical context, are coercively constructed, and always generate a residue, for there could be no clear-cut division line between the East and the West. The intra-European case is a context Edward Said did not consider. However, thanks to our oppressive performative identity concept, we were able to grasp the orientalist machinery in action, given the identitarian symptoms the East of Europe shares with the constructed Orient. In the continuation of Said’s now classic framework, we thus had to adapt the orientalist pattern to suit the Eastern European setting. Ascriptive performative identity is not something Eastern Europe can evade or should simply reproduce by projecting the very same stereotypes on its Eastern neighbours, because this results in an enlargement of the stereotypes.

What to do then? As Zarycki notes, Eastern Europe is at the same time a victim and a producer of orientalist discourse. There is no sound way to evade a certain degree of Orientalism in our region, and we can only try to get a better understanding of its mechanisms. As we saw, identity-building is an everlasting process, theoretical frameworks are only established through reflection on it. Theories hence have a history in the same way identity-building has.

Geographical divisions are required to understand our place in the world, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with naming the East and the West within Europe. The Old Continent’s identity is constantly created and recreated by people and this involves constructions, discursive artefacts, constellations of selves and others. Nevertheless, naming and labelling have considerable power on structuring societies, their inner hier-

archies as well as their relation to other societies. It is by remaining aware of this potency of words that we can prevent constructions from falling into stereotypes, geographical divisions from shifting to moral and value judgements dissimulated behind geographical terms such as the cardinal points.

The specific case of Eastern Europe calls for further research. The cultural and geopolitical characteristics of a borderland need to be examined to give a more accurate picture of the case and dismantle the counterproductive mechanisms of intra-European Orientalism. Within Europe, dependency can be turned into complementarity. Further European integration requires the neutralisation of a power discourse that produces stereotypes and a more attentive focus on the very scales of identity-building: the self-and-the-other pattern is constructive on the microlevel, but a mere patchwork of such microlevels does not shape the identity of the macro, European scale. Self-images have the ability to construct, while stereotypes tend to disintegrate identities.

Bibliography


Todorova, Maria. “What Is or Is There a Balkan Culture and Do or Should the Balkans Have a Regional Identity?” *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 175-185.


Abstract:

The main aim of the article is to analyse the relationship between identity and politics in a broad sense. For the purpose of the analysis, the following hypothesis is formulated: the quality of democracy is a factor which determines identity freedom. In other words, identity freedom is more important in states with a high quality of democracy than in states with a low quality of democracy. In accordance with this assumption, the comparison of states in the two regions represented by the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans creates an opportunity to illustrate this relationship. The analysis conducted on the basis of the purpose-built Identity Freedom Index (IFI) does not allow for a positive verification of the hypothesis. It turns out that quality of democracy is not a determining factor for the level of identity freedom. The starting assumption, intuitively defined division between Visegrad Group states characterised by higher IFI figures and Western Balkan states with a significantly lower level of identity freedom, turns out to be unjustified. In this case, the dividing lines do not reflect the development trajectories determined by the consolidation of the system and, consequently, accession to the European Union.

Keywords: identity freedom, quality of democracy, region, state, consolidation, index, Visegrad Group, Western Balkans, Central Europe, comparison

Introduction

There is no doubt that freedom, a category treated as an object of interest by the representatives of various, often different scientific disciplines, is also a subject of deliberations for political scientists. The reasons for such a situation should be sought in the semantic capacity of the category itself. However, they can also be found in the rich tradition of research concerning the subjective and objective scope of personal freedom, which consti-
tutes, along with a number of other factors, a democratic state of law. Linking the categories of freedom and identity can lead to a specific, multivariant perspective on the issue under discussion. Regardless of whether it is national, cultural or religious identity that is being discussed, the right to its unhampered expression in individual activities and declarations as well as in institutionalised, often collective actions, plays a key role. In each of the analysed variants, the context of understanding what identity freedom is creates legal and institutional state instruments (state organs and institutions and formal regulations), which determine the degree to which freedom, understood in such a way, can materialise and manifest itself.

The main aim of the article is to analyse the relationship between identity and politics in a broad sense. For the purpose of the analysis, the following hypothesis is formulated: the quality of democracy is a factor which determines identity freedom. In other words, identity freedom is more important in states with a high quality of democracy than in states with a low quality of democracy. In accordance with this assumption, comparing the states in the two regions of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans creates an opportunity to illustrate this relationship. In this approach, the region is an internally complex, although relatively homogeneous structure formed by more than two neighbouring countries. The countries share, in varying degrees and scope, common historical, economic, socio-cultural and political experiences. The region defined in this way can therefore be considered an intermediate structure between the micro level (typical for countries) and the macro level (typical, for instance, for the EU). Concentrating on two seemingly different regions can be justified on at least two grounds. First, the regions are linked by a community of experiences related to systemic transformation processes involving changes that are not only strictly political and legal, but also economic and socio-cultural. In this context, one needs to underline the efforts of the states of the Visegrad Group and of the Western Balkans towards building mechanisms for the peaceful definition, articulation and negotiation of group interests. Second, it can be justified by discussing the aspirations of the Western Balkan states to membership of the European Union which, although articulated to varying degrees, generally express a positive attitude towards integrating the Old Continent. Simplifying greatly, it can therefore be assumed that the efforts of the states in this region usually coincide with the foreign policy directions of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, which, as members of the European Union, take an active part in the implementation of the pan-European project.
Methodological Remarks

An attempt to capture and confirm the positive relation between identity freedom and the quality of democracy requires one to formulate several methodological assumptions.

First of all and given the complexity and multidimensionality of the issues under consideration, a detailed presentation of all the conditions regarding both identity freedom and quality of democracy exceeds the scope of this paper. This, of course, does not mean that its authors do not see or accept the whole range of phenomena and processes that determine the functioning of the states and societies of both regions. On the contrary, there is no doubt that each of the regions creates a mosaic of the material and non-material products of human activity analysed both in the institutional and legal dimension, and through the prism of many different but closely related processes of an economic and socio-cultural nature. Presenting the relation between identity freedom and the quality of democracy, while going beyond the traditional classifications and views presented in the political literature, can therefore justifiably be described as a difficult task.

Secondly, the use of a parametric (mathematical) approach is an answer to the dilemmas associated with the study of such a complex problem.¹ In line with the adopted assumption, the present analysis takes the shape of a model, and hence of an intentionally simplified approach. Concentrating

¹ The parametric approach, reduced to measurable and therefore comparable factors, was also used in another work by the authors devoted to analysing the relationship between the space for religious freedom and the condition of a democratic state of law (the degree of its consolidation). In the same work, published in Polish, German and Czech, the three following indexes were used: Democracy Index (DI), Government Restriction Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI). These are also used in this article. See: Robert Wiszniewski, Małgorzata Babińska, Kamil Glinka, Przestrzeń wolności religijnej w Polsce, Czechach i Niemczech. Studium politologiczne [Religious Freedom Area in Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. Political Science Analysis] (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2017); idem, Religionsfreiheitsraum im Polen, Tschechien und im Deutschland. Politologisches Studium [Religious Freedom Area in Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. Political Science Analysis] (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2017); idem, Prostoru náboženské svobody v Polsku, České republice a Německu. Politologická studie [Religious Freedom Area in Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. Political Science Analysis] (Wałbrzych: Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, 2017).
solely on selected elements of a social-political reality, in line with the logic of a mathematical order, enables the authors to carry out a synthetic comparison of the cases under study. A purpose-built index, the Identity Freedom Index (IFI), illustrates the extent to which the Visegrad Group and Western Balkans states create – or do not create – the conditions for an unhampered expression of individual and group (collective) identities.

A similar, parametric approach accompanies the discussion on the quality of democracy in both regions. In this case, the selection of the indicators reflecting the specifics of the systemic transformations taking place in this part of the Old Continent is of key importance. The Nations in Transit study, cited later in this article, is here highly useful.

The use of parametrics is particularly justified for analysing regions, in particular the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans, for several reasons.

First, owing to the internal complexity and, consequently, the heterogeneity of these regions, studies devoted to the functioning of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans require a measure of intentional simplification and generalisation. This is all the more the case where identity freedom and the quality of democracy form the subject of research, as these are phenomena which elude simple, multiplied classifications and definitions.

Second, setting the parametric order to a clearly regional perspective allows for the capture of nodal similarities and differences between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans, these being the most important. In this sense, it enables a synthetic view of the relationship between identity freedom and the quality of democracy at the level of the two regions in question.

Third, the use of the parametric order to analyse the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans is legitimised by the dearth of studies relying on strictly defined measurements. Attempts at providing synthesising analyses are insufficient, despite the existence of an extensive literature providing, especially in the field of political science, many valuable interpretative variants of the meanderings of both regions.

Fourth, the ability to apply captured relationships to other regions of the world is an evident advantage of using the parametric order. Only an intentional narrowing and simplification, based on the constant use of the same measures, can allow us to analyse the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans in a broad enough perspective to cover other regions of the world. In this sense, this view marks a new research perspective implemented by the authors of this article on the pages of other studies.
Identity Freedom and the Quality of Democracy

Regardless of the context in which it is mentioned, the meaning of identity freedom is so capacious as to intensify the dilemmas associated with the adoption of a precise and specific definition of its constitutive components. The multiplicity of the interpretative variants of identity (which in simplified terms can be referred to as “imaginations, judgments and beliefs [...] about oneself”) constitutes in itself an additional difficulty. Rogers Brubaker’s approach linking identity with the concept of “self-understanding” and “social location” and thus the positioning of individual axiological orientations in a wider social and environmental context, channels considerations in a certain direction. For the purposes of the article, it is assumed that identity, analysed in the context of the functioning of both regions, is a kind of “patchwork” of individual identities which, expressed individually and/or collectively by the inhabitants of individual countries, merge following the principle of the “snowball” phenomenon and determine the identity of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. In this sense, one can speak of the relatively homogeneous identities of each of the two regions, these obviously being derived from state roots.

Reflecting on identity freedom in the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans seems to be important in the sense that it makes it possible to address the phenomenon of identity expression analysed at the regional level. Rather than tracing the determinants of the exact identity of each of the two regions and defining the role of individual countries in their creation (the answer to these two questions is left to anthropologists, cultural scholars and sociologists), the authors focus on the instruments which allow these identities to become manifest. Therefore, some general framework (or institutional “case”) of identity is treated as a key designation of identity freedom. In the approach proposed by the authors, the systemic and functional borders of identity freedom are created by at least four groups of components.

The first group, referred to as constitutional guarantees, includes the legal solutions that define the freedoms possessed by citizens, both in a positive (“freedom to”) and negative (“freedom from”) sense. Personal and political freedoms (so-called first-generation human rights), treated as the

foundation of self-identification processes, play a key role. The second group relates to the freedom of mass media (press, radio, television, Internet), these being not only a forum for articulating opinions, views and judgments, but also, and perhaps above all, an instrument of social control on state authorities. Mass media have the capacity to narrow instrumentally the field of expression of individual and group identities, and numerous examples exist to show that they have really attempted to do so. The next, third group concentrates on religious freedom which is, due to the specific denominational structure of a large number of the states in question, a determinant of fundamental importance. The last group focuses on the unrestricted activity of the so-called third sector, i.e. all types of non-governmental organisations (see Graph 1).

The combination of these four briefly characterised groups determines the extent to which identity freedom reflects the situation in the states of the Visegrad Group and of the Western Balkans. It also allows one to perceive identity freedom as a space for articulating individual and/or collective identities, which is expressed not only in legal solutions (a systemic-institutional approach), but also in the freedom of the media, in the freedom to perform religious practices and other types of civic activities (a functional approach).

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7 The relation between the functioning of the third sector and the consolidation of the democratic system has been the subject of many interesting studies. Claire Mercer’s canonical review of the state of research deserves special attention. See Claire Mercer, “NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization: A Critical Review of the Literature,” *Progress in Development Studies* 2, no. 1, (2002): 5-12.
Graph 1 Constitutive components of the concept of identity freedom

Constitutional guarantees

Religious freedom

Identity Freedom

Free media

Third sector

Source: author’s own compilation.

As with studies on identity, the extensive subject literature, especially the strictly political one, provides a variety of approaches to the research on the quality of democracy. The following statement by Alexis de Tocqueville seems to reflect its essence:

“This is in fact, a manly and lawful passion for equality that incites men to wish all to be powerful and honored [...] not that those nations whose social conditions is democratic naturally despise liberty; on the contrary, they have an instinctive

The quality of democracy may therefore be characterised through the prism of the “maturity” of a system, deriving from the legally fortified activity of the state bodies and institutions, which allows one to realise two values of fundamental importance: formally (legally) sanctioned freedom, and equality. In line with the already indicated assumption, the parametric approach is one of the interpretation variants of the quality of democracy. As Brigitte Geissel, Marianne Kneuer and Hans-Joachim Lauth rightly claim, a vast majority of the analyses devoted to the issue “are taking a closer look at those democracies that are regarded as consolidated.” This article goes beyond such an approach, as it also studies states which are characterised by a different level of system consolidation. The attempt to apply the phenomenon of the quality of democracy to the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans results from the intuitive belief that the development of democratic institutions and procedures is a sine qua non condition for the realisation of the idea of identity freedom. Considering the two regions under study, it can be assumed that this development will follow different trajectories.

As can be seen from the analysis of the data contained in Table 2, each of the states in question has undergone (or is still undergoing) transformations characteristic of systemic change. The results of the

Nations in Transit (NiT) survey conducted cyclically by Freedom House allow one to stress that these states stand at different levels in terms of the quality of democracy (i.e. the measured level of systemic consolidation).

This is of course not the only study that allows for synthetic comparative studies of the cases under study: Democracy Index is another example worthy of attention. The measurement made by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), however, has limitations. First of all, according to the analysis of the data in the table below, it does not include Kosovo. Secondly, the number of possible categories (regime type), to which individual states are assigned, is relatively small. This, in turn, does not allow one to fully differentiate the situation taking place in all the ten studied countries (see Table 1).

Table 1 The quality of democracy according to the Democracy Index 2018: comparison of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Democracy Index 2018</th>
<th>Regime type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global rank; overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>34; 7,69</td>
<td>Flawed democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td>44; 7,10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td>54; 6,67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td></td>
<td>57; 6,63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>63; 6,41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>76; 5,98</td>
<td>Hybrid Regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>78; 5,87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>81; 5,74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td></td>
<td>101; 4,98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>no data</td>
<td>no data</td>
<td>no data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 The quality of democracy: the case of Visegrad Group and Western Balkans states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Nations in Transit 2018</th>
<th>Rank; Democracy Score</th>
<th>Regime type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>4; 2,29</td>
<td>Consolidated Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6; 2,61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7; 2,89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td></td>
<td>10; 3,71</td>
<td>Semi-consolidated Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12; 3,93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13; 3,96</td>
<td>Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14; 4,11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15; 4,36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16; 4,64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19; 4,93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The first level (“Consolidated Democracy”) reflects the situation in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, with democracy scores of 2,29, 2,61 and 2,89 respectively. The second level (“Semi-consolidated Democracy”) comprises Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia (with respective scores of 3,71, 3,93 and 3,96), whereas the last level (“Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime”) refers to Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (with respective scores of 4,11, 4,36, 4,64 and 4,93). The index values (“Democracy Score”) are relatively unambiguous in their hierarchisation and show that the states of the Visegrad Group are characterised by a relatively higher level of quality of democracy than those of the Western Balkans. The Czech Republic and Kosovo are two extreme cases. It is symptomatic that Hungary is one notable “breach” in this categorisation: coming in the tenth place in the overall ranking, it loses the status of a fully consolidated democracy. Despite this, the data presented in Table 2 seems to confirm the intuitive belief that the Visegrad Group, treated as a region, has an objectively higher level of democratic consolidation than is the case of the Western Balkans. This statement is particularly important for the further considerations of the authors of the article, i.e. the comparison of identity freedom in the two regions.
Measuring Identity Freedom

Table 3 presents the full scale of the Identity Freedom Index (IFI), ranging from a maximum of 50 (denoting full identity freedom) to a minimum of 5 (lack of identity freedom). The general value of the index is determined by the figures (from 1 to 10) obtained in the six basic categories which correspond to the four, already described, constitutive components of identity freedom. These are:

1. the constitutional guarantees of freedom (“yes” or “no”);
2. the freedom of mass media (according to the World Press Freedom Index, WPFI);
3. the restrictions in the field of religious beliefs and practices (in accordance with the Government Restriction Index, GRI and the Social Hostilities Index, SHI);
4. the condition of civil society (according to the Civil Society Participation Index, CSPI).

The detailed characteristics of all the categories, together with the reasons for choosing these and not other measures, will be presented in a later section of the article.

Table 3 Identity Freedom Index (IFI): conceptualisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Index points</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Constitutional guarantees of freedom, CGF</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Freedom of mass media, WPFI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Restrictions in the field of religious beliefs and practices of governmental provenance, GRI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Restrictions in the field of religious beliefs and practices of non-governmental provenance, SHI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Condition of civil society, CSPI</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s own compilation.

The constitutional guarantees of freedom, the first component of the analysis, can be considered as the absolutely fundamental determinant of IFI. This is determined by the nature of the constitution as the supreme legal act that determines the functioning of the entire state legal system. The
logic of the primacy of the basic law, regardless of the form it ultimately assumes,\footnote{The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is both part and result of the Dayton peace agreement (Annex 4), is noteworthy, see Sienho Yee, “The New Constitution of Bosnia and Hercegovina,” \textit{European Journal of International Law} 7, no. 2 (1996): 176-192.} therefore leads us to believe that the catalogue of personal and political freedoms formulated in its pages is reflected in the national legislation, i.e. in lower-ranking legal acts. Focusing on the constitution seems fully justified in this sense. Differentiating the extent to which the basic acts define the objective and subjective scope of the above-mentioned freedoms can, however, prove difficult. This is especially the case if taking into account the fact that these reflect the states’ specific situation, this being conditioned not only by the current political situation (including the opportunism of state elites), but also by historical, social and cultural circumstances. For this reason, the analysis of the assumptions of the constitution of the ten states under study will be limited to determining whether the legislator defines the basic personal and political freedoms. In the first, positive option (“yes”), the indication value is 10.0. In the second variant, defined as negative (“no”), the indication is 0.00. As Table 4 shows, both in the Visegrad Group and in the Western Balkans, all the examined cases provide for minimal constitutional guarantees of personal and political freedoms. It can therefore be argued that, at this normative level, the inhabitants of each region enjoy a degree of identity freedom underlaid by a certain standard of civil liberties. In this sense, both regions may appear to be “twinned” regions, i.e., having, at least, a similar range of constitutional guarantees for expressing identity.

An analysis of the legal acts being compared here shows that, although they differ from each other, they are similar in the scope of freedoms they provide for. This, in turn, does not make it possible to hierarchise the cases (the partial IFI figure is 10 each time), but it explains the use of an alphabetical order.
### Table 4 Constitutional guarantees of freedom: comparison of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Constitutional guarantees (Yes or No)</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The officially declared nature of the constitutional regulations does not reflect the real scope of the freedoms the citizens of the states in question possess, despite the fact that it undoubtedly affects the specific solutions (institutions, mechanisms, procedures) implemented in practice.\textsuperscript{16} Measurements based on specific factors embedded in the socio-political reality of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans provide an answer to the somewhat flawed normative approach. The World Press Freedom Index, WPFI, is one such measurement (see Table 5).

WPFI presents an assessment of media freedom in 180 countries around the world. The index ranges from 0.00 (full freedom) to 100.00 (complete lack of freedom).\textsuperscript{17} As Table 5 demonstrates, the differences between the states in question are clear, with up to 9.16 points separating the two most extreme cases: Montenegro, which ranks 104\textsuperscript{th} with a score of 32.74, and Slovakia, ranked 35\textsuperscript{th} with a score of 23.58. The results for the Czech Re-


public (40th place with a score of 24.89) and Kosovo (75th place with a score of 29.68) are also noteworthy as, according to the NiT ranking, these are the states showing respectively the highest and the lowest quality of democracy. With a score of 30.44 placing it 87th, Hungary’s case is symptomatic, showing a significantly lower levels of media freedom than in the three Western Balkan states: Bosnia and Herzegovina (63rd with a score of 29.02), Kosovo, and Albania (ranked 82nd with a score of 29.84).

Table 5 Mass media freedom: comparison of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>World Press Freedom Index 2019: rank; score</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>35; 23,58</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td></td>
<td>40; 24,89</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td></td>
<td>59; 28,89</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>63; 29,02</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td></td>
<td>75; 29,68</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td></td>
<td>82; 29,84</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>87; 30,44</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>90; 31,98</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>95; 31,66</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>104; 32,74</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table shows the partial IFI figures, ranging from a minimum value of 1 (for Montenegro) to a maximum value of 10 (for Slovakia). Unlike the constitutional guarantees approach, the IFI here clearly points to differences between the two regions under study. Among the Visegrad Group countries, three out of four (a vast majority) are at the top of the ten-member ranking, while the Western Balkans are characterised by a poorer record, with all six countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro) showing a relatively uniform position on this criterion.

The next, third component of identity freedom is based on the possibility of expressing and cultivating certain religious practices, irrespective of the religion (the dominant vs minority religion). Two indexes prepared by

Robert Wiszniozs and Kamil Glinka
the Pew Research Center address this issue. The first, the Government Restriction Index (GRI), focuses on restrictions to religious freedom introduced by the state, its organs and institutions, while the second, the Social Hostilities Index (SHI), assesses limitations to this freedom originating from the actions of individuals, social groups or organisations. For both these indexes, the minimum value is 0.00 (denoting complete absence of restrictions) and the maximum value 10.00 (very high levels of restrictions).¹⁸

Table 6 shows the GRI values of the ten states under study. With a score of 1.1 (referred to as “low”), Albania features the lowest level of restrictions on religious freedom, while Hungary and Poland, with a value of 3.3 ranking them as “moderate,” show the widest scope of state regulations on the freedom of religious beliefs and practices. With GRI values of 2.5 and 3.1 respectively, the Czech Republic and Kosovo show a degree of similarity and are included in the same “moderate” category. It is therefore tempting to conclude that the relationship between religious freedom, defined through the prism of the activity of state organs and institutions, and the quality of democracy, is not strong.

The IFI scores obviously reflect the hierarchy determined by the GRI with the best result attributed to Albania (IFI 10) and the worst to Hungary and Poland (IFI 2 in both cases).

Table 6 Government-originated restrictions in the field of religious beliefs and practices originating from governments: the case of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Government Restriction Index 2016: score; type</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>1.1; low</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.3; low</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.3; low</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>2.5; moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5; moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Government Restriction Index 2016: score; type</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>3,0; moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>3,1; moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>3,1; moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>3,3; moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>3,3; moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data used leads to a key and seemingly surprising conclusion: that the religious space of the Western Balkans is relatively larger than that of the Visegrad Group. In this sense, the Western Balkans have a noticeably wider range of identity freedom. Although it is difficult to unequivocally determine the reason for this, it can very cautiously be assumed that the cultural and religious heterogeneity of the region is an important factor, as it translates in some “natural” way into local (state) legislation, the powers of state institutions and the practice of their functioning.

The distribution of SHI values, although it also affects the issue of religious freedom, provides a markedly different hierarchy for the examined cases (see Table 7). For example, while the GRI scores categorised as “low” reflect only the situation of Western Balkan states (Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro), the same category includes, for SHI scores, states of both regions, Albania and the Czech Republic.

An analysis of Table 7 below shows that the states with the highest and the lowest quality of democracy differ in the SHI ranking, compared to the GRI ranking. With a SHI rating of 1.2 placing it in the “low” category, the Czech Republic is the state with the highest quality of democracy. At the other end of the quality of democracy ranking is Kosovo with a rating of 3.8. While this score places it in the “moderate” category, Kosovo also shows the highest level of restrictions observed in the field of religious beliefs and practices. This, in turn, allows us to believe that the results of the measurement correspond with the results of the NiT test.

While Albania obtained the highest IFI (10) in both the GRI and the SHI rankings, results differ for the country with the lowest value: while Hungary and Poland both obtained a score of IFI 2 on the GRI index, they are replaced by Kosovo as the lowest-ranking state on the SHI index.
Table 7 Non-government originated restrictions in the field of religious beliefs and practices: the case of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Social Hostilities Index 2016: score; type</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>0,2; low</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>1,3; low</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>1,8; moderate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>2,2; moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>2,4; moderate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>2,6; moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>2,8; moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>3,3; moderate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>3,4; moderate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>3,8; moderate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In comparison with the indications of the GRI index, the SHI results suggest that the dividing lines between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans are blurred. On the basis of the analysed data, it is impossible to point to objectively relevant differences. It can therefore be concluded that, despite the differences visible at the level of the state institutions (as in the case of GRI), social relations do not internalise this type of disproportion. In this sense, both regions are characterised by a comparable scope for religious freedom, which is a constitutive component of identity freedom.

The significance of the fourth component of identity freedom is emphasised by the Civil Society Participation Index (CSPI). The methodology of measurement gives the highest value (10) to situations where the level of the development of civil society is relatively high, and indicates the formation of a participative political culture, while the lowest value (1) denotes permanent crisis in the field of civic activity.

19 The study covered 128 states, which cannot be described as fully consolidated democracies. The time covered by the study is the period 2006-2018, see Gov-
As Table 8 shows, two Visegrad countries stand at the two extremes of the CSPI ranking: the Czech Republic (CSPI = 10), and Hungary (CSPI = 1), while Kosovo, with (as previously stated) the lowest level of system consolidation, ranks seventh with a CSPI of 6.

Table 8 Civil Society measurement in the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Civil Society Participation Index 2018: score</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>Western Balkans</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Visegrad Group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The IFI values reflect the country-level of development of civil society across both regions. The similarity in the situation of Poland, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, with an IFI of 8 for each country, is worthy of attention. This data shows that the CSPI does not allow for a clear differentiation of the Visegrad Group and Western Balkans. It can be inferred that, when studied through the prism of the activity of non-governmental organisations, the condition of civil society depends more on internal conditions, i.e. those that refer to the micro (state) level, than on regional, meso-level causes.

Summary

This model, with its intentionally simplified view concerning the functioning of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans states, is of course not the only approach to analysing the complex and time-varying relationship between the quality of democracy and identity freedom. However, it allows for a synthetic comparative analysis of the studied cases, based on measurable and therefore objective criteria. Table 9 summarises the two key measurements for testing the formulated hypothesis. On the one hand, it ranks the states under study according to the results of NiT. On the other, it presents the ranking based on IFI. Even a quick look at the content of the analysed table makes it possible to capture numerous discrepancies.

Table 9 Identity Freedom Index: comparison of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Nations in Transit 2018</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>IFI points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank; democracy score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>4; 2,29</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>6; 2,61</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>7; 2,89</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>10, 3,71</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>12, 3,93</td>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>13, 3,96</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>14; 4,11</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>15; 4,36</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>16; 4,64</td>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>19; 4,93</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s own compilation.

One first needs to point out the relatively high position taken by Albania which, with 43 IFI points, creates almost the same conditions for the development of identity freedom as is the case in the Czech Republic with its IFI of 45. In comparison with the result achieved in the Nations in Transit study (NiT = 4.11), it is an increase of five places, from seventh to second place.
Second, Hungary’s case is noteworthy, coming in last (tenth) place in the IFI ranking (with only 22 points), a decrease by as much as six positions (from fourth to tenth), compared with its Freedom House ranking (NiT 3.70).

Looking at the states with the highest and the lowest quality of democracy, it can be noted that, whereas the Czech Republic retains its first place in both NiT and IFI rankings, Hungary shows the lowest quality of democracy in the IFI ranking, bumping up Kosovo (last in the NiT ranking) to last-but-one in the IFI ranking. Comparing both sets of rankings shows that only three countries – the Czech Republic, Montenegro and Serbia – retain a stable position. In the seven remaining cases, three – Slovakia, Poland and Hungary – obtain a lower score on the IFI than on the NiT ranking, and four – Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo – gain a higher one.

The analysis of the data presented in Table 9 does not allow for a positive verification of the hypothesis, as quality of democracy appears not to be a determining factor in determining the level of identity freedom. While at the two extremes the cases of the Czech Republic and Kosovo do seem to unequivocally confirm the relation underlying the formulated hypothesis, those of Albania and Hungary clearly contradict the adopted assumption. As has already been pointed out, Albania, a state of the Western Balkans with a relatively low quality of democracy, is characterised by almost the highest level of identity freedom among all ten cases. Conversely, Hungary, as a Visegrad Group state with a relatively high quality of democracy, has the lowest level of identity freedom.

The starting assumption, with its intuitively defined division between Visegrad Group states characterised by higher IFI figures, and Western Balkan states with significantly lower level of identity freedom, turns out to be unjustified. In this case, the dividing lines do not reflect development trajectories determined by the consolidation of the system and, consequently, accession to the European Union. Thus, despite its EU membership and its fulfilment of certain democratic standards, a state may not create sufficient conditions for the development of identity freedom. On the other hand, this freedom can develop almost without hindrance even in states that are just at the beginning of the process of adopting the universal democratic rules and mechanisms. This statement calls for the question of the causes of these unexpected (and therefore somewhat surprising) differences. Apart from the detailed characteristics and explanations which exceed the purpose of the present, partial article, it is worth mentioning the circumstances, both structural (conditioned by historical and sociocultural factors) and opportunistic, which undoubtedly affect the possibili-
ty of shaping identity freedom. Opportunistic circumstances related to the pursuit of specific political projects here seem to play a special role.

The results of our analysis also provoke the question of whether and, if so to what extent, the functioning of both the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans regions internalises specific differences and similarities, taking into account identity freedom and quality of democracy. Contrary to intuitive assumptions, the scale of divergence between the regions turns out not to be very significant and does not allow them to be located at opposite poles of a particular continuum. On the other hand, the focus on identity freedom and quality of democracy obviously does not allow one to draw the conclusion that differences do not exist at all.

Considering the IFI ranking, it can clearly be said that one region, the Visegrad Group, possesses a greater scope of identity freedom. The findings from the IFI index also lead, however, to the conclusion that identities can, as is proven by cases such as that of Albania, successfully manifest themselves in opposition to the developmental trajectories of a democratic state of law. Thus, the instruments underlying identity freedom are beyond the classifications analysed on the basis of the criterion of belonging (or not belonging) to a particular region. This is confirmed by the comparison of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. The comparison also suggests that while regional identities such as those of the Visegrad Group and of the Western Balkans form a relatively homogeneous whole, identity freedom not only differentiates these two regions but also, and this is particularly important, the countries which make up each of these two regions.

Bibliography


National Identity vs Regional Belonging
"Not Racists but Careful." Czech Perceptions of Visegrad Collaboration during the Crisis of European Migration Policies

Ondřej Daniel, Charles University, Faculty of Arts

Abstract:
Although migration from Syria, Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan Africa had almost no impact on the Czech Republic in 2015, the general public in the country was highly receptive to the scenes that took place at migration bottlenecks in the Mediterranean region as well as at the border crossings in Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria. The population's fears gave rise to a new populism, which legitimised xenophobia. In the Czech Republic, leading politicians, influential media outlets and other public commentators insisted on coupling migration with anxieties about Islam and the prospect of a future in which immigrants would outnumber the local population. With the exception of certain marginalised far-right discourses, these ideas had until then been unthinkable. But the events and images that dominated the summer and autumn of 2015 heightened Czech sensitivities around all aspects of migration. The intense debates that took place during this “crisis of European migration policies” thus offer a helpful context for exploring the topic of migration in the Czech media as related to the positive image of Visegrad countries’ cooperation. The chapter is based on a content analysis of Czech media sources following a search for specific keywords and their combinations in the media archive.

Keywords: migration, Czech Republic, islamophobia, 2015, Visegrad Group

Introduction

This chapter deals with Czech images of cooperation among Visegrad countries during the period of heightened discussion about refugee migration, in particular in the second half of 2015. In the emic terms used by media, politicians as well as ordinary people, these events were conceived as a “migration crisis” (migrační krize). The term was highly criticised in the academic discourse, first for merging migrant and refugee agendas and
second for its inaccurate use of the term “crisis” to describe the events. At its peak in late August and early September 2015, the countries on the so-called “Balkans route” received between five and ten thousand refugees each day. Migration was in fact blossoming and it may therefore have been unfortunate to conceive of it in terms of crisis. Czech political scientists Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál introduced a rather technical description of the events based on their reception by political actors in the Czech Republic. According to them, a “so-called ‘immigration crisis’ represents a phenomenon that almost all relevant and even wholly marginal political parties feel the need to react to.”¹ Even further from the emic term, Italian migration theorist Sandro Mezzadra depicted it as a “real crisis made apparent by the ‘long summer of migration.’”² According to Mezzadra, in collaboration with the German cultural studies scholar Manuela Bojadžijev, there was no question of writing about a “migration crisis” and one should label it primarily in relation to the actors who perceived it as such, i.e. as a real “crisis of the European border and migration regime.”³

Issues of migration were one of the topics and series of events that functioned in a unifying manner for several of the “new member states,” including those of the Visegrad Group vis-à-vis the external actors. This opposition was not new, as one could find the first manifestations of this discord in the different reactions to the 2003 US occupation of Iraq. It nevertheless came out much more strongly in the summer and autumn of 2015, perhaps also because of the bitter memories of the economic downturn after 2008, which many commentators in these countries considered to have been imported from the EU. Additionally, this opposition targeted both refugees and asylum seekers, and an “old Europe” considered to be too open towards them. Migration issues strengthened the debates about national sovereignty in the EU and became an important mobilising agenda for local politicians, with deeply receptive local public opinions.

How did Czech images of Visegrad cooperation evolve during these events? And how were they framed? What can this mean for a common

¹ Vladimír Naxera and Petr Krčál, “‘This is a Controlled Invasion’: The Czech President Miloš Zeman’s Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no. 2 (2018): 4.
Visegrad regional identity? In order to bring valuable replies to these research questions, I have gathered material consisting of articles from the main Czech media outlets (press, radio, TV and web portals) from the second half of 2015 and stored in the large media database Anopress. Using this sample, I conducted a search according to three keywords in Czech, namely “Visegrád” for the Visegrad Group, “Orbán” for the then most discussed representative of a Visegrad country, and “Balkán” for the “Balkan route” followed by refugees coming predominantly from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan with the aim of reaching Germany in the first instance, but also the United Kingdom and Sweden. On the basis of the more than 30 articles I identified as useful for this research, I decided to place the main emphasis on the opinion press, which seemed the most adequate source for replying to the research questions. Using the semiotic approach, I have analysed the content of these entries and aimed to contextualise and interpret it. Further research questions arose during the course of the analysis, in particular regarding the meanings attached to Visegrad as a keyword as events unfolded, and regarding the wider self-positioning of the Czech Republic inside the Visegrad Group. These concerned not only discursive relations with Germany, Brussels and Western Europe in general but also with Russia on the one hand, and with the Balkans and Southern Europe as regions with first-hand experience of dealing with the refugee agenda on the other. The nature of the Czech understanding of the refugee phenomenon as well as the solutions proposed also needed to be questioned in order to contextualise the experience of the Visegrad countries from a more general perspective.

“Coming to Rape and Veil Your Daughters”

Mezzadra noted that, although during the events in question, “practices of spontaneous and often amazing solidarity have cultivated the blossoming of ‘welcoming’ initiatives that have involved tens of thousands of common European citizens and have often become stabilised after the ‘emergency,’”⁴ many other initiatives aimed to stop refugees and to address the issue on the basis of concerns that stood in complete opposition with solidarity with the refugees or with their first EU entry countries. On Czech Facebook pages and other social media, numerous hoaxes and viral visuals appeared, animalising the refugees from the Middle East or Africa while de-

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⁴ Mezzadra, “In the wake,” 930.
picting them as “hordes of throats-cutters without control, widening chaos and collapse.” These images showing complete hostility to the refugees became widespread, with many people having heated discussions about them at their workplaces, in their families or even with complete strangers on the street. Media and mainstream politicians started to use many of them for an unashamed anti-refugee campaign that Czech political scientists Ondřej Slačálek and Eva Svobodová described in terms of brutalism, declinism and naturalism, while the more liberal political columnist Jiří Pehe compared the public debate to that of the pre-War proto-fascist “Second Republic.”

The degree of xenophobia, expressed in particular as Islamophobia and Afrophobia, was stunning. Observers noticed it not only in the Czech Republic but also in other countries of the Visegrad region as well as in Germany’s eastern parts. The fear of Islam is probably related to the almost two-decades-long and very intense rhetoric of “clash of civilizations,” to which the Czech audience seems all the more receptive that it has received consecration from the highest levels of Czech politics. The Islamophobic agenda was spread from Prague Castle by Miloš Zeman, the President, a dedicated reader of Oriana Fallaci and Walter Laqueur who enjoys translating their ideas into *bons mots* that entertain or, worse, “educate” an important part of the Czech population.

Naxera and Krčál also note that the “concept of Islamophobia in the Czech Republic is a relevant [one] because the target audience of Zeman’s speeches ‘wants’ to listen to such framing.” Canadian anthropologist Ivan Kalmar nevertheless warned about a tendency to conceive of Eastern European Islamophobia as exceptionalism: “East–West differences in Islamophobia are often seen as greater than they really are. In terms of content,
the discourse of Islamophobia is practically identical to that in the East of the EU and the West, as well as in North America and other parts of the world.”\(^\text{10}\) What is nevertheless common to such stances among the citizens of new EU member states and Visegrad countries is that, as described by Austrian anthropologist André Gingrich, they spring from a non-colonial racism.\(^\text{11}\) As Hungarian media scholar Anikó Imre puts it: “Eastern Europe may be the only, or the last, region on Earth where whiteness is seen as morally transparent, its alleged innocence preserved by a claim of exception to the history of imperialism.”\(^\text{12}\) On the other hand it cannot be denied that many of these countries and their societies were not always passive objects of Austro-Hungarian, then Nazi and finally Soviet imperialism: they also took active roles in shaping these regimes. Several of these countries also currently pursue their own neo-colonial interests in the Western Balkans or in the post-Soviet space, which may result in politically articulated feelings of superiority.

Insularity of the Landlocked?

Even though the Visegrad countries occasionally identified with a common agenda, the possibilities for their mutual understanding and cooperation were complicated by the profound and often emphasised differences in their nation-building. Czech nationalism in particular has often been described as bearing meanings reserved to the “small people,” a political actor that only came into being in the 19th century.\(^\text{13}\) As Ondřej Slačálek and Eva Svobodová also observed of Czech nationalism, “its dominant form does not emphasize conservative values, but rather its own progressive, intellectual and liberal nature.” This may also be one of the reasons for Czech Islamophobia’s success in building on a predominantly aggressive secular mental landscape whereas even among Polish conservatives a

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distant echo of Christian-based ethics of “love thy neighbour” could still be identified.

Czech sociologist and historian Stanislav Holubec has, furthermore, observed that Czech nationalism in the 1990s understood itself primarily as non-nationalist, criticising in particular the Slovak “nationalist nationalism.” For him, there is historically no doubt that Czech nationalism tended to look down on other nations in the Visegrad region, identifying them with the East while Czechs were supposed to carry meanings reserved to the West or, even better, to the Centre. One can also think in this context of Milan Kundera and his highly ethnocentric idea of Central Europe being kidnapped from the rest of the West by the Soviet invasion of 1968.

As anthropologist Milica Bakić-Hayden has shown, several nations of former Yugoslav countries pursued similarly desperate and highly aggressive quests for belonging to the West. She described this lofty attitude towards their eastern neighbours as “nesting Orientalism.” Elsewhere I have argued that one of the first to note such nesting and appropriation of orientalist discourses within the framework of former Yugoslavia, with each of its nations believing to be the easternmost western European nation with its own antemurale historical myths, was Slovenian psychoanalyst and Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek in the early 1990s. Since then Žižek’s thinking has evolved in line with his new role as a global celebrity. He has widely been criticised for adopting a Eurocentric stance after large parts of the Balkans were incorporated in the EU (or at least in its neighbourhood policies), in contrast with his work of the early 1990s which aimed to deconstruct Western misreadings of the Balkans’ history, culture and society. Similarly to nationalist Slovenes, for whom Europe in the 1990s ended at the river Kupa, nationalist Czechs were not likely to compare themselves with Slovaks, Hungarians and Poles: they saw their place elsewhere. Since many negative stereotypes prevailed in Czech society against the French and most other West European nations, including even

neighbouring Germanic nations (though with the sole possible exception of the English), it is also worth asking the question of where exactly Czech nationalists placed themselves on their mental map of Europe.

“Unanimously Against the Quotas”?

Notwithstanding all these differences, some observers concluded that a “common approach to democracy and overall mental climate”\(^\text{18}\) prevailed in the debates on migration in 2015 in the four Visegrad countries. The position these countries were supposed to hold was that of standing “unanimously against the quotas.”\(^\text{19}\) The quotas in question were a Brussels-led initiative determining the numbers of refugees to be relocated from the three countries that were on the frontlines of refugee reception in the Schengen area. In December 2015 when Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka while holding the presidency of the Visegrad Group he was colourfully depicted by a Czech political columnist as a representative “combining the sharpness of the Hungarian position with the limited responsiveness of Poland and the naughty radicalism of Slovakia.”\(^\text{20}\)

The main divergence in the foreign policies of the Visegrad countries was, however, to be found in their positions towards Russia and particularly against its engagement in the war in Ukraine. It was Poland that was perceived as a hard-liner in relation to Russia, following up on its own historical interests in Ukraine, whereas the other three countries adopted more lenient views, in line with their particular business interests both in Russia and in terms of securing Russian investments on their territories.\(^\text{21}\)

On assuming the presidency of the Visegrad Group in July 2015, Sobotka must have searched for equilibrium among these positions, already before


\(^{19}\) Ste, “Visegrád: jednotně proti kvótám!” [Visegrád: Unanimously against the Quotas], Haló noviny, September 5, 2015, 1.


\(^{21}\) Martin M. Šimečka, “Radosław Sikorski: Putin je gambler, kterému přestalo přát štěstí” [Radosław Sikorski: Putin is a Gambler without Luck], Respekt, December 14, 2015, 44.
the migration debate intensified the interest of Czech media and politicians towards the Visegrad Group as such.\textsuperscript{22}

During the heated debates of the late summer and early autumn of 2015, another politician became prominent in the Czech media: Interior Minister Milan Chovanec, of Sobotka’s Social Democratic party. Faithful to his position as chief commander of the Czech security forces, Chovanec did not hesitate to dress in six-pocket khaki trousers and to travel to the “migration frontline” in southern Hungary in order to present to the media images of the security threat and to guarantee a corresponding protection to Czech citizens. Chovanec also insisted on Czech solidarity with Hungary’s aim of stopping the migration by force: “We have offered our policemen to Hungary. We have also delivered 50 large tents and will prepare to deliver, on Hungary’s request, several military trucks for transporting the material.”\textsuperscript{23}

The divergence between the Czech position regarding refugee migration and that of the other Visegrad Group member states came into being only in the second half of September 2015, when the Visegrad countries adopted a common position towards the relocation mechanism. As briefly mentioned above, this mechanism set the quota of refugees each country was to accept after their relocation from Greece, Italy and Hungary, i.e. the countries where they were first registered in the EU system. The relocation system was widely criticised in the Czech media and by its political figures, in particular with reference to the “free choice” of refugees determining their EU country of residence.

This position was often reinforced in the media by the testimonials of refugees themselves, such as one by Mustafa Ibrahim, an Iraqi refugee, for Czech television: “All the people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, they all want to go to Germany.”\textsuperscript{24} Following this logic, Slovak Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák stated to the profoundly conservative national Communist Czech newspaper \textit{Haló noviny} that he could not imagine that migrants living and having family and friends in Germany, Netherlands or Belgium would accept voluntary relocation to Estonia. He insisted that he

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Události, komentáře, “Rozhádaná Evropa a povinné kvóty” [Disputing Europe and Binding Quotas], \textit{ČT 24}, September 23, 2015.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
had never heard any argument proving that quotas were capable of saving human lives and of preventing tragedies.\textsuperscript{25}

Whereas the Czech position of refusing the relocation mechanism fully depended on the Slovak position and partly also on the Hungarian one, Poland finally voted for the quotas. This was presented in the Czech media as a betrayal of the common Visegrad agenda. This is also how Czech president Miloš Zeman, with his characteristic rhetorical style, explained it to Czech television audiences: “If the Visegrad countries reach an agreement on something and this agreement is even repeated, a decent person should not break the deal.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{“Coming to You, Mummy Merkel!”}

The feelings cultivated by the Czech media were those of humiliation\textsuperscript{27} resulting from misunderstandings with Poland but more importantly with the West in general and Germany in particular. According to the critics of its “welcoming policy,” Germany (often equated with the person of its Chancellor Angela Merkel) supposedly transferred its citizens’ anger from refugees to “Eastern Europe,” and it is noteworthy that this time the Czech Republic was included in the region which at other times was looked down upon.\textsuperscript{28} Some other commentators stressed the arrogance of Western European politicians towards the EU’s “new member states.”\textsuperscript{29} Personification through the German chancellor was a rhetorical operation not only \textit{vis-à-vis} Germany but also towards the West as such. Merkel was criticised even by former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski, who objected that her decision, even if based on noble reasons, was a pure-

\textsuperscript{25} Ste, “Visegrád: jednotně proti kvótám!,” 1.
\textsuperscript{26} Události, komentáře, “Rozhádaná Evropa a povinné kvóty.”
\textsuperscript{27} Ex. “Can you imagine our feeling of humiliation? Can you imagine how a citizen of a V4 country must feel when today he sees people, from goodness knows where, unidentifiable, with no proof of identity, coming to you, to Mummy Merkel, in endless streams, with no allowance or respect for any of our rules… and totally at odds with the laws on proper asylum procedures? Do you know how humiliated we feel when they are immediately granted benefit payments much higher than the pay of a ‘hardworking Polish plumber’?” (Speech at a demonstration organised by National Democracy, Prague, 6 February 2016. Cited in Sláčálek and Svobodová, “The Czech Islamophobic Movement,” 487).
\textsuperscript{28} Petřík, “Vydírání.”
\textsuperscript{29} Ste, “Visegrád.”
ly German decision, forgetting that Germany was part of the Schengen area and that its decision therefore had an EU-wide impact.30

Czech prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka criticised Angela Merkel for not taking enough into account the security implications of her decision. According to him, these should have come first, before any aim to help refugees from war-torn Syria.31 In the aftermath of the Paris attacks of mid-November 2015, Sobotka also equated refugees with Islamist terrorism and expressed his understanding for the fears of ordinary people. Calls for the securitisation of the borders and manipulative uses of fear were thus no longer the preserve of far-right politicians such as Tomio Okamura, who in the meantime once again took out the “Greek card.”

Blaming Greece was a popular rhetorical device among right-wing Czech politicians since the late 2000s, when Greece started to encounter its fiscal problems. “Greek cheaters and slackers” were then blamed for the problems of the Eurozone, if not for the whole of the economic crisis after 2008. Now Okamura revived this sort of orientalist stereotyping stating that increases in migration were the result of Greece’s failure to effectively stop the migrants already in the Mediterranean.32 The Visegrad Group should therefore look for its partners not in Western, nor in Southern Europe, but elsewhere, in closer cooperation with Western Balkans countries. As Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek said, “The Balkans must not become destabilised. It is our eminent interest.”33

“Let Us Help Them Where They Come From”

In line with Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini’s later argumentation, Czech commentators hostile to Germany’s welcoming tendencies, such as senator Jan Veleba or member of parliament Jiří Koskuba, considered mi-

30 Šimečka, “Radoslaw Sikorski.”
31 “Rozhovor s premiérem Bohuslavem Sobotkou” [Interview with Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka], Otázky Václava Moravce, ČT 1, November 11, 2015.
33 Bahounkovap, “Visegrád a země západního Balkánu budou spolupracovat” [Visegrad and West Balkans Countries will Cooperate], CT24.cz, November 11, 2015.
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migration to be the result of Western intervention and (neo)colonialism.\(^{34}\)

According to this mental strand of comments, such as that of inventor of one-size-fits-all recipe senator Jaroslav Doubrava, the refugees ought rather to “stay in their places of origin in order to fight for their countries.”\(^{35}\) In the same line of thought, it was stated deliberately that humanitarian help for refugees in Greece or Hungary is distributed so widely that the refugees do not value it anymore.\(^{36}\)

The idea of helping the refugees not directly on the European continent but already before their arrival – i.e. in their countries of origin – was widespread and not limited to political fringes such as the political party Úsvit (The Dawn).\(^{37}\) In November 2015, the Czech Republic together with Slovakia and Hungary announced increases in their humanitarian assistance to Africa, a gesture that could be put in relation with these countries’ unwillingness to accept refugees not only from Africa but from virtually anywhere else as well.\(^{38}\) Many voices critical to the “welcoming initiatives” (iniciativy vítáčů) insisted that Czechs are not, in general, racists, but that they needed to be careful not to repeat the errors committed by Western Europe. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexandr Vondra thus compared the 5 percent of people with a migration background in the Czech Republic living in harmony with the majority Czech society, with the “no-go zones” of Marseille, Rotterdam or Birmingham.\(^{39}\)

Following the analysis released by Deutsche Bank in the early autumn of 2015, which presented migration as an opportunity to rejuvenate Germany’s labour force,\(^{40}\) Czech Chamber of Commerce president Vladimír

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35 Petřík, “Vydírání.”

36 Ex. question of the spectator Jirka in “Boj o kvóty pro uprchlíky” [Struggle for Refugee Quotas], Hyde Park, ČT 24, September 17, 2015: “Photos and videos circulate on the Internet, where humanitarian aid is virtually destroyed. Train stations and the ditches of the roads through which the so-called refugees pass are full of discarded sleeping bags, tents, toys, mats, blankets, food”.

37 Petřík, “Vydírání.”


39 Otázky Václava Moravce, “Uprchlická krize” [Refugee Crisis], ČT 1, August 30, 2015.

Dlouhý was one of the rare voices to treat the subject differently. Dlouhý stated that a special fund for the requalification and education of refugees should be created as a public-private partnership. Such a fund would, according to him, represent a much better investment than the fences and army material that would not block the refugees anyway.41 The economist Pavel Kohout, analyst for the agency Partners, expressed a similar viewpoint when he said that the “German industry needs free circulation, notwithstanding political disagreements.”42 Even representatives of Czech liberal political parties were well aware that the Schengen area is in the interest of the Czech economy, and the Czech Prime minister treated the possible end of Schengen area as a catastrophe for the Czech economy.43 Helena Langšádlová, Member of Parliament for the liberal-right party TOP 09, also did not omit to mention that free circulation in the Schengen area is primarily of an economic nature, in the shape of the free circulation of goods, and that it was therefore in the interest of European countries to keep it as it was.44

“Until Old Europe Open Its Eyes”

Several conclusions can be drawn from the reactions to events that were considered as exceptional. Many Czech politicians adopted and reinforced the unwelcoming position of the Czech population. These positions were further emphasised by the media, as it understood the exceptional nature of the events and the nationwide interest in it. During the period under study, relations within the Visegrad Group, and Czech perceptions of these relations, were very dynamic and saw some turbulent changes. Hungary was the country understood as the frontline and as such it should receive the Czech’s solidarity and help. Greece and Italy were considered too far away and facing their own problems. These latter two countries were also seen through the lens of a simplified narrative of the economic crisis which, in the Czech

43 “Rozhovor s premiérem” [The Interview with the Prime Minister].
44 “Napětí na hranicích” [Tension on Borders], Události, komentáře, ČT 24, September 14, 2015.
Republic, was understood as having been imported from the EU and particularly from its southern region. Czech nationalists’ reaction to the crisis would be to call for the borders to be closed against any new crisis that might arrive from abroad. On the other hand, Germany and the West were understood by Czech opinion as too idealistic and as underestimating the security threat posed by refugees. The Czechs felt they knew the best solution to the “multicultural failure” of the West: to close the doors and build barbed wire fences.

Czech commentators’ unwelcoming agenda contained many seemingly hypocritical positions, including that “Czechs did not need to accept the refugees on their soil as they were already helping somewhere else,” that “these were not refugees but economic migrants, profiteers who in any case did not want to stay in the Czech Republic,” that “they did not even value the help they received here and that they were not grateful for it,” or that “Czechs were not racists as they lived in relative harmony with their minorities.” Of course, one might think about Czech collusion with Ukrainian or Vietnamese mafias to exploit emigrant labor or about the profits made from the poverty business and the social welfare system, e.g. through providing many Czech Roma with non-bank loans with breathtakingly high interest rates, or extraordinarily expensive house rents. To speak about interethnic harmony in the Czech Republic is therefore either a deliberate lie or inexcusable ignorance. Finally, even among relatively refugee-welcoming economists and liberal-right politicians, the interest for the Czech economy of keeping the Schengen area was equated with the general interest of European countries as such. The interests of French automotive workers, for example, surely differed from those of the Czech subcontracting companies, before the Peugeot and Citroën assembly plants were removed from Aulnay-Sous-Bois, France to Kolín, Czech Republic thanks to “free circulation.”

Contemporary Czech nationalists thus looked for allies particularly among the supporters of similar mental positions among the Visegrad countries. For various reasons, these were understood as bearers of a similar socio-historical and economic fate, owing in particular to their experience of Soviet domination. Czech nationalists also presumed that their Visegrad counterparts will share with them particular attention to the new forms of domination explained with mental inertia in similar terms as that of Moscow – be it that of Brussels or Frankfurt. In some cases, the similarity in the position of Visegrad countries with that of radical voices from the *Neue Bundesländer*, both opposing the influx of refugees, was emphasised, thus turning post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe into a common space with a mission to foster and preserve an idealised image of Europe as a safe haven to be protected from mass immigration from the Middle East, North Africa

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and other parts of the Global South. It is questionable whether this phantasy was grounded in any particular historical period, but the 2015 events have undoubtedly shown a new stage in the collective psychology of many inhabitants of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. After the periods of pro-Western euphoria faded into first aesthetical and later in some cases even ethical Ostalgia, Westalgia has become a new relevant trope.

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Leaders and Ethnicity in post-Yugoslav States: The Discursive Politics of Aleksandar Vucic and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic

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Abstract:

Ethno-national leaders most often describe the nations they purport to represent as communities existing naturally in the world, independent of the socially constructed political domain. Building on this assumption, they explicitly seek to reduce ethnic politics to the articulation and pursuit of national interests. Too often, scholars have taken this description as an analytical departure point, focusing their lens on the struggle between competing objectives and blurring the line between ethnic politics and ethnic groups. This both creates analytical deficiencies and implicates the analyst in reaffirming the nationalist politics.

In recent years, various constructivist approaches have sought to expand the analytical terrain by exposing the role of political agents in producing ethnicity as a primary political identity. This chapter departs from this literature by identifying large discursive themes through which Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who served as President of Croatia from February 2015 until February 2020 and Aleksandar Vucic, the current President of Serbia, intensified Croat and Serb ethnic rivalries, preventing the emergence of palpable regional political identities in the Western Balkans. The themes are identified by examining their public statements between 2015 and 2019. By exposing these discursive activities as crucial for group formation, the chapter shows how unstated implicit assumptions perform political work, creating modes of understanding into which the explicitly stated interests will logically fall into place.

Keywords: Aleksandar Vucic, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic nationalism, identity, Western Balkans

1 Presidential elections were held in Croatia in December 2019 and January 2020. Grabar-Kitarovic lost out in the second round to the Social Democrat Zoran Milanovic. The paper was written and submitted for publication before the elections (Note from editors).
Introduction

“Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks,” Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said in June 2017, “can move mountains together”.\(^2\) Six months later, in January 2018, Vucic’s Croatian counterpart Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic stated that Serbs and Croats were “old European nations with a thousand years of intertwined destinies”.\(^3\) The explicit and implicit meanings of these statements by the leaders of the two largest states to have emerged from the collapse of Yugoslavia were several. Both presidents sought to balance their otherwise rival discourses with self-portrayals as constructive leaders, in opposition to leaders that escalate nationalist antagonisms. Both spoke of the potential for moving beyond present-day conflicts, Vucic with the image of a hopeful future, and Grabar-Kitarovic with storylines of shared history.

Yet these occasional appeals to regional commonalities and the more commonplace narratives of two rival nations have more in common than meets the eye. Both defined relevant political communities as ethnic collectivities, rather than as the citizens of their respective states. Both spoke on behalf of ethnic groups, portraying themselves not only as presidents of states, but also as ethnonational leaders. Both were also pedagogical, insofar as the two leaders aspired to educate their audiences about the character of the two collectivities, as displayed in interpretations of past events, present intents and future potential. When speaking of outstanding political issues in the post-Yugoslav region that now falls under the neologism of “Western Balkans,” there was rarely any recognition of political groups other than the ethnic ones. While there may be alternative interpretations of policies, the ethnicised understanding appeared naturalised and immune to serious challenge.

Indeed, this dominance of ethnic groupism reflects the social realities that have emerged from the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. The institutional rubble left behind the collapse of Yugoslavia was replaced with a new architecture that granted independent statehood to all six Yugoslav federal republics. In theory, the new states are envisioned as embodying the principles of individual freedoms and civic nationhood. In the post-conflict po-

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political context dominated by ongoing ethnic rivalries, however, they serve as proxies to ethno-national interests. Beyond the day-to-day politics, Croatia and Serbia have also enshrined ethnicity in constitutional arrangements that define them as the states of the Croat and Serb people respectfully. Neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), targeted by competing Serbo-Croat ethnic claims, has emerged from the 1992-1995 war internally divided into two ethnic territories, the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska.

The pages that follow seek to understand how the current president of Serbia and his former Croatian counterpart contributed to the supremacy of ethnicity as an axis of political identification in the Western Balkans. Rather than analysing this larger region as a whole, the analytical focus follows the main thrust of ethnopolitical rivalries. This is due to the absence of strong regional political identities, whose development is precluded precisely by the ethnopolitical dynamics discussed here. More specifically, the discussion examines the ethno-political triangle of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. It extends to BiH because much of the agency of the presidents of Croatia and Serbia is directed towards the Croats and Serbs living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and involves claims to parts of the internationally recognised territory of the neighbouring country.

This discussion is also an attempt to address a deficiency in the literature on the current ethnopolitical condition in the region. While much has been written on the role of political elites in shaping the dynamics that led to the violent collapse of Yugoslavia, there has been comparatively little research on the agency of leaders in reproducing post-war ethnic divides. A wealth of literature has thus examined the roles of Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic in constructing the ethnic rivalries of the 1990s, but few studies offer a targeted analysis of how contemporary generations of nationalist leaders continue to structure ethno-political dynamics.

Moreover, this analysis has implications for understanding ethnic politics more generally. While the ethnopolitical rivalry discussed here has a unique content specific to post-Yugoslav regional dynamics, it also shares a conceptual foundation with ethnic politics beyond the region, namely that the conceptual fabric of ethnicity differs from those of other types of political collectivities. One may freely modify one’s views on a specific issue,

4 “Western Balkans” is problematic as a geographical term, as its signification has shifted with the EU accession of former Yugoslav republics. With EU accession, Croatia is typically no longer referred to as a Western Balkan state. As such, “Western Balkans” is a political term coined by actors external to the region, and is used here with this caveat.
change political parties, or even acquire and renounce citizenships, yet ethnicity signifies unalterable traits acquired through descent. The naming practices, common culture, or shared bloodline may be social constructs, but they are commonly understood as inherited “possessions” integral to the very corporal existences. There is no appeal to the out-group, but the message to the imagined in-group is of a different kind to those used in more typical forms of political contestation. The rejection of ethnic politics by all those who fall into an ethnic category becomes a matter not of political preference but of treason and betrayal of one’s essence.

The roles of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and Aleksandar Vucic will be examined by deploying the tools of discourse analysis. This approach is chosen because the leaders of the postwar Western Balkans operate within a radically different constellation of opportunities and constraints from those of the wartime leaders, and work in a terrain of ethnic politics that is largely limited to discursive rivalries. In the existing security framework, which involves Croatia’s membership of NATO and the EU, the military option appears to be off the table. Yugoslav wars have ended with mutual recognition and agreement on borders. Yet even with little potential for mass mobilisation, words and statements continue to mobilise group sentiments. The content of the discursive exchange between the two governments is able to drive the ebb and flow of ethnic solidarities.

The performative structure of the two leaders’ discourses will be analysed as they appear in their selected statements during the 2015-2019 timeframe. The analysis seeks to identify the ontological order that works behind the statements, and serves as a conceptual foundation for the leaders’ historical narratives, hierarchies of collective identities, and the advocated political imperatives. In pursuit of understanding the performative effects of the two discourses, it applies the discursive-affective framework as a model for understanding how elite discourses resonate across social fields to generate understandings of collective self and other. Prior to presenting the findings, the next section outlines and justifies this interpretative framework.

The discussion leads to the conclusion that the two leaders contribute to the dominance of narratives built on the moralised binaries of the virtuous self and the corrupt other in the political discursive space of Croatia and Serbia, as well as of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This discursive action generates an affective environment that prevents the emergence of resonant common narratives, stymieing opportunities for the constitution of cross-cutting affective ties, and reproducing the landscape of identities dominated by ethnic cleavages.
Much has been written about the persistence of ethnic issues that remain unresolved two decades after the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Many commentators observe the dominance of collectivist forms of political activism, which comes at the expense of the individualism necessary for democratic development. Yet there has been insufficient attention to mechanisms and processes that consistently reproduce strong group solidarities. One avenue for addressing this deficit is to examine the structure of discourses on ethnicity, since it is them that make ethnic groups possible. By speaking about Serbs or Croats, we bring them into existence. When spoken about by politicians claiming to represent them, Serbs and Croats acquire natural interests, innate characters and other aspects we typically associate with human individuals. These are political performances, always constituted in opposition to alternative conceptions of political communities, albeit their performers seek to disguise them as mere descriptions.

If we depart from this foundation rather than assume the existence of a self-conscious and politicised group, we expose avenues for explaining the power of nationalist discourses to generate such consciousness, intensify the levels of “groupness,” and organise the landscape of identities across time and space. Rather than taking groupist understandings of national leaders for granted, we are prepared to recognise the ways in which leaders are complicit in group constitution. Beyond this, we are able to trace the performative action that politicises collective identities, defines collective interests and results in collective action. When Aleksandar Vucic and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic speak of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, they do not merely recycle commonplace understandings. While they do evoke ethnic nations whose existence has been naturalised and taken as given by the majority of the citizens of Croatia and Serbia, they also add political importance to national membership, essentialise the self/other binary and intensify feelings of ethnic solidarities. As this repetitive performative action reproduces high levels of groupness, the possibilities for congregation around alternative axes of identification are reduced.

An understanding of how what at first glance appears as mere words or rhetoric comes with such far-reaching implications requires that we explore the implicit meanings of discursive acts. This exploration involves two distinct dimensions. First, the analytical locus is directed to identify-

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ing the assumptions that work behind the explicit statements. Each time Aleksandar Vucic states “we Serbs,” he implicitly naturalises the existence of Serbs as a political nation, and simultaneously presents himself as the embodiment of national will. When Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic states that Serbs and Croats are old European nations, she both presents herself as a historical authority and reproduces static views that see nations as near-eternal beings moving unchanged along the path of history.

Yet the question remains why such messages, whether expressed explicitly or subtly circulating below conscious recognition, seem to have a greater power of mobilisation than attempts to intensify alternative solidarities. Citizens can also mobilise along regional lines within states, raising the levels of groupness amongst inhabitants of economically disadvantaged regions. There are numerous linguistic, cultural and historical commonalities that can provide a solid basis for differentiating the people of the former Yugoslavia from nations both to the east and the west of the region. Indeed, it is this ex-Yugoslav axis that suddenly “erupts” into view when Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats meet each other outside of the Balkans. A common aspiration to join the community of European nations within the framework of the European Union, and commitment to shared European values, also does not seem to provide a significant alternative to more traditional self-understandings, despite having been a major theme in the political discourse for over two decades.

The path to answers takes us to the literature on human cognition that has challenged commonplace understandings of a fixed and rational political subject. One such challenge comes from psychologist Drew Westen, who has studied political partisanship to reach far-reaching conclusions about the distinction between reason and emotions. Westen asked participants to comment on a series of slides displaying contradictory statements, some by their favoured candidates, others by rival politicians. While making comments, functional magnetic imaging technology (fMRI) was used to measure the participants’ brain activity. The results, albeit not entirely surprising, suggested new ways for understanding the formation of political preferences, including the power of discourse to generate social realities. When it came to their preferred candidates, the partisans had a hard time finding contradictions, while their brain activity was overwhelmingly concentrated in the areas tasked with emotional processing. In contrast, they were able to quickly identify contradictions in statements made by ri-

val politicians. It appeared that positive emotional associations toward favourite candidates overrode the rational distress of logical contradiction, leading Westen to conclude that when reason and emotions collide in politics, emotions carry the day.

Other studies have corroborated Westen’s conclusions. In *Thinking Fast and Slow*, psychologist Daniel Kahneman\(^7\) thus thinks of two cognitive systems that can be seen as complementary to Westen’s networks of emotional association. System 1 is that of fast and impulsive thinking while system 2 is tasked with conscious, analytical deliberations. The affective reaction of system 1 shapes, or “primes”, the rationality of system 2. Applied to the study of political discourse, Kahneman’s model tells us that logical inconsistencies of an act detectable at system 2 may have diminished relevance if the act is able to mobilise quick positive cognitive associations operating at system 1. A speaker wearing a Croatian checkerboard badge, for example, creates instant recognition as a “we” to Croatian audience, mobilising sensibilities that prime them to positively interpret the speech, which shapes and moulds the more conscious and methodological analytical dissection.

These observations suggest that an understanding of the generative powers of nationalist discourse requires recognition of meaning-making processes that operate below conscious awareness. Rather than search for objectivised “common sense” meanings of an act, we need to give analytical weight to the sensibilities they generate, creating similarities in interpretations and meanings of the same predicament within ethnic lines, and divergence across them. As psychologist Dusan Kecmanovic summarised it, if such actions manage to intensify group solidarities, the resultant identity anchoring can produce a powerful ethnic bias:

> “When people begin to identify with a certain community, they start to treat it as if it were their own and soon behave toward it the way people usually behave toward themselves. They prize the virtues of their own and ignore their imperfections, appear to themselves more beautiful, ready to give precedence to their own over that which is not theirs.”\(^8\)

In the post-Yugoslav space, ethnic politics, dominant since the early 1990s, have consistently reproduced high levels of ethnic solidarities. This has cre-

\(^7\) Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2011).

ated a discursive context in which leaders could speak of ethnic relations with fewer constraints than is the case with economic policy, corruption, the state of political freedoms and other issues about which there are deep political schisms amongst domestic constituencies. Their narration of national virtues, descriptions of national friends and foes, interpretations of ethno-political moment, and definitions of national interest speak for the collective self and about the relations with the other, and as such face fewer domestic challenges. At the same time, the leaders’ discourse does not emerge deterministically out of the political context, as it is always constituted against alternative possibilities. It is this “element of exclusion, in which one has to do violence to the inherent openness of the situation, to impose a pattern” that makes all action political. Thus, its impact on the direction of ethnic politics and, hence, levels of groupness is the leaders’ unique contribution to the landscape of identities.

What, then, are the structures of performances through which the leaders of Croatia and Serbia leave their imprint on the social field? The question can be approached by analysing their mobilisation of the two most abundant reservoirs of discursive resources for producing and reproducing perceptions of deep and essential differences between the peoples of the former Yugoslavia. One is the reservoir of religious differentiation, which is significant considering that culturally and linguistically Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs have more in common with each other than with any other national community outside of the Balkans. It is religion that turns their gaze of solidarity toward coreligionists in distant places, and away from one another. It provides resources for placing the people of the former Yugoslavia in different civilisational narratives, separating them into Western, Eastern Orthodox, and Islamic civilisations.

The second one is the reservoir of past injustices. While the people of the former Yugoslavia have historically been occupied by various empires and invaders from outside the region, the periods of widespread ethnically motivated violence between them have continued to live in collective memories. Some of the most obvious ones are the genocidal killings of Serbs by the fascist Independent State of Croatia, the five centuries of Ottoman Muslim occupation of Serbia, and Serb Cetnik atrocities against Croats and Muslims during World War II. These and other events have been powerful resources for the assembling of divergent national narratives that pit the virtuous national self as a victim of aggression at the

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hands of the profane ethnic other. These are the narratives whose extraordinary performative powers come from the emotional saliency of the portrayals of human suffering in its most extreme form.

Yet the most resonant and performatively consequential resources come from the discursive legacy of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. The brutality of the war, which resulted in numerous atrocities, destruction of cities and obliteration of economies across the region, is within living memory for most. Some of the outstanding points of ethnopolitical contention, such as the status of Republika Srpska within Bosnia, the political rights of Serbs in Croatia, and the partially recognised statehood of Kosovo, are a direct consequence of the institutional arrangements that put an end to the violence but did not remove the conditions for the continuation of ethnopolitical conflict. The contemporary issues, then, unavoidably mobilise the emotionally salient narratives of the wars of Yugoslav dissolution, with accompanying themes that deploy the binaries of good and evil, heroes and villains, friends and foes to essentialise the collective self and other.

The two sets of discursive resources tell us that an understanding of how the discourses of the presidents of Serbia and Croatia mobilise the axis of ethno-national belonging demands that we understand their interpretations of religious differentiations and the content of their historical narratives. The next section takes up this task by juxtaposing the religious discourses of Aleksandar Vucic and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, showing their joint effect of boldening lines between Serbs and Croats. This is followed by a section that looks at the themes through which the two leaders interpret the conflicts of the 1990s.

Reinforcing Religious Symbolisms

When it comes to religious self-identification, the contrast between the current presidents of Croatia and Serbia and their predecessors is striking. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic takes every opportunity to emphasise that she is a practicing Catholic. She is a vocal supporter of the Vatican contracts, which oblige the Croatian state to set aside tens of millions of euros for supporting the Catholic Church and implement mandatory catholic religious education into public schools. In contrast, her predecessor, Ivo
Josipovic, is a self-declared agnostic who has criticised the Church for infil-
trating the secularity of the Croatian state.\textsuperscript{11}

In Serbia, the differences are more nuanced, as the influence of the Ser-
bian Orthodox Church has been steady across different presidencies. Aleksandar Vucic has praised the Serbian Orthodox Church for its role as a “unifier” of the Serb people and can frequently be seen participating in re-
ligious ceremonies. While his predecessors Tomislav Nikolic and Boris Tadic are also self-identifying Orthodox Christians that have nurtured good relations with the Church, there has been a turn towards a greater presence of religious rituals in Serbia’s state institutions. Vucic, for in-
stance, has continued Nikolic’s practice of bringing a \textit{badnjak} oak branch into presidential office, a symbolic expression of religiousness not seen during Tadic’s term.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet the religious themes of the two leaders are more complex, counter-
balanced by the need to portray their states as European secular democra-
cies. Indeed, in the case of Vucic, they are situated within a triple voice. One Europeanises Serbia as a country that shares values and a common his-
tory with other continental democracies. Membership in the common frame-
work of the European Union emerges here as a natural ambition and national interest. The second voice presents Serbia as a leading Balkan na-
tion and a source of regional stability. As the largest ethnic nation in the former Yugoslavia, Serbia is portrayed as a unifying agent. In this voice, the current president of Serbia has emphasised similarities between the constituent nations of the former Yugoslavia. Speaking ahead of a visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015, he observes:

“We desire good relations with Albanians, but that is a different society even when we live side-by-side. With Bosniaks, we are almost the same, our only differences are religion and faith.”\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Filip Rudic, “Orthodox Customs Spread Deeper into Serbian Institutions,” \textit{Bal-
kanInsight}, May 8, 2018, https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/08/orthodox-christian-
\item Faruk Medjedovic, “Vucic: U Srebrenici ce me docekati aplauzima” [Vucic: In Se-
n1info.com/Vijesti/a68049/Aleksandar-Vucic-o-Srebrenici.html (accessed April 19, 2019).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Operating behind this statement is an understanding of nations as linguistic, cultural, historical and religious communities. The first three bring Serbs and Bosniaks together, as becomes evident in contrast with the linguistically and culturally different Albanians. The statement also implicitly echoes the narratives dominant in Serbian historiography that portray Bosniaks and Serbs as nations that share a genetic pool, with the latter being Muslim converts of the former. Religion is what is left to explain the difference. Yet, considering that religion is also a necessary condition for contemporary rivalries and historical brutalities between the two, it emerges as an essential feature of the national character.

This leads to the third voice, which places Serbs and Serbia within the Orthodox Christian civilisation. This civilisational discourse works to intensify feelings of religious solidarity with the Orthodox Christian states in general, and emotional affinities between Serbia and Russia in particular. While pro-Russian sentiments have a long tradition that predates Vucic’s rule, his pro-Russian speech has taken a strong civilisational tone. He has framed Russia as a historical friend and a natural ally of Serbia, portraying the Serbian and Russian Orthodox churches as almost indistinguishable. He has made statements that celebrate Orthodox unity, expressing his hope that the church would manage to “fend off attempts at dividing the Orthodox world”.

For his part, Putin has echoed this frame, pledging millions of euros’ worth of Russian funding for church renovations in Serbia.

This is not to say that Vucic’s politics are aligned or constructed in coordination with those of the church. His attempts at moving Serbia along the path of integration into the European Union set limits to his Orthodox civilisationalism. His willingness to make a compromise over the disputed status of Kosovo, one of the major obstacles standing in the way of Serbia’s EU accession, has been met with opposition and condemnation by religious leaders. The Kosovo dispute notwithstanding, both the president of Serbia and Patriarch Irinej have expressed satisfaction with the relations between the church and the state. The state has aided the church both

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within Serbia and across its borders, having funded the construction of churches not only in Serbia but also in the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska. Vucic has gone so far as to boast that one “could hardly find anyone who has done more for the church.”

The Serbian president’s performative amplification of religious sensibilities has found resonance in the religious symbolism of his Croatian counterpart. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic comes from the Croatian Democratic Union, a national conservative party closely aligned with the church. She has described Catholicism as “an important component and a moral compass” in her personal life. She is frequently seen at mass and has held speeches at prayer gatherings. For their part, the Catholic Church in Croatia has praised the president for the “revival of the Croat essence” and for “valuing Christian and Catholic heritage.”

Beyond the pure self-identification, Grabar-Kitarovic has made comments on controversial religious matters that echo those of the Croatian Catholic Church, albeit with performative disguises designed to maintain the image of the secular character of presidential office. In early 2019, she expressed “deep regret” at the decision of the Catholic Church of Carinthia to forbid a religious commemoration near the Austrian town of Bleiburg for the thousands of soldiers and civilians associated with the fascist puppet Independent State of Croatia that were murdered by Yugoslav forces at the end of World War II. The statement was followed by the explanation that state officials should not comment on church relations, and that she was only speaking as one of the Catholic faithful. In this manner, the church implicitly received discursive support from the state, even with the

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explicit reaffirmation of the dividing line between the two. After all, a sitting president of a state is never merely one of the faithful.

When it comes to the hotly debated proposals for the revision of the Vatican accords, which many lawmakers see as compromising Croatian secularity, the then president has repeatedly expressed her opposition. Yet, rather than expressing direct support for the content of the accords, she legitimised the position by referencing legal obstacles:

“I believe that this would set a dangerous precedent in the international law, except if both sides come to a conclusion that the revision should happen due to practical reasons.”

It remained unclear why international treaties were somehow immune to amendments and revisions. Nonetheless, the statement achieved the goal of supporting the power of the church in Croatian society without having to say as much.

These and many other similar speech acts testify to the fact that the deployment of religious symbolism has intensified during the terms of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and Aleksandar Vucic. While the religious solidarities that the two leaders seek to promote are oriented in opposite directions, their joint effect on the differentiation between Croats and Serbs is mutually reinforcing. When Grabar-Kitarovic emphasises her own Catholicism or promotes a policy that bolsters the role of the church as an agent of socialisation, she mobilises sentiments that are a major source of differentiation between Croats and Serbs. When this happens in the context of the Serbian president’s Orthodox civilisationalism, the parallel enactments bring the lines of separation into plain view.

Yet the two discourses are performatively structured so that this effect is produced without the outright clericalisation that would shatter the line between the church and the state. In Vucic’s case, Orthodox civilisationalism is only one strand tensely coexisting with conflicting Serbian Europeanisation narratives and assertion of intimate bonds with other, non-Orthodox Yugoslav peoples. In this manner, the president of Serbia structures his discourse to pursue the dual goals of EU integrations and close relations with Russia, advancing this political pragmatism with appeals to diverse sensibilities.

The Croatian president is not faced with the same challenge, as the Europeanisation of Croatia has also brought it into political union with other major Catholic states. At the same time, any attempt by state officials to strengthen the position of the church is open to accusations of violating secularity as one of the fundamental values of the European Union. To address this, the religious symbolism of Grabar-Kitarovic has largely operated in the domain of implicit messages. She has mobilised religious sensibilities by means of self-identifications, legal arguments and other messages that contextually display the Catholic traits of Croatian society while the explicit statements reaffirm religious equality and civic conceptions of citizenship.

Indeed, the religious themes are important for producing ethnic differentiation between otherwise similar peoples. Yet they do not necessarily produce ethnic antagonisms and are on their own insufficient for understanding the emotional thrust of ethnopolitical rivalries. To advance this understanding, we must turn to a different type of discursive agency, one that departs from the deployment of the emotionally polarising rival frames of historical injustices, grounded in the moralising oppositions of the ethnic self and other. This conflict of historical narratives is the dominant theme in the rival discourses of the two presidents and is responsible for much of the power of their speech acts to reproduce and radicalise ethnic divides. The following section analyses its content and performative powers.

**The National Essence of Victims and Perpetrators**

The bloodshed of the Yugoslav wars may have ended two decades ago, but its legacy remains omnipresent in the public discourse of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The former warring sides are today parties to a conflict of narratives over the character of the war, with their competing frames of victims and aggressors, wartime events and justness of outcome. Most importantly, these themes are projected towards the future, as unachieved wartime ambitions are kept alive through repetitive rhetorical enactments. We thus hear mention of independence for Republika Srpska, a Bosnia and Herzegovina without entities, the return of Kosovo under Serbia’s control, the creation of a Bosnian Croat entity and other imaginaries whose pursuit would unravel the institutional arrangements that put an end to the conflicts.

To be sure, the leaders of Croatia and Serbia have explicitly distanced themselves from any backward-looking agenda. Yet, implicitly and context-
tually, their discourse contributes to the perceptions that wartime ambitions are never far from the surface as ultimate, even if distant, ethno-political goals. Vucic, for example, generates this effect through frequent appearances with Milorad Dodik, the leader of Republika Srpska, who has championed the idea of the entity’s separation from Bosnia and Herzegovina for well over a decade. While he pays lip service to respect for Bosnia’s territorial integrity, his policy toward the neighbouring state is conducted through close cooperation with Dodik. For her part, Grabar-Kitarovic has made numerous statements underlining Croatia’s respect for the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while simultaneously amplifying the frame of discrimination of Bosnian Croats and developing close relations with politicians that advocate ethnically splitting the existing institutions to create a Croat entity.

When it comes to historical narratives, the two leaders are more explicit. These narratives operate with a temporal rupture that allows explicit interpretations of the past to obscure the meanings they generate about the contemporary moment. The president of Serbia thus speaks of the events of the 1990s as of another episode in the long history of Serb victimisation. He laments the expulsion of the Serb population from Croatia and the loss of Kosovo as tragedies perpetrated by long-standing national enemies. In contrast, the Croatian president sees the events not as the expulsion of Serbs but as the defeat of their separatist army in a legitimate and heroic operation. For Vucic, the creation of Republika Srpska and its subsequent legalisation is the sole just outcome amid the national disaster. For Croatian officials and Bosniak politicians, Republika Srpska is the unjust legacy of the war, having been created through the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats.

While ostensibly speaking about the past, the logical corollaries of these frames refer to the present. Despite Vucic’s blandishments, contemporary Croatia is constituted as a state built on the suffering of Serbs, independent Kosovo is a war catch of Albanians and its Western supporters, and Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged as an artificial state in opposition to its natural ethnic nations. The present further opens up into future potential. While Serbia can do little regarding the status of Serbs in EU-member Croatia, the ongoing struggle for Kosovo becomes a matter not of simple national interest, but of morality and national pride. Support for Republika Srpska likewise means nourishment of the newest part of the national organism borne out of the struggle for survival, while the idea of its independence discreetly signifies a triumph of freedom.

The competing narratives of the Yugoslav wars signify meanings about the contemporary predicament precisely because both leaders speak of na-
tions as fixed, near-eternal beings in the world. The metaphor of the national being serves here to construct the image of the ethnic essence that links the Serbs and Croats of today with those who lived in the distant past. Vucic demonstrates this when speaking of the 19th century Serb heroes who led the uprisings against the Ottoman occupation of Serbia:

“It has become clear that the faith made out of blood and tears is the strongest creation, and from this Serbia was created, we were all created out of it […] if Karadjordje was freedom, Milos Obrenovic was the state. From Karadjordje we learned about ethics, from Milos about politics.”

The statement is more than a description of 19th century events. The heroes of the time are taken out of their space and time to symbolise national continuity and represent the virtuous national essence. Contemporary Serbs are to find a moral and behavioural compass by looking back to the creators of Serbia. The Serb national being, humiliated in the 1990s, can be revitalised if it learns again to behave as it did during the proud years of national rejuvenation.

Indeed, the national being metaphor features more prominently in the discourse of Aleksandar Vucic than in that of any of his predecessors, often with added dramaturgy. Most frequently, he speaks of a humiliated Serb nation brought down on its knees, only to continue with portrayals of his own rule as a time when it proudly stood up, never to bow to anyone again. When speaking of ethnic politics, the Serbian president typically and explicitly deploys groupist understandings that conflate leaders and parties with ethnic groups. When speaking of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, he observes:

“I hope for peace, stability, for better, more open and more concrete relations between Serbs and Bosniaks. The relations between Serbs and Croats in BiH are already very good. This is a kind of paradox – on the one side we have Croatia, where provocations are

frequent, but in BiH Croats are fair towards us and there are no tensions.”

Here Vucic refers to the close relations that president of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik has built with the leaders of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union, conflating it with the relationship between Bosnian Croats and Serbs. He then continues to assign behaviour to the entire nation, Bosnian Croats being “fair” in contrast to the provocative Croatian Croats. Lurking in the background of these frames is a passive voice that constitutes the Serb nation as the innocent recipient of ill intent by the dangerous ethnic other.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic’s performances have also built on groupist understandings and the metaphor of the national being. As in the case of her Serbian counterpart, these frames follow a pragmatic political logic, having been deployed to legitimise Croatian involvement in internal relations within Bosnia and Herzegovina. When addressing audiences in the BiH city of Mostar, the Croatian president thus spoke of Croats as “people, one being,” adding that Bosnia and Herzegovina could not exist without its Croats. Here she uses the national being metaphor to unite the individual self-identifying Croats within a single spatial imaginary, while the latter comment ethnicises the character of BiH society. If BiH could not exist without one of its nations, ethnos emerges as its condition for possibility.

Moreover, both leaders look deeper into the past to constitute today’s national friends and foes. Vucic takes every opportunity to commemorate the genocidal killings of Serbs during the World War II-era Independent State of Croatia. Albeit not explicitly assigning blame on the Croat ethnic other, the performances contextually circulate suspicion that present-day politics are merely another episode in the historical enmity between the two nations. For her part, Grabar-Kitarovic framed Croatia’s history within Yugoslavia as a period of national victimisation at the hands of Serb desire for regional domination. This is a longstanding conflict that caused the Croatian War of the 1990s, along with its atrocities against Croat civilians and the destruction of Croatian cities. Speaking at a commemoration in

Vukovar, she framed history as a defining feature of the contemporary relations: “a lot of water will flow down the Danube before Croatia and Serbia can say that they are friendly countries.”

When it comes to the civilisational discourse, Aleksandar Vucic has resorted to history to legitimise portrayals of Serbia and Russia as the closest of national friends. Besides Orthodox solidarities, he points to the historical role of Russia as the main supporter of Serbia in the toughest of times. This was made visible most recently with the Russian UN veto of the proposed 2015 Srebrenica resolution and the ongoing support for Serbia’s territorial integrity in Kosovo. Although the Serbian president here echoes the dominant understandings amongst Serbs, the historical continuity is made possible only through a highly selective reading of the past. As Jelena Milic observes, the narrative

“consciously skips very important periods in Serbian history such as the interwar period, almost the entire period of Yugoslavia from the Tito-Stalin split until the 1995 escalation of the crisis in Kosovo and the NATO bombings, and the period of the first democratic government of Serbia of the late prime minister Zoran Đinđić.”

All these were periods marked by tense relations between Russia and Serbia.

The conflict of narratives reaches the peaks of affective polarisation when the two leaders speak of “Storm,” a 1995 operation in which the Croatian military forces overran the separatist Republic of Serb Krajina (RSK) and sent hundreds of thousands of Croatian Serbs into refuge. In Croatia, August 5, date of the capture of RSK capital Knin, is celebrated as a public holiday. In Serbia, it is a date commemorating Serb suffering in Croatia. Both are marked with large public ceremonies attended by political leaders. The occasion sets the stage for bringing the clash of storylines into full view, with joyful expression of national pride on one side, and sorrowful resentment over national humiliation on the other.

The speech acts of the two presidents have only served to amplify this affective schism. When juxtaposed with one another, the opposing senti-


ments become manifest in their full intensity. At a 2016 celebration, the current president of Croatia thus proudly declared “Storm” to be a moment in which the historically oppressed nation finally experienced justice:

“The Storm’ is the crown of our historical struggle for freedom. With pride and victory in all the achievements and successes achieved hitherto, let’s joyfully celebrate our state holiday, grateful to all who sacrificed lives and health for the achieved independence.”

In contrast, the Serbian president has echoed the dominant Serb portrayals of the “Storm” as a crime against the Serb nation in Croatia. Beyond this, he has also expressed resentment at the contemporary Croatian observances:

“I do not know if our neighbours will ever stop celebrating our tragedy, but I know that we have a voice that will always say that a crime happened in August 1995 […] this was a continuation of something that started in World War II.”

While the two storylines are clearly in direct conflict, what they share is no less notable. Both are built on a continuist ontology that historicises the 1995 events as part of a causal chain extending into the past long beyond the lived experiences of most. For the Croatian president, “the struggle for freedom” refers to Serb integralism that has oppressed the Croat nation since the first half of the 20th century. For the leader of Serbia, the 45 years of common Yugoslav experience emerge as merely a respite in the historical animosities between the two nations. When the violence continued in the 1990s, it may have involved different generations of Croats and Serbs, but they constituted the same incompatible national beings as in World War II. Moreover, the animosities stretch to the contemporary moment. The defeat of Croatian Serbs may have put an end to the violence, but not to the ill intents of Croats, as seen in their celebrations of a Serb tragedy.

Aleksandar Vucic’s “Storm” narrative is also remarkable for its theme of self-praise. He thus states:

“Whatever they desired against the Serbs they achieved, and on top of that they are playing the role of the victim. And then, some small Vucic from a small and defeated Serbia showed up to say things that we will not, cannot and do not like to hear.”

The current president of Serbia here uses the affective intensities generated by the divergent interpretations of the “Storm” to portray himself as a leader who remasculinised the humiliated nation. His discourse becomes an outlet that matches the affective intensities of Serb masses, constituting him as a courageous leader who says what other Serb leaders do not dare to say. Although the statement acknowledges that the action is in the realm of speech rather than of any policy decision, it becomes a resonant part of his larger narrative of the nation standing up after years of bowing down.

“Storm,” then, instantiates the divergent historical discourses by bringing into collision two of the most affectively salient storylines. Yet, the discourses dominate the political space not only because of such affective qualities, but also due to constant iteration and instantiation. Beyond “Storm,” this is achieved through the interpretation of numerous historical events, policies and personalities through which the two leaders continuously remind their audiences of the deep, longstanding and essential differences between Croats and Serbs. The leader of Croatia has thus amplified the victimisation frame at events commemorating the destruction of the Croatian city of Vukovar, while the Serbian president has done the same when memorialising Serbs murdered at the Jasenovac concentration camp during World War II.

The two leaders have also used the war crimes trials at the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia as opportunities for the deployment of the affectively salient frames of heroes and criminals. While the acquittal of general Ante Gotovina has allowed the Croatian leadership to follow public sentiments and celebrate him as a hero, Grabar-Kitarovic has also shown willingness to go a step further and challenge the Tribunal’s convictions of Croats. In contrast to her predecessors Ivo Josipovic and Stjepan...

Mesic, who stripped over a dozen individuals convicted of war crimes of their state awards, she decided not to do the same for the six Bosnian Croat leaders convicted in 2017.29 Aleksandar Vucic, on the other hand, has moved between self-portrayals as a responsible leader who respects the verdicts of the international court and the popular sentiments that celebrate the numerous Serb leaders that it convicted. While not specifically disputing the convictions, he has criticised the court for making political decisions and emphasised that the implications of the verdicts were limited to individual responsibility.

Indeed, the Yugoslav wars have left many resources for the assemblage of resonant storylines capable of mobilising intense but opposite emotions on the different sides of ethnic boundaries. During the presidencies of Ivo Josipovic and Boris Tadic, the leaders of Croatia and Serbia chose not to engage in constant discursive feuds over the violent past. While they differed in their interpretations of the Yugoslav wars, they much more often spoke of cooperation, emphasised commonalities in their understandings of war crimes and even offered regrets for the policies of wartime leaders.30 In contrast, Vucic and Grabar-Kitarovic have used the frequent commemorations, the ongoing war crimes trials and unresolved points of ethnopolitical contention to send messages that only escalate emotional polarisation. As the iteration of such messages turns ethnic boundaries into the divides between love and resentment, joy and sorrow and pride and shame, ethnic groups emerge in their full palpability.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary individuals who self-identify as Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs often speak of identity politics as a distraction from tangible issues that affect daily livelihoods, such as rampant unemployment, low salaries, gov-

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ernment corruption, or crime. When touching upon the topic of whether
ethnicity defines moral character, one of their mainstream responses is that
the intrinsic virtues of a person know no faith or culture. Even when dis-
cussing the wars of the 1990s, one of the popular narratives describes the
manipulation of ordinary people by their leaders and malicious foreign ac-
tors.

These understandings have made possible the development of dense
economic, cultural and social ties that cut across ethnic boundaries. While
ethnic politics continue to dominate the political space, there has been
comparatively little ethnically motivated conflict in daily interactions. Yet,
these social realities have not been translated into the development of larg-
er political solidarities that would bring together the former warring sides
living in post-Yugoslav states into a single, regional actor. When the locus
of activity shifts from daily interaction to political imaginaries, local and
regional solidarities give way to ethnic particularities. Somehow, despite
the contradiction, individual Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats are good and vir-
tuous friends and neighbours, while the imagined ethnic nations they con-
stitute remain corrupt and profane.

If the post-Yugoslav animosities live on in the domain of imaginaries in
ways that often conflict with lived experiences, then the discursive action
that constructs the imagined collectivities emerges as a site at which the
ethnic conflict is produced and reproduced. The powerful performativity
of leader discourses here come from the modality of a group representa-
tive and outlets that disseminate it widely and frequently. For these reasons,
the previous pages have offered a way to understand the performative
structures and ethnic symbolism of speech acts of leaders of the two largest
post-Yugoslav states. They showed that Aleksandar Vucic and Kolinda
Grabar-Kitarovic have intensively deployed the themes that mobilise senti-
ments of solidarity within ethnic boundaries and the opposite sensibilities
across them more frequently and more radically than their predecessors.
This contributed to the perceptions of ethnicity as an essential differentia-
tor, adding new obstacles to building larger, regional solidarities.

The two leaders have had numerous discursive resources for assembling
narratives that generate high levels of ethnic solidarities. Both have intensi-
fied the deployment of religious symbolism in contrast to their predeces-
sors, thus making the principal marker of differentiation between
Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs more visible. The religious themes only ac-
quired more resonance when deployed within the larger discourses that di-
rectly and blatantly brought to a clash two emotionally salient accounts of
national histories. Although the clash predated them, Aleksandar Vucic
and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic have radicalised it by choosing to engage in-
to this contested discursive space with frequent comments, groupist understanding, parallels to the contemporary moment and, in the case of the Serbian president, added dramaturgy.

Indeed, ethnicity continues to dominate the landscape of identities in the post-Yugoslav space precisely because ethnic markers have remained deeply politicised. To be sure, the disastrous conflicts have left a legacy of powerful affective polarisation that follows ethnic lines independent of any intervention by the elites. Yet, affects and sensibilities ebb and flow across time, partly in relation and response to discursive action. As the daily experiences of ordinary people illustrates, the legacy of the conflict does not determine the development of social ties, nor does it necessarily prevent the emergence of cross-cutting axes of identification. Since political agency can have structuring effects on the field of public discourse, leaders have opportunities to modify storylines, reinterpret events and narrow the gap of narratives, which would create opportunities for moving beyond the ethnic animosities of the past three decades. Whether explicit or implicitly, Aleksandar Vucic and Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic have done the opposite.

Bibliography


Religious Institutions as Agents of Continuing Ethnic Mobilisation in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract:
Understanding the role of religious communities in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina’s post-Communist societies is very important for grasping the nature and history of democratic development in these two countries. A close investigation reveals that the relationship between the political and religious elites is crucial, but also subject to change given the shifting nature of social developments. Three stages in this relationship can be observed. The first phase started with the collapse of Yugoslavia and Communism in 1991-1992 and lasted until the early 2000s. This was a formative stage for the new societies, and religion played a key role in the national homogenisation and construction of new identities. The second phase, which started in the early 2000s and lasted most of the decade, was a period of relative economic prosperity, with a weakening of the nationalist political elites’ sway, and consequently a weakening of the role of the religious organisations. The third phase, which started with the financial crisis of 2008 and is still ongoing, is marked by a renewed populist and rightist agenda in politics, which has also resulted in a strengthening of the public role of organised religion in both countries.

Keywords: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catholic Church, Islamic Community, far-right populism, HDZ, SDA
Introduction

Religious organisations played a key role in the ethnic consolidation and mobilisation that both preceded and directly facilitated the outbreak of inter-ethnic strife that brought down the second Yugoslavia. The majority of contemporary observers and historians of the Yugoslav conflict recognise the centrality of the convergence of political-religious interests in this process. This is not to say that the political elites and religious leaders of the time shared the same worldview, or even interests. Rather, the interests of political and religious leaders were either complementary or, very often, overlapping, making this a happy and long-lasting marriage of convenience. In addition, these political-religious synergies varied widely across the different Yugoslav republics, depending on the elites’ political origins, the ideological underpinnings of the post-Communist regimes, and the social role and nature of the religious organisations involved.
According to Brubaker, both ethnicity/nationalism and religion have been characterised as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification.\(^1\) There is an inextricable link between the two, especially in the context of societies in their formative or contested stage. Religion is useful to political leaders since it “provides a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community and a set of schemas, templates and metaphors for making sense of the social world.” It can also be understood as a “mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling and organizing social relations.”\(^2\) This latter function is especially important and can be observed in the formative stages of nation-building around the world and throughout history. Leaders of the nation need religion, together with culture, language and lore, in order to help them define criteria for belonging to an ethnic group. Religion consequently helps reproduce religious, ethnic and national communities over the long run and has worked to prevent their dissolution through assimilation.\(^3\)

Religion in its practical manifestation in society is inherently political. The process of making monotheistic religions imperial continued almost uninterrupted since Emperors Constantin and Theodosius’ declarations of Christianity as the official faith and church of the Roman Empire. When the ideological beliefs of national leaders clashed with established religious creeds, quasi-religious identities were constructed to serve the same purpose. For example, the Nazis substituted Christianity with quasi-pagan, ostensibly ‘Germanic’ rituals in constructing their new society.

Both Sunni and Shia Islam at different times entered into the ‘imperial’ stage, whereby religion lost its original esoteric focus in favour of a more concrete political role and function as the empire’s official creed. Sunni Islam entered this phase very early. The defining moment that resulted in the original schism between the two strands of Islam, the battle of Karbala in 680, had distinctive features as an anti-imperialist struggle and imperial revenge. The fact that, less than fifty years after Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632, an imperial army had no qualms about massacring the Prophet’s own grandson, Husain, and his entire family, testifies to how far Islam was already removed from its original purpose and meaning. Some authors actually describe the fateful transfer of the capital of the nascent

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2 Ibid.
Islamic empire from Medina to Damascus as a key factor in this process, due to the incorporation of Byzantine imperial traditions into the practices of the Islamic court. It was during this period that the title of ‘Caliph’ (leader of Muslim community) came to symbolise unity of faith and the state, with an essentially hereditary monarch justifying his secular rule by assuming the religious title and accompanying symbolism.

In Sunni Islam, the Umayyad Caliphate was succeeded by the Abbasids and eventually passed down to the Ottomans, until it was finally abolished by Ataturk in 1924. In all three major Islamic dynasties, the incorporation of Islam as the official imperial creed broadly parallels the developments related to the political role of the Church in Eastern and Western Christendom. Shia Islam, being the original revolutionary party, maintained its independence and developed its more esoteric interpretation of the Islamic faith until another fateful (and very political) decision to make it the official creed of the Persian Empire in 1501. From there on, Shia Islam, while retaining many of the original dynamic, revolutionary and esoteric aspects of the creed, developed into another imperial religion. This symbolically culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran led by ‘Rahbar’, the supreme religious authority superior to the secular institutions.

In both the major monotheistic faiths important for our discussion here, organised religion is therefore an inescapable component of the political system, a process which some authors have dubbed “confessionalization.” As summed up by Brubaker, “confessionalization substantially tightened the relationship between political organization and religious belief and practice. In so doing, it provided a model for and matrix of the congruence between culture and polity that is at the core of nationalism. Confessionalization involved the fusion of politics and religion through the emergence of territorial churches.”

Due to the key role organised religions played in the formative stages of society-building in the former Yugoslav republics, this article will explore the role that religious organisations in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) played as agents of ethnic mobilisation after the start of this process in the early nineties. Croatia and BiH are chosen because of the central role that religious organisations played for the entire duration of this period. The involvement of different faiths (Catholic Christianity and Islam)

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5 Brubaker, “Religion,” 7.
also allows for an excellent comparison of the social and political role played by the respective religious organisations, despite the different nature of the faiths involved. In other Yugoslav republics during this period, religious organisations either did not occupy a central position, as in Slovenia and Macedonia, or played a role that was clearly secondary, with political leaders calling all the shots, as was the case in Serbia. I will argue that religious organisations played a role that was analogous to and intertwined with that of the political elites, but also that this symbiotic relationship was rather spontaneous and that no side exercised a leadership role.

First Phase: Shared Interests

At the time of the collapse of the monolithic Communist ideology, and in the absence of Yugoslav-wide shared values and ideologies, political leaders searched for sources of legitimacy and agents of social mobilisation in the republics where their constituencies lay. Due to the collapse of the socialist ideology’s appeal, and the failure of popular organisations and institutions to reform for the purpose of allowing them to remain relevant to the social discourse, a vacuum of sorts existed in the transitional period. Religious leaders were happy to seize the opportunity, primarily viewing it as a chance to undo decades of socialist regime-imposed social sidelining, during which the power of organised religion faded into near oblivion.

This initial marriage of convenience proved to be a happy arrangement for all the parties involved. Religion experienced a social renaissance, its rituals becoming public holidays and open displays of religiosity becoming the norm, among both the general public and the political elites. It has been well established that, in the absence of more profound differences between ethnic groups, religion has become the defining factor in establishing both the substance of ethnic identity and the dividing line between the groups.

This phase, which includes the period of violent ethnic conflicts in the early nineties, was characterised by a strong emphasis on the religious factor, the prominent public role that religious leaders and rituals played in public life, and by religious sanction for some of the political leaders’ more abhorrent practices during this turbulent time. Already in the spring of 1991, the Catholic Church in Croatia firmly positioned itself as the champion of the Croatian state’s national interests: “We are facing tenacious resistance to democratic changes. The resistance which permeates the political program aiming to preserve the socialism of Communist type, Yugoslavia as centrally organized state, and Serb interests as dominant. Forces
that advocate this program are leading Serb politicians, army officers (a majority of which are Serbs), and, unfortunately, some leading personalities in the Serb Orthodox Church. Communist ideology, greater Serbia tendencies and military force hence find common objectives.”

Despite the ferocity of public statements and social upheavals in the turbulent 1990s, the initial phase is also considered to have been a period in which the nature of the interaction between the secular and the religious was relatively simple. The republic’s elites very soon consolidated their power as a result of the conflict, which homogenised ethnic groups. Beyond the formative phase at the time of the first democratic elections, the need for religious sanctioning was no longer essential, but rather symbolic. Likewise, religious authorities at this time set about rebuilding their institutions and widening their appeal among the population by providing humanitarian aid in times of conflict and psychological assistance to a population seeking solace amidst a challenging social, economic, and security environment. In practical terms, it was important for the religious authorities that political leaders be seen in churches and mosques for important communal prayers, while for politicians it was likewise also important to be there in order to reaffirm their identity to their constituents.

During this period, the Catholic Church in Croatia and the Islamic Community in BiH maintained an officially neutral political stance, not lending their support to any political party. However, when it came to the interaction between the church and mosque clerics and their congregations, unofficial messages would often be incorporated into the sermons. The implied message was that it is the civil and religious duty of believers to vote in the elections and to grant their vote to the parties that further the interests of the faith they belong to.

Conspicuous displays of religiosity, such as praying in public or the ostentatious display of religious symbols, very soon became an indispensable identity badge for the new political and economic elite, in the same way that membership in the Communist party or participation in May Day parades had served to ascertain loyalty during socialism. The Catholic Church in Croatia moved swiftly to adapt to the new social conditions and position itself at the centre of the social and political processes. At its first,

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7 Mladen M. Pisek, “Crkva i država, procesi (de)sekularizacije” [Church and State, Processes of (De)secularisation], Zagreb/Ljubljana: Pikatišk Ljubljana, 2014, 143-147; Dugalić, “Politička traganja,” 528.
founding meeting in 1993, the Croatian Bishop’s Conference established a committee for relations with the state, which was soon followed by the Croatian government establishing the State Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities. Regular joint meetings of the two bodies became a permanent and important feature of political life in the new state.\(^8\)

Sensing its opportunity, the church soon demanded a more formal recognition of its demands by the state. It insisted that the introduction of religious instruction in all primary and secondary schools in 1991 was just the beginning of a process, not an end in itself, and that many areas of church work in society remained unregulated. The church demanded that its role of “spiritual guidance” in the army, police, hospitals, prisons and media be formally and legally regulated.\(^9\)

This marriage of convenience between the Catholic Church and the state finally received official sanction with the signing of the now-infamous Vatican Treaties, the first three Treaties being signed soon after the war, in 1996, and the fourth in 1998. The first three Treaties regulate, respectively, legal affairs, cooperation in the area of education and culture, and pastoral care for Catholic believers in service in the army and security services. The fourth, and according to many observers the most contentious Treaty, regulates the return of Church property confiscated during Communism, as well as state funding for “public and socially beneficial Church activities.”

Critics of the Vatican Treaties point out that the whole process of concluding these international legal instruments was compromised from the very beginning, since the supposedly sacred aspect of the treaties was allowed to creep into normal state-to-state legal negotiations. This is illustrated by the famous proclamation of the Croatian government’s main negotiator, minister Jure Radić, upon signing the fourth Treaty: “by this act we hereby strengthen and legally bind the historically good relationship between the Holy See and the land of the Croats, which began already in the time of [medieval feudal lords] Višeslav and Branimir, and in the manner appropriate for the dawn of the third Christian millennium.”\(^10\)

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8 Dugalić, “Politička traganja,” 488.
9 Ibid.
Besides the questionable public rhetoric that surrounded them, the Treaties are also criticised for their unbalanced approach to regulating the relationship between the Vatican and Croatia, which is heavily skewed in terms of stipulating numerous obligations for one side only (the Croatian state) and wide-ranging rights for the other side. The Catholic Church has, for instance, absolute rights over the regulation of religious instruction in schools, including the firing and hiring of teachers, without any regulatory interference from the government. In the area of education and culture, the Treaty states that the Church plays “an indispensable historical and current role in Croatia, in the area of cultural and moral upbringing of the people.”\(^\text{11}\) The role reserved to the church in a supposedly secular state stands on very dubious legal and constitutional grounds. Even more appalling is the provision that, in case a criminal investigation is initiated against a serving cleric, “the judicial authorities are obliged to notify the church authorities prior to starting the investigation.”\(^\text{12}\) The last provision is without precedent in the legal systems of modern secular states. In the area of finances, the fourth, most contestable treaty stipulates that the state owes wide-ranging financial contributions to the Church, without providing for any accountability or transparency from the Church. On average, the state of Croatia transfers to the Catholic Church approximately HRK 720 million (EUR 100 million) annually, with no questions asked.\(^\text{13}\)

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Islamic Community’s (IZ) role in public life has never officially been regulated. Ironically, the IZ remains the only one of the three major monotheistic faiths not to have any legal agreement with the state (the Catholic Church signed such a treaty in 2006 and the Orthodox Church in 2007). Belated attempts were made after 2011 to sign such a treaty with the IZ, but this failed due to the refusal of the Serb and Croat members of the Presidency, Mladen Ivanić and Dragan Ćović, to vote in favour of the proposal referred to the Presidency by the Council of Ministers of BiH.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{11}\) Pisek, “Crkva i država, procesi (de)sekularizacije,” 143; “Što se krije.”

\(^{12}\) “Što se krije.”

\(^{13}\) “Detaljno pobrojane sve milijarde: Bože, koliko novca iz godine u godinu dajemo Crkvi” [All Billions are Detailed: God, How Much Money We Give to the Church Year After Year], Novilist.hr, March 5, 2019, http://www.novilist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Detaljno-pobrojane-sve-milijarde-Boze-koliko-novca-iz-godine-u-godinu-dajemo-Crkvi (accessed November 9, 2019).

\(^{14}\) Alma Dzekovic, “IZ Pozvala da se ne politizira pitanje njenog statusa” [IZ Calls not to Politicise the Issue of its Status], Anadolu, April 22, 2018.
It must be borne in mind, however, that one of the reasons for the treaty with the IZ not having even been considered until 2011 is that the IZ itself did not consider such a document as necessary and failed to discuss it and propose it to the state. During the war and in the post-war period, the Islamic Community enjoyed an almost symbiotic relationship with the main Bosniak party, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). While completely informal, such a close relationship stemmed from the mass-movement nature of the SDA, which was perceived not just as a normal political party but as a sort of leader for the Bosniak renaissance. Three key elements existed in this national awakening process, as was the case in the homogenisation of all ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia: a territory in the form of a nation-state, a distinct language (in place of the former Serbo-Croat compromise), and religion. Without a state to call their own, and with language remaining a contested issue, religion asserted itself as a central cornerstone of the Bosniak national identity.

The Islamic Community had all the more reason to view the SDA as champions of religious freedom as the original top SDA leadership consisted of former political prisoners sentenced to long prison sentences in the infamous show trial of the “Islamic fundamentalists” in Sarajevo in 1983. The IZ invested considerable effort into lending credence and legitimacy to SDA policies during and after the war, going as far as to actively promote and support SDA candidates from the mosques’ pulpits during election campaigns.

The SDA returned the favour by mainstreaming religion into public events, sponsoring mosque reconstruction projects as well as the construction of new religious institutions and endowments, mostly through budget transfers and donations from the different level governments where the SDA held a majority.

Much of this relationship centred on the person of Dr Mustafa Cerić, the longest-ever serving Reis (Head) of the Islamic Community (in office from 1993 to 2012). Reis Cerić proved to be a quite colourful actor with clear political ambitions, as was amply demonstrated by his candidacy for the Bosniak member of the Presidency in the 2014 general elections. He also reportedly considered running for the same office in the 2018 elections, but eventually failed to register as a candidate.15

Second Phase: Partial Normalisation after the Early 2000s

From today’s perspective, the early 2000s represent a period of unprecedented – and to date unrepeated – normalisation of the Western Balkan societies. Franjo Tudman’s death in 1999 was followed by a social democratic victory in the 2000 parliamentary elections in Croatia, putting an end to the era of Tudmanist nationalist excesses. In the same year in the Federation of BiH, the non-nationalist Alliance for Change came to power, giving hope that nationalism could be reined in as a fundamental political principle. Likewise, president Milošević was ousted in a popular uprising in Serbia in 2000 after more than a decade in power (longer if counting his previous position as president of the Communist party of Serbia). In 2003, former Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović died: although never radically nationalist compared to his counterparts Tudman and Milošević, his death symbolically marked the end of an era of rule by strong nationalist presidents who led their countries in war and negotiated peace in Dayton in 1995.

The relative normalisation of social and political processes was accompanied by the strong economic growth of war-ravaged economies. By the mid-2000s, the economies of all the former Yugoslav republics experienced a decade of continuing growth, scoring high in most economic indicators including GDP, HDI and Misery Index. Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004, while the election of the new reform-minded governments in Croatia, Serbia, and partially Bosnia also promised to speed up the process of EU integration in these countries. Economic prosperity, coupled with the coming of age of the first generation not to have experienced the war as adults, shifted the population’s focus towards the future and away from nationalism as a hitherto dominant public discourse.

The “normalisation” of societies also resulted in the decreased public prominence of religious authorities on the political scene and in the media. More moderate messages could be heard regarding the most divisive issues that dominated public discourse in that period, including the role and treatment of minorities, the return of refugees, political, cultural and religious plurality, etc. Several reasons contributed to this general trend. One, already mentioned, was economic growth. Another reason was the strong pull factor from the European Union. In 2004, ten countries joined the bloc, mostly from Eastern Europe, increasing the appeal for the coun-

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tries of the so-called Western Balkans (the former Yugoslav republics, minus Slovenia, plus Albania). Integration to the EU became the priority of the new governments, assisted in this drive by the international community’s representatives in the Balkans.

It became unfashionable in this period to use nationalist rhetoric, the new priorities being economic prosperity and European integration. The accession to the EU of ten formerly socialist countries, including the former Yugoslav republic of Slovenia in 2004, was an eye-opener for many countries in the region, who saw that the prospect of EU membership was a real and achievable objective. The so-called “pull factor” of EU integration led to a shift in political processes towards the liberalisation of societies.

One interesting indicator of the normalisation of Croatian society was the cessation of the Feral Tribune magazine, which after a long stagnation finally folded in 2008. Feral Tribune was an iconic weekly which positioned itself as a merciless critic of nationalist elites in Croatia, building its fame on barbed criticism of the crude right-wing rhetoric of political and religious authorities. With changes in government bringing in more moderate political leaders and muting religious leaders, the once wildly popular (among the urban population at least) Feral Tribune lost the fodder for its anti-establishment message and its readership dwindled.17

The Catholic Church in Croatia took on a lower public profile during this period. According to chroniclers from within the church itself, societal changes that arose after the change of government in the early 2000s made the church shift its stance, from self-proclaimed “leader of the people” to a more moderate role as champion of the socially disadvantaged and critic of what it called the “secular fundamentalism.”18 Instead of actively engaging with politics, the church now stressed the “personal development of the faithful in the spirit of the social teachings of the Church, and stronger engagement of lay associations in the civil society.”19

The Catholic Church strongly resented being sidelined in the political and social discourse of the 2000s. Their leaders and sympathetic authors even likened the new political reality to the situation under Communism. Media voices critical of the Church were likened to the “rhetoric in the spirit of the Communist times, when every effort was made to kick the

19 Ibid.
church out of the public sphere in order to ‘liberate’ the society from religious ‘backwardness’.”

In other words, the Church viewed this period as a continuation of the leftist ideological struggle for the removal of religion from the public sphere. The religious authorities failed to adapt to changing times, even though some commentators sympathetic to the Catholic Church understood this process as akin to the process that took place in other European democratic states where the agnostic worldview gradually prevailed.

These dynamics are very important for understanding the subsequent period, during which organised religion returned with vengeance and established itself at the centre of political discourse in society, especially in Croatia. The feeling of betrayal contributed to the Church leaders’ firm resolve to prevent any future estrangement from their central public role.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Islamic Community underwent a similar process of sidelining from public life in the predominantly Bosniak parts of the country. However, the amplitude of the changes experienced by the IZ was much smaller than was the case for the Catholic Church, for several reasons. First, the multi-ethnic and multiconfessional nature of BiH society meant that the Islamic Community was never able to obtain a monopoly of the role reserved for the religious communities in post-communist societies, and was limited to playing a role in the small part of the country where Bosniaks remained the dominant ethnic group.

A second reason was the involvement of the international community in the reform and reconstruction of the post-conflict society. The European powers involved in BiH in particular were not keen on seeing the religious communities play a prominent role in a secular post-conflict society. An institutionalisation of the role of the IZ similar to that of the Croatian Catholic Church was therefore impossible. The third reason was the lack of an institutional and hierarchical organisation for the Islamic Community similar to that of the Catholic Church. As a religion, Islam does not recognise clerics as canonical intermediaries between the believer and his God, a fact which has historically contributed to a severely diminished potential for the construction of a clerical organisation as a political actor in society. Despite the IZ imams (prayer leaders) typically being on the community’s payroll, their role is still far from that of a distinct professional caste with the possibility of horizontal and vertical mobility and control.

20 Dugalić, “Politička traganja,” 523.
The contested nature of the relationship between the IZ and the main Bosniak party, the SDA, provides the fourth reason. While the early SDA leadership, centred around president Izetbegović and his cadre of pious Muslims, were united in their opposition to Communism, the growth of the party resulted in a leadership where the non-pious backgrounds were in a majority. The SDA was seen during the 2000s as a rather meek supporter of the Islamic Community in internal politics, while at the same time the main opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) was demonised as going against the interests of the Muslims. Due to its perceived ideological bias, the SDP was therefore complicit in the anti-Muslim hysteria pursued by the Serb and Croat ethnic parties, forcing the Islamic Community to remain in the shadows, for fear of another Communist-style pogrom.22

Third Phase: A Renewed Nationalist and Conservative Push after 2008

The jury is still out on the actual social impact of the great financial crisis of 2008-2009. What is clear so far is that the prolonged effects of the crisis had an impact which went much further than the immediate economic effects. The crisis greatly contributed to a feeling of disenfranchisement among the middle and lower classes in developed democratic societies. Such a feeling, combined with disillusionment with political elites perceived as estranged from ordinary people’s interests, certainly facilitated the general turn to the right of the political spectrum in the US and across Europe.

In the long run, the most important effects of the financial crisis are therefore political and social, not economic. The decade after the crisis saw a thorough transformation of the political scene in Western societies, which was without precedent in the more than half a century since World War II.23 The rise of populist movements on both sides of the political spectrum, but most visibly on the right, culminated in the election to par-

liaments over the last few years of even the most extreme right-wing parties, including in the 2019 elections for the European Parliament. Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States, the successive triumphs of Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orbán and Brexit can all be attributed to the social and political fallout from the crisis.

Even more importantly, right-wing groups’ and parties’ appeal in the political arena has forced mainstream centrist or right-of-centre political parties to radicalise their rhetoric and political programmes to prevent the haemorrhaging of voters towards far-right parties. This is, for example, what happened to Orbán’s Fidesz party, which shifted firmly to the right of the political spectrum to prevent voters’ defection to the fringe anti-Semitic Jobbik movement. The rise of the radical and populist English Defence League (EDL) and UKIP in the United Kingdom likewise radicalised and strengthened the right wing of the Conservative party.

The general turn to the right in the European Union was given a new lease of life as a consequence of the 2015 migrant crisis, when over one million migrants, mostly from the Middle East, crossed from Turkey into the EU. To far-right politicians everywhere, this was a gift straight from heaven. As parties across the political spectrum shifted their policies and rhetoric to the right in response to public concerns, the crisis also dealt the most serious blow to European democracy since the rise of Nazism on the eve of World War II.

The most significant and visible impact of the crisis so far is that it has allowed populist concerns to impact political discourse and transform nominally moderately conservative European parties. This is also precisely the most important consequence of the crisis in the countries of the Western Balkans, including Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Croatia, presidential elections in 2014 and parliamentary elections in 2015 and 2016 (following the government’s collapse after only 146 days in power), brought the HDZ back to power. This traditionally conservative party felt compelled to harden its electoral rhetoric, but also to include in the coalition members of far-right fringe political parties. This had the effect of lending credence and prominence to parties and individuals whose programmes would normally struggle to attract enough voters to make it pass the electoral threshold.

The increased prominence of such parties, most of which had made strong informal alliances with the Catholic Church in Croatia, resulted in the grand return to the political stage of the Church, led by an emboldened right-wing cadre of bishops and priests within its own ranks. Again, having accommodated the far-right parties that owed part of its strength to the Church, the HDZ itself felt compelled to court the Church leadership,
producing a firm alliance between mainstream politics and a radicalised Church.

The payoff demanded by the Church was the wholesale shift to the right of the political and social arena, especially in areas considered to be vital for the continuation of the Church’s dominance in Croatian society: education, culture, social welfare and (chiefly reproductive) health. The period since the 2015-2016 elections has seen the radicalisation of public discourse and repeated attempts to severely curtail the rights of minority groups whose agenda was deemed unacceptable by the Church. The unholy alliance between political elites seeking to deflect public criticism for their incompetent handling of the economic crisis and far-right groups seeking to further their agenda has produced very visible and potentially long-lasting effects.

Already in 2013, a referendum insisting on a constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman passed with around 65 percent of the vote, following a strong campaign by far-right groups and the Catholic Church. What is important to note, however, is that the total turnout for this referendum was a measly 37.9 percent of voters. In effect, the referendum law allowed a tiny minority of the voters to dominate the public discourse and interests of the silent majority. The far-right groups’ referendum victory bolstered their demands set in successive referendums for overturning the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and for a decrease in the number of places reserved for national minorities. Both issues are highly symbolic for the right-wing groups, which are openly supported by the Church. The Istanbul Convention was at the centre of the Church’s ire for months, owing to the Convention’s presumed hidden agenda on the inclusion of a gender ideology that was unacceptable to the Catholic Church. Anti-abortion campaigns also proved to be a strong rallying point for right-wingers and the Church, resulting in the law being amended to allow medical staff to invoke the “rule of conscience” in order to refuse to perform abortions, but also to prescribe or issue contraceptive pills to women.

Annual “walks for life” attract thousands of people in major Croatian cities, including celebrities, political leaders keen on retaining the support of the vocal conservatives, and Church leaders. “Prayer communities” picketed abortion wards, targeting women intending to terminate pregnancies. The liberal abortion law in effect since Communism has been declared unconstitutional by the conservative-dominated Constitutional Court, and the new law has been repeatedly delayed as a result of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring by the most hard-line representatives of the Church and political officials including the current Minister of Health, and the more
liberal political leaders fearful that an overly strict law would alienate their majority liberal voting base. The Catholic Church is also able to completely dominate the public media space, with a constant stream of Catholic holidays, celebrations and religious content pushed into the mainstream programming of what is supposed to be a neutral media in a nominally secular state. The Church’s interests are very frequently intertwined with those of the political elites that cynically use the Church to bolster their nationalist credentials, while the Church also strongly pursues its own ideological agenda irrespective of politics. It can do so because of a general overlapping of interests of both sides and because such trends are also very visible in the European Union, where Poland, Hungary, and to a lesser extent Slovakia and Czechia serve as ideological and social role models for Croatia’s Church and nationalist politicians.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in this third phase has also been influenced by the fallout effects of the 2008 economic crisis. However, despite the similarities, there are also important differences between the two cases. The Islamic Community did become more prominent politically and more visible publicly. However, as already mentioned, the multi-ethnic and multiconfessional nature of Bosnian society strictly limits the role of the Islamic Community to the predominantly Bosniak areas. In addition, unlike the two other ethnic groups in the country, Bosniaks also maintain a significant measure of political plurality, with liberal and social democratic parties receiving a fair share of the vote. Among the Serbs, both the main political parties, the SDS and SNSD, remain firmly nationalist and compete in the elections by trying to bolster their nationalist credentials among the voters. The PDP, until recently the third Serb ethnic party, played a slightly more moderate centrist role, only to discover that this diminished its appeal among the voters to the point of being routed in the last general elections in 2018, where it received approximately 10 percent of the votes in Republika Srpska.24 Among the Croats, the main nationalist party, the HDZ, regularly wins elections at all levels, receiving the almost unanimous support of the Croat electorate. Only among the Bosniaks have parties with non-nationalist programmes had any lasting success. The Social Democrat Party (SDP) has been an almost permanent member of ruling coalitions since the war. Other parties, such as the Democratic Front (DF), Naša stranka (NS) and Narod i pravda (NiP) have

all participated in the governments on different levels, and currently rule the largest and most important Canton of Sarajevo in the Federation of BiH.

The ties between the Islamic Community and the strongest Bosniak party, the conservative and nationalist SDA, remain strong and have been reinforced in this period by a combination of social, cultural and economic factors resulting from the 2008 crisis. These ties also benefited from the unique nature of the SDA’s relationship with the Islamist-rooted ruling party in Turkey, the AKP. The two parties maintain a very close relationship based on personal ties between their respective leaders and their families. The statist role of the Islamic community in Turkey has traditionally been enshrined through the office of religious affairs in the government, the Diyanet. Such a statist tradition also permeates the understanding of the role of organised religion in state affairs by the leaders of the two parties. As a result, the Diyanet has made a significant commitment to bolster IZ finances, to the tune of EUR 15 million annually in the last few years, according to sources close to the two sides. The Turkish state has also sponsored the reconstruction of Ottoman-era monuments of Islamic religious architecture destroyed during the 1992-1995 war, adding to the visibility and public role of the IZ in the country.

Another very important contributing factor to the generally more prominent role of religion and the Islamic Community among the Bosniaks is the pervasive feeling of endangerment in the contested Bosnian political space. Memories of wartime sufferings are still regularly evoked, contributing to the omnipresent fear that, in another war, Muslims would once again be pariahs of Christian Europe without allies but surrounded by Croat and Serb enemies. In a political discourse loaded with such emotions, radical tendencies thrive on all sides. Numerous authors have observed the rising importance of religious beliefs among the Bosniaks, and the Islamic Community has been keen to capitalise on this trend. This is despite the fact that Muslims in BiH have also experienced the effects of religious pluralism, as the IZ is far from being the sole actor in the arena of organised religious institutions in the country. Again, unlike in Croatia, the Islamic Community does not enjoy a privileged legal status, or guaranteed financing by state institutions. Access to the media has been largely curtailed since the early 2000s, leading the IZ to come up with solutions capitalising on the growth of social media, with a number of web portals and magazines catering to the interested public. Social media still have a limited impact on the general public, however, as the access to the public mass media relays to the public the impression of official sanction of the religious practices and messages.
Conclusion: Key Players or Accidental Partners in Crime?

This discussion of the relationship between political elites and the institutions of organised religion in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals that, despite the very different structures and the roles the two religious communities play in their respective countries, some very important similarities can be observed. This points to the universal role that religion plays in transitional and post-conflict societies. Coming back to the initial statement by Brubaker, who characterised both ethnicity/nationalism and religion as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification, the case of the Western Balkans demonstrates both the validity and continued reinforcing potential of his statement. Both religious communities under consideration here found a common language with the new elites and played a very important symbolic role in the early stages of building the new social order after the collapse of Communism. As such, Christianity and Islam lent credence to nationalist policies or political leaders of ethnic groups that differed in little else than their adherence to different religious creeds. Theirs was a marriage of convenience, however, where both religious organisations and the political elites profited, without any side taking on a dominant role. Unlike in most other post-Communist societies, the original honeymoon proved to be an extended one, due to a protracted ethnic conflict that significantly impacted both societies. The period of post-war settlement and of economic growth in turn led to a decrease in the role of organised religion in both societies, which both led to a period of soul-searching, and fed the resentment that would contribute to the strong return to the public sphere of both the Catholic Church and the Islamic Community following the 2008 economic crisis. This last and still ongoing period has resulted in more prominent roles for the two organisations, especially the Catholic Church in Croatia, which has successfully tapped the strong institutional and legal foundations and benefited from the fact that Croatia is nowadays one of the world’s most homogeneous societies in the world, in both ethnic and religious terms. The Islamic Community’s institutional and legal foundations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not as strong, but it has made the best use of the contested nature of the Bosnian political and social landscape, where feelings of insecurity and endangerment among the Muslims give more importance to their ties to the Islamic Community.

However, studying both cases through the three stages of development of post-Communist societies also strongly suggests that religious organisations, despite their prominence and periodic centrality in political and social discourses, do not act as independent political actors on their own. Rather, today, as in the early nineties, they are still benefiting from particular political, social, and economic circumstances, rather than formulating and driving the agenda in their societies. Nationalist political elites and the organised religious organisations therefore represent accidental “partners in crime,” but only as long as such an arrangement benefits the political leaders.

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Jewish Muslim Poles: Frankism, Modern Polish National Identity and its Ambivalent Multicultural Heritage

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Abstract:
The article describes contradictions of Polish national identity that originate from Poland’s multi-ethnic and multireligious heritage. This ambivalence is presented through the analysis of the great impact of Frankism, the Muslim-Jewish syncretic cultural phenomenon on Polish culture, especially literature. The article also focuses on the Orientalisation of Jews in Polish nationalism, their rejection because of their alleged Oriental character and mostly unconscious merging of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Keywords: Frankism, Judaism, Islam, Polish literature, Polish national identity, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, multicultural heritage

Introduction

On October 10, 2019 Olga Tokarczuk, a Polish writer, received the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Prize provoked mixed reactions in Poland, because of the deep polarisation of Polish society on a variety of issues including the attitude to the legacy of the multicultural past and its importance for Poland’s national identity. The social and political divisions increased particularly under the government of Law and Justice (PiS), a nationalist-populist party which has ruled the country since 2015. In consequence, besides vague official congratulations, pro-government media and certain PiS politicians expressed what was at the very least a lukewarm opinion on Tokarczuk’s writing, or even criticised her positions on Polish history and identity. Indeed, she contests the idea of ethnic national identity affirmed by the ruling elite and promotes a multicultural narrative on the history of Poland. In her novels, she rediscovered the enormous and often forgotten contribution of non-Poles and non-Roman Catholics to Polish history and culture. In her public statements, she very outspokenly called on Poles to face the dark side of Polish rule over various national...
and religious minorities. Tokarczuk received death threats which forced her publisher to provide her with bodyguards.

The complex legacy of Poland’s multicultural history occupies a central place in Tokarczuk’s works but also constitutes the main dividing line in Polish debates regarding national identity and historical memory. Her monumental (over 900 pages) historical novel *The Books of Jacob or a Great Journey Through Seven Borders, Five Languages and Three Major Religions, Not Counting the Small Ones*, published in 2014, constitutes her most important contribution to that debate. The book should be recognised as one of the most significant novels written since the fall of Communism in Poland. It is not an accident that the Nobel Prize jury acknowledged *The Books of Jacob* as her magnum opus. Its protagonist is the charismatic 18th century mystic leader Jacob Frank, who was determined to unite Jewish, Christian and Muslim creeds and whose imprint on Polish culture and identity was enormous and is still awaiting a fully-fledged rediscovery. The plot takes place mostly in the south-eastern part of the former Poland, belonging to *Kresy* (the Borderland), mainly inhabited by non-Poles, and in the neighbouring Ottoman Empire. As Tokarczuk said when describing her book in one of her interviews,

“My book shows that Poland was negotiating identities between so many nations and cultures, including Muslim culture because it shared a border with the Ottoman Empire. My heroes in the book are Jewish, they change their identity and religion and become Polish. It shows the old traces of many Polish cultural traditions, like Polish messianism.”

The originality and revolutionary character of Tokarczuk’s novel is related particularly to the first sentence of the quotation, namely the recognition of the contribution of Islam to Polish culture and identity that took place through Jewish intermediaries. Acceptance of this fact is, currently, especially difficult in Poland. Polish nationalism has gained in recent years a very strong anti-Muslim character, and to a lesser degree anti-Jewish. Moreover, the perception of Jewish-Muslim relations as marked by eternal and permanent conflict is widespread in Polish society and among cultural elites.

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In modern Polish history, literature and culture have been very strongly intertwined with politics and nationalism. In consequence, the article will be based on an analysis of sources in literature and their relationship with historical nation-building processes and political ideologies. Confusion and contradictions originating from Poland’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious heritage entrenched in Polish national identity are the very topics of the article. This ambivalence will be presented through the analysis of the great impact of Frankism, the Muslim-Jewish syncretic cultural phenomenon on Polish culture. At the same time, the article will analyse the Orientalisation of Jews in Polish nationalism, namely their rejection because of their alleged Oriental character and mostly the unconscious merging of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The article will start with a short description of Poland’s multicultural heritage, approaches towards this heritage in today’s Poland, and its place in the nation-building process. It will then present the characteristics of Frankism as one of the most important embodiments of Poland’s multicultural heritage, locating it in the Muslim context which until now has been researched only on a limited scale. Finally, the article will concentrate on its impact on Polish culture and the reaction towards this phenomenon as a key element of the rise of Polish ethnic nationalism.

The Ambivalent Legacy of the Polish Multicultural Past

With the establishment at the end of the 14th century of the Polish-Lithuanian Union – a close confederation which transformed itself into the (Polish-Lithuanian) Commonwealth (federation) at the end of the 16th century, Poland became for several centuries a multi-ethnic and multireligious empire which included believers of various Christian denominations but also of Judaism and Islam. Known as the Golden Age, this was the period in which Poland reached the height of its power in Europe. Until the second half of the 17th century, ethnic Poles made up only around 35 percent of the population of the Union/Commonwealth. In fact, Ruthenians, the ancestors of the Ukrainians and Belarusians, constituted the largest ethnic community. The level of ethnic and religious heterogeneity substantially differentiated Poland from Western Europe. That Muslims and, to a cer-

2 See, for example: Andrzej Mencwel, Przedwiośnie czy potop: studium postaw polskich w XX wieku [Early Spring or Deluge: a Study of Polish Attitudes in the 20th Century] (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2019).
tain degree, also a very populous Jewish community lived in Poland-Lithuania between the 16th and 18th centuries made it a unique case in the West.\(^3\) In consequence, religions and denominations perceived in Poland as “Eastern” (Orthodox Christianity, Greek Catholicism, Armenian Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Karaism) left a great imprint on “Western” (mostly Roman Catholic) Polish culture.

However, the legacy of relations between Poles and other nations that lived within the same state for centuries is very mixed, translating itself into both coexistence and confrontation and resulting in métissage and syncretism as well as in sharp ethnic and religious cleavages. Moreover, the legacy of this multicultural reality was very different in various parts of the country. Poland-Lithuania could be more or less divided into two parts: the centre, inhabited by the majority of the ethnic Poles, was relatively more ethnically homogeneous, while the Eastern borderlands were the peripheries where non-Poles made up the majority of the population. However, the latter regions played a key role in Polish history, as centres of culture and through the over-representation of Poles from Kresy in the elites.

Already in the 17th century, the above-mentioned ethnic structure, combined with weak central state structures, the Counter-Reformation (simultaneous promotion of Catholicism and of the Polish language by state and aristocracy), the frontier character of Roman Catholicism in Poland and many wars against internal and external non-Roman Catholic adversaries, created a favourable environment for the development of an early modern Polish national identity. Based on cultural criteria and on religion, this foresaw ethnic homogeneity as an ideal. Poland started to be perceived by many Poles as an Antemurale Christianitatis (Bulwark of Christian Europe) gradually merging with Europe and the Occident against Asia and the Orient.\(^4\)

At the end of the 18th century, Poland-Lithuania was partitioned, with Russia receiving the greater share and Austria and Prussia the remainder. In effect, during the 19th century, the crucial period for the development of modern national identities, Poles did not possess their own state and were often discriminated against as a national minority. The ideal of the modern Polish nation was based on the concept of the reunification in one

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state of all the members of the Roman Catholic Polish-speaking ethnic
community. The Poles engaged in a fierce rivalry with their neighbours for
terrorlands which mostly were inhabited by non-Poles. In consequence,
the national minorities were perceived by many Poles as a fifth column ex-
plotted against them by external enemies.

At the end of the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century,
a highly popular political force led by Roman Dmowski, National
Democracy, played a key role in the promotion of xenophobic ethnic
nationalism mixed with Roman Catholicism and the rejection of the multi-
tultural heritage. Dmowski was both proud of the Polish-Lithuanian
Commonwealth and simultaneously critical of its multicultural character,
which he perceived as its Achilles’ heel. He postulated the re-establishment
of Poland as a major regional power, but also as a national power that
should have become exclusively Polish. All minorities were supposed to be
assimilated or expelled: as regards the latter option Germans, and even
more so Jews, whom he perceived as Poles’ greatest enemies, were not wel-
come in his ideal Poland. Dmowski’s hatred of Jews was particularly radi-
cal because it was based on the conviction of their complete civilisational
otherness (West, Europe vs Orient, Asia). He perceived them as Oriental
people with a very different mentality and racial features. Dmowski’s eth-
nic, homogeneous and religious vision of Polish identity clashed with
more state-oriented, left, secular, civic and multicultural conceptions of
Poland and the Polish nation personified by Józef Piłsudski, a Polish states-
man who served as the Chief of State and Marshal of Poland and is consid-
ered the de facto leader (1926–35) of the Second Polish Republic. This
split between the two visions of Poland to a large degree divides Polish
society to this day.

The Second World War resulted in a dramatic change of character for
Poland which, as a result of genocides, forced exchange of population, eth-
ic cleansing and border changes, became one of Europe’s most ethnically
homogeneous countries. Few countries in Europe experienced such a dras-
tic change in ethnic composition and such a radical rupture with the past
as Poland in the 20th century. The identity of Communist Poland
(1945-1989) was based on the ideal of an ethnically homogeneous nation
and the rejection of its multicultural past. Today this rupture with the

5 Grzegorz Krzywiec, Szowinizm po Polsku: Przypadek Romana Dmowskiego
(1886-1905) [Chauvinism in Polish: The Case of Roman Dmowski (1886-1905)]
(Warsaw: Neriton-Instytut Historii PAN, 2009).
6 Although, Piłsudski cultivated the vision of Poland as the bulwark of the West, de-
fending it against Russia.
multicultural past remains a serious challenge for Poles’ historical memory. The tension between the “glorious” multi-ethnic/religious/cultural past and the preferred “ordinary” present of ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity became a key Gordian knot of Polish national identity. Because of a lack of will, or at least of partial support for the idea, the political and cultural elites of democratic Poland did not undertake a radical reshuffle of the paradigm of ethnic nationalism after the fall of Communism. In consequence, according to many opinion polls conducted in Poland, the rise of xenophobia, identification with the ethnic concept of nation and a rejection of the idea of a multicultural society can be observed in Polish society since around 2010. In an opinion poll published by Pew Research Centre in 2017, almost 60 percent subscribed to the opinion that “it is better for us if society consists of people from the same nationality, and who have the same religion and culture” while only fewer than 35 percent endorsed the opinion that “it is better for us if society consists of people from different nationalities, religions and culture.” In other surveys conducted by the same centre, almost 65 percent of Poles declared that it is important to be of a religion dominant in the country in order to truly share the national identity. One-third of Poles had an opposite opinion on that issue. It was one of the highest proportions among the almost 35 European countries in which the opinion poll was conducted. Poles distinguished themselves also by their overwhelming support (at over 80 percent, one of the highest among European nations) for the opinion that, in order to truly share their own national identity, it is important to have been born in the country or to have family background from that country. Moreover, most Poles reject a wider cultural autonomy for national minorities. Muslims and to a lesser degree Jews play a particularly important role as the Others in opposition to whom the ethnic Polish national identity is developing and gaining popularity. The opinion polls conduct-


9 In the opinion poll conducted in 2015 by CBOS, a Polish research centre, 60 percent of Poles did not accept place and street names in the languages of national minorities and slightly more than 30 percent approved of them. More than half of Poles declared that national minorities should not be allowed to communicate in
ed by the Pew Research Centre show that around two-thirds of Poles expressed an unfavourable approach to the Muslim minority living in Poland, which is in fact very small and well integrated. Only slightly more than one-fourth of Poles announced their positive feelings towards Polish Muslims. 10 Meanwhile, according to the surveys conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Poles became between 2015 and 2019 the nation which distinguished itself with the highest rate of approval for opinions defined as anti-Semitic (with a rise in average support from 37 to 48 percent) among the polled European countries. 11 At the same time, paradoxically, opinion polls showed that the great majority of Poles perceived religious and ethnic tolerance as one of their most important national “traditional” features. They perceive the period of multicultural statehood as the time of their greatest glory. The great majority of Poles also believe that they should be proud of their history, because they committed only minor crimes against other nations, while they suffered greatly at the hand of neighbours and behaved mostly as heroes. 12 Indeed, the long period of Russian domination, the loss of independence and the experience of being ruled by neighbours in a crucial period of modern nation-building (the 19th century) resulted in most Poles’ reluctance to recognise the dark sides of their rule over other nations, and strengthened their feeling of victimhood.

The identity processes were strengthened by various external and internal factors (threat perceptions, tensions with various nations, exposure of Polish society to nationalistic propaganda, etc.). They contributed to the victory of Law and Justice (PiS) and to the good results of smaller national populist and radical right parties in the parliamentary elections in 2015

their own languages at the local offices in the municipalities where they live. Around 40 percent supported that idea.


and again in 2019 (above 50 percent of the vote). After winning the elections, PiS implemented, on an unprecedented scale, the politics of memory that cultivate this kind of identity. Roman Dmowski gained unprecedented prominence in the party’s politics of history. On the one hand, the party acknowledges in its political programme the different ethnic roots of some Poles and accept – albeit in a very selective way – the contribution of certain faiths to Polish history and culture.\(^\text{13}\) However, at the same time, it defines Roman Catholicism as the most important pillar of Polish national identity because of its enormous and allegedly exclusively positive role in Poland’s history. According to PiS, it makes Poles a unique case in Europe. Moreover, the vision of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity, of Europe and of the West – these being treated as synonyms – defending them over centuries against onslaughts (especially Muslim onslaughts), occupies a central place in its politics of memory. At the beginning of its rule, PiS tried to establish a strategic partnership and “civilisational community” (Judeo-Christianity) with Israel and the Jewish diaspora, based on the common enemy: Islam. However, the unprecedented deterioration in Polish-Israeli relations, caused mostly by a politics of memory in which PiS presented historical Polish-Jewish relations almost exclusively in a positive light, resulted in a rise unprecedented in Poland’s modern history of anti-Semitism in the Polish public space. PiS often adopted a lenient approach to that phenomenon or sometimes expressed (mostly indirectly) anti-Jewish opinions.

PiS pays lip service to Poland’s multicultural heritage, but only because it represents a key feature of the period of greatest power and glory in Polish history. The heritage is idealised by PiS.\(^\text{14}\) The multicultural Poland is presented in the political programme and statements of its politicians as

\(^{13}\) In the party programme Greek Catholics, Lutherans and Polish Tatars, whose belonging to the Muslim creed is “omitted” are mentioned as non-Roman Catholics who had a positive influence on Polish culture and history. Nevertheless, the program did not recognise a major contribution of Jews, Orthodox Christians and Calvinists to the Polish multicultural heritage.

\(^{14}\) The justification of the project of law on the National Day of the Martyrdom of the Inhabitants of Kresy prepared by PiS constitutes a very good exemplification of that worldview. “In the Polish tradition, Kresy (the Borderlands) played the role of an area of peaceful coexistence and intertwining of various nationalities,
a sort of ethnic and religious paradise on Earth. In that vision Poles are a benevolent ruling nation, with a civilising mission targeting other nations. Moreover, this vision is used in order to reject any criticism and accusation of Polish responsibility for crimes and wrongdoings in the past and present. Paradoxically, Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the party, makes references to “traditional” Polish tolerance in his speeches when he attacks minority groups (Muslims, LGBTI, etc). Moreover, the ruling party (Law and Justice, PiS) vigorously rejects multiculturalism, presenting it in a binary opposition to nations. Its superficial attitude towards Poland’s multicultural past also confirms a historical narrative on the past which is very simplistic and takes into consideration only to a very limited degree the complexity of historical and religious relations between Poles and different nations and religions (coexistence and confrontation).

*The Books of Jacob* and Tokarczuk’s public statements should be placed in the context of an ongoing debate on Polish identity. Tokarczuk is a very strong proponent of a multicultural idea of the nation. In an interview given to the English Pen Club magazine *PEN Transmissions*, describing the reception of *The Books of Jacob*, she stated: “I think the subject of my book – a multicultural Poland – was not comfortable for proponents of this new version of history. The book was boycotted. It didn’t fit in with the new narrative order.” She does not idealise the multicultural past of Poland, to the contrary. In 2016, after winning one of the most important Polish awards in literature, she urged Poles to acknowledge the darker elements of the nation’s past. As she said, “We have come up with this history of Poland as an open, tolerant country. Yet we committed horrendous acts as colonizers, as a national majority that suppressed the minority, as slave owners, and as the murderers of Jews.” Her statement was to a certain degree a generalisation and oversimplification of the complexity of Polish history but it should be perceived as a reaction to the government’s official policy of almost completely rejecting Polish responsibility for crimes and...
persecution of minorities. During the refugee crisis in 2015, Tokarczuk also criticised the Polish government for the Islamophobia it directed against asylum seekers. She raised the issue of the strength of Polish culture in relations with the Other. According to her, a “strong, colourful culture is not afraid of other people’s culture, just like strong tradition is not afraid of foreign influences. This fear of Others and Islam is an expression of a sense of uncertainty and complexes.”

The obvious clash exists between the ethnic vision of the nation promoted by PiS and the multicultural and civic ideal envisaged by Tokarczuk. In one of the above-mentioned interviews, she rejected decisively the idea of ethnic Polishness as a very dangerous and unrealistic idea because, according to her, *The Books of Jacob* “shows us as a melting pot in the middle of Europe.”

The Jewish community probably represents the most striking exemplification of the historical phenomenon of the melting pot in the history of Poland, and Poles’ contradictory approach towards it. On the one hand, Jews often played a key role as intermediaries between Poles and other nations including Muslim Turks and Tatars. At the same time, they became the victim of Orientalisation by Polish ethnic nationalism rejecting the multicultural heritage.

**Hetero-orthodox Polish Jewish Muslims**

The role of the Jews as intermediaries between Poland and the Islamic world is very old. In fact, it started with the beginnings of Polish statehood. This role increased in the early modern period when a large number of Sephardi Jews, strongly Arabised in cultural terms, were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and found a safe haven in the Ottoman Empire. Some among them reached the Polish-Lithuanian Union, home to the largest Jewish community in Europe but of Ashkenazi origin. Despite their small numbers, Sephardi Jews, being rich and well-educated, gained a prominent position in the Jewish elite of the Polish-Lithuanian Union.

In the first half of the 18th century, the strong ties between Jewish communities living in the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Com-

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monwealth resulted in the large-scale reception of Sabbatianism among Polish Jews, particularly in Podolia. Sabbatianism was a religious movement founded in the second half of the 17th century by Sabbatai Tsevi (1626-1676), a Sephardi Jew from Izmir (Turkey), who announced himself to be the Messiah and, having been rejected by the Jewish community, converted to Islam together with his followers. His family represents a good exemplification of the close ties between the Polish Ashkenazi Jews and the Ottoman Sephardi Jews. His wife Sara, who converted with him to Islam, had an Ashkenazi background, she was the daughter of a rabb from Podolia. According to Paweł Maciejko, a Polish historian of religion, “in the mid-eighteenth century, Podolia became for Judaism what twelfth century Languedoc was for Christianity: a seditious province where dissenters gathered and heterodoxy was practiced openly and publicly. Podolia was the only place in the world where – almost a hundred years after Sabbatai Tsevi’s conversion to Islam – many Jews openly adhered to Sabbatianism. A number of communal rabbis belonged to the sect and drew in their entire communities.” At the same time, Podolia may be compared to the Western Levant (Lebanon and Western Syria), while Sabbatianism can be seen as similar to Alawi, Ismailis and Druze people, namely heterogeneous Muslim or post-Muslim communities living in a very mixed religious and ethnic environment.

Ottoman Turks referred to Sabbatianists in Turkish as Dönmez, that is “the converted.” Their community has survived in Turkey to the present day. They played a significant role in the development of modern Turkish

20 Sara lost her parents during Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s uprising of 1648-1654, an alliance of Ukrainian Cossacks with the Muslim Crimean Tatars. She was forcibly converted to Catholicism and raised by nuns in a Polish convent or by a Polish nobleman. She migrated to Eastern Europe and became a prostitute in Livorno before going to Cairo in the Ottoman Empire. Sara met there and married to Sabbatai Zvi. She was his third wife.
22 In Podolia, Sabbatianism had a significant influence on the birth of Hasidism, a mystical current in Judaism. The term Hasid was first used by Sabbatists to describe ascetic and pious followers of Sabbatai Zvi. Its founder Baal Shem Tov was a Sephardi Jew who was at least neutral and sometimes even sympathetic towards the ideas of Sabbatai Zvi. The rituals of Hasidism were based on the Sephardi rite. Meanwhile, the internal organisation of Hasidic communities was similar to the Muslim mystic brotherhoods.
nationalism. Under the impact of their contact with the Sabbatianists in the middle of 18th century, groups of Polish Jews migrated to the Ottoman Empire and converted to Islam. The most notable among them was Jacob Frank (1726-1791), who even declared himself to be the Messiah. After having returned to Poland together with his followers (Frankists), Frank rejected Islam in favour of Roman Catholicism and joined the ranks of the Polish nobility. Their descendants would be substantially overrepresented in the Polish cultural and political elites. The Frankists can therefore be called the Polish Dönmeh: an emblematic product of the Polish-Ottoman entanglement.

Jacob Frank was born in Podolia. When he was only a few months old, his family left Poland and moved to the Ottoman Empire. Frank grew up in the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, spending extended periods of time in the Ottoman territories proper. He lived in Izmir, Sofia, Constantinople and in various smaller towns in the Balkans. From a cultural point of view, Frank became a Sephardi Jew. Nevertheless, his nickname “Frank” alluded to his “foreign” Ashkenazic origins. The word is a Turkish equivalent of the Arabic firandj, referring initially to the Franks, and had become a common appellation for Europeans. After converting to Islam, Jacob Frank joined the Janissaries, the elite infantry forces that formed the Ottoman Emperor’s household troops. Jan Doktór, a prominent expert on Frankism, pointed out that, as far as rituals and beliefs are concerned, Sabbatianism and Frankism were shaped particularly by the Bektashi order, a heterogeneous Muslim Sufi (mystic) brotherhood (he did not, however, research that issue extensively). In the Ottoman period, Bektashists were formally Sunni but in practice much closer to Shia Islam. Bektashism mixed in a syncretic way elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Turkic Shamanism and Gnosticism. The Bektashi brotherhood was very closely affiliated to the Janissaries, as the elite corps was for a long time composed of soldiers converted from Christianity to Islam, bringing together within the melting pot of Ottoman imperial identity members of various ethnic com-

23 According to some sources, Frank converted to Orthodox Christianity before his death.
munities. Bektashism placed a particular emphasis on the Islamic mystic concept of the “Unity of Being,” which was often labelled as panentheism (“all in God”). Bektashism especially venerated Jesus (Isa) as a great prophet who is generally, in Islam, the patron of mysticism as Spirit and Word of God. In most Muslim traditions, Isa will arrive with the Messiah (Mahdi) during the Doomsday with Isa to fight against “the false Messiah.” Eventually, Isa will slay this false Messiah. After the death of Mahdi, Isa will assume leadership of humanity. This is a time associated in Islamic narrative with universal peace and justice. It is also worth remembering that, in Shia Islam, belief in the Messiah is not part of the creed, but its foundation. Bektashists also particularly worshipped the Virgin Mary (Miriam), mother of Isa. Taqiya, a secret adherence to Shia Islam, while publicly professing to be Orthodox Sunni represents another important element of Shia Islam present to a certain degree in Bektashism. The latter distinguished itself by secret mystic rituals (trance, dance, ecstasy) and stages of initiation. As heterogeneous mystics, they did not obey various Orthodox religious norms and laws.

It should be underlined that Jacob Frank and his followers converted to Islam in Ruse – a city now in Bulgaria located on the banks of Danube River – before joining the Janissaries stationed in Giurgiu, on the opposite side of the river. Deliorman, a region well known by the Islamic hetero-orthodoxy is in the vicinity of these towns. Currently, it is home to a large community of Alevi, a branch of Shia Islam that treats Bektashism as the main pillar of their beliefs. Already in the 15th century, Sheikh Bedreddin, an influential mystic and revolutionary, launched a rebellion in the region. It should be noted that Bedreddin was of mixed Muslim and Christian parentage, a fact which probably contributed to his syncretic religious beliefs later in life, particularly to the doctrine of “oneness of being.” Bedreddin advocated overlooking religious difference. He argued against zealous proselytism, and in favour of a utopian synthesis of faiths. He preached that all Abrahamic religions are essentially the same, as well as that ownership of property should be communal. Such revolutionary ideas lay behind his failed rebellion. After his execution, his teachings remained

influential for centuries in the region, among followers known as the Bedreddinlus. Some of Bedreddin’s syncretic ideas also became common among members of the Bektashi order.

Many ritual and theological elements of Bektashism and Bedreddin beliefs became incorporated into Sabbatianism and then Frankism. In fact, the idea of the unity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic religions occupied a central place in Sabbatianism and Frankism. Sabbatians in Podolia named one of their doctrines dat hadasha le-gamre, the new complete religion. Its purpose was to order an “explanation and reunion of the three religions, that of the Jews, Ishmael [i.e. Islam] and the Christians, so as to create of them one chariot.” Some among Frank’s followers stayed in the Ottoman Empire and remained Muslims. They were called in Turkish Lehli (Poles). Frank approved of their decision and justified it by saying that “when man holds on with one hand and does it for several years, his hand will become numb and fall down, but when a man holds on with two hands to two places, when one hand becomes numb, the other still holds on. When the second hand becomes numb, he can hold on with the first. This is why many men fell, because they did not think about it and held on to one place. These two (places) are Ishmael and Esau.” Ishmael was the personification of Islam, while Esau symbolised Christianity. The idea of unity and holism may also be detected in Frank’s visions concerning politics. Frank boasted that, with his army of the faithful, he would become first the king of Poland, then the Emperor of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, and finally the ruler of the world. Besides Bektashism, Sabbataists and Frankists were strongly shaped by Kabbalah, an esoteric school of thought of Judaism. It emerged in 12th and 13th century Spain and was reinterpreted in 16th century Ottoman Palestine. The interactions with Muslim culture played a significant role in its development. Kabbalah matched with the secret rituals of Sabbatianism and Frankism originating from hetero-orthodox Shia-oriented Islam.

31 Abraham G. Duker, Polish Frankism’s Duration: From Cabbalistic Judaism to Roman Catholicism and from Jewishness to Polishness: A Preliminary Investigation, Jewish Social Studies 25, no. 4 (October 1963): 306.
Frankism and Polish Romanticism

Frankism had a considerable impact on Polish national identity, contributing to the development of Polish romanticism and Messianism. Frank believed that “Poland holds all that is good in this world” and therefore it is predestined to play a key role in world history. Many ideas and motives flowing from Frankism to Polish culture and religious thought appeared especially in the works of Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), one of the most significant poets in the history of Polish literature. He married Celina Szymanowska (1812-1855), whose parents were Frankists. There is also a hypothesis according to which Mickiewicz himself had a partly Frankist background. Celina had an enormous influence on Mickiewicz’s poetry and worldview. Messianism, intertwined with the idea of chosen nations uniting Poles and Jews as brothers, constituted the most important pillar of Mickiewicz’s philosophy. According to the historian of literature Katarzyna Kornacka-Sareło, *Dziady* volume III, Mickiewicz’s *opus vitæ*, is based

“on the doctrinal assumptions of millenarianism and messianic philosophy in its Frankist version. On the one hand, the Frankists were representatives of the Jewish people – ‘a people without land’ and doomed to wander, on the other hand, because of the events of history, they, as ‘Poles by choice’, could not enjoy the independence of their homeland due to the partitions of Poland. Under such circumstances, Frankists were simply condemned to succumb to strong messianic hopes and chiliastic utopia. In other words, they were people, somewhat doubly uprooted and completely lonely, relying solely on themselves, especially after the death of the charismatic leader of the movement, Jacob Frank. […] The paradigm of the fate of the Polish Frankist is implemented in *Dziady* by the protagonist of the drama, Gustaw-Konrad, who gradually losing his sense of his ethnic (not religious) Jewishness, decides to take up the national liberation struggle as a Polish patriot. The symbolic change of the name of the hero of Mickiewicz's drama […] is also a reference to the change of the name of Jacob, who after the victorious fight with God and Angel receives the name Israel, becoming the leader of the national Jewish community. Konrad's personal drama consists primarily in the fact that, feeling himself a Pole, he did not cease to be a Jew-Frankist, as evidenced, paradoxically, by his strong attachment to the cult of Mary, which is an expression of the Frankist doctrine of ‘the Vir-
gin’ hidden in the icon of Czestochowa. Konrad is also familiar with the doctrine proclaiming the presence of holiness in sin, taken over by the Frankists from the Sabbatians."

The idea of “redemption through sin” is also present in another Mickiewicz drama, *Konrad Wallenrod*. It gave birth in Polish culture to the concept of Wallenrodism – an idea that is personified by a man who uses deception and betrayal to accomplish a noble purpose. Moreover, according to Abraham Duker, the famous number 44 evoked in *Dziady* volume III, was based on Kabbalistic numerology with various, multilayered esoteric meanings. However, the Muslim connection should be also recognised with respect to Mickiewicz himself. Mickiewicz was partly of Tatar origin and was born in Navahrudak in Belarus, which was also inhabited at that time by a large Muslim Tatar minority. As a young man, he was especially fascinated with the Muslim cultures. Masterpieces of his poetry (for instance, the *Crimean Sonnets*) were dedicated in an original way (empathy, familiarity, bridging, melting pot) to Muslim topics, and inspired by Islamic poetry. Mickiewicz died in Istanbul, where he had come because of his engagement in the organisation of the Polish Legion, which was composed of Christians (Roman and Greek Catholics, Orthodox), Jews and Muslims and fought on the Ottoman side against Russians. Mickiewicz admired the multireligious and multi-ethnic character of the Legion because he believed that “if we want to resurrect Poland, we must remove the reasons for its fall: unite various races and religions of Poland under one banner.”

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32 The most venerated icon of the Virgin Mary in Poland, patron of the country.
34 Moreover, Mickiewicz presented in his poetry Muslims from Andalusia who fought against reconquista, accepting Christianity only on the surface as the key source of inspiration for Konrad Wallenrod, a personification of the concept of Wallenrodism.
36 Andrzej Fabianowski, “Rola Kozaczyzny w koncepcjach politycznych Michała Czajkowskiego” [Kozaczyzna’s Role in Michał Czajkowski’s Political Thinking]
This emphasis on unity and similarities in the case of Mickiewicz’s worldview concerned also his attitude to Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Maria Janion, a prominent theoretician of Polish literature, underlines that for Mickiewicz

“the most important act of self-determination was monotheistic faith. In this context, I would like to remind once again that he was ready to accept a nobleman who would convert to Islam because of sincere conviction. [...] He did not condemn such Mohammedan converts as Józef Bem and Michał Czajkowski, who fought for Poland’s liberation, thus fulfilling ‘God’s will and law’ [...] So it is about faith in the one God and Poland.”

Mickiewicz shared with Jacob Frank this Abrahamic vision of commonality and also support for the secret activities.

The Backlash of Polish Ethnic Nationalism

As Maria Janion rightly points out, “the participation of the Frankists [...] in our history and in our culture also became, very early, the basis of the sinister phantasm of Judeopolonia, a gang that plots to destroy Christianity,” which met with the backlash of Polish ethnic nationalism rejecting the multicultural heritage of Poland. It was based on the Orientalising of Jews (presenting them as totally Oriental and as the antithesis of the Occident) which was particularly alluring in view of the Frankists’ cultural background.

The Orientalisation of Jews is deeply rooted in European history. As Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar rightly point out,

in Szkoła ukraińska w romantyzmie polskim [The Ukrainian School according to Polish Romanticism], ed. Stanisław Makowski, Urszula Makowska and Małgorzata Nesteruk (Warsaw: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 430.


“the Western image of the Muslim Orient has been formed, and continues to be formed in inextricable conjunction with Western perceptions of the Jewish people. [...] Orientalist representations of the Jews have always been at the very center of orientalist discourse (which we believe to be based historically in the Christian West’s attempts to understand and manage its relations with both monotheistic Others).”

Zygmunt Krasiński, a noted Polish Romantic poet (1812-1859), was one of the greatest enemies of the Frankists and of their role in the shaping of Polish national identity, using an Orientalising discourse to criticise them. He rejected the romantic fascination for the Orient present in his earlier works, and started decisively to orientalise Jews in a negative way. According to him, Jews, as Oriental Semites, were totally alien in Europe and allegedly hated Christians because they wanted to rule the world. The drama Undivine Comedy, Krasiński’s masterpiece and the key piece of Polish Romanticism, was built around the resentment directed especially against Frankists. Krasiński’s description of Leonard, the main negative protagonist of his drama and a Jewish convert, is a classic example of a negative, Orientalist representation of Jews:

One whose dark eye, glittering through
Long dusky lashes, marks his Orient race.
His shoulders droop, he sways from side to side,
As if his indolent limbs could scarce support his frame.
His lips are full, voluptuous and cruel;
His fingers gleam with rings and precious stones.

Krasiński also used Oriental clichés to attack Mickiewicz’s wife, stating that “there is something dark and bad in her, something material and Oriental, which tempts forever and fights the genius of the Occident in Mickiewicz.” For Krasiński, Mickiewicz, under the influence of his wife, turned into “the perfect Jew.” Maria Janion stresses many similarities between Krasiński’s obsession with the conspiracy of Jewish converts and “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” – the infamous and very popular ear-

39 Ivan D. Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, Orientalism and the Jews (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2005), XIII-XIV.
40 Janion, Bohater. Spisek, Śmierć: Wykłady Żydowskie, 128-152.
ly 20\textsuperscript{th} century anti-Semitic pamphlet. It is worth noting that, according to Abraham Dukur, the fabrication of “The Protocols of Elders of Sion” by Tsarist Russia’s secret police should be explained by its long-time interest in the Frankists.\textsuperscript{43}

At the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the negative attitude towards Frankists became a basic pillar of anti-Semitism, occupying a central place in the ideology of National Democracy. At that time, many anti-Semitic articles which presented Jews as the “Oriental” fifth column representing an eternal threat to the European nations, appeared in Polish newspapers close to National Democracy. Some of them equated Jews with Muslim Arabs. For instance, in the journal “Głos” (Voice) in 1890, Maurycy Cygar – in fact most probably a pseudonym used by the leader of National Democracy, Roman Dmowski – wrote an enthusiastic review of a book on the history of Spain which found as reasons for its decline at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century that an insufficient “natural selection” within Spanish society had left a number of foreign elements or remains of non-Spanish communities. The reviewer underlined especially the negative role of the “powerful Semitic element” (Jews) and their “Arab compatriots.” In his opinion, Spain had been captured for centuries by the “genius of Semitic psychology,” which was personified by both Jews and Arabs. Remains of the spirit of these “Oriental peoples” allegedly predominated in the culture of modern Spain. According to the reviewer, literature, especially romances and dramas, are saturated with bloodthirstiness, unparalleled level of crime and a penchant for bizarre exoticism, including perversions in the form of pornography.\textsuperscript{44}

In the interwar period, National Democracy kept on Orientalising Jews. Jędrzej Giertych, one of the most prominent leaders and ideologists of National Democracy and author of an essay entitled \textit{Tragizm losów Polski} (The Tragedy of Poland’s Fate), promoted the idea of Frankists as revolutionaries and conspirators, false Christians aiming at the destruction of Poland and the establishment of a Jewish state in Poland (Judeopolonia). It is striking that Giertych recalled the close ties between Frankists and \textit{Dönmeh} and underlined “the amazing similarity of fate of Poland and Turkey – the great international participation of prominent Jews in their terrible down-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Duker, \textit{Polish Frankism’s Duration: From Cabbalistic Judaism to Roman Catholicism and from Jewishness to Polishness: A Preliminary Investigation}, 307.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Krzywiec, \textit{Szowinizm po Polsku: Przypadek Romana Dmowskiego (1886-1905)}, 115.
\end{itemize}
fall.” Meanwhile, Zofia Kossak Szczucka, a widely read interwar novelist and supporter of National Democracy, wrote in one of her articles that “Jews are so terribly alien to us, alien and unpleasant that they are a race apart. They irritate and all their traits grate against our sensibilities. Their oriental impetuosity, argumentativeness, specific mode of thought, the set of their eyes, the shape of their ears, the winking of their eyelids, the line of their lips, everything.” Kossak Szczucka became famous especially thanks to her novels dedicated on the Crusades. However, the image of the Muslims in her novels is not unequivocally negative. In fact, the Muslims are quite often shown in a positive light and Kossak Szczucka sometimes even promotes the idea of the coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the Medieval Middle East.

The Oriental clichés merging anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim prejudices returned to the public discourse in recent years when PiS, in its politics of identity exploiting the anti-Muslim and anti-refugee narrative, used old Orientalist anti-Semitic clichés and prejudices. Piotr Osęka, a Polish historian of anti-Semitism, analysing the Islamophobic discourse of pro-government public and private media, noticed that “the nationalist press in the Second Polish Republic did exactly the same thing: it threatened with ‘Jewry’, which was portrayed as vermin that floods Poland, so you have to get rid of it.” Still comparing the nationalist press of the interwar period and of more recent years, he adds that

“a novelty, strongly visible in ‘Wiadomości’ and on right-wing portals, is erotic obsession. Refugees not only come to blow themselves up, but also to rape and harass. The fact is, the same was said about Jews before the war. They were supposed to be extremely lecherous, corrupt, trading in pornography and lurking for Christian women.”

46 During the Second World War, Kossak Szczucka remained an outspoken anti-Semite but simultaneously took part in the activities of the Polish underground aimed at helping Jews.
47 Joanna Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 99.
48 The Second Polish Republic was the unofficial name of Poland in the Interwar period.
49 *Wiadomości* (News) is the main pro-government public news programme.
50 Angelika Swoboda, “Piotr Osęka: ‘W ‘Wiadomościach’ TVP widać erotyczną obsesję’” [Piotr Osęka: “In the TV Show ‘Wiadomości’ One Can See Erotic Obses-
As Osęka also underlines, Jewish people were also presented as potential terrorists and as a Bolshevik fifth column. On the other hand, when in 2018 the politics of memory (penalisation of opinions suggesting the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust) of the Polish government provoked an unprecedented crisis in the relations between Poland and Israel, the widespread Islamophobia, playing with Oriental clichés and provoking a general rise of xenophobia prepared favourable conditions for the rise of anti-Semitism in the Polish public debate.

Polish Andalusia...

The Books of Jacob rediscovered the story of Frankism, the multicultural religious movement launched by Jews but strongly influenced by Islam that contributed greatly to the development of Polish culture and identity.

The Islamic elements of Frankism and in consequence of Polish culture were decisively strengthened by Olga Tokarczuk’s novel. As she underlines, the book that shaped her worldview and style was The Saragossa Manuscript, written by Count Jan Potocki (1761-1815), a Polish Orientalist and traveller who was born and raised in Ukrainian Podolia. As Tokarczuk wrote,

“The Saragossa Manuscript’ was one of the first ‘total’ books I read in my life, which means that it gave the original, pure pleasure of reading and participating in the story. This book is also a formative book for me – I wouldn’t be who I am if I hadn’t read it at the right time and if I hadn’t devoted so much thought, amazement and admiration to it. In addition, “Manuscript” belongs to my literary first aid kit – I have just several titles there, which I use when I feel myself in a writing crisis, when it seems I can’t put together a sentence.”

The Saragossa Manuscript played a key role in the transmission of Oriental and Arabic influences to European literature, both because of the formal
structure of the work and also because of its theme, which deals chiefly with Islam as a repressed part of Spain’s identity. As far as the formal structure is concerned, *The Saragossa Manuscript* is “a story within a story” inspired by the *Thousand and One Nights*, a masterpiece of Arabic literature in the shape of a collection of tales compiled in the Middle East during the Islamic Golden Age. In fact, Potocki’s novel should be recognised as a landmark in the history of the reception of the *Thousand and One Nights* in European culture. The Manuscript shows the extremely diverse, colourful and magical world of Andalusia and North Africa, inhabited by intertwined believers of various sects and religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism), ethnic groups and races. It is very indicative that the most significant Muslim protagonists are Shiites who, as has already been noted, were allowed to conceal their true religious identity and have an important messianic component in their doctrine. These elements enhanced Potocki’s attempts to play with the idea of a hidden community striving to rule the world. The striking similarities between Potocki’s *The Manuscript* and Tokarczuk’s *The Books of Jacob* do not limit themselves to the formal structure and to certain motives, but they also share basic foundations of worldview that originate from the *Thousand and One Nights*. As the Dutch scholar Richard van Leeuwen rightly points out, Potocki showed that “only by acknowledging the Islamic component can Spanish history be complete, although it is not necessary to give up the Christian component: In the end each element has its proper place. It is this vision of plurality which seems to be Potocki’s message, and there is no better narrative model to express it than the *Thousand and One Nights*. Indeed, the necessity of recognising the plurality of Polish culture and identity, including its Islamic elements, as the basic precondition of their completeness, also represents the main message of Tokarczuk’s *opus vitae*.

However, the Islamic contribution to Polish culture remained to a large degree forgotten or rejected, because Polish ethnic nationalism was built on a refusal to accept Poland’s multicultural heritage, excluding only nationalistic misuse of it as an evidence of past glory and alleged “traditional” Polish tolerance. This kind of nationalism promoted the idea of a homogeneous nation very tightly intertwined with Roman Catholicism, this being presented as the assurance of Poland’s belonging to the Occident. The entrenchment in the Occident became particularly important

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for many Poles due to the frontier character of the Polish ethnic community, which has lived for centuries next to Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims and other small “Oriental” denominations. Moreover, in the modern period most Poles found themselves under Russian “Oriental” rule. Poles’ ambivalent relation with their multicultural past may also be placed in a wider Central European context. It is similar to the nostalgia for an idealised, multicultural Austria-Hungary in today’s mostly ethnically homogeneous Austria and Hungary. Nationalists cultivate this nostalgia, but they do not support a genuine multicultural society: it is, rather, part of a dignity-orientated narrative, used to present their own nation as the “imperial” one ruling over other nations. This kind of superficial “multiculturalism” may be interpreted as a sort of alibi for a nostalgia for power.

As Maria Janion rightly points out, the struggle between Krasiński’s ethnic homogeneous nationalism and Mickiewicz’s multicultural civic vision of Poland remains to this day a key dispute of the Polish cultural paradigm. Indeed, The Books of Jacob, with its focus on Frankism, constitutes a reaction to the current rise in ethnic nationalism in Poland, powered by Islamophobia and to a lesser degree anti-Semitism. Because of its strong Islamic component, the multicultural identity of Frankism stands in a particularly dramatic opposition to the current mostly mono-ethnic shape of Polish national identity. Islamophobia does not concern only the supporters of national populists and the radical right but also – though to a substantially lesser degree – enjoys support among many liberal and left-oriented Poles. They define Islam as the antithesis of the West in order to reconfirm Poland’s belonging to the latter. However, paradoxically, Poland’s entrenchment in the current West – as in the case of Spain and Portugal – requires the recognition of the country’s multicultural heritage, including also Jewish and Muslim elements because ethnicism alienates Poland from the EU’s mainstream. The latter acknowledges the contributions of Islam and Judaism to the European heritage. The vision of Poland promoted by Tokarczuk, as the melting pot of various nations, cultures and religions, paradoxically requires an acceptance that the societies of that kind were based on the predominance of one group and that confrontation between communities and prosecution of minorities sometimes took place. However, at the same time, the cultural métissage that stands behind the idea of the melting pot means that a certain modus vivendi was established between the groups, and that mutual cultural diffusion, though asymmetrical, occurred. Therefore, the historical narratives should avoid

the trap of simplifying generalisations (“Poles were...”) which even Tokarczuk sometimes falls in. Nevertheless, first of all, the recognition of the impact of Islam and Judaism demands the acceptance of a worldview that affirms diversity and places more emphasis on similarities between various faiths and cultures and cultural diffusion.

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Identity Politics in History Textbooks in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia

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Abstract:
The use and misuse of textbooks by ethnic entrepreneurs in the lead up to and following the wars of the 1990s in the Western Balkans has been extensively documented by the literature. In this chapter, we examine the main trends and changes to history textbooks in the post-Yugoslav countries over the past several decades. Despite the fact that the overt nationalist propaganda of the 1990s has been mostly removed from textbooks across the region, they are still wrought with messages specifying who belongs to “us” and who is the Other, heavily employ victimisation narratives, and interpret events exclusively through the prism of each nation’s preferred narrative. We examine the strategies history textbooks use to define identities: selective representations of the past, presenting the nation as the ultimate victim, and shifting responsibility for wrongdoings. We discuss the common elements in textbook identity politics throughout the region, and point to the ways in which they differ, both within and across countries.

Keywords: history textbooks, national identity/nationhood, national narratives, ethnic nationalism, former Yugoslavia

Introduction

Schools are one of the most important socialisation agents for children, and their capacity to affect identity, feelings of national, ethnic and racial belonging, as well as stereotypes and images of other groups, has been ex-

1 The contribution of Tamara Trošt to this work was partly funded by the Slovenian Research Agency project number BI-HR/20-21-034.
2 The contribution of Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc to this work was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency under the research programme Historical interpretations of the 20th century (P6-0347).
tensively documented in the literature. Textbooks – and history textbooks in particular – play a central role in the production of knowledge in schools, serving a crucial role in nation-building and creating social cohesion. Both in content and in form, textbooks represent the “official knowledge” of what a society has recognised as “legitimate and truthful,” and in turn, the public thinks of textbook material as “authoritative, accurate, and necessary.” Yet, the selection and organisation of this knowledge is a highly ideological process structured by economic and political realities, an arena of cultural politics highly affected by questions of power. In transitioning and post-conflict contexts, the struggle over textbook material becomes even more pronounced as historiography represents the central arena in which elites try to assert the dominance of new historical narratives that justify the new social order, largely centred on the “ideologisation and state-sponsored institutionalisation of inflexible forms of cultural difference.”

In the Balkans particularly, textbooks have been pointed to as one of the main sources of ethnic animosity and socialisation into exclusive identities, especially during and after the wars of the 1990s, when history was drasti-


cally manipulated to serve exclusivist nation-building purposes. The official goal of history education, to instil national consciousness and promote patriotism, mushroomed into glorification of one’s own history, emphasis on the nation’s past greatness, and continuous suffering and victimisation. As Dubravka Stojanović explains, in the late 1980s, both Croatia and Serbia underwent a concerted effort to reconstruct a new national narrative, which was “a blend of delusion of grandeur and self-pity, of national arrogance and self-victimisation” – part of an effort to “return to oneself” after decades of Communist rule, which had, according to the new interpretation, purposely erased national consciousness and memory. For this reason, history teaching became even more important, since it allowed for the establishment of the new narrative: it included not only changes in interpretation, but also changes in actual historical facts.

Because of the extent of the ethnonationalist language and stereotypes in these post-1990s textbooks, and their role in mirroring ethnonationalist agendas in the post-Yugoslav states, history textbooks were cast into the spotlight of both academic and policy studies. Many conferences were organised, edited volumes published, and workshops held, centred on the topic of re-writing history in the Balkans. Several authors, including Dubravka Stojanović, Snježana Koren, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić, Tea Sindbaek, Branislava Baranović and others, have provided excellent reviews of the state of history education in post-Yugoslav countries, and are involved in ongoing projects of producing less biased and less normative, agenda-driven history education. To name some of the biggest endeavours in textbook analysis, the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe published, in 2002, *Clio in the Balkans: The Politics of History Education*, with reviews of the state of history education in all the Balkan countries, and initiated the Southeast European Joint History Project, with the aim of producing a multiperspective approach to history education. Several scholarly volumes were produced in the past two decades with the explicit goal of studying history education in the Balkans: *Oil on Fire? Textbooks, Ethnic Stereotypes and Violence in South-Eastern Euro-

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10 Božo Repe, *Between Myths and Ideology: Some Views on Slovene Contemporary Historiography* (Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, 2001), 90.
pe,13 The Image of the Other: Analysis of High-School Textbooks in History from Balkan Countries,14 (Re)Writing History: Historiography in Southeast Europe After Socialism,15 “Transition” and the Politics of History Education in Southeast Europe,16 and several special Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research publications devoted to the topic.17

These works, mostly focused on the textbooks of the 1990s, demonstrate the strategies at work to create new national narratives. As Anthony Smith’s work on nation-building myths shows, myths not only serve to legitimate particular orders or regimes, but also promote radical change, by “referring to past events but serving present purposes and/or future goals; […] a potent and appealing dramatic narrative that links the past, the present, and the future through the character and role of the national community.”18 Across the Balkans, from the former Yugoslav republics to Greece and Turkey, the matrix that structured the national narrative in history textbooks contained the same common elements: a superiority/inferiority complex, a tendency to represent one’s people as victimised, and an emphasis on the historical continuity of national territory and statehood.19

In order to (re)construct these new myths, elites and textbook authors relied on strategically picking which historical facets to include and which to exclude from the curriculum, while also relying on other, more subtle strategies, to present this new monolithic, historically congruous narrative. While the degree of ethnocentric identity messages in history textbooks has since subsided, largely due to pressure from NGOs and the international community, textbooks are still wrought with messages specifying who belongs to “us” and who is the Other, heavily employ victimisation narratives, and interpret events exclusively through the prism of each nation’s

14 Panos Xochellis and Fotini Toloudi, eds., The Image of the Other: Analysis of High-School Textbooks in History from Balkan Countries (Sofia: Balkan Colleges Foundation, 1998).
15 Brunnbauer, (Re)Writing History.
17 For a full bibliography of work on Serbian and Croatian history textbooks, see Tamara Trošt’s academia.edu page: https://www.academia.edu/29863112/Bibliography_of_Literature_on_Serbian_and_Croatian_History_Textbooks.
preferred narrative. In this chapter, we review the state of history textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, and Serbia, from the dissolution of the Socialist narrative until today, providing a systematic analysis of the common elements in textbook identity politics throughout the region.

The chapter proceeds as follows. We first provide an overview of the major changes to history textbooks in the region of the (former) Yugoslavia from the 1970s until today, summarising how changes in the political sphere and national historiography were reflected in changes in textbook publishing. We document changes to textbook content and publishing during the wars of the 1990s, and the different trajectories taken by the republics in the post-war years. In the second part of the chapter, we turn to a pointed analysis of how identity, who belongs to us and who is the Other, and national stereotypes are conveyed through the actual content of the textbooks across the region. We discuss the similarities and differences in these identity strategies across and within the post-Yugoslav countries.

All of the analysis in the chapter is based on 8th or 9th grade textbooks, as national 20th century history, which is always taught in the last year of primary school (8th or 9th grade, depending on whether the country has shifted to a 9-year primary school system or not) is the material that is most heavy in identity messages. While identity messages can also be found in earlier grades, most notably in sections about the Ottoman past, the chapter examines only 8th/9th grade textbooks in order to provide a comprehensive and systematic comparison across time and space. Textbooks included in the analysis are provided in Table 1; it includes the population of approved textbooks in the three countries from 1974 until 2017. When performing content analysis of the textbooks, we examined the strategies history textbooks use to define identities, such as selective representations of the past, presenting the nation as the ultimate victim, and shifting responsibility for wrongdoings.
Table 1 Textbooks included in the analysis (all approved 8th/9th grade history textbooks 1974-2017 in Croatia, Serbia, and BiH)

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Overview of the State of History Textbooks from the 1970s until Today

Over the last several decades in the Western Balkan region, historiography in general, and history textbooks in particular, have undergone a tumultuous and extensive transformation. Beginning with a common history based on the idea of brotherhood and unity among the Yugoslav peoples, which permeated textbooks of the Communist time, textbooks transi-
tioned to the idea of ethnically separate territories in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Accordingly, the process of rewriting textbooks meant not only changing how events were to be interpreted, it also meant changing some of the facts, which was necessary in order to create a new narrative.\textsuperscript{20} These haphazardly written wartime textbooks then gradually solidified into new national narratives in the early 2000s. Examining the major changes in textbooks since 1974 until today, three distinct “eras” of textbooks can thus be observed:

2. Wartime textbooks – of the late 1980s and 1990s.

The following section outlines the changes to the process of approving and publishing history textbooks during these three eras, and how textbooks reacted to changes in the political and public sphere, whereas the changes to the actual content of the textbooks are addressed in the subsequent section.

During the Socialist era, each republic of the federal Yugoslavia was in charge of its own textbook production, which was done centrally – a Council for Textbooks (Zavod za udžbenike) existed in each of the republics, which commissioned and approved one textbook per subject per grade; all of the textbooks followed the nationally-set curriculum, which was largely similar across the republics (for instance, 8th grade history covered the period from World War I to contemporary times, with alternating units on the events globally and nationally). In addition to the national-level textbooks, ethnic minorities were allowed to have Supplements for subjects of “national interest”: nature and society, history, music and arts education, as well as for their mother language with elements of national culture; all of these textbooks and supplements were published by the Council for Textbooks.\textsuperscript{21} These textbooks followed the central Yugoslav

\textsuperscript{20} See Koren in Bojan Munjin, “Udžbenici – povijest bolesti” [Textbooks – Medical History], Novosti 528, January 30, 2010 and Dubravka Stojanović, “Revisions.”

\textsuperscript{21} Current rules governing the education of national minorities and their rights to national supplements in their language are largely similar; in Serbia, for instance, see the “Plan for Elementary School Textbooks in National Minorities Languages and in Subjects of Interest for National Minorities” [Plan udžbenika za osnovnu školu na jeziku i pismu nacionalnih manjina i udžbenika za predmete od interesa nacionalne manjine], article 16 of the Law on Textbooks: both the state-owned and private publishers can publish Supplements for national minorities, though in practice the Zavod and Klett are the only two publishers to have done so.
idea of “brotherhood and unity,” glorified the partisan movement (of World War II)\textsuperscript{22} and the Communist party more generally, and emphasised the importance of the multi-ethnic composition of the Yugoslav peoples, discussed in greater detail in the second part of the chapter.

Textbooks written in the lead up to and during the wars of the 1990s represented a sharp departure in content from previous Socialist-era textbooks, in some cases with entirely new author teams, although they still followed the same publishing process and structure: one textbook per subject per grade per country, published and approved centrally by the state. Serbian history textbooks began gradually introducing ethnonationalist content in the mid-1980s, which later exploded during the 1990s, but these new textbooks still relied on the same Socialist-era textbook template: Socialist sections (such as glorification of the Partisans as the only true anti-fascist movement) were simply intertwined with newly-added ethnonationalist text. Croatia, conversely, produced an entirely new textbook with a new author in 1992, which removed all Socialist content and already represented the template for the new Croatian narrative. In BiH, despite growing nationalistic mobilisation, the Socialist-era textbook remained in use without significant modifications up until the war broke out in 1992. Since none of the emerging ethnonational political elites had enough power to induce changes in textbook writing, the script remained formally the same. After the war broke out, schools started using textbooks depending on the military force that controlled a particular locality.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, textbooks from the Republic of Croatia were used on the territory controlled by Croatian forces, with a similar situation on the Serbian side. On the territory controlled by the forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government in Sarajevo, the old Socialist textbook remained in use until 1994. After the war ended in 1995, the educational system was segregated according to language (i.e. Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian), which as a rule conflated with the dominant ethnicity of the population living in a territory. The ethnically defined textbooks used in BiH contained mutually conflicting historical perspectives, in which “the members of other national

\textsuperscript{22} The Partisans were a resistance group led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia with Josip Broz Tito as its leader.

groups of the country are typically presented through enemy images.”

While Croatian and Serbian textbooks contained an exclusive ethnic perspective, Bosnian textbooks seemingly portrayed an image of a unified country, with a dominant Bosniak (i.e. Bosnian Muslim) perspective. This provoked an intervention by international organisations, which pushed for textbook reform, at first demanding simply blacking-out offensive text and that all textbooks should be produced and printed in BiH. Textbooks approved by the government in Sarajevo continued to be used in schools that followed the curriculum in the Bosnian language, while locally produced textbooks started to be used in Serbian schools in 1997 (as a textbook supplement, and as a textbook in 2000) and in Croatian schools in 2003. It should be pointed out, however, that all but one of the Bosnian-Croatian textbooks were actually just slightly modified versions of textbooks printed in Croatia proper: the Mostar branch of a Zagreb publishing house took on an additional local historian to write in small segments of text relating to BiH in order to fulfil the formal requirement that it be a “locally” produced textbook.

In the last two decades, after 2000, most of the countries adopted completely new, supposedly “democratic” textbooks with new authors, and in most cases complete changes in form and content: these textbooks were printed in colour, with more images, higher quality paper, and included more activities, extra material, and questions for discussion. Many of these changes reflected pressure from international NGOs, who actively worked on getting the more problematic material from the textbooks removed. However, the political backdrop was not always supportive of these efforts,

nor were the societies ready for drastic changes. This is reflected in the textbook content: the textbook in use from 2001-2005 in Serbia, for instance, simply removed entire sections of text on the more controversial topics (such as the wars of the 1990s), avoiding any discussion of these events, as no political consensus on the “proper” interpretation of these events has been reached, while an especially nationalistic textbook was published in Croatia in 2004,\textsuperscript{28} which overtly relativised fascist crimes and was unapologetically anti-Serbian. Fewer than 10 percent of Croatian teachers opted for this textbook, which was therefore not used in subsequent years.

Since 2000, most of the countries have also opened their market for history textbooks, allowing the publication of textbooks published by private publishing houses, in addition to the textbook published by the state-owned publishing house (Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva in Serbia, Školska knjiga in Croatia,\textsuperscript{29} and Svjetlost in Bosnia\textsuperscript{30}). The private publishers include both foreign publishing houses that operate across the region (e.g. Profil-Klett, Logos, BIGZ), and domestic ones (e.g. Alfa in Croatia, Sarajevo Publishing in Bosnia). Schools are allowed to choose which publisher’s textbooks to use each year, in accordance with each country’s law on textbook choice, although the former socialist/state publishers’ (Školska knjiga and Zavod) textbooks are still the most frequently used textbooks in Serbia and Croatia.\textsuperscript{31} This change to an open market system for history textbooks occurred in 2000 in Croatia and 2010 in Serbia.\textsuperscript{32} In Croatia, up to four histo-

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{29} Školska knjiga is no longer state-owned. Currently all of the textbook publishers in Croatia are privately owned.
\bibitem{30} It should be noted that publishing house Svjetlost in Sarajevo ceased to issue textbooks in the mid 2000s.
\bibitem{31} Information on how many schools chose which textbooks is occasionally published on the site of the Ministries of Education in Serbia and Croatia, though complete data were unavailable at the time of publication of this chapter. According to the authors’ internal sources, in Serbia, for 8th grade history in the 2017-2018 school year, the state-owned Zavod textbooks were chosen by over 30 percent of the schools, followed by Novi Logos and Klett with 20 percent each, whereas the Freska and Eduka publishers were chosen by less than 9 percent of schools. In Croatia, for the 2019-2020 school year, for 5th grade history textbooks (data was unavailable for 8th grade), around 40 percent chose Alfa and Školska knjiga each, followed by Profil-Klett (20 percent). See the Ministry of Science and Education, https://bit.ly/2YqWkuf.
\bibitem{32} Of all of the post-Yugoslav republics, Montenegro is the only one that still has a closed history textbook market, meaning that only the textbook published by the state-owned publisher is used.
\end{thebibliography}
ry textbooks are approved for 8th/9th grade each year, while in Serbia there are up to seven different textbooks. The situation in BiH is complicated compared to the other Yugoslav successor states, since there is no common country-wide educational policy, and textbooks are approved at the lower levels of government. In the entity of Republika Srpska, only one textbook is approved and issued by the state-owned publisher (Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva RS). Within the other entity – the Federation of BiH, which is subdivided into ten cantons – the cantonal level decides on educational policy. In practice, the Federation Ministry of Education approves textbooks for Bosnian-language schools, while the Institute of School Affairs in Mostar approves textbooks for Croatian-language schools, predominantly used in four cantons with a large Croat population.33 As will be discussed in greater detail below, this kind of publishing system only institutionalises the division that was created by the war.

In all of the countries, the approval of textbooks is still centrally controlled despite the open textbook markets, and the textbooks must adhere to state history curricula goals, which explicitly include building pupils’ national identity and patriotism.34 Nonetheless, with the opening of the market, alternative “versions” of history textbooks are now offered, meaning that there is no longer a unitary national narrative, and significant variations can be observed between various authors within a same country. Some of the publishers have a reputation for being more left- or right-leaning, and while textbooks from several different publishers may be approved, there are typically one or two more popular textbooks that the majority of the country’s schools choose. Debates frequently appear in the public sphere regarding how textbooks are chosen by schools and the extent to which political, ideological or material factors affect school choice: because of alleged corruption and pressure on teachers in choosing particular textbooks, Croatia moved to an anonymous online system for choos-

33 There is an exception of the District of Brčko, a town that does not belong to either entity and where schools and classes are not ethnically pre-determined. Here 50 percent of the history teaching is organised in mixed classes using textbooks of all three educational programmes, while the other 50 percent is taught in divided lectures that follow different programmes; see Lessons from Education Reform in Brčko: A Report Prepared by the OSCE Mission to BiH Education Department (Sarajevo: OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2007).

34 Snježana Koren and Branislava Baranović, “What Kind of History Education Do We Have after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia?” in “Transition” and the Politics, ed. Dimou, 91–140.
ing textbooks in 2019.\textsuperscript{35} Debates have also occurred regarding whether foreign publishers should be allowed to publish textbooks for subjects of national relevance (like history), as well as frequent complaints of textbook money going to foreign companies: in Serbia, the media have called out the monopoly of the “German-Slovenian conglomerate” (including Klett, Novi Logos, and Freska) for controlling more than a third of the textbook market, estimated at a yearly value of 80-150 million euro.\textsuperscript{36} In both Serbia and Croatia, there was a minimum 5 percent rule according to which textbooks not chosen by at least 5 percent of teachers would not be offered in the following year; this rule was withdrawn in Serbia in 2019, allowing the state-owned Zavod to continue printing non-profitable textbooks.

In addition to debates regarding the publishing, approval and selection process of textbooks, controversies and public engagement with the actual content of textbooks also arise every few years across the countries; at the same time, textbook changes have largely reflected changes in the public sphere. In Croatia, the first major controversy occurred in 2005, after the publishing of a Supplement to the Textbooks on Current Croatian History (Dodatak), which included a more balanced and multiperspective text.\textsuperscript{37} These debates received massive attention in the media, and the authors were blamed for relativising responsibility in the war, “twisting the truth about Serbian aggression,” attempting to equal Serbian and Croatian wrongdoings, and mentioning Serbian victims in the war.\textsuperscript{38} After much discussion in the media, the texts were withdrawn or edited following extensive censorship by the Ministry of Education. Several years later, a few textbook authors nonetheless offered interpretations that were similar to those in the Supplement, i.e. not completely in line with the curriculum.

\textsuperscript{37} For an excellent review, see Koren and Baranović, “What Kind of History Education.”
\textsuperscript{38} Details regarding this controversy can be found in Maja Dubljević, Jedna povijest, više historija [One Past, Several Histories] (Zagreb: Documenta – Centar za suočavanje s prošlošću, 2007) which supports the Supplement, and in Robert Skenderović, Multiperspektivnost ili relativiziranje? [Multiperspectivity or Relativisation] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2008) which summarises the perspectives of the critics of the Supplement.
which led to a new series of debates in 2007. At this point, the Croatian parliament had already passed Declarations on the Homeland War (in 2000) and on Operation Storm (in 2006), and a battle was fought between politicians and historians as to whether textbooks should be consistent with the parliamentary declarations or not. The Ministry eventually approved these textbooks: among the currently approved four history textbooks, two include a more balanced interpretation of the events of the 1990s.

In Serbia, after the opening of the textbook market, as the trial for the rehabilitation of Dragoljub Mihailović was under way (the Belgrade Higher Court rehabilitated Mihailović in May 2015, annulling the Communist-era verdict of 1946 that had sentenced him to death) along with a broader national “return” to the četnik past, textbooks in Serbia also changed in content, painting a very different picture of the actors and main events of World War II from the earlier textbooks. In some of the current textbooks, whether the textbook authors support or are ambivalent about this switch to glorifying the četnik movement and accompanying extremely


41 As Koren notes, the Ministry of Education has other strategies to promote its official version of history, such as in-service training of history teachers, which began in 2008. See Koren, “Croatia.”

42 The Četnik movement was a military group that operated in the area of the former Yugoslavia during World War II and was led by Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović. As a remnant of the defeated Yugoslav Royal Army, they were first organised to oppose occupying Axis Powers but later lost Allied support for collaborating with pro-fascist forces. After the war Mihailović was convicted for collaboration, while the trial was deemed unjust in 2015, though it did not go into the merits of the initial trial. For an extensive discussion, see Jelena Đureinović, “Law as an Instrument and as a Mirror of Official Memory Politics: The Mechanism for Rehabilitating Victims of Communism in Serbia,” Review of Central and East European Law 43, no. 2 (2018), 232–251. For various narratives on the četniks see Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc and Tamara Pavasović Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists? Multiple Interpretations of World War II in Post-Yugoslav Textbooks,” in The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics, eds. Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (Routledge, 2017), 173–192.

43 See Trbovc and Pavasović Trošt, “Who Were the Anti-Fascists?”
negative depiction of the entire Communist era can clearly be discerned.\textsuperscript{44} Overall, however, it can be said that Serbian textbooks (and historiography in general) have slowly solidified the new national narrative throughout the past 15 years, gradually rejecting a positive evaluation of the shared Yugoslav/Communist past and returning to 12\textsuperscript{th} century nationhood roots; in Croatia, by contrast, the “new” national narrative, anchored in the idea of the millennial thread of Croatian nationhood, and accompanied by the historical revisionism required to sustain this narrative, was present already in 1991.

In BiH, school textbooks are also a recurring topic in local media. In the Federation of BiH, where teachers are supposedly free to choose textbooks from the open market, local media have reported that the process is riddled with corruption: textbook publishers have been accused of bribing teachers and headmasters to choose a particular textbook using different methods including financial compensation by giving donations to schools and gifts to teachers,\textsuperscript{45} or by organising the promotion of new textbooks at seaside hotels, turning this into a paid holiday for teachers.\textsuperscript{46} Another hotly debated issue in the media was the decision of the Federation of BiH to approve only one textbook per subject in 2012, a decision that goes against the general trend of opening textbook markets in the region. However, this policy applied only to the Bosnian-language school programmes, while the Croatian-language programme continued using several textbooks (which are, as mentioned previously, reprints of those published in Croatia proper, with small alterations).

Finally, it must be noted that, along with the ethnocentrist forces that came to dominate the arena of history teaching, the period post-2000 also witnessed dynamic work by non-nationalist-minded historians and educators, who diligently worked against these trends and tried to implement changes. The above-mentioned Joint History Project, led by Christina Koulouri, resulted in a series of textbook supplements that attempted to address the most controversial aspects of Southeast European history by including multiperspectivity and civic values. However, these materials were attacked by the public as well as by several leading historians on the grounds that they weakened the importance of the nation, threatened na-

\textsuperscript{44} See Pavasović Trošt, “Ruptures and Continuities.”
\textsuperscript{45} Vanja Bjelica-Cabrilo, “U odabir udžbenika morat će se uključiti i SIPA” [SIPA Has to be Involved in the Textbook Selection], \textit{Dnevni list}, August 28, 2011.
tional identity, represented a “genocide on memory” and a path towards cultural homogenisation.47 These materials were never employed in national history teaching.

Strategies Used in Identity-Building through Textbooks across Time and Space

The section below analyses the actual content of the textbooks, outlining the main strategies used in identity-building in history textbooks across the three eras described above, and both within- and across- the post-Yugoslav republics.

Socialist-Era Textbooks

In textbooks of the Socialist era, the central theme is the Yugoslav notion of “brotherhood and unity,” and overall a strong “us” vs “them” emphasis. In these textbooks, and in accordance with the official ideology, “we” includes all Yugoslav peoples, who are referred to as “the people” (narod) and using personal pronouns (“us”, “ours”). For historical episodes that could threaten this narrative, such as World War II, or episodes in which there was inter-ethnic strife, the textbooks simply refer to perpetrators as “the enemy” (neprijatelj) or “the occupier.” The Serbian textbook, for instance, emphasises that none of the ethnic groups in Yugoslavia were to blame for the events of World War II as a whole, only individuals: “[Apart from the German minority in Yugoslavia], other nationalities did not [help the occupier and bring evil upon our people]. Only individuals or small groups became traitors.”48 The Croatian textbook also goes to great lengths to show that (Communist) Serbs and Croats were united in their goals, for instance by including a subsection on “The united fight of Croats and Serbs against occupiers and domestic traitors” which explains that the Croatian people could not lead the battle against the ustaša movement49

49 The ustaša movement was the Croatian fascist organisation that was put in charge of the Independent State of Croatia by the Axis Powers in 1941. It was responsible for the mass killing of Serbs, Jews and Roma on its territory.
on their own, but needed the help of the Serbs and other Communists.\textsuperscript{50} Across the region’s textbooks of the Socialist era, individuals (Croats or Serbs) who did commit inter-ethnic crimes are referred to as “domestic traitors,” not connected to an ethnic group, and their coercion by foreign enemies is highlighted. Identity messages in the Socialist era thus come primarily through the division between the “good guys” (Partisans, Communists, “the people”) and the “bad guys” (traitors, Germans, Italians, fascists, “the enemy”). However, as Höpken points out, the phrase “brotherhood and unity” was simply an educational objective, repeated over and over throughout all types of educational materials, reducing it to a cliché and empty phrase that was not sufficient in preparing students for understanding the tenets of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, the emphasis on teaching Yugoslav history meant limited space for national history teaching, which created a feeling of undermining national identity, and that the national question went completely unaddressed in history education.\textsuperscript{52}

Though Socialist-era textbooks generally reproduce the same historical narrative in all three Yugoslav republics analysed in this paper, there are small differences. While the Socialist-era textbook from Serbia does not mention the concept of Greater Serbia or Greater Croatia, the Croatian textbook of the same period mentions the “Greater Serbian bourgeoisie” as aggressors who attempted to take away Croat territory to create a Greater Serbia, but in a clear Communist vs bourgeoisie vs anti-Communist matrix, thus (at least in text) de-emphasising the role of ethnic attachments in the social problems mentioned. On the other hand, the Socialist-era textbook from BiH equates the concepts of “Greater Serbia” and “Greater Croatia,”\textsuperscript{53} that is, with the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), an Axis puppet state that existed on the territory of present-day Croatia and BiH during World War II. Both ideologies are presented foremost as fascist and anti-Communist in nature, and less as nationalistic projects. What is presented as an expression of “the will of the people” is the partisan movement and

\textsuperscript{50} Ivan Jelić, Radovan Vukadinović, and Dušan Bilandžić, \textit{Narodi u prostoru i vremenu 4: udžbenik povijesti za VIII. razred osnovne škole} [Nations in Space and Time 4: History Textbook for VIII Grade of Primary School] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975), 82.
\textsuperscript{51} Höpken, \textit{Oil on Fire?}
\textsuperscript{52} Höpken, \textit{Oil on Fire?}, 106.
\textsuperscript{53} Stanko Perazić and Husein Serdarević, \textit{Povijest: udžbenik za VIII razred osnovne škole} [History: Textbook for VIII Grade of Primary School] (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1984).
the anti-fascist council which proclaimed BiH to be a multi-ethnic republic, equally belonging to all three constitutive nations: Serbs, Croats and Muslims. This shows that even in the Yugoslav period, there were different strategies of identity-building in each federal republic: strategies that combined elements of the pan-Yugoslav historical narrative but emphasised or excluded certain facets in order to support republic-level identity building.

Wartime Textbooks

During the wartime period of the late 1980s and 1990s, Serbian and Croatian textbooks erupted in drastic ethnonationalism.\(^54\) As Dubravka Stojanović summarises, textbooks were to build a narrative that would justify the current political state: “it was necessary to emphasise national feelings in the first place, and to create a concrete concept of national sentiments and identifications through a specific structuring of the relations me-us and we-others.”\(^55\) These new wartime textbooks needed to create a new national narrative, shifting from the ideology of socialism to the ideology of nationalism, first and foremost by re-emphasising the importance of the national consciousness, and secondly by re-writing history so that it fit into this narrative.\(^56\) In Croatia, a completely new textbook by a new author was written in 1992. This book discarded all traces of Socialism and instead offered a new version of Croatian history: “an ethnocentric account was created with the development of the national state at its centre, and relations with neighbours were presented as a series of conflicts and Croatian resistance to conquering intentions and attempts to annihilate Croatian national identity.”\(^57\) This new textbook emphasised the continuity of the Croatian state from the Middle Ages to the present day, repre-

\(^{54}\) For an extensive discussion of the strategies used by wartime textbooks, see Tamara Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, “History Textbooks in War-time: The Use of World WWII in 1990s War Propaganda in the Former Yugoslavia” (paper presented at “War Frenzy: Exploring the Violence of Propaganda,” an Annual Interdisciplinary Conference, Princeton University, May 12-14, 2017), 1–16.


\(^{56}\) For a full discussion, see Pavasović Trošt, “Ruptures and Continuities.”

\(^{57}\) Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić, “The Use and Misuse of History Teaching in 1990s Croatia,” in *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transforma*
senting every Croatian state “as a positive historical fact, including the pro-fascist Independent State of Croatia:” an ethnonational paradigm that the 1995 curriculum firmly solidified. Thus, the primary identity differentiation in Croatian textbooks was not only Croats vs Serbs, but also Croats vs Communists/pro Yugoslavs: because Partisan crimes towards Croats, such as the killing of fleeing anti-Communists arrested in Bleiburg, are emphasised (along with Tito’s presumed un-Croatian stance), the textbook implicitly equates Communism with being “anti-Croatian.” Serbia was not as quick in completely changing its textbooks, so the 1990s textbooks included extreme and overt ethnonationalist language, haphazardly added on top of the previous Socialist template.

In accordance with the new national narratives, a major identity strategy in textbooks of the 1990s in those countries that published revisions during the war (Serbia, Croatia) involved presenting the outgroup as an eternal enemy led by a clear goal of exterminating the ingroup. These wartime textbooks thus include long sections of explicit and gruesome details regarding the atrocities. For instance, the 1990s Serbian textbook talks about Jasenovac concentration camp victims as being “slaughtered with knives, killed with axes, hatchets, hammers, steel crowbars and rammers, shot and burned in crematoriums, cooked alive in cauldrons, devoured by hunger, thirst, and cold.” Croatian textbooks of the 1990s include similarly explicit text: Croats were “butchered, shot, hung, massacred, robbed, burnt, and taken away to numerous collective camps […]” by “uncivilized”

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59 Bleiburg is a small town in Austria where anti-Communist prisoners of war fleeing from the Yugoslav Partisans were captured at the very end of World War II. They were taken over the border to Yugoslavia and later unlawfully executed in several locations, which are jointly called “Way of the Cross” in Croatia’s heavily politically instrumentalised new national narrative; see Tamara Pavasović Trošt, “War Crimes as Political Tools: Bleiburg and Jasenovac in History Textbooks 1973–2012,” in History and Politics in the Western Balkans: Changes at the Turn of the Millennium, ed. Srdan Jovanović (Belgrade: CSDU Press, 2012), 13-47; Vjeran Pavlaković, Dario Brentin, and Davor Pauković, “The Controversial Commemoration: Transnational Approaches to Remembering Bleiburg,” Politička misao 55, no. 2 (2018): 7–32; Pål Kolstø, “Bleiburg: The Creation of a National Martyrology,” Europe-Asia Studies 62, no. 7 (2010): 1153–1174.
60 Nikola Gaćeša, Ljiljana Mladenović-Maksimović, and Dušan Živković, Istorija za 8. razred osnovne škole [History for the 8th Grade of Primary School] (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 1994), 122.
Serbs.61 Where Albanians are concerned, Serbian textbooks of the 1990s include language regarding terror, treason, and an inclination towards claiming pieces of Serbian territory. The term “Albanian terror” appears as often as “ustaša genocide” and related phrases include “separatist aspirations” and “creation of a Kosovo republic.”62

The wartime textbooks also combine the notion of national superiority with presenting the ingroup as a perpetual victim. In Serbian textbooks, for instance, Serbia is constantly mentioned as having fared the worst, be it in World War II, in secessionist movements, etc. The uniqueness of the Serbian role is very pronounced: “The contributions of specific Yugoslav people to the […] war against fascism was not equal. The contribution of the Serbian people was the greatest,”63 or “Serbs were the only people, apart from Jews and Gypsies […] to have suffered from the Croatian ustaša genocide.”64 Similarly, Croatian textbooks of the 1990s rely on stories of suffering – presented as the cost the nation had to pay in order to finally achieve statehood – in order to justify present-day problems and the new national narrative which was centred around the ideology of Croatian statehood: these include stories of Croatian suffering and injustices committed towards Croatians, the chains of Greater Serbian hegemony, the forced migration of Croats, the eternal Croatian statehood question, as well as textbook units bearing titles such as “the chains that bound Croats and Croatia.”65

The Bosnian wartime textbook generally keeps the same frame of representation as the Socialist one, maintaining the glorifying picture of Partisans as a multi-ethnic, all-encompassing movement that fought its deadliest battles precisely on the territory of Herzegovina. However, this framing is sometimes abruptly interrupted by new information that takes as its vantage point the Muslim population as an ethnic group, members of which took different sides during the war. It goes to great lengths to describe how the majority of Muslims opposed the ustaša’s genocidal policies in the Independent State of Croatia into which the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorporated, though admitting that some Muslims also

61 Ivo Perić, Povijest za VIII. razred osnovne škole [History for VIII Grade of Primary School] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1992), 151–152.
62 Gaćeša, Mladenović-Maksimović and Živković, Istorija. The expression “Kosovo republic” (Kosovo republika) refers to a chant used by Albanian protesters in the 1980s.
64 Ibid.
65 Perić, Povijest, 129.
participated in the administration and forces of the ISC. Further, the textbook narrates how some Muslim politicians, in their eagerness to gain autonomy (from the ISC) under the German protectorate, bartered with the occupying forces. They requested ammunition from the occupying forces in order to create Muslim militias in the villages “which would protect the population from possible četnik attacks.” On the other hand, these Muslim political representatives supplied Muslim soldiers to the German army. The textbook is apologetic in presenting the German army’s Muslim unit, first by stating that it was comprised mostly of “muhadžiri [Muslim refugees] fleeing from četnik kama [dagger]” and second by stating that this military unit, upon being sent to France, “was the only case of a unit in the German army staging a rebellion during World War II.”

Though these Muslims were effectively collaborating with the occupying forces (or were a part of them), the Bosnian wartime textbook does not refer to them as collaborators, while it does use that label for the ustaša and četnik movements. Although the Socialist-era Bosnian textbook did not mention these Muslim military groups, they were included in the general group of “domestic traitors” who in the later narrative were exculpated because of their Muslim ethnicity.

Thus, the main difference across the region’s wartime textbooks is that the Croatian textbooks of the early 1990s already contained the re-written blueprint for the new national narrative, whereas Serbian textbooks of the 1990s still straddled the fence between Socialism/Yugoslavism and ethnonationalism, providing a schizophrenic and inconsistent account of the past, solidifying into the new national narrative only in the late 2000s. This is discussed in the following section.

Post-2000 Textbooks

In the era after 2000, the most problematic text was mostly removed from the textbooks across the region. While the main narrative remained the same, explicit and aggressive wording was subdued, largely due to pressure from NGOs and the international community. In the majority of the post-2000 textbooks, many of which are still used today, identity messages

66 Mustafa Imamović, Muhidin Pelesić, and Muhamed Ganibegović, Historija: 8. razred osnovne škole [History: 8th Grade of Primary School] (Ministarstvo obrazovanja, nauke i kulture, 1994).
67 Imamović, Pelesić and Ganibegović, Historija, 98.
68 Imamović, Pelesić and Ganibegović, Historija, 98.
thus appear in a subtler form. Prior to analysing the more subtle strategies that current textbooks employ, it is necessary to emphasise that, across the region, there is also a clear divergence in the factual interpretation of several important events and topics, where the “creativity” of textbook authors in re-writing the same historical events is most apparent. These include the character of the creation of the first Yugoslavia in 1918; the reasons for the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1941; the character of the internal strife during World War II, including the atrocities committed by the fascist Independent State of Croatia towards Serbs and Jews; misdeeds of the Partisans towards the *ustaša* following World War II (the repatriation of prisoners in Bleiburg and the so called “Križni Put – Way of the Cross”); the character of the relationships between peoples of different ethnic groups between 1945 and 1991, including the effects of the 1974 Constitution; the nature of the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the ensuing ethnic wars; and the purpose and justness of the post-war tribunals. As discussed below, most of the divergence in content and interpretation is focused on these key points of contention.

In Croatia, the first few years of the open textbook market (2000-2010) witnessed a proliferation of new textbooks, some of which were more ethnocentric than others, but the market gradually settled into today’s situation: there are four main textbooks in use, approved for use for longer periods of time. There are still several controversies in the public sphere regarding how certain events should be interpreted, such as the debates regarding the *Dodatak* discussed above regarding how Croatian textbooks should discuss the Croat-Bosniak conflict, and Croat atrocities in the Bosnian war (absent from all but one Croatian textbook) and towards the Serbian population following Operation Storm in 1995. These controversies are observable in the textbooks as well: of the four textbooks currently approved for use, the ideological standpoint of the author is quite clear, and the textbooks differ in the interpretation of events related to Bleiburg, the extent of space devoted to the “Homeland War” (i.e. the 1991-95 war

69 It is important to note that this chapter analyses 8th grade history textbooks, which cover 20th century history. Clearly, there are other points of contention in earlier eras, such as the nature of Ottoman rule (for instance, in how the “blood tax” (*danak u krvi*) and the conversions to Islam is presented), although most of the critical disagreements concern historical events of the 20th century.

70 See the example of Jurčević and Raić, *Povijest VIII*, discussed above.
in Croatia), whether atrocities towards Bosniaks and Serbs are discussed, etc. The central narrative in Croatia’s history textbooks of the post-2000 era, and of those used today, however, is still largely similar to the one created in the early 1990s, as it follows a similar curriculum which relies on the same ideology – albeit without the virulent and normative text of the 1990s. The curriculum change in 2006 simply solidified this narrative: it made the “Homeland War” the most extensive topic in the curriculum, in which students are expected to be able to give detailed descriptions about the conflict, the most important military operations of the Croatian army, to name “distinguished Croatian defenders,” to “define who was the aggressor and who was the victim,” and describe the suffering of (Croatian) civilians in the conflict. At the same time, it excluded all mention of Operation Storm or of Croatia’s role in the war in BiH.

In Serbia, as a response to pressure from the international community, the dominant strategy between 2001 and 2005 was simply one of avoidance, as the text simply dropped all controversial material: the entire era from the 1980s until today, a timespan of 25 years, received a one-and-a-half-page treatment. As mentioned above, there was still not enough public and political agreement at this point as to how these events should be interpreted, so they were deleted altogether. Avoidance and using the passive voice continued throughout 2005, with an ambivalent stance taken towards the Partisan and četnik movements (they are presented as equal, side-by-side anti-fascist movements with different ideologies), phrases such as “war was waged,” “religious buildings were destroyed,” and blame placed on Serbian president Slobodan Milošević for the situation Serbia found itself in the 1990s: “Milošević brought the Serbian nation to the edge of existence.” After 2005, and especially after the opening of the textbook market in 2010, in accordance with changes in the political sphere, Serbian textbooks gradually solidified into the “new” Serbian national narrative, and it is during this period that Serbian textbooks can be said to have

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72 Koren, “Croatia,” 197.
“reinvented” the past. This new narrative is based on several components: it is now much more negative about Yugoslavia, Communism, and the Partisans; it normatively supports the četniks and the rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović; it is ambivalent or justifies crimes of the Serb collaborationist government led by Milan Nedić, and it returns to the medieval Nemanjić dynasty and the glorious 12th century past as a foundation for the contemporary Serbian nation. However, it must be noted that up to seven textbooks are approved for use every year, and the standpoint of the textbook author, for instance on the extent of glorification of četniks, is clearly discernible.

International pressure to reform textbooks was most visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since it was often considered a necessary part of the post-conflict peace-building process. The internationally-driven process forced the local education policy officials to adopt the Guidelines for writing and evaluation of history textbooks for primary and secondary schools in BiH in 2005, which stipulated that open hate speech must be eradicated, that the BiH state should be “the main reference point” for history-writing instead of the ethnic community, and that textbooks should avoid writing about the last war, because there is no consensus on how it should be interpreted. Over time, the reform did result in removing the harsh language used in the 1990s textbooks to demonise the Other. However, while Bosnian-language textbooks largely stuck to the principles of political correctness prescribed by the Guidelines, the textbooks written for programmes in the Croatian and Serbian language only tempered the intensity of these messages. By the same token, the first Bosnian-language textbooks published


75 Heike Karge, 20th Century History in the Textbooks of Bosnia and Herzegovina: An Analysis of Books Used for the Final Grades of Primary School (Braunschweig: Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, 2008), 18.
after the adoption of the Guidelines\textsuperscript{76} did not narrate war events, ending the story in 1992, while other textbooks ignored this point of the agreement. Bosnian-Croatian textbooks in particular included an extensive narrative about the 1990s, especially those reprinted from textbooks used in the Republic of Croatia, where passages about BiH were inserted into a larger narrative of the so-called “Homeland War.”\textsuperscript{77} As a response to Croatian and Serbian textbooks in Bosnia not following the Guideline’s recommendation to avoid discussion of the recent war, the newest textbook in the Bosnian language (issued under the new policy of one textbook per subject) provides a narrative of the war in Bosnia as a “silent occupation” and “aggression” by Serb forces.\textsuperscript{78} The Guidelines of 2005 did not significantly alter the framework through which history is portrayed in BiH textbooks. Despite the implemented changes, they never dismantled the dominant ethnonational lens through which historical narratives in the textbooks are conveyed.\textsuperscript{79} In fact, textbooks used in Bosnia by Croatian and Serbian children are (on average) more ethnocentric than the textbooks used in Croatia and Serbia proper. The textbooks used in Bosnian-language schools generally tend to be more tepid and less ethnocentric, though they still heavily utilise victimisation narratives when depicting the suffering of the Bosniak (i.e. Bosnian Muslim) people. While Bosnian-language textbooks always take the BiH state as their central frame, they tend to alternate between civic and ethnic (Bosniak) conceptions of national identity from one page to the next.

Following these revisions, as is summarised above, current textbooks in the region still rely heavily on victimhood and superiority narratives,

\textsuperscript{76} Hadžija Hadžiabić et al., Historija: udžbenik za osmi razred osnovne škole [History: Textbook for 8th Grade of Primary School] (Tuzla: Bosanska knjiga, 2007); Zijad Šehić, Zvjezdana Marčić-Matošović, and Alma Leka, Historija 8: udžbenik sa historijskim čitankom za osmi razred osnovne škole [History 8: Textbook with History Reader for 8th Grade of Primary School] (Sarajevo: Sarajevo Publishing, 2009); Leonard Valenta, Historija – Povijest za 8. razred osnovne škole [History – History for 8th Grade of Primary School] (Sarajevo: Bosanska riječ, 2007).

\textsuperscript{77} E.g. Hrvoje Matković, Boža Goluža and Ivica Šarac, Povijest 8: udžbenik za VIII. razred osnovne škole [History 8: Textbook for VIII Grade of Primary School] (Mostar: Školska naklada, 2009).


\textsuperscript{79} Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc, Public Narratives of the Past in the Framework of Transitional Justice Processes: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, PhD thesis (Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, 2014).
though the actual strategies are more subtle in the current textbooks than in the virulent ones of the 1990s. One of the subtler ways in which identity is portrayed in current textbooks consists of employing different strategies for labelling the identity of victims of serious crimes, most notably those perpetrated in the Jasenovac concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia (for Serbian textbooks) and against anti-Communists captured at Bleiburg (for Croatian textbooks), the two events that have essentially become the building blocks for identity-building in the two countries.\footnote{For a full discussion, see Pavasović Trošt, “War Crimes.”}

Aside from manipulating the total number of victims (for Jasenovac for instance, Serbian textbooks cite up to 800,000 victims, as opposed to tens of thousands in Croatian textbooks), the textbooks also identify victims in particular ways: for Jasenovac, Serbian textbooks highlight the identity of victims as being primarily Serbs, Jews and anti-fascists, while Croatian textbooks emphasise the primary victims as being (in that order) Jews, Roma, and Serbs, as well as Croats. Similarly, where Bleiburg is concerned, Serbian textbooks identify the victims as 
\textit{ustaša} and defeated enemy soldiers, whereas Croatian textbooks tend to emphasise that the victims included Croatian civilians, presenting the event as a “tragedy of the Croatian people.”\footnote{Pavasović Trošt, “War Crimes.”}

Another less overt way in which identity was and still is signalled in the current textbooks is through the presence of “master narratives,” which naturally posit groups against each other and establish superiority. In Serbian textbooks, a master narrative of victimisation can be sensed throughout the textbooks, for instance by providing details of all of the injustices committed towards Serbia since 1945: the 1946 Constitution; the transfer of Baranja to Croatia; making Kosovo a province while the majority Serbs in Croatia were not given province status; Serbia’s unequal status in the federation, etc. The 2005 textbook, for instance, uses the passive voice where any possible Serbian wrongdoing is concerned (e.g. “the wars led to the creation of five independent states,” “war was waged,” “Bosnia found itself in a tragic fissure,” “ethnic cleansing was recorded,” “thousands of people were forced to leave their homes”),\footnote{Rajić, Nikolić and Jovanović, \textit{Istorija}, 189–192.} but uses the active voice where Croatia is the perpetrator, explicitly stating that the Croatian goal in the military operations “Flash” and “Storm” (which took place at the end of the war in Croatia) was, in the words of Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, “to strike with such blows that Serbs practically disappear from...
these areas!” This master narrative is buttressed by and simultaneously reinforces the idea that one’s own nation was always on the right side of wars: it was Serbs who helped the other Yugoslav nations to receive absolution for World War II and to bring them to the side of winners; when accompanied by biblical metaphors, this strengthens “the components of historical and national self-awareness that shape an image of the people-victim, distinct from all the others, and therefore also the chosen people, for, despite all the suffering, it remained ‘just.’”

In Croatian textbooks, the master narrative revolves around Croatia’s millennial statehood dream, including emphasising the historical suffering and threats to Croatian nationhood throughout history (for instance, in Greater Serbia “Croatia’s territory would be reduced to leftovers of the leftovers”;85 and presenting events related to Bleiburg as a tragedy of the Croatian people (discussed above). These strategies, in turn, allow for the justification of all other historical events in which Croats could otherwise assume guilt, even relativising crimes of the ustaša state in World War II. The centrality of the Croatian statehood narrative is present even in Bosnian-Croatian narratives: this is the central thread around which the chapters are organised, while information about Bosnian statehood is inserted as an addendum. In textbooks that are reprints of those published in the Republic of Croatia, minimal alterations make this visible: the chapter title, visual material and even typeset remain the same as in the original Croatia-proper textbook, while the title, for instance, is slightly altered, from “Establishment and Development of Independent Croatia”86 to “Establishment and Development of Independent Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.”87 At the end of the chapter that describes in great detail 10 years of events in Croatia (the prelude to the war, its development, military operations, post-conflict settlement and war crime trials at the international tribunal), a sub-chapter on Bosnia is added, which simply glosses over key moments, thus disrupting the chronology. Even the only Bosnian-Croat

83 Rajić, Nikolić and Jovanović, Istorija, 191.
85 Stjepan Bekavac and Mario Jareb, Povijest 8 (Zagreb: Alfa, 2014), 99, italics in original.
86 Stjepan Bekavac and Mario Jareb, Povijest 8 (Zagreb: Alfa, 2014); Croatia proper textbook.
Conclusion

In the region of the former Yugoslavia, history textbooks have employed different strategies for creating national identity, be it a pan-Yugoslav or an ethnonational one. In the socialist period, despite a noticeable parallel Yugoslav and republic-level identity-building theme, there is unquestionably a common Yugoslav metanarrative about World War II, which played a crucial role in conceptualising Yugoslav statehood identity. The Yugoslav strategy of nation-building dealt more with the definition of the Self than of the Other: emphasising unity among ethnicities (within the Yugoslav community) was more important than vilifying “the enemy.” On the other hand, wartime textbooks not only emphasised the importance of national consciousness, but also portrayed the image of the self in contrast to the Other. In the post-Yugoslav states, though the new national narratives contradicted each other, they employed very similar strategies of nation-building, by presenting the outgroup as an eternal enemy led by a clear goal of exterminating the ingroup, or by combining the notion of national superiority with a presentation of the ingroup as a perpetual victim of the Other.

Post-2000 textbooks reveal greater diversity, and the opening of textbook markets for alternative and private publishers has contributed to the existence of a more diverse set of interpretations; however, they remain within the perimeters of the new ethnonational metanarratives. While the aggressive and normative text of the 1990s has been removed, the content and central themes remain similar. The main commonality in the strategies of nation-building discussed above is that they present their own nation as a just participant in the wars, always on “the right side of history.” As discussed above, certain textbook authors have attempted to include a more critical perspective on the responsibility of their own nation (such as discussing the victims of the ingroup’s aggression), but they are nonethe-

less subject to extensive censoring and must follow the syllabus mandated by the state, and are thus quite restricted in their manoeuvring space.

Strategies of nation-building as employed in history textbooks in the region of the former Yugoslavia have certain commonalities in each of the three analysed periods. Virtually all of the textbooks analysed in this chapter employ a baseline understanding of the nation as a coherent political body with unison opinion, power, will and motivation, as if it is a person and not a community of diverse individuals and political groups. When individuals are disassociated from the national community – such as World War II “traitors” of the Yugoslav “people” – they are singled out not to demonstrate diversity within the nation, but rather as outliers from national unity. Such a discourse about the nation fortifies the dominance of the national perspective in narrating history, thus concealing social diversity as well as class, gender and racial differences.

Finally, we would like to note that the normative and proscriptive teaching of history has waned over time, giving more room to a multiperspectival and interactive approach in which pupils are expected to form their own opinion instead of just being given one. However, the dominance of the national perspective – at the expense of the history of private and cultural life, the history of ideas and technology etc. – demonstrates that, in the region of the former Yugoslavia (as in much of the rest of the world), history teaching is still conceptualised as history of (and for) nation-building.

Bibliography


**Analysed Textbooks**


Contemporary Language-Naming Practices in the Western Balkans

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Abstract:

This chapter explains the process of politicisation and ethnicisation of language-naming practices in the Western Balkans, predominately in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. Additionally, this chapter analyses the impact of nationalism on contemporary linguistic identity and linguistic standpoints in the region. Its goal is not to deny or negate any linguistic idiom, but to address the reasons for the non-scientific differentiation of four standardised variants of the same polycentric language.

Keywords: Western Balkans, Serbo-Croatian language, Bosnian language, Croatian language, Montenegrin language, Serbian language, nationalism

Introduction

Serbo-Croatian, as a language, was principally used in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991). It was considered an official language in four of the six federal states (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia), while (North) Macedonia and Slovenia used Macedonian and Slovenian respectively as their national language. The Serbo-Croatian language was conceived after signing the Vienna Literary Agreement (March 28, 1850) and the Novi Sad Agreement (December 10, 1954).

Within the Vienna Literary Agreement, it was initially agreed that all South Slavs should have a commonly accepted language. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (Serbia), Ivan Mažuranić (Croatia) and Franc Miklošić (Slovenia) are among the notable signatories of this agreement. In view of its general divergence, later revisions removed the Slovenian language from this stan-

1 The terms: a) Serbo-Croatian, b) Croato-Serbian, c) Serbian or Croatian, d) Croatian or Serbian, are used equally.
2 Minority languages such as Hungarian or Albanian were in official use in the Serbian autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo.
standardisation, even though the official language of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1945) was formally called Serbo-Croato-Slovenian. The Serbo-Croatian language was commonly spoken by 73 percent of the population of Socialist Yugoslavia, which leads to it being safely categorised as a lingua franca.

With the Novi Sad Agreement, it was decided that the national language of Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins is a single language and that “within the name of the language it is always paramount to emphasise both of its set pieces (Croatian and Serbian).” It had two scripts: Cyrillic and Latin; three pronunciations: Ekavica (Aekavitsa, Ekavian), Ijekavica (Aeykavitsa, Iyekavian) and Ikavica (Ekavitsa, Ikavian); and three dialects: Štokavian, Kajkavian and Čakavian. After the breakup of Yugoslavia (1991-1995), the Serbo-Croatian language fell apart and its remains were used as the foundations for the Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin languages.

Despite the different naming standards, it can be said with certainty that there was no crucial difference between them, so it comes to essentially one polycentric language, with four different names. Bernhard Gröschel states that “In addition, the constitutional declaration of some idiom as official language and the constitutional fixing of its name do not have a sociolinguistic character, but a political one [...] Since the constitutional declaration of the official language is managed by non-scientific motives, it does not affect the sociolinguistics.”

**History of Language-Naming Practices**

Contemporary nationalist narratives most often seek the historical foundation of the modern languages in historical sources and practice. This section of the chapter will not observe the elements of the historical appearance and the “justification” of the terms Serbian or Croatian language.

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3 Although the Slovenian language differs from Serbo-Croatian, the official state ideology in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia insisted on the idea that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are “three tribes of one Yugoslav nation.”
4 Bosniaks at the time were not yet recognised as a separate nation. They were recognised under the national name “Muslims” in 1968, while in 1993 “Bosniaks” was declared as their official national name.
5 Attempts at linguistic purism, the archaisation of language and the introduction of new letters had a minimal impact on the criterion of mutual intelligibility.
6 Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* [Language and Nationalism], (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010), 110.
due to their indisputable historical background, but will refer to the terms Bosnian and Montenegrin language. However, it is equally important to recall the historical foundation of the two-part names “Serbo-Croatian” or “Croato-Serbian,” which was used by Jacob Grimm in 1824, followed by Jernej Kopitar in 1836, and which from 1854 was regularly used in grammar books published in Zagreb. Pero Budmani published in Vienna his Grammatica della lingua serbo-croatica (illirica) as a result of his work in the Dubrovnik High School, where Serbo-Croatian was also taught as a first language. It is particularly interesting to note that, in 1861, the Croatian Parliament (Hrvatski sabor) voted to name the official language as Yugoslavian:

“Let the gentlemen arise who wish the language to be called ‘People’s’ (a small minority). – Who wish the language to be called ‘Croato-Slavonian’? (Nobody). – Who wish the language to be called ‘Croatian or Serbian’? (Minority) – Who wish the language to be called ‘Yugoslavian’? (Majority).”

At the very end, officials from Vienna refused this request, so the Parliament in 1867 declared the name of the official language to be “Croatian or Serbian,” which was acceptable. Ten years later, the Dalmatian Parliament voted for the name “Croato-Serbian” or “Serbo-Croatian” as the official language.

The idea of a total linguistic unification between the Serbian and Croatian standard was presented by Jovan Skerlić in 1913: in his text Istočno ili južno narečje (The Eastern or Southern Dialect), published in two volumes in Srpski književni glasnik (Serbian Literary Messenger), he pointed out the historical necessity according to which “Croats will accept the Eastern dialect (Ekavian pronunciation), and the Serbs will abandon the Cyrillic script” while “the Latin will become a general literary alphabet.” And indeed, after the creation of the Yugoslav state (initially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), some of the most distinguished Croatian writers (such as Tin Ujević, Miroslav Krleža and Gustav Krklec) accepted Skerlić’s formula and practiced it until the end of the twenties, after which

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7 Kordić, Jezik, 127-128.
9 Kordić, Jezik, 274.
it became apparent that the Serbian intellectual elite was not ready to make concessions regarding the Cyrillic script.\footnote{11}

The term Bosnian language can be found in sources from different historical periods, such as with Bartol Kašić (1599)\footnote{12} and Franjo Glavinić (1585-1652), who marked the Bosnian language as universal for the printing of liturgical books;\footnote{13} Matija Mažuranić, in his 1842 travel book *Pogled u Bosnu, ili kratak put u onu krajnu* (A Look at Bosnia, or a Short Road to That Province), wrote that he found out, from conversations with different people, that they speak the “Bosniak language.” In the popular magazine *Bosanski prijatelj* (Bosnian Friend) in 1850, in the chapter “Bosnian Literature,” we can read about the practice of “interpreting from Roman into Bosnian language, with Serbian letters.”\footnote{14} Immediately after the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, the country was proclaimed a crown land or *condominium*, which meant that Austria and Hungary would manage it together. At the beginning of 1879, Croatian was declared the official language, but it was soon renamed as State language (*Ländersprache*),\footnote{15} then considered to be a more neutral term, to avoid dissonance between ethnic groups. In the following years, at different levels, the language received different names including “Bosnian state language”, “State language (Croatian, Serbian)”, and “State language (Bosnian or Serbo-Croatian).” At the very beginning, the Latin had primacy over the Cyrillic script, but in 1880 they became equal. In June 1879 Luka Zore, the Cavtat-born former school counsellor in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sent his opinion to the Provincial government regarding this question: “Croats name their own language Croatian, Serbs – Serbian, and Muslims name it Bosnian.”\footnote{16}

In the wake of Benjamin von Kállay’s ideas of interconfessional Bosnianhood and Bosnian nation, the Provincial government of Bosnia and Herzegovina published a Bosnian Grammar in 1890. This act of the government was criticised in an ironic manner by the pro-Serbian magazine *Bosanska vila*: “And now we greeted for the books to be written and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\footnotetext[12]{Vladimir Horvat, “Afterword,” in *Ritual Rimski* [Roman Ritual], Bartol Kašić (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1993), 17.}
\footnotetext[13]{Horvat, “Afterword,” 17.}
\footnotetext[14]{“Književnost bosanska” [Bosnian Literature], *Bosanski prijatelj*, no. 1 (1850): 26.}
\footnotetext[15]{Šator, *Bosanski/hrvatski/srpski*, 71.}
\footnotetext[16]{Vojislav Bogićević, *Pismenost u Bosni i Hercegovini* [Literacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina], (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1975), 251.}
\end{thebibliography}
printed with the inscription ‘Bosnian language’. A grammar of the Herzegovinian language will surely appear from somewhere, as equality is required. Otherwise, the Herzegovinians are right to protest about learning Bosnian, and not Herzegovinian.”¹⁷ Serbian confessional schools refused the use of the term Bosnian language, while Croatian schools accepted it peacefully. This situation lasted until October 1907, when the Serbo-Croatian language came back in official usage. From then on and until the end of the 1960s, the Bosnian language was not a relevant topic, although it was treated colloquially, as for instance in David Bogdanović’s Pregled književnosti hrvatske i srpske, Vol. 1 (Review of the Croatian and Serbian Literature, Vol. 1) of 1932.

In his 1970 book Tokovi i otpori (Courses and Resistsances), Enver Redžić described the Bosnian language as historically grounded, adding that “the charters and donations of Bosnian bans, grandees and kings were written in Bosnian script (...), and this name of the language was preserved in Bosnia over centuries, even after the adoption of the Serbo-Croatian literary language.”¹⁸ Mustafa Imamović, in his book Pravni položaj i unutrašnji politički razvitak Bosne i Hercegovine od 1878. do 1914. (Status and Internal Political Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1878 to 1914), which was published in Sarajevo in 1976, affirms the idea of the Bosnian language, noting that this name “was deeply entrenched among the Muslims.”¹⁹ Similarly, Alija Isaković, in his 1986 book Neminovnosti (Inevitabilities), also writes about the justification of the name “Bosnian language,” although he concludes that “Muslims speak the same language as Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins.”²⁰

On the other hand, before the 1960s, the term Montenegrin language was referred to as colloquial only in certain travelogues (such as those of Viala de Somier, Ljubomir Nenadović and Ante Mažuranći). In the period of the existence of the Prince-Bishopric of Montenegro, later Principality and then Kingdom of Montenegro, the Serbian language had official status. In the period of Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš’ rule, the official school textbooks were the 1838 Srbski bukvar (Serbian Elementary

¹⁷ Šator, Bosanski/hrvatski/srpski, 110.
¹⁸ Enver Redžić, Tokovi i otpori [Courses and Resistsances], (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1970), 88.
¹⁹ Mustafa Imamović, Pravni položaj i unutrašnji politički razvitak Bosne i Hercegovine od 1878. do 1914. [Status and Internal Political Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1878 to 1914], (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976), 79.
Reader) and the 1838 Srbska gramatika (Serbian grammar), and these were printed and published in Cetinje (which was then the capital of Montenegro). This practice continued in the following years and was also reflected in the Law on High Schools in the Principality of Montenegro (1890) and the Law on Public Schools in the Principality of Montenegro (1907), where Serbian was proclaimed as the official language. The idea that Montenegrins should name their language with their own national name was first put forward by Hungarian poet József Bajza in his book The Montenegrin Question (1927); Montenegrin esperantist Bogić Noveljić also subtly wrote, during the 1930s, about the “Montenegrin provincial literary language.”

It is interesting to mention that there was an attempt to introduce the Montenegrin language as the official one, through the adoption of the so-called Fundamental Constitution of the Kingdom of Montenegro, referring to the World War II fascist puppet state formed on July 12, 1941. Article 3 of this constitution (which was never adopted) envisaged that the official languages should be Montenegrin and Italian. The mass uprising of July 13, 1941 prevented the adoption of this constitutional document. During World War II, the Montenegrin quisling Sekula Drljević advocated the affirmation of the Montenegrin language in his 1944 work Balkanski sukobi (Balkan Conflicts). From that time until the end of the 1960s, the controversy regarding the Montenegrin language was almost banned.

Although the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Montenegro (1946) did not define the official language, its Article 113 decisively specified that “the court proceedings are conducted in the Serbian language.” But already in 1969, the Montenegrin philologist Radoje Radojević, in one polemical text in the magazine Kritika, stated that the official name of the Serbo-Croatian (Croato-Serbian) language was unsustainable and that the roots of the Montenegrin type of literary language were to be found already in the 11th century. In the same text he asked the following question: “Why should Montenegrins (and who can force them to do that!?) name their own native language with the names of other nations, and repress and forget, and thus impoverish and crush their national integrity?”

Vojislav P. Nikčević, in several of his works published in 1970 and 1971, advocated the official introduction of the Montenegrin language, with two

23 Radoje Radojević, Osporavana kultura: kritike i polemike [Contested Culture: Criticism and Polemics], (Danilo Radojević, 2006), 99-101.
contradictory conclusions: a) This [Montenegrin] language is not a linguistically separate language, but Montenegrins deserve to name their native language with their own national name, adding that the Novi Sad Agreement was anti-historical and anti-linguistic; b) It is an unjustified claim that the national language of the Serbs, Croats and Montenegrins is one language. Two Montenegrin intellectuals who agreed with this view were Milorad Stojović and Radoslav Rotković. After the Third Conference of the League of Communists of Montenegro, the special party commission made the decision that the statements regarding the existence of the Montenegrin language were scientifically unfounded, so the propagators of this idea suffered political sanctions. In the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, the Serbo-Croatian language (of the Iyeakvian pronunciation) was nominated as the official one. Thus, the topics regarding the Montenegrin language were silenced until 1988 and the appearance of the book *Etnogenozofobija* (Ethnogenophobia) by Savo Brković, in which the author pleaded for the constitutional introduction of the Montenegrin language. This book was officially condemned by the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Montenegro.

We can conclude from this that the initiatives for defining new idioms (Bosnian and Montenegrin language) were inspired by the famous “Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language,” published in Zagreb in 1967, which was dominantly promoted by *Matica hrvatska* and the Croatian Writers’ Association. This declaration was also signed by the famous writer Miroslav Krleža. The message of the declaration was that “it is the inalienable right of every nation to name its native language with its own national name” and that by imposing a “state language” (Serbo-Croatian), the Croatian literary language will be suppressed. The rest of the declaration says that the Serbian and Croatian language should be separated and nominated as equal constitutional categories, since “the previous constitutional provision on the Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian language, by its inaccuracy, caused these two comparative names to be understood as synonyms rather than as the basis for the equality of the Croatian and Serbian literary language.” The declaration was also supported by the Writers’ Association of Serbia, which formulated the in-

26 *Matica hrvatska* is an institute for the promotion of Croatian language and culture.
formal counter-declaration “Proposal for Thinking,” demanding that the Croatian and Serbian language should be developed in full autonomy and equality. The signatories of this declaration were famous Serbian writers such as Antonije Isaković, Brana Crnčević, Matija Bećković, Mira Alečković, Milorad Pavić and Momo Kapor. Both declarations were strongly condemned by the Communist establishment, so this topic was temporarily pushed to the side.

It is important to emphasise that both declarations were politically motivated. The Croatian declaration was an introduction to the so-called Croatian Spring (1971-1972), and aimed to re-actualise the Croatian national question, especially after the Brijuni plenum, when Aleksandar Ranković, a leading politician in socialist Serbia, was removed from power. After that event, Croatian political and cultural circles gained the confidence to open the issue of Croatian identity in Yugoslavia, while the Croatian declaration received enormous public attention because it was supported by Miroslav Krleža, the most influential Croatian writer and Tito’s personal friend. During the Croatian Spring, these requirements were expanded, but were condemned by Tito and the federal government. On the other hand, the Serbian declaration did not obtain noticeable public attention, since its signatories were still insufficiently reputed writers at the time. However, both declarations formed the basis for the events that would follow later.

Constitutional Break-up of the Language

In order to weaken the nationalistic tendencies that began to awaken in Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the new constitutional reform of 1974 transformed Yugoslavia into a soft federation (with a set of federal elements), especially if we take into account that the federal units (‘republics’ and autonomous provinces) received significant competencies. Thus, Article 138 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (1972/1974) stated that “[i]n the Socialist Republic of Croatia, in official use is the Croatian literary language – the standard form of the national language of Croats and Serbs in Croatia, which is called Croatian or Serbian.” Such a pronouncement represented an essential compromise: the distinctive features of the Croatian standard language were recognised,

27 Ustav Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske [Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia], (Zagreb: Narodne novine, 1972), 175.
but this also implied that Croatian and Serbian are actually different names for the same language. However, after the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica) and its leader Franjo Tuđman\textsuperscript{28} came to power in 1990, a new language policy was introduced. By adopting amendment LXVIII in July 1990, the Croatian Parliament proclaimed the Latin script to be the only official script in the country, with the addition that the use of Cyrillic is guaranteed in those administrative units where a majority of the population uses the Cyrillic script. Ultimately, Article 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (December 1990) states that “the Croatian language and the Latin script are in official use,” with the emphasis that in some local units another language or script (without specifying which one) can be introduced. This act ended the practice of studying the Cyrillic script in all elementary schools in Croatia. The aim was to achieve a clear differentiation between the Croatian and Serbian languages, and to standardise the Cyrillic script as minor and non-Croatian. The reasons for this were articulated through the political view that Croatian independence also implies the independence of the Croatian language, and that obvious similarities with the standard Serbian language must be minimised for this purpose. In the following years, this differentiation was enforced both intensively and persistently.

In September 1990, the Republic of Serbia adopted a new constitution, its Article 8 stating that the “Serbo-Croatian language and Cyrillic script are in official use in the Republic of Serbia, while the Latin script is in official use in accordance with the determined law.”\textsuperscript{29} In principle, this provision followed the tradition established by the previous 1974 Constitution, although this time the preference was given to the Cyrillic script. The aforementioned preference correlated with the nationalistic and Serbocentric political matrix of Slobodan Milošević, who followed the ideas of the SANU Memorandum (1986) regarding the “impaired equality of Serbia and the Serbs in Yugoslavia.” For the purpose of the “consolidation” and “defence” of Serbian identity, the Cyrillic script was presented as one of its essential components. The Serbian Constitution of 1990 can in part be labelled as independence-oriented, since its Article 135 states that the Republic of Serbia has the right to proclaim legislation for the protection of its own interests, should federal acts violate Serbia’s equality within the

\textsuperscript{28} Franjo Tuđman signed the “Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language” (1967), after which he was expelled from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

\textsuperscript{29} Ustav Republike Srbije [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia], (Belgrade: IRO Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, 1994), 8.
federation. In this way, the primacy of the Serbian constitution over the federal one was emphasised.

In October 1992, the Republic of Montenegro adopted a new constitution, its Article 9 stating that “the Serbian language, of the Iyeakavian pronunciation, is in official use,” while the Cyrillic and Latin script were equal. It follows from this that the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Montenegro were the first to leave the platform of a common polycentric language. However, we can add two important facts with certainty: a) the Republic of Montenegro only harmonised its own constitution with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which came into force in April 1992, and whose Article 15 said that in the newly formed state “the Serbian language of Ekavian and Iyeakavian pronunciation and Cyrillic script is in official use, while the Latin script is in official use, in accordance with the constitution and law.”\textsuperscript{30} b) Bearing in mind that this state was formed by the Republic of Serbia as well, we can also say that Serbia abandoned a common language platform, at least on a federal (constitutional) level. Political instances in Serbia and Montenegro, in accordance with the new political circumstances (the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, the war in Croatia) and the rising nationalistic narrative, rendered the use of “Croatian” in the name “Serbo-Croatian” unacceptable.

It is interesting to note that, in the wartime Constitution of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992/1993), Article 4 stated that the “Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian language, of the Iyeakavian pronunciation, is in official use. Both Latin and Cyrillic scripts are equal.”\textsuperscript{31} The updated version of the constitution was signed personally by President Alija Izetbegović. Izetbegović even outwitted the request of the War Congress of Bosnian Muslim Intellectuals (December 1992) to change this article and to declare a “common Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian language, of the Iyeakavian pronunciation” as the official language in the country.\textsuperscript{32} It is important to emphasise that this constitutional document was adopted only a few months before the First Bosniak Assembly, when the Bosnian language was officially declared as the national language of Bosniaks. This abandonment of the common language platform by Bosniak intellectual


\textsuperscript{31} Službeni list Republike Bosne i Hercegovine [Official Gazette of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina], (Sarajevo: No. 5, March 14, 1993), 85.

circles was conditioned by the new political and war circumstances, especially if the Serbian and Croatian war crimes against Muslims (Bosniaks) are taken into account. In this way, any identification with the term Serbo-Croatian language, from the Bosniak perspective, became impossible. This certainly served as an excuse for political elites in Sarajevo to more firmly establish the Bosnian standard language.

Nevertheless, in December 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, with one of its integral parts, Annex 4, laying down the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The text of the Constitution does not mention the official languages, but they are mentioned in the entities’ constitutions (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Republika Srpska). Thus, Article 6 of the Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina states that the official languages in this entity are Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, while the Latin and Cyrillic script are equal.\textsuperscript{33} The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a very complex state entity consisting of cantons, which each have their own constitutions. In its four cantons (Herzegovina-Neretva, West Herzegovina, Posavina and Canton 10), the cantonal constitutions do not recognise the Serbian language and Cyrillic script. Accordingly, the Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared the constitutions of these cantons as “unconstitutional.”\textsuperscript{34}

The constitution of the other entity states that “the official languages of the Republika Srpska are the language of the Serbian nation, the language of the Bosniak nation and the language of the Croatian nation. The official scripts are Cyrillic and Latin.”\textsuperscript{35} The definition of this provision, although seemingly confusing, has a political background. Namely, the Serbian political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with part of the Croatian political forces, do not recognise the term Bosnian language. Their argu-


ment is that Bosniaks cannot name their national language with a state name, only with their national name (Bosniak language). Otherwise, this would mean that the Bosnian language, as the language of Bosniaks, is at the same time the state language. Therefore, from the Serbian and Croatian political perspective, the Bosnian language, as the official idiom, has been designated as a possible means of assimilation of Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This problem escalated in the school system of Republika Srpska, so the parents of Bosniak children in some municipalities (Zvornik, Srebrenica) refused to send their children to school until they were allowed to study the Bosnian language. On the other hand, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the constitutions of three cantons with a Croatian ethnic majority (Posavina, West Herzegovina and Canton 10), the Bosniak language (instead of Bosnian) was recognised as a constitutional category. The Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina also declared these constitutional provisions as unconstitutional in 1998, but they remained in force. The Institute for the Serbian Language of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published a statement in 2015 which stated that, according to the “rules of word formation in the Serbian language, from the word ‘Serbian nation’ is derived the equivalent name of the language (‘Serbian language’), from the word ‘Croatian nation’ is derived the name ‘Croatian language’, and from the word ‘Bosniak nation’ it is only possible to derive the equivalent name ‘Bosniak language.’” 36 This standpoint was literally and officially adopted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska. This implies that the largest Serbian scientific institution (SANU) has become involved in another political controversy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although the Bosnian language is being studied legally in Serbia (more precisely in the region of Sandžak).

After the dissolution of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia passed its new constitution in 2006. Its Article 10 states that the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script are official in the country, while the official use of other languages and scripts is regulated by law. From this point the Serbo-Croatian language ceased to exist as a constitutional category, while the new norm excluded the Latin script from broader official use. Montenegro adopted a new constitution in 2007, and its Article 13 states that the official language in Montenegro is Montenegrin.

and that the Cyrillic and Latin script are equal. It was also stated that “Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian languages are also in official use.” According to the interpretation of the Constitutional Court of Montenegro (March 2011), this constitutional provision means that “the use of the Montenegrin language, as an official one, applies on the whole territory of Montenegro,” while “the right to official use of the Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian languages is an individual right.” Such constitutional solutions have deepened the traditional political dichotomy in Montenegrin society and produced dissatisfaction among the unionistic (pro-Serbian) oriented population, which voted against the independence of Montenegro (44.5 percent) in the 2006 referendum.

On the basis of the political agreement of August 2011, the Parliament of Montenegro adopted amendments to the Law on General Education, which produced changes in Article 11. This article stated that classes in schools are conducted in the Montenegrin language as an official language, as well as in the Serbian language as a language in official use, taking into account “the same linguistic basis.” The following article also added the next statement: “With respect to the rights of national minorities, classes in the institutions are also conducted in Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian, as languages in official use.” The main consequence of this political agreement is that pupils in Montenegrin primary and secondary schools study one common language subject: Montenegrin – Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature. Two years later, these legal amendments were assessed as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Montenegro, as the legislator in this case “used the Serbian language in a material sense in a manner contrary to the Constitution, both in relation to the Montenegrin language as the only official language in Montenegro, as well as in relation to other languages in official use.”

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37 It is interesting to mention another unusual fact: according to the Code of Criminal Procedure of Montenegro, each defendant has the legal right to hear the proceedings in his native language. To this day there is no registered court interpreter in Montenegro for the Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian languages. This would hypothetically mean that if a defendant (or his counsel) were to request proceedings in one of these three languages, it would be impossible for the judicial system to implement it on time, due to the complicated procedures for the registration of new court interpreters.


39 Ustavni sud Crne Gore [Constitutional Court of Montenegro], “Odluka U-I br. 39-11 i 3-12.,” www.ustavnisud.me (accessed September 29, 2019).
theless, despite this decision of the Constitutional Court, this legal provision remained unchanged.

From the examples above, it is obvious that the language-naming issue in these four countries of the Western Balkans is considered a political question *par excellence*, or (from the perspective of nationalists) one of the basic conditions not only for political, but also for ethno-national independence. Such a matrix ignores scientific and linguistic conclusions, or at worst politicises, ethnicises and adapts it to its own narrative. It has established the idea that one of the most important conditions for full and unquestionable state independence is a separate national/state language, as an essential part of a separate national identity. Thus, the former Yugoslav federal entities, once linked by a common polycentric language and a common culture, became ethnic islands, in which the ethno-national prerogative (for basically everything related to identity) became a matter of life and death.

*Ethnicisation and Politicisation*

As was expected, the political and constitutional separation of the Croatian language was followed by its linguistic separation and differentiation. This was especially obvious through the promotion of the “newspeak” based on linguistic purism, or through the “de-serbisation” – i.e. “re-croatisation” of the Croatian language. Thus, Vladimir Brdonjak’s *Razlikovni rječnik srpskog i hrvatskog jezika* (Dictionary of Differences of Serbian and Croatian Language) was published in Zagreb in 1991, and relied on Petar Guberina and Kruno Krstić’s book *Razlike između hrvatskoga i srpskoga književnoga jezika* (Differences Between the Croatian and Serbian Literary Languages, 1940), but also on Ivan Esih’s *Hrvatski pravopisni rječnik za pravilnost i čistoću hrvatskog jezika* (Croatian Spelling Dictionary for Accuracy and the Purity of the Croatian Language, 1940). The idea of neologisms in the Croatian language was promoted in the 19th century by the philologist Bogoslav Šulek, but it mostly referred to the scientific terminology. The escalation of neologisms and language purism occurred during the period of the Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945), the fascist puppet state. The Cyrillic script and “Serbian words” were legally banned, and it was also prohibited to swear.

Thus, in August 1942, the Croatian newspaper *Hrvatski list* published an article which claimed that Serbs brought swearing to Croatia: “It is a miserable and low habit, which has been introduced to our nation for the pur-

However, according to the claims of Croatian linguists such as Dubravka Sesar and Ivana Vidović, the “newspeak” disrupted the structure of the Croatian language, restricted the vital functions of the Croatian literary tradition, degraded some of the lexicon, compromised part of the phraseological treasure, and overlooked the meanings of the words. In this regard, we are testifying to the paradox that some words that are typical for some Croatian regions, such as “hiljada” (in Dalmatia) or “komšija” (in Slavonia), have been thrown out of the Croatian standard language, having been proclaimed to be “Serbian words.” Language purism is still present in today’s Croatia, and its manifestations are additionally burlesque. For example, the Croatian linguistic magazine Jezik institutionalised in 1993 the Dr. Ivan Šreter award for the “best new Croatian word,” which is up-to-date until now. Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein wrote about this phenomenon in a very suggestive manner:

“After the establishment of a democratic Croatia, we hoped this was exactly the time when the language should be completely free. But, as in many other things, everything went wrong [...] Although no one said it in that way, for many invited and uninvited participants in this debate, the Croatian language began to be defined not as a ‘Croatian language’ but as ‘a language different from the Serbian.’ The complex that appears among part of the (mostly ‘ultra’) Croats is wider than the linguistic problem; it stems from a

Another sensitive issue regarding language in Croatia is the introduction of “bilingual signs” in Vukovar in 2013, i.e. the introduction of Cyrillic inscriptions in public places, and the right to the official use of the Cyrillic script. According to the Croatian Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, those national groups that constitute more than one third of the total population of a particular municipality or city are entitled to the official use of their mother tongue. However, the attempt to introduce the Cyrillic script in Vukovar ended unsuccessfully, due to sharp protests by war veterans and to the destruction and desecration of Cyrillic inscriptions. However, it is important to point out that Cyrillic inscriptions exist in other Croatian municipalities with a Serb majority, but that the issue of Vukovar became problematic because of its symbolic significance (during the war in Croatia, 1991-1995, the city was shelled and besieged by the Serbian forces). Due to this, in November 2013 Vukovar was declared a place of special piety by decision of the local parliament and the amendments to the city statute which stipulated that the law on minorities cannot be applied to this city. However, in 2019 the Constitutional Court of Croatia declared this decision unconstitutional. On the other hand, the Croatian linguist Snježana Kordić assessed in one interview that the Cyrillic script in Vukovar is not a sign of bilingualism: “A different script does not mean that it is a different language. For example, if the text in Russian is switched from Cyrillic to Latin, it will remain in Russian. After all, if the letter signifies another language, the Serbs within Serbia would be bilingual, because they use both Latin and Cyrillic scripts.”

Despite the constitutional paradox in the Republic of Serbia (the Serbo-Croatian language was a constitutional category in the Serbian constitution, and the Serbian language was official in the FRY Constitution), an obvious compromise was made within the school system. If we analyse the Grammar of the Serbian Language for Secondary Schools from 1992, which was prescribed in the school systems of Serbia and Montenegro, re-
Regardless of the dominant idiom (Serbian language), there was a chapter in the grammar with the title “Serbo-Croatian language,” in which the first sentence states: “In South Slavic countries, the Serbo-Croatian language, which [...] takes the shape and name of the ‘Serbian’ and ‘Croatian’ language [...] today is spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.”

It follows from this that the official linguistic standpoint in Serbia (and Montenegro) was that the Serbian language is a variant of the Serbo-Croatian language. Nevertheless, regardless of such a standpoint, there has been a visible trend of “cyrillisation” of the Serbian standard language, or rather the peripheralisation of the Latin script as an equal one. A constitutional provision from 2006, which treats Cyrillic as the only official script in the Republic of Serbia, additionally contributes to this trend. In the draft of the national Strategy for the Development of Culture in the Republic of Serbia from 2017 to 2027, it is even stated that “in the circumstances of the dominance of anglophone global communication and the Latin script, it is necessary to foresee, by law and other acts, incentives for the affirmation of the Serbian language and of Cyrillic in public use.” The above-mentioned draft also envisages a reduction in taxes for publishing newspapers, magazines and books in Cyrillic, and giving priority to translations published in Cyrillic. This document has actualised opposing standpoints among Serbian linguists on this issue. Thus, Sreto Tanasić, in his interview for the newspaper Politika (August 2018), stated that the “Latin script is not a Serbian script [...] However, it was imported, especially after the Second World War, in the name of the unity of the Serbo-Croatian language.” On the other hand, Ranko Bugarski, in his interview for the newspaper Danas, stated that both scripts are equally Serbian, adding:

“However, it turns out that it is more important to say that the Latin script is not Serbian, which then turns us to another unpro-

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46 Scientific advisor at the Institute for Serbian Language (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) and President of the Committee for the Standardisation of the Serbian Language.
ductive field, where we are arguing whether it is, which is completely irrelevant and only draws attention away from the fundamental questions. Actually, it is not a question of whether the Latin script is Serbian, but the question is whether both of the scripts, Latin and Cyrillic, belong to the Serbian language. [...] Linguistically, the script in which a language is written is also the script of that language, although it may even be used primarily as a script of another language. Scripts do not belong to the nations, but to languages, if we can even speak about such a type of belonging at all.”

The process of standardisation of the Bosnian language was initiated with two publications: Alija Isaković’s *Rječnik bosanskog jezika* (Dictionary of the Bosnian Language, 1995) and Senahid Halilović’s *Pravopis bosanskoga jezika* (Orthography of the Bosnian Language, 1996). It is not hard to notice, in both publications, an obvious orientalisation of the Bosnian standard language and its archaisation through the forcing of turkisms; and a noticeable emphasis on the letter h in certain words. The (ideological) upgrade of this linguistic paradigm has been represented in the works of Dževad Jahić, who insists on the differences between the Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian standard language. In his book *Bosanski jezik u 100 pitanja i 100 odgovora* (The Bosnian Language in 100 Questions and 100 Responses), he introduces the principle of the linguistic *merhamet* (spirit, compassion), linking it to the *merhamet* as one of the typical characteristics and features of the Bosniak mentality. Therefore, he says that turkisms in the Bosnian language, versus Serbian and Croatian, do not sound sharp and foreign, but that on the contrary they sound natural and organic, they have a softer and finer content.

With this Jahić tries, in a burlesque way, to bring into organic connection the ethno-national “spirit” of one nation and the compatibility of its language with turkisms. On the other hand, the Government and the National Assembly of Republika Srpska proclaimed in 1996 the legal decision of the (obligatory) official use of the Ekavian pronunciation on the whole territory of this entity, with the aim of “equalising” the Serbian standard language. Although the Iyekavian pronunciation has not been abolished,
the advantage is given to the Ekavian one. However, this norm lasted only two years, although its initial intention was political: to emphasise the difference between Bosnian (Bosniak) and the Serbian standard language. In this regard, Enver Kazaz states that the Serbian and Croatian political oligarchy in Bosnia and Herzegovina autocolonised and “debosnificated” (sic.) their own language expressions by accepting official language policies from Belgrade and Zagreb, adding:

“Bosniaks debosnificated their language and they bosniakised it to the maximum, since the ‘Orthography’ by Senahid Halilović, who tried to emphasise the differences with the Croatian and Serbian language. The Bosniakisation of the Bosnian language destroyed its multicultural tradition. [...] The interrupted tradition of the Bosnian language within its modern standardisation is reflected above all in the archaicisation of the orthographical norm, its dialectisation, orientalisation, turkisation, derussification, deserbisation, and also noticeable croatisation. Archaisms literally overwhelmed the orthographical norm.”

The milestone in the re-actualisation of the Montenegrin linguistic question was 1990 and the formation of the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro (a political party), the Montenegrin PEN Center and the Montenegrin Society of Independent Writers. These three organisations were the main promoters of the Montenegrin language, and their members were the earliest propagators of this idea: Vojislav P. Nikčević and Radoslav Rotković. Nikčević’s 1993 books Piši kao što zboriš (Write as You Speak) and Crnogorski jezik 1 (Montenegrin Language 1) were the first step toward the standardisation of the Montenegrin language. In them, the author promoted three new letters of the Montenegrin language, ś, ź and з, implying that the Montenegrin language had a special and different phonological system from the other three standards of Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. Croatian linguist Dubravko Škiljan, in his interview for the Serbian magazine Vreme (1996), said that if these phonemes (letters) were to become standardised, then it would be possible to single out the Montenegrin language as, typo-

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logically and structurally, a separate language. Particularly comical is the fact that the letters ź and з are used (colloquially) in only a few words, but very rarely in broader Montenegrin speech. However, from the perspective of Montenegrin nationalists, it was quite desirable, for political purposes, to give legitimacy to the idiomatic Montenegrin language, by emphasising the phonological differences with the (primarily) Serbian standard language and with the other two standards as well.

Nikčević’s Phonological System was supplemented with the “Declaration of the Montenegrin PEN Center on the Constitutional Position of the Montenegrin Language” (1994), but also by Radoslav Rotković’s 1995 book Odakle su došli preci Crnogoraca (Where the Ancestors of the Montenegrins Came From). In this book, the author explained that the old homeland of the Montenegrins is the geographical area between the river Elbe and the Baltic Sea, which implies that Montenegrins have Western Slavic origins, unlike other South Slavic people, and therefore explains why the Montenegrin and Polish phonological systems are so similar. Rotković further stated in his book that there are 865 identical toponyms in the region between the Elbe and the Baltic Sea and in the region of today’s Montenegro. From this it follows that Rotković sought the justification for Montenegrin linguistic features in historical categories that date back to the Middle Ages (!).

Vojislav P. Nikčević soon published Pravopis crnogorskog jezika (Orthography of the Montenegrin Language) in 1997 and Crnogorska gramatika (Montenegrin Grammar) in 2001. The government’s official policy in Montenegro was that the Serbian language should be preserved as a constitutional category, until 2004. In the same year, the statement of Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Đukanović that his native language is Montenegrin, symbolically heralded the change of the constitutional position of the Serbian language in Montenegro. Therefore, the following thesis of Jaak Kölhi from the University of Helsinki should be treated as very grounded: “At this point, at the latest, promoting the Montenegrin language became associated with certain political groupings that aimed at strengthening a separate Montenegrin identity and with the ultimate goal of complete po-


52 Radoslav Rotković, Odakle su došli preci Crnogoraca [Where the Ancestors of the Montenegrins Came From] (Podgorica: Matica Crnogorska, 1992).
political independence from Serbia." In 2009 the Ministry of Education approved the official Orthography of the Montenegrin Language, which included two new letters, ś and ź, and whose authors are the Montenegrin philosopher Milenko Perović, the Ukrainian philologist Ljudmila Vasiljeva, and the Croatian linguist Josip Silić. Silić is also the author of a Grammar of the Montenegrin Language, along with Adnan Čirgić and the linguist Ivo Pranjković. The Grammar was approved in 2010, so the official standardisation of the Montenegrin language was ultimately completed.

However, this standardisation was preceded by a conceptual breakdown in the Council for the Standardisation and Codification of the Montenegrin Language, which is currently reflected in the existence of two parallel programmes for the study of the idiom. The circle of linguists around Adnan Čirgić, current Dean of the Faculty of Montenegrin language, advocated a version of the Montenegrin language with jotations and new letters (ś, ź). The circle around Tatjana Bečanović and Rajka Glušica, from the Study Programme for Montenegrin Language and South Slavic Literature (University of Montenegro, Faculty of Philology), advocated the adoption of the idiom, but with the reliance on the previous Serbo-Croatian linguistic form (with possible compromise regarding the introduction of one new letter, š). The circle around Bečanović and Glušica accused Čirgić of linguistic nationalism and archaisation of the language, while Čirgić estimated that Bečanović and Glušica actually wanted Montenegrins to learn and speak the Serbian language, and just to call it Montenegrin. He accused them of ignoring Montenegrin linguistic features. In that sense, Čirgić further clarified his position:

“The separate standardisation of the Montenegrin language is often shown as a process that will ghettoise Montenegro and its literature. One of the main arguments is that others will not read us because they will not understand us. Should one language be standardised according to the understanding of those who do not speak it? The Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks naturally did not standardise their languages in accordance with the Montenegrin taste,

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nor in accordance with how many Montenegrins will read them. Montenegrins cannot act differently either.”

The conflict between the two linguistic circles escalated at the time of the publication of the first volume of the *Dictionary of the Vernacular and Literary Montenegrin Language* by the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts. The creation of the dictionary was coordinated by Tatjana Bečanović. Adnan Čirgić assessed the dictionary as a copy of the *Dictionary of the Serbo-Croatian Literary and Vernacular Language* (published by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts). Čirgić further characterised as a *crimen* the fact that the *Dictionary* included some words from the books of Montenegrin writers who wrote in the Serbian language (!), such as Borislav Pekić or Miodrag Bulatović.55

After the adoption of the political agreement in August 2011 and of amendments to the Law on General Education, by which pupils in Montenegrin primary and secondary schools began to study Montenegrin – Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian Language and Literature, it turned out that the official state policy had abandoned the principle of ethnic language. Although he opposed the above-mentioned political agreement, the then President Milo Đukanović stated that Montenegrin is not the language of ethnic Montenegrins, but the language of the Montenegrin state (the state language), pointing out that “[i]f Montenegro is independent, and if every state from the Serbo-Croatian speaking region named their own official languages with the name of the country, Montenegro should do the same.”56 However, the data from the latest census in Montenegro (2011) remains indicative: 42.88 percent of citizens declared that their native language is Serbian, while 36.97 percent declared it to be the Montenegrin language.

It is also important to note the obvious prevalence of the Latin script in official use in Montenegro, although the Cyrillic script is equal (in a for-

mal sense). While this can be explained by the intention of adapting the Montenegrin language to contemporary global trends, the issue of the script is often posed as a political and ideological one. In today’s Montenegro it articulates the following perception: it usually indicates that those people, publishers, organisations and institutions that predominantly use the Latin script are liberal and pro-Montenegrin (pro-Western), while those who use the Cyrillic script are mostly conservative, traditionalists and pro-Serbian (pro-Russian). This is only one of the segments of the split between Montenegrins and Montenegrin Serbs, which initially began (in the words of Montenegrin sociologist Bojan Baća) “as a political/ideological (rather than ethnic) split.”

Instead of promoting the common polycentric language as the basis for cultural and economic cooperation between these four countries, and therefore the rest of the Western Balkans, it became a symbolic point of disagreement. Adding to this the fact that in Slovenia, North Macedonia and Kosovo, the common language had the status of a lingua franca, and that even today a significant part of the population of these three countries speaks it fluently, we can conclude that the common language has the potential to be one of the fundamental bases for multilateral cooperation and regional linkage in the Western Balkans.

The so-called linguistic question suggests that the Western Balkans, and its four (central) countries are burdened with similar ethnocentric nationalisms that are producing hopeless politicisation and ethnicisation, starting with banal interpretation of profanity (swearing), all the way to the misunderstanding of the most complex identity categories. Instead of promoting cultural and historical similarities (in the same way as evident diversity), political elites in these four countries are producing a “fascinating” paradox: that apparently similar or identical things are named, categorised and interpreted as significantly different.

**Conclusion**

These examples do not imply that today’s idioms (the Bosnian language, Croatian language, Montenegrin language, and Serbian language) are in

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any way disputable. However, they certainly suggest that the naming of these idioms is articulated by political reasons, and not by scientific and linguistic ones.

In that sense we are facing ideas that the Serbian and Croatian language are actually ethnic languages, or languages of ethnic groups: Serbs and Croats. It is usually interpreted in this way: if your native language (mother tongue) is Serbian or Croatian, you are an ethnic Serb or an ethnic Croat, with small exceptions. This idea has been broadly accepted among Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. On the other side, we are facing the idea that through the concept of “state language” in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro and the tendency of creating a common national identity, these processes could be interpreted as a possible tool of assimilation. Accordingly, we can say that the idea of “state language” could not be broadly accepted in multi-ethnic countries like Montenegro or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is therefore important to mention the “Declaration of the Common Language” (2017) signed by liberal and left-oriented linguists, university professors, writers, intellectuals and public figures from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. The idea of the Declaration is that insisting on a small number of existing differences and the violent separation of these four standard variants leads to a series of negative social, cultural and political circumstances, such as the use of language as an argument for segregating children in some multinational environments, unnecessary “translation” in administrative use or in the media, as well as censorship (and necessarily auto-censorship), in which linguistic expression is imposed as a criterion of ethno-national affiliation and a means of proving political loyalty. The declaration was mostly attacked by nationalists and conservative linguists such as Željko Jozić, Miloš Kovačević and Dževad Jahić.

Accordingly, if we take into account that there are four languages which have been standardised on the basis of the Serbo-Croatian language, we can say with complete certainty that these are only four standardised variants of one polycentric standard language, especially because the differences between the standards are inessential and not systemic and do not affect the criterion of mutual intelligibility.

58 The author of this chapter is also a signatory of this declaration.

Nikola Zečević

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Contemporary Language-Naming Practices in the Western Balkans


New Regimes, Old Fears. Layers of Democracy and Regime Changes in Hungary

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“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.” – Plato

Abstract:
Political transformation reached Hungary in parallel with other Central and Eastern European states at the turn of 1989 and 1990, the so-called “annus mirabilis”. It seemed to be the global triumph of world capitalism and the rule of law based on democratic elements. This optimistic approach was based on the dominance of the principles of Western civilisation both in political economy and in the political systems determined by the competition of different parties. Most of the former socialist bloc member are now members of the European Union. Hungary was fortunate to enter the 21st century under radically changed and much more favourable conditions than it had ever enjoyed before. This smooth transformation was interrupted by a political and economic crisis that resulted in the victory of the previous opposition that gradually implemented the System of National Cooperation. The aim of this chapter is to give a brief explanation of the nature of illiberal democracy in Hungary in a wider scope and to link it with the history of Hungarian democracy, the nature of the sequence of transformations and their effects on the Hungarian society by using the 2018 elections as a reference point.

Keywords: transformation, Hungarian society, illiberal democracy, political culture

Introduction

“For roughly the first two decades of Hungary’s post-Communist history, from 1990 to 2010, Hungary was a young but stable democracy. International observers touted it as a model of a successful transition from author-
itarianism to democracy.”¹ This is one of the comments related to the current political situation after the 2018 elections in Hungary. The author of this comment, an American journalist, goes even further by describing Hungary as a typical example of “soft fascism: a political system that aims to stamp out dissent and seize control of every major aspect of a country’s political and social life, without needing to resort to ‘hard’ measures like banning elections and building up a police state.” Reading the alarming analyses about the weakening of democracy in Hungary, and although some of them are far from objective, it is worth examining how the Hungarian success story turned into a negative example of the illiberal ideology that is shared by an increasing number of politicians all over the world.

Political transformation reached Hungary at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, in parallel with other Central and Eastern European countries. The year 1989 was called the “annus mirabilis”² because within one year almost the entire Central and Eastern European region stepped on the path of change. Within a short period of time, the contributing partners adopted Western features, the institutions of the new political systems were established, and the new political power verified and consolidated its legitimacy by means of free elections.³ Fifteen years later, the transformation came to an end as most of the former members of the Socialist Bloc joined the European Union. The geopolitical reality also served as an obstacle and an additional factor. With the collapse of the bipolar system, there was no doubt that Hungary belonged to the Western culture, and neither was there any dispute regarding its orientation in the 1990s. Many Eastern and Central Europeans wished to shake off the colonial dependency implicit in

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the very project of Westernisation. Imitation was widely understood to be the shortest pathway to freedom and prosperity.⁴

Hungary has been studied alongside Poland as one of the best examples of a smooth and rapid transformation.⁵ All these events took place peacefully and without a single shot being fired. Hungary was fortunate to enter the 21st century under radically changed and much more favourable conditions than it had ever enjoyed before. In the spring of 2006, for the first time in Hungary’s post-socialist history, the ruling coalition managed to obtain a new victory and to remain in power. However, a few months later in September 2006, three weeks before the municipal elections, the streets of Budapest resembled a battlefield, with frequent demonstrations disturbing everyday life. This political uncertainty, accompanied by the economic crisis and its consequences in 2009, altogether undermined the legitimacy of the democratically elected government. The prime minister abdicated, while a new technocratic government was forced to concentrate on rapid crisis management. One year later, in 2010, the opposition parties obtained power and, for the second time since 1998, Viktor Orbán was elected Prime Minister. Since 2010, he and his party have won two further elections, enabling them to implement the System of National Cooperation (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere, NER). Today, the Hungarian political system seems to be far from the ideas that determined the early 1990s. Critical arguments follow every step of the government, while the Hungarian model recalls various negative remarks. The opening of “illiberal

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“democracy” was followed by the elimination of independent institutions. It is beyond dispute that Hungary has experienced an additional regime change since 2010, the only doubt being about the date of birth of this new system.6

The aim of the paper is to give a short analysis of the history of Hungarian democracy and its (dis)functioning institutions, and to confirm the argumentation with some statistical data explaining the correlation between living standards and support for the government. It is also our intention to examine whether the Hungarian case can be treated as a unique case or whether it can more generally be understood as a typical East-Central European phenomenon. Using the 2018 elections as a reference point, our aim will be to discuss whether the current Hungarian regime can be explained as a consequence of the troubled system change or whether it is rooted in the distorted political system.

The Teething Problems of Democratic Rule

Accepting Tölgyessy’s explanation, or that of Gyulai and Stein-Zalai,7 democratisation influenced the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, but the dissolution of authoritarian regimes is not necessarily followed by the building of pure democratic systems. Even authoritarian regimes can widen their citizens’ participation. It was, in other words, hardly assumed that the path from authoritarian regime to democratic system could be travelled in the opposite direction. While the Great Recession made matters worse, a democratic decline was already underway, because the number of countries that could call themselves democracies with a good standing began to drop before the economic crisis hit.8

Gyulai and Stein-Zalai identify a so-called “grey zone” between democratic and authoritarian regimes, while Bozóki and Hegedűs use a “triple structure.” According to their argumentation, this grey zone or middle zone is wide enough to identify certain models. The Hungarian example is proof that even consolidated democratic systems can be transformed into hybrid regimes. As the authors write, the Hungarian case is nonetheless a unique phenomenon, demonstrating that such a system can exist within the democratic European Union. In terms of democracy, Hungary is in the weakest position among the (by now) 27 EU member states. Freedom House’s latest report shows that, regarding its democratic performance, Hungary is the only state to belong among the “partly free” countries together with the post-Yugoslav successor states and Ukraine.

Hybrid or mixed regimes such as illiberal democracies can be also characterised in terms of competitive authoritarianism, where the democratic elements are still present but where the system favours the governing party, or where “the competition is real, but not fair.” Ungváry came to a similar conclusion when observing the elections in 2014. According to Levitksy and Way, the following elements can be recognised: elections with limited freedom and transparency, limited civil rights and media transparency, defects in the separation of power, more obstacles for opposition groups and ruling parties that can hardly lose elections.

Illiberal democracies are dynamically changing hybrid systems. In these mixed regimes, political competition is still affordable, however, in general, the political institutions are in favour of the ruling groups. Hungary thus can be characterised as the onset of autocratic, crypto-dictatorial trends, a slide towards semi-dictatorship or elected autocracy, or even operetta dictatorship, or a hybrid regime, or as the deconsolidation of

12 Bozóki and Hegedűs, “A kívülről korlátozott hibrid rendszer.”
14 Levitsky and Way, “Elections Without Democracy.”
15 Bozóki and Hegedűs, “A kívülről korlátozott hibrid rendszer.”
According to the 2018 Freedom House report on Hungary, the level of democratic progress in Hungary is questionable.\(^\text{17}\) It appears in Figure 1 that, between 2010 and 2018, a sharp decrease in democratic values became visible. Based on surveys by Tárki in 2013, the researchers focused on four different aspects by analysing Hungarian society.\(^\text{18}\) They found that there was a decline in the importance of democracy between 2009 and 2013. It must however be emphasised that the perception of democracy also changed according to the political belief of the citizens interviewed. The 2009 economic and political crisis in Hungary resulted in an increased distrust towards the political system, and a general optimism became visible one year later, with the arrival of the (then) new Fidesz government. The regime’s political fragility was demonstrated by a new wave of distrust in 2012 and 2013. In the newest report, the threat of corruption and the freedom of expression received an even lower score.

17 The democracy scores and regime ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.
18 Trust, following norms, evaluation of the role of the state and the importance of democratic principles.
The partial regime of political participation rights is measured through two criteria: freedom of association and freedom of opinion, press, and information. \(^{19}\) The centralisation of the media was carried out in parallel with cuts in the financial revenue of the independent media from the advertising market. By 2018, roughly 80 percent of the total population received information either from the Fidesz-oriented newspapers or government-controlled TV or radio channels.

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**The History of the Fragile Hungarian Democracy**

Hungary served as the symbol of the smooth and tranquil transformation, yet Hungarian citizens had only limited experience of democratic institutions over the past centuries. As an integral part of the Habsburg Monarchy, peaceful coexistence determined the functioning of the political institutions from the second half of the 19th century. However, an analysis of the political system of independent Hungary in the 1920s shows that it could be identified with the principles of a competitive authoritarian regime. \(^{20}\) This was not particularly specific to the Hungarian case, as such types of regimes were predominant in the majority of the new independent states of Central and Eastern Europe of that time, Czechoslovakia being the only exception. One of the common features of the new successor states was the fact that, by the 1930s, most of the constitutions were suspended (if they had existed at all).

These types of regimes can be characterised by limited, not responsible political pluralism, the lack of an elaborate and guiding ideology, and the presence of distinctive mentalities. Political mobilisation is usually extensive, or at least not intensive, except at some points in their development. \(^{21}\) These regimes usually require a leader, who exercises power within formally ill-defined limits. The interwar East-Central European political systems could be characterised as weak democracies with strong leaders. As a characteristic feature of the competitive authoritarian regimes, Hungary’s recent history is dominated by long-term national leaders: Horthy, Kádár and Orbán. The three leaders pursued politics of consolidation. \(^{22}\)

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19 Bogaards, “De-democratization in Hungary.”
20 Levitsky and Way, “Elections Without Democracy.”
Regarding the historical roots of trust towards the democratic institutions, it is essential to turn back to the 19th century in Hungary. As part of a greater empire and with limited sovereignty, Hungary was in a subordinate position as the central power in Vienna had dominance in the executive branch while legislative power was divided between the king (emperor) and the national assembly. The belated embourgeoisement, or the lack of urban population and the dominance of the nobility at the regional level, did not assist with the transformation either. Hungarian society at that time was mostly rural and the majority of the urban population was German-speaking. The flagship holders of modernisation thus were, paradoxically, the representatives of the nobility. The first Act on Election from 1848 worked out as the result of a successful revolution, grounding the terms of new legislative power by giving roughly 7.5 percent of the population the right to vote.23 The Hungarian Act on Election was modified twice before the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, but the share of the population with the right to vote did not change significantly.24 Participating in elections in Hungary was thus, even at the turn of the 20th century, the privilege of only a selected group of people, in particular the nobility.

The first Hungarian democratic experiment25 was brought to an end first due to Austrian and Russian supremacy in the lost War of Independence in 1849, and for a second time with the Compromise of 1867.26 Being an equal part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Hungarian government had limited sovereignty. This Compromise was concluded as

23 This 7.5 percent seems a bit weak, but the Hungarian Act on Election was quite liberal in view of 19th century practices. 1848.5. Act on Election, http://mnl.gov.hu/a_het_dokumentuma/kepviselovalasztas_1848ban.html (accessed November 23, 2019).
24 In the Western European countries, the situation was just the opposite. By the end of the First World War, a greater share of the population obtained the possibility of exercising voting rights, while in Hungary this share was reduced.
25 Bogdan Góralczyk, Magyar törésvonalak [Hungarian Cleavages] (Budapest: Helikon, 2002).
26 The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a well-functioning regional integration system focusing on a common economic policy with free trade, a common currency, and the elimination of customs frontiers within the Monarchy, but as a political system it remained a dynastic empire with limited democratic elements. The Hungarian parties were divided according to the question of whether they accepted or rejected the dualist system, although the Hungarian party system in fact took the shape of a “pseudo two-party system” in which only one party had a chance of winning. The question is how far change was resisted from self-interest, lack of imagination, or a rational intuition that dualist Hungary might not be reformable.
the compromise of the Austrian and Hungarian elites²⁷ and as a response to the crisis the Austrian Empire experienced as a result of the 1848/49 War of Independence and the divergence from Western European traditions. The Habsburg Monarchy was a multi-ethnic structure and, as the different ethnic groups lived in ethnically mixed regions, the influence of national awakening affected their demands for autonomous status. Giving them autonomy or support for their attempts could hardly be afforded, because of the difficulty of separating them into ethnically homogeneous units, and because of the nature of the empire’s mode of functioning. In contrast to Western European states, the presence of unifying and separating nationalisms impugned the stability of the Habsburg Monarchy. In order to find the solution to preserve its integrity, the compromise between the two strongest nations seemed to be the smallest loss. From the perspective of the functioning of political institutions, this compromise was a mixture of ideas from the Western European parliamentary system and elements of the feudal system.

The dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy resolved the claims of ethnic groups as their claims for independence were recognised by the great powers. The new independent Hungary also faced several challenges. The Horthy regime, named after acting governor Miklós Horthy, lasted from 1920 to 1944. The system itself was variously labelled conservative, Christian-nationalist, authoritarian, or even fascist.²⁸ István Bethlen, the acting prime minister of the 1920s, emphasised that Hungary was still not ready for mass democracy, as it could lead to anarchy, disintegration, and dictatorship.²⁹ He also had to concentrate on integration and internal cohesion, key elements in the Hungarian mentality in view of the territorial loss that determined the Hungarian political discourse as a reaction to the Peace Treaty in Trianon in 1920. The interwar years in Hungary thus were influenced by the idea of peaceful (and, from the late 1930s, increasingly aggressive) territorial revision and by attempts to break out of political and economic isolation. As every single political decision was saturated by the territorial claims, the efforts to gain back the lost territories assisted in the de-

²⁸ Given that the entire political system collapsed in 1918 and in 1919, there was an understandable need for a strong government and regime.
cision that determined Hungary to enter the Second World War on Germany’s side.

After the end of the war, a relatively short phase of democratisation took place in Hungary between 1945 and 1948, however that freedom remained limited and was controlled by the Soviet Union as Hungary found itself in the Soviet zone of influence. This short phase was also characterised by a particular dualism based on the contradiction between a legislative power concentrated in the hands of the coalitional government with the dominance of the right-wing Independent Smallholders’ Party, and an executive power exercised by a strongly Soviet-influenced Communist Party. This democratic experiment lasted only until 1948 and ended with the transformation into a totalitarian regime. Hungary rapidly followed the Stalinist directives and ideology, with a first interruption in 1953 after Stalin’s death and a second with the 1956 Revolution and freedom fight.30 The Soviet tanks destroyed Hungarian democratic ambitions, but the Soviets found a politician suitable for the Hungarian needs, a next “strong man.” János Kádár took on the role of long-term national leader31 and, in parallel, successfully embodied the myth of the Hungarian “forgotten man.” Nevertheless, this devoted ally of the Soviet Union founded a regime that remained valid and justified for approximately three decades.

“Homo Hungaricus” – the Nature of the Hungarian Mentality

Since the turn of the 20th century, the Hungarian mentality has been characterised with the symbol of the ferry, the image used by famous Hungarian poet and actor of Hungarian political journalism Endre Ady and repeatedly by Péter Hanák.32 On his return from Paris, where he became influenced by Western political ideology, Ady compared Hungary to the ferry that moves between the two banks of a river, is not able to calm down and is frequently moving from one bank to the other. The metaphor about Hungary as the ferryboat between the East and the West became a deter-

mining element of Hungarian political culture.\textsuperscript{33} It can also represent the ambiguous belief towards modernism that can develop into a general social crisis. The Hofstede Institute relies on six factors to assess different countries: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty or avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence.\textsuperscript{34} Based on their investigations, Hungarian society belonged to the group of individualist societies with a high preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. In such societies, offense causes guilt and a loss of self-esteem, the employer/employee relationship is a contract based on mutual advantage, hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on merit only, management is the management of individuals.\textsuperscript{35} Paternalism and statism are also linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance.\textsuperscript{36}

Because of society's pervasive/deep/ingrained fear of economic instability, consumption or, at least, the possibility of consumption, was and still is an important element of its mentality. Based on the findings of the Hofstede Institute and of the World Values Survey, Hungarians belong among the followers of secular-rational values as opposed to traditional family values. This unique duality leaves Hungary between Eastern and Western states on the two-dimensional value chart although, compared to Western countries and most East-Central European post-socialist countries in the region, it has more in common with the value systems of Eastern countries steeped in Orthodox culture.\textsuperscript{37} In fact, this set of values has proven to be quite stable and has not changed in the 25 years following the regime

\textsuperscript{33} The metaphor of the “ferryboat country” not only presents a choice between the “barbarian” East and the “civilised” West, Asia or Europe, it is also a rewriting of the East/West opposition (a central topic of the area’s intellectual history) and the Hungarian national character from a more provocative and tragic standpoint. Nemzetközi Magyarság tudományi társaság (International Association of Hungarian Studies), http://hungarologia.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Teslar-Akos-rezume-hu.pdf (accessed May 10, 2019).
\textsuperscript{35} Hofstede Insights.
change. Hungarian society is rather tolerant or, at least, places less emphasis on religion, traditional family values and authority. In other words, citizens consider economic and physical security to be the most important values. Researchers generally agree that the major components of this value structure may be described in the following terms: rational yet closed thinking, a relatively weak commitment to democracy, distrust, a lack of tolerance, norm confusion, a sense of injustice, as well as demand for paternalism and statism.

These outcomes correspond with those of the research conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in 2017. Hungarians were asked about their dreams and the answers confirm that there is little meaningful support for a more eastward orientation (2 percent) but that the numbers believing Hungary should find its own path (44 percent) more or less equalled those who believe the country should more closely resemble Western Europe (for instance Austria). The “Hungarian Way” is thus very strongly present in the Hungarian imagination, and indeed its supporters slightly outnum-
ber those wishing for a closer alignment with the West.

The stability of these values, i.e. the trust in individual economic stability and the undecided relation with political representation, was also determined by the fact that Hungarian society had to face a sequence of regime changes that was marked by instability, with frequently changing value preferences related to the belated modernisation and partial catching up with Western values. One of the most visible differences between the Eastern and the Western European approach can be observed in the field of social integration. Hungarian political culture was influenced by several problems as the entire 20th century was marked by rapid changes in the political system. With the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the entire Central and Eastern European region experienced a double transformation, from empire to democracy and from great empires to nation states. This latter phenomenon had a great influence on the Hungarian outlook. Territorial loss and changes in ethnic composition, with the formation of an ethnically homogeneous state out of an ethnically mixed empire, resulted in confusion and an increase in the popularity of extremist views. Terri-

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torial revision appeared on the interwar governments’ agenda, while the Hungarian nation’s ideology of cultural supremacy determined the position of Hungary and its relation with other values belonging to different social groups, including anti-Semitism. Hungarians tried to emphasise their cultural supremacy by neglecting other ethnic or religious groups.

Since 1945 a special dualistic value has characterised Hungarian society. With the nationalisation of land, the wealthy aristocracy and the Catholic Church lost the financial bases necessary for their survival. With the disappearance of these post-feudal social groups, Communist politicians returning from the Soviet Union shared new values. As they represented two different worlds, these two groups looked at each other with suspicion. The elimination of the thousand-year-old evidence that the church and secular estates represent wealth, the appearance of previously banned Communist values, the changes in the composition of the civil service and the Communist influence in this, all caused confusion. The institutions of civil society of the previous decades were also dismantled, but the political anti-Semitism and the consequences of the lost war resulted in the extinction of the Jewish population and in the expulsion of Germans, the two most urbanised groups in Hungary. The suspension of clubs and other civic organisation in the late 1940s also led to the isolation of society.

Andrew C. Janos writes about the redistribution shock that characterised Central and Eastern European societies. He explains the asymmetry between economic development, or economic performance, and political participation in the following way: while in Western European countries the extension of the civil rights followed economic development, the process was reversed in the Central and Eastern European region. Economic inequalities acted as an obstacle to the popularity of democratic values. The uncertainty of the Hungarian society can be recognised by the lack of

42 Of the around 13,000-14,000 clubs existing in the 1930s and 1940s, fewer than 1,000 remained by the 1950s as a result of the drastic changes. Most of these were involved in political activities. Korall, Társadalomtörténeti Folyóirat, http://www.korall.org.hu/node/1718 (accessed November 23, 2019).
43 Hofstede Insights.
inherited wealth resulting from the redistribution crisis that overwrote the ownership of properties on several occasions.\textsuperscript{45}

Within 130 years, Hungarian society survived five waves of a redistribution crisis that also determined both the position of the social classes and the values they shared.\textsuperscript{46} As is visible from Table 1, the translocation of assets and their redistribution resulted in the inclusion of new social groups with different values.

\textbf{Table 1 The Steps of the Redistribution Crisis in Hungary}

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1880 – 1918</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>1938 – 1944</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1946 – 1949</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>1987 – 1989</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Since 2010</td>
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Source: Lengyel, 2016, edited by the author.

Within less than one hundred years over the past century, Hungary also experienced nine different system changes, only the last being peaceful as the previous changes were the result of violent events.\textsuperscript{47} These cataclysms followed each other so rapidly that Hungarian society was forced to build up

\textsuperscript{45} The lack of inherited wealth adds to the feeling of uncertainty within the society and the priority given to economic stability. See László Lengyel and György Surányi, \textit{Határátkelés – beszélgetőkönyv} [Border Crossing – a Book of Discussion] (Budapest: Kalligram, 2013).

\textsuperscript{46} László Lengyel, \textit{Halott ország} [Dead Country] (Budapest: Helikon, 2016).

\textsuperscript{47} These are the following: the Aster (or Chrysanthemum) Revolution in 1918; the Hungarian Soviet Republic in spring 1919; the Horthy Regime in 1920; the Szálaszi coup d’état in 1944; the Democratic Transformation in 1945; the Rákosi System in 1949; the 1956 Revolution; the Kádár Regime; and the negotiated transformation in 1989. Csizmadia mentions nine types of regime changes (Ervin Csizmadia, “A Magyar rendszerváltás és az ellenzék” [The Hungarian System Change and the Opposition], 24.hu, August 20, 2018, https://24.hu/poszt-itt/2018/08/20/cszizmadia-ervin-a-magyar-rendszervaltasok-es-az-ellenzek-tanulokepesege/ (accessed November 23, 2019), while Tölgyessy counts eleven.
a special defensive mechanism to enable it to overcome smoothly the sequence of shocks it had to face. This strategy was embodied in adaptability and survivability. The Hungarian reaction did not stop at these abilities, but their behaviour was influenced by the deficit of trust towards the institutions representing the population’s personal interest. The following elements can be treated as the survival of these mechanisms:

1. Pending trust towards politicians and political institutions
2. Lack of self-confidence
3. Relation to the external environment

The value preference of Hungarian society was examined several times. Regarding the outcomes, most experts agree that these data are still influenced by the troubles in value changes inherited from 1945.\textsuperscript{48} \textsuperscript{49} The results of these polls proved that Hungarians, as the least able to identify their close environment beyond the family members, were an “atomised society”\textsuperscript{50} usually susceptible to accepting social justice as a zero-sum game.\textsuperscript{51} The essence of this game is that the price of somebody’s success can be measured by the failure of the other. In other words, voters were sure that the price of their better condition is the worsening circumstances of the others; however, this legacy is rarely questioned. “Homo Kadaricus” thus represents the abandoned man, who is less keen on criticism and trusts the state and the government, whose dreams are concentrated on small necessities, and leaves political participation to politicians.

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\textsuperscript{49} Such surveys regarding value preferences also were made in the 1980s, however, as Tóth remarked, the results were never published due to their harsh criticism towards the existing regime. See Tóth, Turánbánya? Értékválasztások, beidegződések és az illiberálizmusra való fogadókészség Magyarországon.

\textsuperscript{50} Hankiss, \textit{Kelet-európai alternatívák}.

Regarding value preference, security (or financial security) was treated as the most important value of society, as is shown in Table 2. The current fear of unknown migrants or refugees threatening this security and taking the jobs and goods that determined the communication of the government was beneficial.

Table 2 Changes in Values from 1986 to 2007

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1. Financial security</td>
<td>Safety of workplace, no unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Freedom</td>
<td>Financial security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Safety</td>
<td>Predictability</td>
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Source: *Figyelő* 51, no. 39 (2007), edited by the author

**Strong Politician Demands – the Birth of “Homo Kadaricus”**

This focus on wellbeing also resulted in a lack of interest in political behaviour. According to Huntington, the survival and legitimacy of authoritarian regimes depend heavily on their economic performance, that is, on their output. Democracies’ legitimacy, by contrast, is based mainly on input: shared ideas about what the political system represents and relatively durable electoral procedures that assure the representation of citizens’ interests. “Hybrid regimes aspire to achieve a balance between output and input elements of legitimacy, but the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods aimed at keeping incumbents in power creates an inherent source of instability.”

There are also states that have undergone democratic erosion, where existing democratic institutions are undermined (e.g. through vote rigging), horizontal accountability is damaged in favour of expanding executive power, and the rights of citizens and the opposition are restricted.

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to external circumstances and adapt their legitimation patterns to various
democratization pressures, for example, popular demands or external
events.”

The Kádár regime was an excellent example of the legitimacy of authori-
tarian regimes. Having been appointed by Soviet politicians representing
the head of the state, having gained power on the ruins of the defeated in
the Revolution in 1956, and being responsible for the execution of em-
blematic figures of the events, Kádár focused on keeping citizens away
from politics, in order to avoid further rebellion. His power was based on
the presence of the Soviet army and the ability to supply his citizens’
needs. Kádár focused on compromise in internal policy and consump-
tion in economic policy, even if this policy led Hungary to being trapped
in debt in the 1980s.

There was a silent agreement between the politicians and the citizens
that “we shall guarantee your well-being and you don’t have to deal with
politics.” The government let the people earn money, the legality of over-
time work became a tendency as after the early 1980s they even needed to
work hard to keep their standards of living. Citizens tried to find their
own paths toward well-being, “Homo Kadaricus” was added as an addi-
tional layer; it symbolised the quintessence of the Kádár regime: trust in
the promises made. A politician’s task was to increase the standards of liv-
ing, using tools that would not disturb the citizens’ daily routine. In oth-
er words, the basis of the governance even within the democratic circum-
stances remained the same; the centre knows what to do and the guarantee

54 Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudny, “No more Colour! Authoritarian Regimes
and Colour Revolutions in Eurasia,” Democratization 19, no. 1 (2012): 1-14; Hono-
57 András Vigvári, “Reform és rendszerváltás Magyarországon” [Reform and Regime Change in Hungary], Rubicon 3 (2008); Romics, Magyarország a XX. században; Lengyel and Surányi, Határaitelés – beszélgetőkönyv; Andrea Schmidt, “The Economic Transformation in Hungary, Detour or Impasse,” Politeja 28 (2014); András Oplatka, Németh Miklós, mert ez az ország érdeke [Németh Miklós, because this is the Hungarian Interest] (Budapest: Helikon 2014).
of the success of the reforms is based on the exclusion of interference to the central division.

**Figure 2 Best time for Hungary**

![Best time for Hungary](image)


Hungarian society’s value structure rests on rational yet closed thinking, a relatively weak commitment to democracy, distrust, a lack of tolerance and demand for strong state intervention. The systemic changes, the transition to a market economy and a period of privatisation notwithstanding, demand for state intervention, along with the desire to escape social instability, remained key aspects of the national preferences. The weakest trust towards the transformation was measured in Hungary in 1997 and in 2009. Both years the distrust was in accordance with Hungary’s economic performance. The effects of the Hungarian shock therapy (the Bokros package, as it was named) on the living standards a year later, resulted in dissatisfaction, while in 2009 the consequences of the economic crisis and the uncertainty regarding the future of the mortgage loans paid in foreign currency

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59 Biró-Nagy, “Illiberal Democracy in Hungary.”
again increased distrust towards the government. Assuming that trust towards the regime is strongly connected with its citizens’ own financial conditions, there is nothing surprising in this decrease in support. Apart from the missing reforms, a general cleavage appeared within Hungarian society. The Hungarian left-wing parties experienced a massive decline in support, while society itself also underwent a dramatic neurosis. In 2006, just before the financial crisis, Hungarian democracy reached a turning point which Lengyel calls “Annus Miserabilis.” In the local elections that followed the parliamentary elections, voters expressed their distrust of government. Regarding the economic consequences of the regime changes, the changes in economic conditions determined the trust towards democratic institutions. In 1998, already three-quarters of the Hungarians were suspicious of organisations aspiring to exercise power, and by 2009 their confidence index sank even lower, with the share of sceptical citizens increasing to 90 percent.

Several investigations have shown that Hungarian society does not widely support egalitarian approaches. The Hungarians’ standpoint is quite controversial, in that they support taking away the richest groups’ higher income, and the poorest groups’ social benefits. This attitude can also be explained as a sign of social jealousy rather than as a need for social security. It is recognised by the attempt to transfer responsibility rather than as the expression of solidarity or trust towards the state’s institutions. Trust towards the state is paradoxically in accordance with Hungary’s well-

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60 By 2009 roughly 90 percent of the mortgage loans were based on foreign currency. With the economic and financial crisis, more than 50,000 families became insolvent due to the increasing costs of the monthly instalments and the loss of job security. See Emese Fekete, “Így lett Magyarország devizapokol” [This is How Hungary Became a Foreign Exchange Currency Hell, Origo.hu, August 22, 2011, http://www.origo.hu/gazdasag/hirek/20110822-hogyan-terjedt-el-a-devizahitelezese-ki-a-felelos-erte.html (accessed November 23, 2019)].


62 That is different from the “Annus Mirabilis” of 1989. Ferenc Gyurcsány’s scandalous “Ószöd” speech, in which he confessed to the lies the government had made to pretend governing, provoked general dissatisfaction.

63 Biró-Nagy, “Illiberal Democracy in Hungary.”
known individualism. On the other hand, the lack of trust towards each other lets the state be responsible for various tasks including social policy. Based on the previously mentioned survey coordinated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in 2017, it appears that the most important personal desire of Hungarians is to lead a healthy life. After health, the most common response was a stable and secure income and pension to live on, which was chosen by every second Hungarian. As the contributors of the research show, it is interesting to note that there is no statistical correlation between the level of education and desire for a secure livelihood.

Towards a “New System?” – Experiences from the 2018 Election

The first five free elections demonstrated that painful reforms paralyse trust towards the government. From 1990 to 2002, each government was replaced by a new one drawn from the previous opposition. The year 2006 was a milestone in the history of Hungarian governance, as the coalition government of 2002 managed to repeat its victory, but the demonstrations in autumn 2006 and the economic crisis in 2009 facilitated the victory of the opposition. Nevertheless, in the 2010 elections, the Fidesz-KDNP (Christian Democratic Party) coalition achieved 53 percent of the votes, resulting in a constitutional majority with 68.13 percent of the mandates. Four years later, in 2014, based on the new Act on Election, the coalition received the same share of votes.

Thanks to the new system, the compensation rule and the votes from Hungarians living in the larger territory of historical Hungary, altogether less than 45 percent of the votes were sufficient to reach 68.83 percent of the mandates. Because of the new proportional electoral system, the supremacy of the governing parties was not an issue, the only question mark being over the size of the Fidesz majority. The opposition parties did not expect victory.

The other uncertain issue was the share of participation. The experience of elections since 1990 shows that turnout was always higher in Budapest and in the bigger cities than in the rural regions, particularly in the Eastern counties. In previous elections, higher turnout was favourable to the liberal or left-wing parties, so optimism increased among the opposition as the incoming data showed a higher turnout. In 2018 the turnout was 70.22

percent, 8.49 percent higher than the previous election in 2014, but the Fidesz-KDNP coalition obtained a landslide victory. With 49.27 percent of the votes, Fidesz-KDNP gained 66.83 percent and a constitutional majority.65 Naturally, after the first shock, several theories appeared to explain the results. Based on the nature of the Act on Election applicable from 2011, the results from the 2014 and 2018 elections prove that cooperation among the opposition parties is the best strategy for achieving victory over the governing coalition, but this cooperation was not in place. There were suspicions of gerrymandering in the 2018 elections, but the opposition candidates’ inability to form a coalition was also advantageous for the winners. It is of course difficult to calculate the number of mandates that were given to the Fidesz-KDNP because of the absence of such cooperation.

Apart from the opposition’s unwillingness to cooperate, the result of the elections was also influenced by economic factors. The Hungarian Statistical Office publishes annual reports about the richest and poorest regions of Hungary. The Hungarian weekly magazine *HVG* reported the correlation between the poorest regions of Hungary and the share of the votes in the elections. Analysing the PPS (Purchasing Power Standard) statistical data in the ten poorest settlements of Hungary, the Fidesz-KDNP’s relatively large advantage in its victory came as a surprise.66 The highest support towards the incumbent government came from districts that originally belonged to left-wing party supporters. The local population’s party preference perfectly demonstrated the expectations towards the strong politician, the need for state intervention and the lack of a bottom-up strategy.

It was strengthened by statistical data that showed that governing parties received their greatest support in the poorest regions. Apart from fear of migrants, the presence of public works also helped the governing coalition to win the elections. In these depressed regions, inhabitants are very much dependent on public works, which are often the only existing employment options. Although these jobs are financed from the state budget, the only persons the public works participants can identify are the mayors of the settlements, who depend on the local members of parliament. The system, which has been functioning since 2011, reached its peak five years later. In 2016, approximately 200,000 citizens took part in the public work

programme. Due to the collapse of the left-wing political parties, the competition for power in many cases included only two major parties: Fidesz, and the radical right-wing Jobbik party. Accepting the fact that the most underdeveloped regions are ethnically mixed with an important Roma population, the radical and covertly racist Jobbik could not appear as an alternative solution for the voters. Finally, taking short-term expectations into account, the governing party used an interest-based policy combining the demand for financial safety with the request for protection against migrants. This new layer of identity policy proved to be a success for the governing party, while it was entirely lacking among the opposition.

There are thus several reasons for the victory of the Fidesz and KDNP and the support given to populist views. Undoubtedly, several groups of Hungarian society still live in isolation, in a specific language prison, as only a small proportion of Hungarians speak a foreign language. With the centrally controlled media easily able to supply them with fake news, their lack of knowledge of foreign languages also prevents them from accessing other sources of information. It is a tendency in Central and Eastern Europe that exclusion from alternative sources of information can easily lead to the acceptance of such information as described by Snyder as “Medium-Size Lie.” These social groups are ready to engage, at least part of the time, with an alternative reality. Sometimes that alternative reality has developed organically; more often, it has been carefully formulated with the help of modern marketing techniques, audience segmentation, and social media campaigns. The medium-size lie, or in other words the conspiracy

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67 The active population reached a total of 4,500,000 in 2016, while the number of the unemployed decreased from 466,000 (2011) to 191,000 (2017). With the public works, the unemployment rate decreased from 11-13 percent to 7-8 percent. Public works do not cover all 12 months of the year, but they can have an impact on the data. These numbers are based on the annual report of the KSH [Central Statistical Office], http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_qlf010.htm l (accessed November 23, 2019).


69 Juhász and Molnár, “Szolidaritás és jóléti sovinizmus a magyar társadalomban.”

70 Snyder cited in Appelbaum, “A Warning from Europe.”
theory, is propagated first by a political party as the central plank of its election campaign, then by a ruling party, with the full force of a modern, centralised state apparatus behind it. The core figure of the conspiracy theory is the Hungarian-born Jewish billionaire, George Soros, identified as the greatest supporter of bringing in migrants, and is the target of the government’s propaganda. Regarding the position of Jews in Hungary, the latest surveys prove the presence of such theories.\textsuperscript{71} The Fidesz’s election campaign message emphasised the threats from the (almost non-existent) migrants. Supporters of the governing parties come from rural areas and belong to the older generation. An additional reason can be found in the frequently changing value preferences. As various polls and surveys have emphasised, economic conditions are among the values ranked highest by Hungarian society and a large proportion of the social groups, particularly among the most vulnerable groups, see the state as the main guarantor of this security. The weakness of the interest articulation, the underdeveloped civil society, the lack of control over the accuracy of news can also be observed in the acceptance of populist views and the desire towards a strong state and charismatic politicians. It is also in accordance with the government’s strategy of extending control over the citizens by reducing opportunities for civil society oversight, with NGOs falling under the suspicion of collaborating with the supporters of migrants. Opportunities for civil society control are getting less frequent as these organisations face more obstacles to their functioning and financing. The suspension of the financial support provided by the EEA and Norway Grants, the Open Society Foundation’s expulsion from Hungary, the increase in the state’s control over universities and the limitations placed on academic freedom together have resulted in both the obstacles to the formulation of critical argument

\textsuperscript{71} Soros is portrayed as a puppet master manipulating opposition politicians or using NGOs to import millions of Muslim migrants into Hungary and change the demographic balance of the country. Caricatures of Soros as a malevolent wizard – or even as a literally reptilian monster – tap into a rich vein of European anti-Semitic imagery. Michael Abramowitz and Nate Schenkkan, “How Illiberal Leaders Attack Civil Society,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, April 6, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2018-04-06/how-illiberal-leaders-attack-civil-society (accessed November 23, 2019). Based on a poll conducted in the Visegrad Group states, approximately 40 percent of respondents think that Jews have too much power and influence to control governments and institutions around the world. This was one of the core findings of the GLOBSEC survey in 2018. GLOBSEC, “Globsec Trends 2018, Central Europe: One Region, Different Perspectives,” https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2018.pdf (accessed November 23, 2019).
against the government, and government propaganda, being stronger than ever.

Conclusion

Empirical investigation shows that a variety of motivations explain the preference of some electors for Hungary’s illiberal regime. Three types of fear form the background to their reaction. One can be called an economic aspect: anxiety about losing jobs and living standards, can result in hundreds of blue-collar workers shifting from the moderate left to the extreme right to join the populist forces of reaction. The second aspect is based on the cultural rebellion or “security rebellion.” Fear of terrorism and crime can be stimulated and fanned by politicians into greater hostility towards minorities, refugees, migrants, and foreigners, thereby developing a virulent xenophobia. Conspiracy theories can also be attractive to people. Finally, experience from the historical past including belated embourgeoisement, the feeling of being isolated, neglected, trapped and victimised, can also lead to such tendencies. These factors are not typical Hungarian features, as the entire region has experienced a similar historical and political reality. It requires the much wider explanation of why and how the Hungarian identity has been shaped over the past centuries. Relative economic backwardness, belated modernisation and the overwhelming position of the state have all contributed to shaping the Hungarian mentality and political culture. An additional factor is connected with the transformation period: the experience of catharsis was lacking in the Hungarian transformation in 1990. Hungarian citizens did not have a feeling of happiness towards the new system, partly because there was no need for compensation. Hungarians did not experience military occupation or terror, and neither did they gain independence. Until the 2010s there was not even elite change as the representatives of the technocratic elite were also for the changes. Hungarian society thus survived a sequence of regime changes within a short period and had to accommodate with a frequently changing outside world. The unusual insistence on a strong state and the limited willingness to take part in politics thus can be explained by various reasons. It can be understood as a specific Hungarian phenomenon but, widening our scope, it can also be treated as a special reflection of a more general tendency.
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Online Resources


Conclusion –
Contradictions of Regional Identity and National Interests

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Keywords: regional and national identity, regional cooperation, political elites

Exploring Identities: the Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans

This book presents a collection of studies that analyse two politically constructed regions in Europe – the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Western Balkans (WB) – through the prism of identity. Regions are either areas consisting of several states, or territorial areas within a state. The two regions addressed in this book belong to the first category, that of a region established by several states, either voluntarily to address similar political issues – this is the case of the Visegrad Four – or as a result of having been clustered into a region by an external actor, the European Union – this is the case of the Western Balkan region. Political motives, underpinned by cultural or historical similarities, due to regional closeness and shared historical experiences, constituted the motivation for forming these specific regions. The countries are embedded in larger geographical, historical, socio-cultural and partly linguistic regions with particular similarities. These similarities offer a potential sense of shared belonging. This might shape the region as a common area beyond short-term political priorities.

The surrounding historical and socio-cultural regions influencing the V4 and Western Balkan countries are taken into consideration, as states/regions cannot be completely separated from their neighbourhood. Regions are concentric circles among others that stretch from local to global, which indicate the prominence of other geographical levels. In the context of this book, we do understand regions as a group of nation-states, promoting political, cultural and economic cooperation.

The concepts of region and identity relate to each other, as geographical location, space and territory are elementary aspects in shaping identity. The geographical position of a region is defined by the relational interpret-
The West becomes “the West” because there is an “East” and, by nature, the own group is considered to be superior to the other regions. The same applies to group identity. Stereotypes are drawn up by identifying specific characteristics, which are elevated and attributed to a certain ethnic group, country or even region. Perceiving the Balkans as “conflict-ridden” and “uncivilised” constitutes a counterpart to “the civilised West,” as does the “underdeveloped East,” seen as a laggard in relation to economic and political standards. As a consequence of the negative stereotyping of certain regions, the countries attempt to mentally reposition themselves through narratives, by avoiding a certain geographical terminology and applying more positively perceived labels, such as Central or East-Central Europe instead of Eastern Europe, or South-East Europe for the Balkans.

After the fall of Communism, Central Europe re-appeared from behind the Iron Curtain onto the political map of Europe and into the consciousness of the Old Continent. Whereas the V4 states, as a group of nation states, jointly addressed their political and economic challenges to make their way into the European Union, Yugoslavia disintegrated into its late federal republics. The people of former Yugoslavia lived for years with each other in a federal state, although a feeling prevailed that disparities among the nations existed. The change of the political landscape provided the opportunity to demand more independence and self-reliance from the political centre of the federation, by stressing the differences between the constituent nations of Yugoslavia. Prominent political leaders made the case for the idea of an ethnic homogenous nation state, driving a wedge between people which resulted in hate and brutish killings. Adam Bence Balazs argues that people who are very similar or alike – such as family members – are determined to stress their differences and even detest each other. In the case of former Yugoslavia, people fought wars based on reinforced differences, despite apparent similarities. Nowadays, people from the states of former Yugoslavia, when abroad, refer to “their people,” meaning persons who speak a similar language and come from the region. Another example is Czechoslovakia, where the people, despite shared similarities in linguistic and socio-cultural aspects, preferred to live independently in separate states next to each other. The so-called “Velvet Divorce” of Czechoslovakia in 1993 was, however, a politically mediated and negotiated process, whereby both states continued their cooperation within the Visegrad group.

Even though both regions either are EU member states or are working on being admitted to the “exclusive European club,” the dividing lines between the “disdained East” or “the Orient” and the “presumptuous West”
have not disappeared. Central European states were disappointed in their expectations that accession to the EU would eliminate these disparities. The Visegrad countries still feel misunderstood and not treated as full members by the “old” Europe. The concepts of hetero- and auto-stereotyping, which describe the different perspectives on a state or region by the Other and one’s self-perception, provide an explanation for the formation of these misunderstandings. How powerful these mechanisms of stereotyping are, became apparent during the migration situation of 2015, when the V4 states, after more than 15 years of EU membership, felt misinterpreted by the “western” EU countries. Overcoming biased perspectives and stereotypes is a long-lasting and tedious undertaking for the countries and regions introduced in the book, and it is questionable if it will succeed, and if so how.

To summarise, the book’s motivation was to explore the relationship between identity and these “political” regions, and the formation of national identities within these regions. However, what it demonstrates is that the creation of national identity actually contradicts the function of regional cooperation activities in creating a prerequisite for a common understanding between the countries.

**Regional vs National identity**

What brings people together and provides the context for a feeling of belonging to a particular group is collective identity. A clear distinction from the Other is needed to create the Self. This differentiation is created by narratives, used by political actors to clearly draw borders between what belongs to the in-group and what constitutes the out-group. Furthermore, there are the outside actors ascribing distinctive features to a certain group of people or states, again creating clear mental boundaries of who and what is considered to be part of a community and what not.

As Balazs mentions, by focusing on the differences rather than on the similarities, political actors weaken regional integrity. Political elites construct collective identity, which is based on excluding others and on an overemphasis on the importance and rightness of national values. The selection and the strengthening of certain aspects of an imagined ethnic homogeneous population by political leaders provides the basis for political control over the in-group. Political actors are driven by personal interest and use opportunities to reach their objective of gaining political positions, and to obtain access to political power in the state or in their community as a result. In democracies, politicians must convince the electorate
in order to receive their support. In divided societies, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and northern Kosovo, voting along societal cleavages is common, with the electorate voting for the representative of their community, rather than on the basis of political considerations. These cleavages are often deeply entrenched, especially in post-conflict societies, which are used by leaders to sharpen their own political profile to present themselves as defenders, protectors or real representatives of the community. In unstable political and economic situations, communities search for security and protection, and for strong political leaders, who have to establish an emotional connection to their in-group. As groups are always in competition with each other, the own group is always assessed more positively than the other by their group members. This affirmative feeling to one’s group has to be maintained by the politicians. This can be done by applying specific mechanisms, such as discursive strategies, omitting certain interpretations of social and political realities, justifying particular interests for the in-group, victimisation, re-interpretation of history or control in education and media to establish a feeling of superiority and a loyalty with “their community.” Moreover, fear of being marginalised is introduced in the often complex social-cultural situations, which results in support for more nationalist politicians with an exclusive political agenda. Thus, the political leaders and their motivations are the key to either solidifying particular identities or to reaching out and finding common ground with others, thereby creating a basis for regional belonging.

What function do regions have under those circumstances, especially when regional cooperation is facilitated as in the case of the Visegrad Four, or encouraged as for the Western Balkans? The motivation for cooperation differs for both regions: whereas the V4 countries came together in 1991 to support each other in their preparations for EU and NATO accession, regional cooperation was made a prerequisite for the Western Balkan states’ efforts for EU accession. Regional cooperation became the means for the stabilisation of the region, which would not be allowed to enter the EU so long as dormant bilateral conflicts linger on. The V4 states, eagerly supporting the EU enlargement process of the Western Balkan states, have accepted this regional approach, even promoting themselves as a role model for successful regional cooperation. After the V4’s EU accession, the Western Balkan region received special attention from the V4 countries, when it was selected as a priority region for cooperation. In particular, Hungary was very keen to establish close political and economic links to the Western Balkans, due to being in its direct neighbourhood and to the Hungarian minority living in Vojvodina (northern Serbia). As former Communist countries and new EU members, the V4 states felt that, due to their politi-
cal and economic experiences, they are best fitted to be of assistance to the Western Balkans in advising on political and economic reforms. The V4 states have been involved in a number of military operations in the Western Balkan region, i.e. the NATO and EU operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia, additionally to UN and OSCE missions in the same countries and in Croatia. Close contacts between the leaders of both regions are forged with the help of regular meetings as part of the rotating annual V4 presidencies. Smaller projects are actively supported through the International Visegrad Fund, facilitating cooperation between both regions in the area of education, social, cultural and sport initiatives. Sharing of experience is an important motivation for cooperation between the regions. With the assistance of the V4, the Western Balkan countries set up their own Western Balkan Fund, modelled on the International Visegrad Fund, in 2015. There is an obvious interest for intensifying the economic cooperation, as the Western Balkans are considered to be an important market for the V4 countries. Membership of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), which was established in 1992 by the V4 countries, has shifted to the South and the East, as currently all six Western Balkan countries and Moldova are members, while the Central European states left CEFTA due to their EU membership. The preservation of political relations is actively pursued and is based on an understanding of sincere cooperation and support for the Western Balkan states. It is interesting to note that the V4, despite their focus on the Western Balkans, have not yet developed their own distinct policy for the countries of this region, and instead refer to the EU’s strategy for enlargement.

Some cases indicate that, once beneficial reasons for cooperation are found, states are more inclined to work together. The assessment of the benefits of the V4 cooperation is linked to accession to the EU and NATO, but also to the willingness of all members to continue their activities as a regional group. As EU members, the V4 have an additional forum for political discussions and coordination of political decisions within the EU. The costs of the cooperation are considered to be moderate, because political institutions for the V4 cooperation are limited to appointed personnel in the respective foreign ministries, and no additional institutions were set up except for the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava. The V4 received an image boost – not necessary a positive one – when in 2015 the migration issue became acute and it started to formulate a policy in opposition to western EU members.

In the case of the countries of former Yugoslavia, the background for pursuing intensive and efficient regional cooperation is more difficult. The
results of the first pluralistic elections in 1990 indicated that the Yugoslav idea was rejected and replaced by distinct national ideologies in the respective Yugoslav republics. This tension built up over decades and ended in a cruel war, destroying relations between the peoples of the region. From this viewpoint, it is understandable that enthusiasm for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is limited, but still the national interest of the individual countries and a more pragmatic approach led to a number of regional initiatives. In the Western Balkans, regional cooperation as a policy was introduced in the late 1990s, foremost to address security issues and to ensure compliance with the Dayton and other international peace agreements. A number of regional organisations, externally imposed onto the regions, were formed, such as the Stability Pact for Southern Europe (1999-2008) and the Southeast Cooperative Initiative (SECI) formed in 1996. In the same year, the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) was initiated, which is a regionally-owned organisation, set up to facilitate political meetings with the leaders from the region. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), established in 2008 by the SEECP, replaced the Stability Pact for Southern Europe and became a coordinating organisation responsible for implementing the political decisions taken by the SEECP. The Brdo-Brijuni Process is a small-scale initiative by Slovenia and Croatia in cooperation with other Western Balkan leaders with the aim of improving political relations among the states and of dealing with unresolved bilateral issues. This initiative could perhaps be the nucleus of a Western Balkan format comparable to the V4. In October 2019, after the EU Council declined to start EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, both countries together with Serbia met to discuss the development of a “mini-Schengen area.” The motivation for regional cooperation is, however, very much directed by the interests and policies of the national political leaders. What can be said is that cooperation between the political leaders exists, especially when it is in their interest, but successes are limited due to lack of resources and in some cases willingness to cooperate. Furthermore, the regional cooperation initiatives in South-East Europe are not always limited to the six Western Balkan states but include other states from the wider region.

The function of a region is to bring together states to cooperate in a number of areas, consequently leading to a better understanding of each other and to the development of common interests. Returning to the question of whether identity can be extended across national boundaries to a historical-cultural region, what the examples discussed in these articles show is that, in the end, it depends on the political leaders. The motivation of the political leaders to try to conduct politics in cooperation with others
on a regional, national or community level depends on the benefits for the politicians, whose main objective is to maintain themselves in office.

The authors provide an insight in identity formation mechanisms processes on a regional and national level, and investigate the interest of the actors involved in the process. Structures for regional cooperation in both regions exist, providing a platform for political actors for joint activities.

Outside Perspective: Relational Aspects of the Regions under Study

The majority of the authors have analysed identity from the national perspective rather than from a regional level. However, Ladislav Cabada, Kinga Anna Gajda, Kamil Glinka and Robert Wiszniewski take a step back and observe the two regions from a more distant perspective.

Ladislav Cabada addresses the region-identity nexus, an often-debated issue in social sciences. Two issues influence the regions’ identity: firstly, the long-term disparity in East-West relations, and secondly, the centre-periphery cleavage, which fuels discussion on regional identity. An imbalance still exists between East-Central Europe and Western Europe, which despite EU membership has not abated.

Kinga Anna Gajda again touches on the idea of stereotyping Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Western Balkans by constantly applying a particular model, designed by the Other, thus creating a performative identity. Countries attempt to overcome their negative stereotypes and the subordination of Eastern (and Central) Europe and the Balkans by stressing affirmative aspects of the region.

Moving away from the subjective stereotyping and negative perceptions of the regions to a more objective quantitative parametric (mathematical) approach which explores the political and social conditions of the individual countries constituting both regions under study, Robert Wiszniewski and Kamil Glinka investigate the correlation between the standard of democracy and the level of freedom. The outcome of their study showed a mixed result, which indicated that the different levels of democratic development in the Western Balkans compared with the V4 are not correlated with the levels of identity freedom.

The subjective reputation of some countries is based on bias, but does not always stand the test, when reviewed on the basis of data. Preconceptions are misleading and – as previously discussed – need to be addressed to create a more positive image of the countries and the regions.
The Perspective from Within: National Identity Formation

Leaving the macro-level analyses and moving to the case studies on the micro-level, this book provides a multifaceted picture of identity creation and formation in the countries under study. How and when are collective national identities created, for what reason and by whom? These are some of the guiding questions the authors address in their articles.

Unexpected events might generate a certain level of panic within societies and trigger a stronger association between the in- vs the out-group. The so-called “migrant crisis” in the summer of 2015 was such an event, whereby the V4 leaders rejected the “welcoming culture” of “old Europe” and felt that they had the responsibility to defend Christianity against the “horde of uncivilised Muslims.” Two differentiation processes were taking place at the same time, one between Central Europe, represented by the V4, against the pre-2004 EU Member states, and one pitting the local population against the incoming migrants from the Middle East. Ondřej Daniel analysed the Czech media regarding the construction of an enemy image of refugees on their way to Europe. The content analysis of approximately 30 opinion pieces in Czech newspapers demonstrated that the “welcoming culture” initiatives in Germany were countered by a campaign of animalisation of refugees by the media, fuelling Islam- and xenophobia in the Czech Republic. These developments contradict the Czechs’ self-image of being secular, progressive, intellectual and observant of liberal values.

The use of particular frames and narratives facilitates the creation of negative or positive images, which unconsciously influence the behaviour of people towards each other. These mechanisms are also used in public speeches by political leaders to directly address and relate to the audience. Adis Maksic analyses the political speeches of two prominent political leaders in Croatia and Serbia – the former president of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and the Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic – to demonstrate how mechanisms work in strengthening group solidarity by differentiating between national identity groups. Using emotions in discursive acts to create a feeling of belonging and a specific interpretation of history, are important elements of group formation. This way, both political leaders are complicit in constituting groups over which they can hold political control.

The objective of political leaders is to gain power, and to remain in power with the support of the population they claim to represent. In some circumstances it also makes sense to look for alliances, such as with religious leaders, to underpin the support by the community. Ešref Kenan Rašidagić illustrates how religion was used by politicians during the war...
years in the early 1990s and since then to solidify the existing identity groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Rather than overcoming community divisions, differences were emphasised. The overlap of interests of the political and religious actors in influencing a specific ethnic group facilitated these collaborations. Rašidagić argues that this situation impacted the social development of the countries.

Religion is (mis)used as an identity marker in the Western Balkans. Central European states relate to a homogenous Christian identity, but as Adam Balcer shows for Poland, even this image is very much constructed to serve a specific political purpose. The paper refers to the Polish writer and Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk whose writing, in contrast to the current official narrative of Polish identity as a homogeneous and predominantly Catholic, promotes a multicultural narrative of the history of Poland. Balcer also takes the reader through history and describes the story of Jacob Frank, who became the leader of a movement which was active from 1755 until 1815, thereby demonstrating the multicultural lifestyles of people at the time, equally influenced by the Ottoman Empire, Judaism and Christianity.

The dealing with the past and the interpretation of history is in general open for abuse. Teaching history to children is a sensitive task, as it influences their way of thinking and their attitude towards other groups for years afterwards. Especially in the Western Balkans, where the wars of the 1990s are not forgotten and where enemy concepts originating in World War II prevail, history education can be misguided for political reasons. Tamara Pavošovic Trošt and Jovana Mihajlović Trbovc discuss how history textbooks in the 8th and 9th grade of elementary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia are used to reinforce certain national narratives. Children are socialised through education, thus the use of certain ethnonationalist terminologies and facts included in or omitted from history textbooks are an attempt by the state to promote a specific ethnocentric identity. The construction of identity, through the (mis)interpretation of historical events, is still applied by the states, but there are a number of academics, international organisations and civil society organisations who point out these issues and are working on a change of history teaching across the entire region.

Language is another important identity marker and is the topic of Nikola Zečević’s paper, which looks at the identity construction process by means of language-naming in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. Language is a main identifier for national identities, therefore used to strengthen identity through constructing a national language or state language. The processes of developing distinct state languages in
the four countries under study have been criticised by some linguists and academics, as the idiom becomes more artificial, discarding the naturally evolved structure of the language and its intelligibility. Language is changed to fit the national state-building purposes of the states in the region.

Historical legacies shape the socio-economic and political development of the states. The countries in both regions have faced a number of profound transitions, which affected the people and consequently the political culture of the countries. Andrea Schmidt puts the current political situation after the re-election of the Fidesz-KDNP government, for the third time in a row, in 2018, in context with Hungary’s past political experiences. Hungary positioned itself as part of the Western European tradition, but its democratic institutions are, according to the standards of a liberal democracy, dysfunctional. This is seen as a consequence of the various dramatic regime changes in Hungary’s history (a total of nine since 1918) and the influence of dominant political leaders throughout the last hundred years of political life in Hungary. The result is the deconsolidation of the Hungarian democracy in 2019, when the “illiberal democracy” of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s making was downgraded by Freedom House to “partly free.”

This overview of the articles provides an insight into the diversity of themes, approaches, methodology and aspects, used to discuss identity and to explain its formation. Looking at both regions, we can note that different historical development influenced their stance towards regional cooperation. It is important to assess the situation of both regions regarding their motivations in pursuing and conducting regional cooperation.

The End

The articles in this book left behind a colourful family photo, where outsiders can only judge the complexity of the situation on the basis of the visible aspects, which often convey a different picture of the actual situation. Insiders – such as the authors of this book – have provided additional insight into the internal family matters. Identity, a key concept in social sciences, has been discussed against the backdrop of regional dynamics, nation-building processes, decisive political events and historical legacies. Political leaders are the driving force in creating collective identity through a range of means such as discursive elements, influencing education, finding a unifying event or aspect of identity and stressing its importance or by collaborating with community leaders. The formation of a collective national
identity impacts people’s lives as these dynamics override individual identities. Considering the macro-level, regional identity appeals less to the population as its reference frame is not well established. In the end it is again the political leaders who need to show an interest in creating a regional identity. Political leaders actively promote regional cohesion only when there is a political gain.

In conclusion, we note that the issues addressed in this book remain topical and are going to affect politics and society in the future. This collection of articles gave us a taste and snapshot of the dynamics within the countries of the two regions. Providing a selected view into the current developments helps the reader to get a better understanding of the issue of identity in the regions. The question about the relationship between identity and region is a complex and dynamic one, which requires further discussions and research. In this respect we close the book with the knowledge that more will be written on the subject. So, there is no end to this story.
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