

## FORUM

### FROM THE EDITORS

In the context of the current European and global crisis that we see unfolding on multiple fronts, outlined by catch phrases like “Ukraine-Russia conflict,” “European Union crisis” and “the rise of political populism,” international attention is also focusing on the post-Socialist states of Eastern Europe. Over the last few years, we have observed the election of right-wing, populist parties in these countries and a tendency towards the erosion, in some cases even the usurpation, of constitutional institutions at the hands of democratically elected governments and their patronage-based networks. Accompanying this process has been a trend to fall back on former historical models of patriotic mobilization and social integration. At the same time, however, East European societies can be seen to differ significantly from one another when examined more closely. Do these references to historical resources, such as the political policies and tools familiar to us from the interwar period, really have the potential to bring about lasting change within the political system of a country in the 21st century? The editors of JECES have invited historians from several East and East Central European countries to lead this debate.

### Interwar Period 2.0?

#### History as a Resource in European Conflicts of Interest around Diversity and Integration: An Introduction to the Debate

Anna Veronika Wendland

### Revolution Retour and a Global Multi-Crisis

“Revolution retour? The Legacy of ‘89 and the Current Seduction of Authoritarian Rule” was the title of a podium discussion held on the 26th of May 2017 as part of the 36th German Evangelical Church Convention. Manfred Sapper, chief editor of the journal *Osteuropa*, invited contemporary witnesses and historians from Poland, Hungary and Germany to take part in the event.<sup>1</sup> Speaking from the perspective of their own countries and subject areas, they considered the question of whether this “legacy of ‘89”—understood as the beginning of a new era of western-style liberal democracy centered around human and civil rights—can still be seen to have any binding force at all in light of present-day European crises and challenges. Prior to the discussion, the host of the event specified two opposing ideas that dominate in current discussions within and around political developments, particularly from a

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<sup>1</sup> Revolution retour? Das Erbe von ‘89 und autoritäre Versuchungen heute, with Manfred Sapper, Krisztián Ungváry, Adam Krzemiński, Markus Meckel and Anna Veronika Wendland. For a video recording of the event see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTr6CulwddQ>.

German perspective: namely the largely unchallenged positive “legacy” of the peaceful revolution versus the recent “seductions of authoritarianism.”

However, worrying political developments and upheavals are by no means perceived as limited to Eastern Europe. Today, the awareness of a crisis in Europe continues to crystalize around the deeper sense of a complex, multi-faceted crisis of global proportions. This crisis is characterized by the following critical developments, which in some cases overlap, and are listed below in a very simplified form:

1. The abandonment or challenging of an established international order—which was set up during and after the Cold War with its own form of stability-oriented policy—at the hands of governments in Russia, recently also in the USA, and through “disintegration schemes” like Brexit and other movements directed against deepening integration in Europe.
2. Fleeing refugees and labor migration as well as postcolonial migration to Europe, mainly out of Muslim countries, and the challenges these mass-migrations pose for the social systems and integrational capacity of European nations.
3. The global rise of populist and nationalist movements and parties connected, both with the reconsideration of value orientations within democratic systems—which were previously considered binding—and with the call for values and systems to be changed as a necessary response to the current crisis.
4. The attempt made by democratically elected governments, using their political majority as leverage, to out-manuever rule-of-law institutions, or to usurp them through pro-government networks with the aim of securing ongoing power over these institutions.

### Is this Eastern Europe’s Problem?

Particularly in the case of Eastern Europe, we continue to search for historical explanations for why, after the quick and peaceful triumph of western democracy as a political model—and of neoliberalism as an economic model—we are now seeing signs that the value orientation commonly labeled “western” (as superficially and hegemonically conceived as this is) is being phased out, and along with it, the fundamental orientation of political action and policy-making towards universal human rights, civil liberties and both national and international legal norms. In line with this, the pro-European Ukrainian uprisings of 2014 cannot be read as a counterexample, but rather as a “catch-up development;” in the wake of the imminent disenchantment, what will follow will be an almost inevitable “turn to the right.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Here, I am following the interpretation of leading historian on Ukrainian nationalism, John A. Armstrong, who traces the idea of the Ukrainian nation and state from its basic

One possible explanation for the present-day situation can be found in the rapid molding of East European societies around the western economic model (in the case of market radicalism and the replacement of the welfare state with the Anglo-Saxon paradigm) together with economic, legal and monetary integration (in the case of the eastward expansion of the EU). Such developments have obscured the fact that these societies, in entering the new, democratically constitutional political system, brought with them a complex inheritance made up, not just of the remnants of recent Socialism, but also an array of political and identity-defining traditions that can be traced back to the time before the Second World War or even earlier. Though the legacy of Socialism initially lived on in principle, the option of a social democratic reform was rejected: in none of the post-Socialist countries (with the exception of Slovenia) did newly established leftwing parties that distanced themselves from the corrupt networks of the Communist Party successors ever succeed in attaining governing responsibilities. And even the socialist or social democratic newcomers are now clearly succumbing, like their opponents on the right wing of the party spectrum and their antagonists on the traditional left, to the current seduction of populism.<sup>3</sup>

This tendency is not restricted to Eastern Europe and it serves as further evidence that traditional political classifications have begun to slide and, in some places, have already been extensively eroded. Striking examples are the mobilizations that have been achieved by the populist rightwing parties in traditionally social democratic environments as well as the unexpected coalitions of rightwing populists and leftwing politicians on issues related to the critique of capitalism and the anti-globalization movement. Lastly, in very specific terms, we can see these developments manifesting in the stance that has been taken, both towards the Putin administration's policy on Ukraine and the sanctions on Russia.

Considering the corrosion of certainties that held true during the economic boom and the post-Cold War era, the political scientist Herfried Münkler has recently produced a study on the parallels that exist between current developments and the interwar period. These parallels are characterized, as he sees it, by "post-heroic" weakness and a withdrawal to individual interests within established democracies, as well as militant nationalism in Eastern Europe. The current circumstances prompted Münkler to warn of a return to an "a regime without guardians" (*Ordnung ohne Hüter*).<sup>4</sup> Leonid Luks promptly dis-

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orientation around social revolution in the period prior to World War One up until the integral nationalism in the context of Fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s: JOHN ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG: *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 3rd ed., Englewood/CO 1990.

<sup>3</sup> STEFFEN VOGEL: *Die autoritäre Versuchung. Europas Neue Linke zwischen Aufbruch und Populismus*, in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (2015), 11, pp. 71-79.

<sup>4</sup> HERFRIED MÜNKLER: *Ordnung ohne Hüter*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from 2017-07-04.

puted this thesis: on the one hand with reference to the many exceptions that can be taken from historical findings—for example, the Polish and British readiness to mobilize and capacity to endure suffering in the resistance against Hitler's Germany, which can by no means be called “post-heroic”—and, on the other hand, by determining that the Europe of today demonstrates a far greater degree of immunity against authoritarian rule than the Europe of the interwar period.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the argument is often made that this current renaissance in Eastern Europe is related to a specific problem lodged within the region's history. Here, it is political inheritances from the interwar years that are identified as being problematic: the integral nationalism, corporative state ideologies, latently or manifestly anti-Semitic and anti-urbane programs and the declarations of hostility that accompany them.

What we are in fact seeing is that these kinds of programs—or parts of them—have now found a new home under the umbrella of formerly liberal reform movements like Fidesz or newly established conservative parties like the PiS. However, the picture is not consistent: while, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, populist tendencies go hand in hand with a striking and pragmatic neo-Russophilia (or “Putinophilia”) amongst the elites—which does not at all fit with the historical experiences of uprising in these countries since 1944—in Poland, the latter has played no significant political role, a fact that is entirely in line with the historical tradition there.<sup>6</sup> While anti-Semitic and anti-Ziganistic statements are considered socially acceptable in Victor Orbán's circles, and the ruling party's local alliances of convenience with openly fascist and violent groups like Jobbik are not being tabooed, anti-Semitism is at least playing a far less significant role in the open mobilization of the PiS and there is no institutionalized cooperation with rightwing extremists in everyday practice. Then again, in the case, both of the Hungarian and Polish governments, there has been a similar upsurge of polemics directed against sexual minorities, the “erosion of traditional values at the hands of liberals,” and potential Muslim immigrants. These denunciations have gone hand in hand with references to the nations' dominant “Christian” culture and have coincided with similar programs that we have observed being implemented by the Russian government in an attempt to mobilize and integrate its own society.

<sup>5</sup> LEONID LUKS: Ähnelt die heutige Krise Europas der Konstellation der Zwischenkriegszeit? Zu den Thesen von Herfried Münkler, in: Die Kolumnisten, 2017-07-11, URL: <https://diekolumnisten.de/2017/07/11/aehnelt-die-heutige-krise-europas-der-konstellation-der-zwischenkriegszeit-zu-den-thesen-von-herfried-muenkler/> (2017-07-12).

<sup>6</sup> Unless we consider the extreme right and far left of the Polish political spectrum: Polen-Analysen from 2017-05-02, URL: [http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen199.pdf?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Polen-Analysen+Nr.+199](http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen199.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Polen-Analysen+Nr.+199) (2017-08-02).

Similarly, we have observed attempts in Russia, Hungary and Poland to interfere with democratic institutions like the division of powers and freedom of the press—though the degree to which this has occurred in the respective countries has differed greatly (in Russia, to the greatest extent, and in Hungary more seriously than in Poland). What we are seeing in Russia can only be described as a successful usurpation of government institutions at the hands of an oligarchy whose wealth has been generated through the sale of natural resources. This take-over has been formally “dressed up” as a democratic procedure, in the course of which the opposition has either been suppressed through the direct exertion of force or criminalized by means of formal constitutional processes. In Poland and Hungary, however, the political opposition has remained part of the political system. While in Hungary there have been massive governmental interventions into the autonomy of the justice system and both press and academic freedom as well as a tendency to oligarchize the economy, equivalent attempts in Poland have been curbed by well-organized resistance both within and outside of the parliament; though Poland is experiencing a constitutional and legal crisis in the ongoing dispute around the constitutional court, which onlookers ascribe, among other things, to the path dependencies that have existed since the interwar period, the country’s democratic immune system appears to be functioning.<sup>7</sup> Even though government representatives from Hungary and Poland may take up a strident position against the hegemonic tendencies in the EU in the wake of infringement proceedings, they would never plead, like their British political friends have, for a withdrawal from the Union.

Institutions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are also working under the pressures of economic upheaval as well as uncertainties around energy and defense in the shadow of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In Ukraine, a European country currently in a de-facto state of war, the EU continues to be held in high esteem and the political representation of the new right, as measured against the election results and due to the permanent political and economic crisis, is negligible. Nevertheless, the political culture there remains tied to its post-Soviet past: paternalism, a patronage system and ongoing hindrances to anti-corruption measures continue to shape a government that verbally claims to orientate itself according to “pro-European” and “western” values. Regarding Ukraine’s recent history, however, Ukrainian politics has never been interested in self-reflection or the guidance offered by critics and academics: at present *Geschichtspolitik* in Ukraine appears to be a made up of mix of anticommunism (in the form of post-colonial, anti-Russia sentiment), positively

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<sup>7</sup> For a skeptical judgment regarding institutional stability and rightwing culture in Poland: MARTA BUCHOLC, MACIEJ KOMORNIK: Die PiS und das Recht. Verfassungskrise und polnische Rechtskultur, in: Osteuropa 66 (2016), 1-2, pp. 79-93; JANUSZ MAJCHEK: Die Lage der Opposition in Polen, in: Polen-Analysen fromm 2017-03-07, URL: [http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen196.pdf?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Polen-Analysen+Nr.+196](http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen196.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Polen-Analysen+Nr.+196) (2017-08-02).

framed recourse to the integral nationalism of Ukrainian terrorists and partisans who were active during and between the wars, as well as victimization. In choosing a national memory strategy, the government, which presents itself as liberal, is guided, not by scientific research, but by a small group of nimble-witted, patriotic ideologists working for the Institute of National Memory.<sup>8</sup>

### Questions on the Historiography of Eastern Europe

So, even within a first, superficially comparative overview of Eastern Europe, we can see an astonishingly heterogenous picture emerging. In terms of historical research, this raises the question of whether we need to move beyond negative theories of a political thawing process—whereby, in our historical region, the realm of ideas from the rightwing political spectrum during the interwar period have survived the communist “ice-age” more or less intact and only need to be further thawed by future generations. Are such theories really sufficient to explain the developments we are currently observing?

At first glance, the recourse to history stands as an indisputable resource within the reservoir of arguments and lines of reasoning that today’s Eastern European movements and parties in the rightwing and populist spectrum are drawing from, be it in the form of references to the historical traumas or “great moments” of the respective national thought-collectives. In most cases, it is agreed that the current “reload” of ideological traditions and models stems from the interwar period, thus from a time when the societies in question, having not existed as governmental states for a long time, began to rebuild their political institutions and communities in new contexts and to reforge their traditions accordingly before being forcibly communized in yet another imperial context, namely that of the socialist “enclosure.”

But which facets of historical experience are really being “reloaded” in an unaltered form, and which have undergone a transformation? Indeed, can we even locate these experiences in the interwar period, or do they in fact date back to an earlier period of history? Which models of historical societal integration are current movements drawing on and associating themselves with and where are these ties at best an imitation? In the case of the latter, if the underlying ideas in fact stem from the 21st century, does it not follow that we should be analyzing them using tools from criticism of post-modern identity politics, instead of tools that sufficed for analysis of the interwar period? And

<sup>8</sup> ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: Kriminelle Tätowierungen auf der Haut unserer Städte, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung from 2016-04-05, URL: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst/ukrainischer-streit-um-sowjetisches-kunsterbe-14158980.html> (2017-08-02); EADEM: Der Eigene. Nicht so schlimm: Integraler Nationalismus als Kiewer Prospekt, in: Ukraine-Nachrichten from 2017-06-04, URL: [https://ukraine-nachrichten.de/eigene-nicht-schlimm-integraler-nationalismus-kiewer-prospekt\\_4636](https://ukraine-nachrichten.de/eigene-nicht-schlimm-integraler-nationalismus-kiewer-prospekt_4636) (2017-08-02).

does the interwar period not also provide counter-models to patriotic integration, for example if we consider how the management of cultural diversity and the state policy on minorities<sup>9</sup> was conducted in Czechoslovakia or Estonia prior to 1939?

Finally, how virulent are these—alleged—answers from the interwar period to the current problem areas of cultural diversity and social integration within modern, information age societies? Do they really highlight a paradigm shift, are they, quite literally, “state-changing” ideas, or are they merely a byproduct of patriotic, post-factual thinking, part of an overheated, mob-building phenomenon occurring across social networks that we can disregard as the restless “spume” of daily politics thrown up by the tremendous and far deeper undercurrents of an irreversible process of westernization taking place within the *longue durée*? Or is the recourse to historical models integrating early 20th century rightwing thinking ultimately a transformation that has gripped both Western and Eastern European societies and therefore not a specific problem of Eastern Europe at all?

These are the questions we asked our colleagues from Germany and Eastern Europe to discuss with regard to their own, respective fields of work. The answers they gave will appear, in loosely chronological order, in the upcoming issues of the *Journal for East Central European Studies*.

## Secondary Shocks: Poland's Two Transformations

Maciej Górny

### The End of History 1.0

The readers of the last issue of *The Slavonic Review* in 1927 received a publication as interesting as it was late. The editorial board, recognizing that ten years after the Great War, it was time to start looking to the future more boldly, had launched a series of articles signed by prominent politicians from “Slavonic” countries. The former Russian Foreign Minister, Liberal Pavel Miljukov, fired the opening salvo. His essay contrasted two models of “Slavonic policy”. One of them deferred to tradition and was monarchical and conservative in character. The other was modern, liberal and democratic. Representatives of both trains of thought clashed in practically every country which Miljukov considered, but he viewed the case of Czechoslovakia as

<sup>9</sup> HANS LEMBERG (ed.): *Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1918-1939): Stärke und Schwäche der neuen Staaten*, Marburg 1997; DAVID J. SMITH, JOHN HIDEN: *Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State: National Cultural Autonomy Revisited*, London 2012.