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Introduction

Coping with Plurality: Nationalist and Multinational Frames of Mind in East Central European Political Thought, 1878–1941

The time period that begins roughly in 1878 with the end of the Russo-Turkish War and the Berlin Congress, and continues up to the Second World War is perhaps one of the most intensive and eventful in East Central European history. It includes two devastating world wars, radical and fast changes in the political and cultural landscape, and the birth and spread of ideologies that were to define the political life of the region for decades to come. One can argue that this was the time when Eastern Europe entered political modernity. Although this time period is usually divided into halves with the First World War as the watershed, it might also make sense to look at it as a continuum. At the end of the day, the interwar changes were to a considerable extent brought about by the Great War, and this war itself was in many senses a result of the preceding period. In other words, the First World War was as much a dividing line as it was the link between what is conventionally termed *fin-de-siècle* and interwar periods. At the same time, the experience of the war played an important role in synchronizing the development of the region internally as well as in relation to other parts of Europe. The disappearance of the great empires and establishment of at least purportedly democratic nation-states in the postwar Versailles system is often seen as the landmark of East Central European history, an almost natural outcome of the previous century of national development and "struggle for national liberation".

While much scholarly work on East Central Europe focuses on nation and nationalism, little attention is paid to those thinkers and initiatives that took up the task of going beyond the nation by inventing, promoting, and engaging in a variety of regional, federalist, and other non-national, transnational, and supranational projects. This aspect is largely overlooked

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by national historiographies, and is controversial in many senses. An insensitive treatment of regional and transnational discourses may lead to the creation of a new homogeneous unit, i.e., the region which supplants the nation in the analysis. Essentializing the region, be it Eastern Europe, Central Europe, or the Balkans, would not provide much of an insight. What can be useful and interesting instead is to embark on a comparative path, looking at projects of regionalization and thus treat a region as naturally multilayered and being constantly in flux, which the six contributions to this issue effectively do.

By bringing together these six studies we aim at achieving several goals. The first and very obvious one is to fill an unfortunate gap in English language scholarship on the region, which has a rather limited coverage of cases marginal even by the East European standard: Latvia and Estonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Albania, and importantly, projects of transnational regional cooperation. The second goal is to problematize the nation-centered approach without falling into the trap of essentialist regionalism, and to present a complex picture of political thought in a broadly defined East Central Europe before and after the creation of the modern nation-states. A more reflective analysis should go beyond registering and describing instances of nationalism and nation- and state-building in order to demonstrate the richness of regional political thought, with federalism, supra-ethnic regionalism, and international socialism as powerful and important alternatives/additions to nationalism. Even when a study focuses on the process of national consolidation and state-building (such as the one by Lea Ypi on Albania) the point of departure remains the same—to analyze nationalism as one of many available options, and to demonstrate the issues and dilemmas of nation-building as a political project.

Nation-building in these cases was a late phenomenon and the nation-builders had to struggle in order to create at least some degree of national cohesion. Moreover, the entire project was also heavily contested by the persistence of imperial and post-imperial frameworks. On the one hand, the rise and radicalization of national ideologies at the turn of the century seemed to aim at establishing new national units and legal entities, and thus created a very practical "nationalities problem" for the imperial authorities. In the Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires non-titular national groups voiced their demands for more equitable representation, political reform, and possibility for free national development with renewed energy and pressure. On the other hand, all these claims were made within and in compliance with the rules and logic of the imperial political

structures. While it was Austria-Hungary with its relatively broad constitutional liberties after 1867 which gave birth to the most famous and celebrated idea of non-territorial autonomy and also to sophisticated federalist projects, both the Russian and the Ottoman contexts witnessed extremely interesting debates on these issues.

In fact, on the Western fringes of the Russian Empire federalism was by default the mode of operation of the non-Russian nationality elites (with the exception of the Polish political class, with its strong tradition of national independence), and the triumph of the principle of national self-determination implying secession came with great difficulty only after the success of the Bolshevik revolution. All contributions to the current issue analyse this problem to some extent, either by focusing on self-determination specifically (Kaarel Piirimäe), or through the discussion of international and regional networks (Elvis Fejzić and Diana Mishkova). The importance of imperial frameworks for intellectual transfer becomes most apparent when one looks, for instance, at the development of socialist political ideologies. Two articles tackle this issue directly (Ivars Ijabs on Latvia and Fejzić on Bosnia) and when read together provide fascinating material for comparative analysis.

Our most ambitious goal, which transcends the boundaries of a journal issue, was to present some results of an exercise in comparative intellectual history. All contributions derive from the authors' involvement in the ongoing international research project, "Negotiating Modernity: History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe," funded by the European Research Council and hosted by the Center for Advanced Study, Sofia (for more details, see www.negotiating.cas.bg). The principal aim of this project is to provide an overview of the history of modern political thought in East Central Europe, which is not locked in the "national grand narratives" but pays special attention to transnational discursive phenomena and to supranational and subnational (regional) frameworks, where different national projects interacted. The volume in the making ensuing from this project will be neither a compendium of case studies nor a deductive Area Studies type of work that tends to eliminate differences to forge a general narrative. What it seeks to achieve instead is a cross-cultural "synthesis"—the result of the work of a compact team of multinational composition, skilled in comparative research and drawing on the recent upsurge of transnational historiography.

It is obvious that there is an increasing demand for a more context sensitive approach to European political thought that, however, cannot be based

on merely projecting the Western European historical narratives onto the whole continent, but requires the careful scrutiny of the specific regional and local ways of dealing with modernity. The recent debates in comparative European politics also focus on the role of indigenous political cultures in the complex interplay of sustaining nationhood and democracy. All this points to the need of well-informed, methodologically advanced empirical studies that create a more complex framework of comparing and linking political traditions. By shifting the reference point of historical thinking from the "West" to the cross-European experience with a special emphasis on East Central Europe, we aim to contribute to the rethinking of the "negotiation of political modernity," moving from "methodological nationalism" and oversimplification towards a more encompassing notion of what constitutes the European intellectual heritage.

The body of scholarship that the project team and the current issue's contributors could rely upon is fairly limited, and what is available are either local case studies (even if some of the works transcend the national scope, Central European and Southeast European cultures are usually treated separately) or synthetic works on the broader region where political thought is subordinated to a general narrative of political or cultural history (such as Piotr Wandycz's *Price of Freedom*). There are indeed very few titles to cite which aim at a more comprehensive vision of the history of political ideas in this part of the world. It is symptomatic, however, that even the most ambitious comparative volume among these, the one edited by Michel Maslowski and Chantal Delsol, *Historie des idées politiques de l'Europe centrale* (1998), is a compendium of nationally based case studies written by mainstream historians from the given national contexts, without being able to offer a common narrative based on comparative analysis, and remaining thus on the level of registering implicitly the parallel phenomena.

At the other extreme, the works stemming from the "industry" of Nationalism Studies tend to offer broad ranging generalizations on the history of nationalist political ideas in the region, without however being able to conduct research on all the cases analyzed and thus often unwittingly and paradoxically reproducing the ideologically laden self-perceptions of national(ist) scholarship in these countries. Taking into account the historiographical developments outlined above, it becomes clear that no meaningful synthetic work could be written solely on the basis of the existing corpus of secondary literature. There is an obvious need for new empirical and comparative research into a variety of East Central European contexts,

which in turn will make the re-contextualization and incorporation of these cases into European perspectives and narratives possible.

By bringing together a variety of case studies from the Balkan to the Baltic region that stem from the interaction of scholars linked to this project, we seek to call the reader's attention to similarities and parallels in the dilemmas that quite different national contexts had to face, and to highlight the importance of transnational and cross-border transfers and networks. The first two texts in this thematic issue (by Ijabs and Fejzić) register and analyze the problem crucial for the whole of East Central Europe—the uneasy and sometimes paradoxical relationship between internationally oriented socialism and the agenda of nation- and state-building dominant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the examples of Latvia and Bosnia respectively show. The pivotal question for European progressives at the turn of the century, whether class or nation are the driving force of historical progress, was of particular weight on the imperial peripheries, where the political actors were faced with the entangled problem of national and social emancipation, and where the ties between the socialists and the national liberals were stronger than in Western Europe.

The second pair of studies have a more clearly defined transnational and regional perspective, as they (from different perspectives) approach the question of the sustainability of a small nation and the validity of regional and/or supranational identity. Diana Mishkova, in her analysis of the regionalist scholarly discourses in the Balkans, points out that "the Balkanist discourse could at one time erode and at another buttress national differences" and she continues by arguing that "the attraction of the 'Balkan idea' seems to have resided in the symbolic resources which it provided for posing questions about modernity and negotiating the nation's relationship to the transnational cultural, social, and economic processes". A conclusion remarkably relevant for the Baltic debates is the analysis by Kaarel Piirimäe in his study of Baltic federalist ideas shows. Piirimäe discusses the intricate relationship between the ideas of socialist federation, self-determination, and geopolitical security issues of the small nations, and demonstrates how the idea of transnational cooperation developed over several decades and survived through what is conventionally labeled as the time of the success of nation-states.

The last pair of articles concerns cases where the national entity was carved out of a multinational framework, but its existence remained extremely precarious. Lea Ypi looks at the immediate aftermath of the success of creating a nation-state, in this case Albania, from such an imperial

periphery. She demonstrates skillfully the scale and depth of the problems a late nation- and state-building project encountered in the early twentieth century, pointing out the complexity and interconnectedness of the post-imperial legacies, the intranational social and religious divides, and concerns of international security in the new framework of nation-states. Nevenko Bartulin addresses a comparable question of identity-building in the dramatically different context of a type of Croatian political thought that intended to subvert the dominant supranational project. He reconstructs the argument made by the Croatian anti-Yugoslavists, and pays special attention to their use of available ethnic, racial, and linguistic arguments taken out of, and often used to subvert, the regionalist geomorphological and anthropogeographical schemes.

As there are a number of themes and analytical problems that run across the contributions to the issue, consequently a certain matrix of comparative research starts to appear. Without claiming that the contributions themselves present instances of comparative analysis, we want to stress the importance of this matrix of parallel developments, direct borrowings, mutual influences, common origins, and also striking differences of intellectual phenomena under consideration. Locating individual cases in this complex and dynamic analytical framework can be a step towards the creation of a new synthetic vision of East Central European thought on and surrounding the themes of nationalism and the national question.

Of many issues that persist in the political thought of East Central Europe, the problem of backwardness or "catching up" has been one of most characteristic since the Enlightenment. The role of the more advanced "Other" was normally ascribed to a generalized "Europe," or the "West." And although the theme of backwardness has never disappeared completely, the period between 1890 and 1945 can be said to be the time when the gap to Western Europe was partially abridged, at least in the sense of synchronization of political discourse. The status of "backward" lands and societies was not as easily accepted anymore and was indeed rejected by many actors, which led to the creation of qualitatively new political theories and ideologies that transformed what used to be perceived as weaknesses into strengths.

Scholarly disciplines of cultural and physical anthropology, geography, and study of folklore were important tools used to reshape local identities and re-qualify their constitutive features from "backward" into "progressive." Two contributions (Bartulin and Mishkova) take up the issue of scholarly research and academic disciplines and their political dimension and

implications, but proceed in rather different directions. In Mishkova's article, academic scholarship is analyzed as a source of both national autochthonism and supranational regional identity. In Bartulin's text we see another side of the coin, as the anti-Yugoslavist racial thinking in Croatia heavily relied on an originally regionalist anthropological scholarship to establish the difference between the Croats and Serbs.

Another phenomenon that can be encountered in many contexts is the proliferation of "ideological mutations" or "ideological hybrids," which originated as a result of the local attempts to appropriate external concepts and political theories; whether they travel from the West (France, Germany, England) or East (Russia or the Ottoman Empire) is of minor importance. The trajectory of East Central European socialists is an example par excellence of this departure from the classic "mother" concept and theory. Socialists in this part of the world faced dilemmas which required a lot of independent and creative thinking: how to build socialism without a working class; if the peasantry can be treated as progressive rural proletariat; and whether it is acceptable and advisable to cooperate in the conditions of an underdeveloped society with the liberals who were advocating modernization.

Yet another component of great importance for this flexible and open-ended comparative matrix is intraregional transfer. While the transfer from center (often imperial) to periphery has been studied at least to some extent, instances of intraregional, "horizontal" transfer are much less known. Looking at socialist networks is just one instance of such a transfer, regional academic ties is another. Obviously, giving a more comprehensive overview of these patterns of transfer requires further concentrated work by a great number of researchers.

To sum up, we hope that these six original and valuable contributions, brought under the common cover of the thematic issue, provide not only rich empirical material very rarely found in international circulation, but also initiate discussion and further research on complex political and intellectual debates in cases usually disregarded when talking about European intellectual traditions.

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