SPOTLIGHT

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**Academic Freedom in Danger.
Fact Files on the 'CEU Affair'**

Abstract. In the beginning of April this year, the Hungarian Parliament passed two amendments to the existing educational law, which in their particular formulation targeted specifically the renowned Central European University in Budapest and sought to undermine the legal basis of its existence in Hungary. In four contributions leading academics and a PhD student of the History Department of the Central European University place the latest events in context, provide insights into the institutional set-up and the development of the History Department, and explain why this institution is special and worth fighting for.

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The Political Context
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In the following short thematic block, the four authors of this 'Spotlight on the CEU affair' intend to provide context for the recent developments that surround the Central European University (CEU, www.ceu.edu). It is followed by an extensive—though not exhaustive—press review on the CEU affair in major international media.¹

The situation escalated after 4 April 2017, when the Hungarian Parliament reduced the parliamentary debate to a three-hour plenary discussion and passed an amendment to the higher education act that undermines the continuing operation of CEU in the country—all without any previous consultation oth-

¹ We would like to thank Adri Bruckner and Stefan Roch for compiling the press review, as well as Cody Inglis for linguistic editing.

erwise required by the law, not even with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The amended law requires CEU, among other items, to build a campus in the United States and conditions its further operation on an agreement between the US Federal Government and the Government of Hungary, disregarding the fact that accreditation issues are the competence of the individual states, in this case the state of New York, whose educational authorities had accredited CEU's degree programs.

The passing of the law took place amidst an extensive defamatory campaign against CEU, and specifically its founder, George Soros, by the government, unfoundedly charging it with fraud, illegitimate privileges earned via corruption and pressure, violations of the law, and so on. CEU forcefully rejected these charges and seeks legal remedies, including the amendment's annulment through the review of the Constitutional Court—a procedure whose outcome, despite sound legal arguments, is unpredictable. The situation is aggravated by further specifications in the law that leave practically no time for negotiation and stipulate that unless each requirement is fulfilled, the university will not be able to admit new students into its programs after 1 January 2018.

The government's thinly veiled motivation is CEU's firm adherence to the values of critical thinking and the indispensability of sound reflexive knowledge in society, which the government perceives as threatening its determination to transform Hungary into an 'illiberal democracy'.² The fierceness of the attack on CEU, and the intensity of a concomitant anti-EU and xenophobic ideological campaign that seeks to turn Hungary into the pioneer of a break with the liberal-democratic political consensus that has characterized the post-1945 dynamic of Western European politics, came as a surprise to many observers who perceived Viktor Orbán as a pragmatic and cynical power-maximizer devoid of strong ideological commitments. However, taken from a more longitudinal perspective, it is interesting to note that the idea of the break with the liberal-democratic consensus had been first launched by Orbán as an ideological weapon of self-defense back in 2011. In the context of the debates in the European Parliament following the controversial media law and the acceptance of a new 'Basic Law', Orbán was confronted with the vocal disapproval of socialist, liberal, and green MEPs, with the most fiery criticism being formulated by Daniel

² See the contributions to András Inotai, ed, Hungary's Path Toward an Illiberal System, special issue *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society* 63, no. 2 (2015); Ausgeklinkt. Interventionismus in Russland und Ungarn, *Osteuropa* 11-12 (2015); Schieflage. Macht und Recht in Ungarn und Russland, *Osteuropa* 4 (2013); Quo vadis, Hungaria? Kritik der ungarischen Vernunft, *Osteuropa* 12 (2011); In Bewegung. Ungarn, Tschechien, Bergkarabach, *Osteuropa* 6 (2010). See also the special dossier compiled by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Dossier: Focus on Hungary, <https://www.boell.de/en/focus-hungary>. The dossier is updated regularly. All internet references were accessed on 29 June 2017.

Cohn-Bendit.³ In response, Orbán started to talk about a fundamental cleavage between him and his critics and claimed to represent the ‘forgotten Europe’ of Christianity, family values, and national pride, which was undermined by the Western 68-ers as much as by East European communists. Supported by similar arguments formulated by the chief ideologist of the regime—the director of the House of Terror, Mária Schmidt—Orbán has stressed that the cultural hegemony the ‘new Left’ achieved in 1968 made the articulation of a truly rightist ideological position impossible in the West, while in Hungary (and Eastern Europe in general) the communist ‘old Left’ had no legitimacy whatsoever and thus the Right could be more ideologically self-confident. While this argument is rather inaccurate historically, it somewhat unexpectedly struck a soft chord with some of the Western European conservatives, who would have hardly subscribed to an open attack on their own domestic left-wing and liberal political competitors in these terms but projected some of their existing frustrations on Orbán’s ideological struggle, turning him into a champion of unconventional right-wing solutions—perhaps somewhat too crude, but doubtlessly efficient, corresponding to the ‘lower’ level of political culture in the East.

This aura became all the more powerful in 2015, when the escalation of the refugee crisis, to which the Orbán government contributed substantially by first blocking the borders of the country, nearly causing a humanitarian catastrophe, and then overnight forcing all the refugees out of the country, effectively placed all of the burden on Austria and Germany. The heavy-handed measures of purging the country of asylum seekers divided the Western European public as well, and turned the Hungarian leader into the hero of those political forces that saw the solution of the refugee crisis in building symbolic and actual walls. This was the moment when the Bavarian prime minister, Horst Seehofer, demonstratively invited Orbán to Munich in order to signal his profound disagreement with Angela Merkel’s policies. Concomitantly, the crisis and the xenophobic campaign orchestrated by Hungarian state media restored the popularity of Orbán and his party among the Hungarian voters. Especially after the 2014 elections, where, due to the redesigned electoral system allowing gerrymandering and making the system even more disproportionally majoritarian, FIDESZ won 66% of the seats with a mere 44% of the votes, Hungarians had become increasingly disaffected by the endemic corruption, especially visible in the use of European structural funds, captured by a handful of oligarchs personally related to the leader.

With the successful demolition of domestic checks and balances tolerated and sometimes tacitly assisted by European institutions, as well as by Western European governments, Orbán became increasingly convinced of his own pioneering role in establishing a ‘new world order’ of self-enclosed and ethnically pure

³ On the ‘Basic Law’ cf. Imre Vörös, *Hungary’s Constitutional Evolution During the Last 25 Years*, in: Inotai, ed, *Hungary’s Path*, 173–200.

nation-states (a modernized version of Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Geschlossener Handelsstaat*), eliminating the universalist references to human rights and democratic representation, and allowing instead for the proliferation of oligarchic and hybrid authoritarian regimes, allegedly fitting the 'national character' of the respective country. Orbán was rather vocal about his aspirations already in the famous Tusványos speech of summer 2014, where he described his policies with the concept of 'illiberal democracy' and sketched out his program of building a 'state based not on welfare, but on work'. But all of this had a completely new twist in autumn 2016, when a series of global developments seemed to signal a global turn towards ethnopopulism and anti-liberalism, especially Brexit and the election of Donald J. Trump, but also the rise of several right-wing populist parties in Europe such as the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD), the Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ), and Marine Le Pen's National Front (*Front national*, FN) in France.

It is not by chance that Orbán was among the first political leaders to enthusiastically greet Donald Trump's election in the United States, after he had already expressed his support for him during the electoral campaign. He stated, rather paradoxically, to have received the 'gift' from a higher instance to finally act as a sovereign country, which obviously implied that from now on the US authorities would not monitor the state of human rights and press freedom in Hungary, thus allowing Orbán's government to proceed with shaping the country to his own liking. From then on, the developments escalated, and the propaganda campaign sustained by the ever-expanding state-owned and state-supported media positioned Orbán as the third key figure of the global transformation, alongside Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. The flagship of the campaign is the popular news website, *Origo*, which the Hungarian branch of *Deutsche Telekom* recently sold to a company close to the government circles; the deal was facilitated by the promise of an exclusive contract of every Hungarian state servant with this mobile network operator.⁴ While the details of the discussion remain uncertain, and perhaps will never see the light of day, the attack on CEU came less than two months after Putin's visit to Hungary and also coincided with the intensification of the Russian government's campaign against George Soros through the various domestic and international media outlets controlled by the Russian secret services. This Russian campaign included the emergence of a mysterious 'STOP Soros' movement in Macedonia, the country that, incidentally, hosted most of the anti-Clinton post-factual internet sites and servers seeking to influence the US elections. This movement supported the nationalist

⁴ See A Telekom eladta az Origót, *Origo*, 17 December 2015, <http://www.origo.hu/gazdasag/20151217-a-telekom-eladta-az-origot.html>; and A Telekom lesz az állami intézmények mobilszolgáltatója, *Origo*, 6 February, 2017, <http://www.origo.hu/gazdasag/20170206-a-magyar-telekom-lesz-az-allami-szervezetek-mobilszolgáltatoja.html>.

former prime minister Nikola Gruevski, a strategic ally of Putin.⁵ Importantly, the campaign used the emails of the Brussels office of the Open Society Foundation that had been hacked in summer 2016 by the same hacker team that hacked the US Democrats' internal correspondence. It is perhaps also not accidental that two weeks before the legislative attack against CEU, a Russian undercover TV crew sneaked into CEU and prepared a widely transmitted reportage with the assistance of Hungarian politicians, 'unveiling' a 'conspiracy' orchestrated by Soros that allegedly used NGOs to topple nationally oriented governments and impose his cosmopolitan values on the world.⁶

All of this international entanglement points to the need to place CEU's case into a global context. The attack on CEU weaves together a complex web of antiliberal and neo-authoritarian political forces and ideological streams. This leads the authors of this thematic block to believe that, apart from the fate of one particular institution, the case is symptomatic for the general predicament of the academic sector at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even more broadly conceived, it leads to questions of freedom of thinking and expression, as well as civil liberty and the rule of law. This is particularly the case because the attack against CEU coincided with a number of other highly alarming instances of an authoritarian crackdown on academics and universities, including the current campaign against academics in Turkey and the attack on the European University of St. Petersburg. CEU has become a symbol of academic freedom, and the politically motivated legislative attack on an independent institution of higher education—especially because it takes place in a member state of the European Union—has provoked unexpectedly wide support and solidarity: from the president of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier; from the members of the European Commission and the European Parliament; from the president of Academia Europaea; from eighteen Nobel Prize winners, including Mario Vargas Llosa and Orhan Pamuk; from the Regius Professors of Oxford and Cambridge; from the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; from the presidents of leading US universities such as Berkeley, Harvard, Duke, NYU, and Princeton; and from tens of thousands of other individuals and institutions.

In the articles following this introduction, however, rather than analyzing the developments in depth, which would require much more space, and also a thorough engagement with the burgeoning interpretative literature on the authoritarian turn in Hungary after 2010,⁷ we provide an overview of some

⁵ See the movement's website, Global Initiative – Stop Operation Soros | SØS, <https://stopsoros.mk/>.

⁶ 'Soros, go home': спонсор 'цветных' революций потерял поддержку Госдепа, *vesti.ru*, 19 March 2017, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2867806>. The part on CEU starts towards the end, from minute 05:50.

⁷ For further reading on the 'morphology' of the 'System of National Cooperation', see Jan-Werner Müller, *Wo Europa endet. Ungarn, Brüssel und das Schicksal der liberalen Demo-*

features of the specific research and educational milieu of CEU and its contribution to a new vision of the history of Central and Southeast Europe. While it would be an exaggeration to claim that the attack came exactly because of the emphatically transnational perspective of history developed by CEU, it is nevertheless true that the campaign orchestrated by the government targeted the very essence of the educational process at CEU, namely its transnational embeddedness conducive to a rational and scholarly approach to historical, social, economic, and philosophical problems devoid of any national bias.

The CEU History Department. A Brief Overview

Alfred J. Rieber

From the founding of CEU in 1991, the distinguished Hungarian historian Péter Hanák brought together a very strong permanent faculty of Hungarian historians supplemented by visiting professors representing both the international state of the art in the theories and methods of historical studies and the histories of several neighboring countries, including Russia. The mission was to assist in the democratic transition of these states and societies. I, an American, succeeded Hanák and expanded this tradition to broaden the international profile of the department by adding visiting professors from Romania, Ukraine, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Poland. The two guiding ideas here were to have the faculty reflect more closely the composition of the student body and to promote the recruitment of students from these countries. Initially, the main intellectual challenge facing the department was to design a curriculum at the master's level that would introduce the students to a critical and pluralistic approach to history and counter the tendency, beginning to gather strength in educational institutions throughout the region, to replace one set of dogmas (based on Marxism-Leninism) with another set (rooted in a nationalist narrative). With these guiding principles in mind, a one-year MA program in Central European History was launched and approved by the New York State accreditation authorities beginning in 1992/93.

It soon became apparent to the members of the department that the process of building a representative international faculty and a well-integrated curriculum had reached a point where it was possible to plan for a doctoral program. The resources of the library had also been greatly expanded with substantial book

kratie, Berlin 2013; Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?*, Berlin 2016; Péter Krasztev / Jon Van Til, eds, *The Hungarian Patient. Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy*, Budapest 2015; Bálint Magyar / Júlia Vásárhelyi, eds, *Twenty-Four Sides of a Post-Communist Mafia State*, Budapest 2016; Bálint Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State. The Case of Hungary*, Budapest 2016; Peter Wilkin, *Hungary's Crisis of Democracy. The Road to Serfdom*, London 2016; Paul Lendvai, *Orbán's Hungary*, Vienna 2016; Inotai, ed, *Hungary's Path*.

donations by several American historians of Russian and European history and by the library of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, as well as with the more recent donation of archival collections by the Open Society Institute. In designing a doctoral program that would meet the standards for an American accreditation, it was decided to present a unique formula based on the department's unusual combination of human and material resources. This was the basis for the PhD in the Comparative History of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In 1996, with the approval of the rector, the department invited a team of three American external reviewers to evaluate its newly designed doctoral program. Following a favorable review, the department's doctoral program was accredited by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York, the first doctoral degree to be approved at CEU. In keeping with the belief that the teaching of history should not be confined to the narrow parameters of a nationalist outlook, courses were designed along thematic lines. All entering MA students were required to take a course in historiography that provided an introduction to historical methods but that also served as a socializing experience. The committee for the defense of the master's thesis is now composed of the supervisor, second reader, and a member external to the department. All doctoral candidates are required to take a course in the literature of comparative studies, including readings in the social sciences, privileging the interdisciplinary approach. In keeping with the criteria for accreditation as an American degree, the history department's PhD program requires the entering student to have completed a master's degree and then, after a year's course work, to pass an oral examination on two comparative fields before being formally admitted to the doctoral program. The doctoral exam is organized around a set of comparative themes in two of the three regional areas designed by the student in consultation with an advisor, a dissertation proposal, and a preliminary bibliography. In accord with our inter-institutional as well as international outlook, we have drawn on the services of faculty from universities in Hungary and numerous other European, and occasionally overseas, universities to serve on our examination committees for both the MA and PhD.

From the early years, the department began to invent a number of traditions to enhance what was already a growing spirit of collegiality among the students. The first of these was the Hanák Prize for the best master's essay, judged by three professors none of whose students had been nominated, and awarded at the end-of-term departmental graduation dinner. Another was the trip to visit the museums in Vienna led by our art historian. More recently, an annual spring walking tour in the Buda hills has been inaugurated on the initiative of our staff.

In response to the changing international environment and composition of the faculty, a growing sentiment, encouraged by the central administration, developed on the need to introduce a more global perspective. During the early

2000s, geographic horizons widened to embrace the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In 2014 the department decided to change the name of the master's degree program simply to Comparative History. This signified a movement away from an exclusively area studies focus to a more general thematic organization of both graduate degrees within the department. Combining historical themes with explorations of up-to-date approaches aimed at highlighting more universal implications and refining the approaches themselves. As part of the university's innovative initiatives, specialized thematic studies were introduced including Political Thought, Science Studies, the Center for Religious Studies, and the Jewish Studies Program, as well as Archives and Evidentiary Practices. At the same time, a fourth area, the Eastern Mediterranean, was added to the three original regional areas in the doctoral program. The special programs award their own advanced certificate together with the MA degree. They also sponsor their own lecture series. In addition, there are three focus areas, growing out of the university's initiative in the humanities program: Early Modern History, Labor History, and Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian History, each of which features strong teaching and research. The object of all these programs is to offer students a wide range of flexible approaches to the study of history, facilitating cross-departmental cooperation while retaining thematically coherent courses of study.

Further enhancing institutional cooperation, the history department, under the leadership of Laszlo Kontler, in cooperation with the Medieval Studies Department, established in 2005 a Doctoral School in History designed to meet all the PhD requirements of a Hungarian PhD. This means that students who choose to fulfill additional academic criteria set by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee can obtain a second, Hungarian PhD. Along with the Hungarian accredited PhD in economics, the Hungarian accredited PhD in history enabled CEU to acquire legal status as a Hungarian university. Three years later, the Departments of History and Medieval Studies again cooperated to introduce a two-year Master's Degree in Comparative History to coincide with the reduction from four to three years of the BA in EU universities. This program was also subsequently registered with the New York Board of Regents and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

The history department has continued to multiply its cooperative relations with other universities in Europe and North America through a variety of programs, including the Erasmus Program for two-year master's and doctoral candidates, individual exchanges with Purdue University, Princeton University, and Bard College in the United States, and as part of an international consortium of universities at Florence, Vienna, Regensburg, and Münster. Through a web of personal and institutional ties—conferences, research projects, mutual participation on dissertation committees, etc.—with all major sites of training

and research in historical studies, whether based at the Academy of Sciences or universities, the department is deeply integrated into the historical profession in its Hungarian homeland.

As an important part of the department's research agenda, Pasts, Inc. Center for Historical Studies organizes research seminars and conferences and grants fellowships to support innovative projects by emerging scholars. It also sponsors the journal *East Central Europe*. Three members of the department have inaugurated and formed the editorial board of a series of monograph publications by CEU Press under the title 'Historical Studies of Eastern Europe and Eurasia'. The department also hosts one of the three editorial offices (the other two are based at the University of Manchester and the European University Institute in Florence) of the *European Review of History / Revue d'histoire européenne*.

Let me conclude on a personal note. Coming from teaching for twenty-five years in the United States, I was struck from the outset of my tenure here, as many of our permanent and visiting faculty have been, by the mutual respect and noncompetitive, friendly yet highly serious demeanor of our students. No matter how controversial the subject under discussion, ranging from religious conflicts to the nature of repressive regimes, war and other human disasters that, in many cases, had directly affected their families, students engaged in few, if any, recriminations, denunciations, or harsh exchanges in classroom discussion and debates; I observed none in my twenty years at CEU. Rather, there was an overwhelming desire to understand the roots of the controversies that had so divided, and more often ripped apart, the societies from which they came. It was for me and others (including outside visiting lecturers and examiners) as well, a lesson in tolerance that could be well emulated in other national or international institutions in our time.

Comparative Historical Research at CEU. The Balkans as a Laboratory of Transnational History Constantin Iordachi

As an intellectual project, the establishment of the Central European University (CEU) in 1991 in Budapest was part of the 'revival' of scholarly and political interest in Central Europe and its implementation in new forms of regional cooperation. In the 1980s, in their attempt to disentangle and then liberate the region from the Soviet political-ideological grip and military occupation, a plethora of thinkers reasserted Central Europe's own cultural identity and political traditions, distinct from those of the Soviet Union. The revalorization of the concept of Central Europe originated in literary studies. The international debate triggered by Milan Kundera's 1983 essay 'The Tragedy of Central Europe' led to the articulation of a new political and intellectual discourse on

Central Europe as a historical, cultural, and political space. As Maria Todorova has pointed out, the concept was soon adopted and redefined in academia and in political discourse, before, finally, being implemented in political practice (see, for example, the Visegrád Group as a form of Central European interstate cooperation).⁸

Established at the same time as the Visegrád Group, CEU can be regarded as another successful outcome of the resurgence of this regional identity. The university has its roots in the anticommunist dissident spirit of the 1980s. Its ideal is to foster regional interaction and cooperation in higher education to recreate a 'republic of letters' in Central Europe characterized by tolerance, openness, and critical thinking. In its almost three decades of existence, CEU has emerged as a leading intellectual forum that has contributed to shaping intellectual discourses in/on the region and to fostering cooperation. It has trained a new generation of academics and experts able to contribute to the transformation of the region's academic life. During this time, CEU has transcended, in many ways, its regional focus, and has founded new departments of mathematics and its applications, environmental studies, cognitive science, network science, as well as a School of Public Policy. At the same time, CEU has remained proud of its roots in Hungary and Central Europe, a space with a rich historical heritage and intellectual tradition.

CEU's regional identity is best reflected in the research and teaching agendas of the Departments of History and of Medieval Studies. The two departments offer multifaceted degree programs focusing on Central Europe (in constant comparison with other historical regions of the world) from late antiquity to contemporary times, aimed at the understanding of persistent themes in the experience of these regions in a *longue durée* perspective. These themes include patterns of social development, cultural history, and everyday life from the Reformation through the Enlightenment to modernity; problems of modernization, backwardness, and unequal development; modern ideologies; empires and imperial structures, nationhood, and the nation-state; and varieties of authoritarianism such as fascism and communism, and their historical legacies. In order to foster a critical spirit of inquiry and high standards of verification, the empirical themes are supplemented by a solid training in comparative methodology.

Given the long history and political connotations of regional geographical denominations, the label 'Central Europe' necessitates certain clarifications. In our usage, it refers to the vast historical space between Germany and Russia, on the one hand, and between the Baltic and the Mediterranean, on the other. For comparative purposes, we divide this large space into three subregions:

⁸ Maria N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford et al. 2009.

East Central Europe, Southeastern Europe (or the Balkans), and Eastern Europe. While largely heterogeneous, this space is characterized by a distinguishable geopolitical position (in the middle of the continent), by multiple imperial legacies—related mostly to the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, the Hungarian Kingdom, the Habsburg Empire/Austria-Hungary, and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in Central Europe; to the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires in the Balkans; and to the Russian Empire in Eastern Europe—, by a common recent communist past, and by common postcommunist challenges, marked by processes of transition from a command to a market economy, political transformations, and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic, and security organizations.

To promote their comparative research agendas, the two departments have initiated, supported, and hosted a large range of research, educational, and training activities, as well as published a number of scholarly works. In the Department of History, institutional activity in comparative history was first conducted within the framework of the CEU-HESP Comparative History Project, a four-year project (2006–10) that aimed at stimulating teaching and research on comparative history in universities in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. HESP is the acronym for the Higher Education Support Program (HESP) of the Open Society Foundations. The project organized three annual conferences and numerous workshops on comparative history, offered mobility grants to local researchers, and supported the establishment of new teaching programs on comparative history in universities in these regions. One example is a program set up at the Moldova State University in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova.

The study of the Balkans has been an integral part of our comparative explorations in regional history. The history of this complex and diverse region provides a fertile ground for testing new methodologies; its study necessitates interdisciplinary perspectives combining insights from history, oral history, political science, sociology, anthropology, law, and environmental sciences, among others. A 2006 international conference suggestively entitled ‘From the Balkans to Europe: Refocusing South-East European Studies’ aimed at countering the stigmatization of the Balkans as a realm of violence, setting the field on new comparative methodological foundations. In a further attempt to help overcome the stereotypes that still pervade the study of Balkan history, a recent editorial project coordinated by Pasts, Inc. Center for Historical Studies, CEU, entitled *Battling over the Balkans. Global Questions, Local Answers*, makes available, in English, excerpts from works by local historians in the Balkans.⁹ The volume concentrates on five controversial questions from the region’s pre-communist history: (1) pre-1914 Ottoman and Eastern Christian Orthodox

⁹ John Lampe / Constantin Iordachi, eds, *Battling over the Balkans. Global Questions, Local Answers*, Budapest et al. 2017 (forthcoming).

legacies, (2) post-1918 struggles for state building, (3) European economic and cultural influence in the interwar period, (4) violence and paramilitary forces in interwar and wartime political regimes, and (5) the fate of ethnic minorities during World War II.

With specialists in fields such as Late Antique, Byzantine, Habsburg, Russian, Islamic, and Balkan studies, CEU has also striven to provide novel and original interdisciplinary perspectives on the interplay of multiple imperial legacies in the region, and to set into conversation fields that have traditionally been considered separately, such as Balkan studies, Middle East studies, and Ottoman and Turkish studies. To this end, the Department of Medieval Studies has set up a focus on Byzantine studies, with the aim of studying the political, cultural, intellectual, and religious history of the Byzantine Empire from the seventh through the fifteenth centuries, especially in relation to the Balkans, the Romanian Principalities, and the Caucasus. In addition, in 2010, CEU started a major focus in Ottoman studies by appointing two new faculty members specializing in Ottoman studies, one in the Department of History, the other in the Department of Medieval Studies. This was followed in 2016 by another appointment in Modern Turkish History. In conjunction with these appointments, CEU's library has contributed special funds to consolidate its collection in Ottoman and Modern Turkish studies. We see Ottoman history as a large cultural umbrella providing a forum for intense dialogue and exchange across cultural, linguistic, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries. The approach of the new focus has therefore been to study, teach, and research Ottoman history in its entirety, inclusive of all the peoples and cultures that comprised the empire and its successor states. What makes us different from other programs is that we focus primarily on the Ottoman and Turkish presence in Rumeli (i.e. the Balkans), Central Europe, and the greater Mediterranean world in general. In regard to the latter, in 2010 CEU established the Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies (CEMS), heir to the Center for Hellenic Traditions (2004/5-2009/10), with a mandate to promote the study of the eastern Mediterranean and its hinterlands, from antiquity to the end of the Ottoman period. In view of these foci, we are committed to recruiting students from Turkey and various Balkan and European countries (such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and the Ukraine), as well as from the US, applying for Ottoman and Modern Turkish studies or for Balkan studies in general. We encourage our students to study not only modern Turkish and Ottoman but also modern Balkan and/or other European languages to better historicize the role of Byzantine, Ottoman, and Turkish cultures in the region. To enable comparative work, starting in 2010/11, students are able to take intensive, high-level courses in the region's classical and modern languages within the newly created Source Language Teaching Group. The offering includes ancient

and modern Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, and Ottoman, as well as Russian, Hungarian, and modern Turkish.

In addition to teaching, our efforts to integrate more firmly the region's national histories into common European and global frameworks has fostered novel transnational research perspectives. Stemming from the tradition of comparative history and comparative politics, these frameworks promote new methodologies on 'shared', 'connected', or 'relational' history, legal and political transfers, and *histoire croisée*. These cross-historical approaches place the analytical emphasis on the multiple levels of interactions at various subnational, national, and supranational levels. The flagships of these research activities in the two departments are four major European Research Council (ERC) grants in historical studies, two of which specifically focus on the Balkans. The first ERC project, 'Entangled Balkans', coordinated by Prof. Roumen Daskalov, CEU and New Bulgarian University, Sofia (2009/14), sought to treat the modern history of the Balkans from a relational perspective in terms of shared and connected pasts. This innovative project has resulted in a series of four volumes entitled *The Entangled History of the Balkans*.¹⁰ It is expected that this path-breaking book series will further stimulate transnational studies on the Balkans. It might be useful to mention, in this respect, that the first two volumes are already available in Bulgarian translation. Another ERC project, entitled 'The Fashioning of a Sunni Orthodoxy and the Entangled Histories of Confession-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th-17th Centuries' (2015-2020), initiated by Tijana Krstić, investigates the evolution of confessional discourses in the Ottoman Empire in a longer perspective that spans the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Another major field of research and teaching is that of contemporary history. The rich and still under-researched historical experience of the Balkans in the twentieth century—marked by massive demographic and sociopolitical transformations, attempts of large-scale social engineering under fascist and communist dictatorships, and processes of democratization and European integration—presents certain particularities that makes this area a laboratory for comparative methodologies. Until recently, the study of contemporary history

¹⁰ See Roumen Daskalov / Tchavdar Marinov, eds, *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 1: National Ideologies and Language Policies, Leiden 2013; Roumen Daskalov / Diana Mishkova, eds, *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 2: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions, Leiden 2014; Roumen Daskalov / Alexander Vezenkov, eds, *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 3: Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies, Leiden 2015; Roumen Daskalov / Diana Mishkova / Tchavdar Marinov / Alexander Vezenkov, eds, *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 4: Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations, Leiden 2017. For a review on vols. 1-3 cf. Sabine Rutar, R. Daskalov u.a. (Hrsg.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, *H-Soz-Kult*, 4 February 2014, <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-21253>; and Sabine Rutar, *Sammelrezension: R. Daskalov u.a. (Hrsg.): Entangled Histories of the Balkans I/III*, *H-Soz-Kult*, 20 July 2016, <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-22131>. A review of volume 4 is forthcoming by the same author at the same place.

has remained encapsulated in national historiographical traditions, a situation leading to academic isolation and politicization. The downfall of the communist system in 1989 and the liberalization of historical discourses, the opening up of new archival collections for scientific research, the end of the Cold War, the intensification of academic exchange, and interaction between local and foreign scholars have all challenged scholars to experiment with new transnational approaches to the study of contemporary history. Against this background, CEU's Contemporary History Platform provides a meeting ground for comparatively minded scholars from various academic disciplines working on the history of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries (1900 to the present) in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, within the broader frameworks of European and world history. The platform develops connections to a wide range of academic networks, such as the European Network for Contemporary History (EurhistXX), made up of research centers specializing in contemporary history.

In conclusion, over the last twenty-six years, the CEU's Department of History and Department of Medieval Studies have emerged as leading research centers on transnational history, with a particular focus on Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean area. Yet our focus on historical regions, in general, and on Southeastern Europe as a particular object of research, is not simply a subject matter informed by the academic tradition of 'area studies'. We believe that concepts of historical regions provide huge analytical potential for scholarly research; yet they should be approached never in isolation (because that might result in parochialism) but in relation to wider, indeed global, questions and concerns, and from the perspective of meaningful, up-to-date scholarly debates in various disciplines.¹¹ That is why, while focusing on area studies, our research agenda and degree-writing programs increasingly emphasize the study of local, national, and regional topics in a global context. This can only be done while paying careful attention to the cultural heritage in which CEU is located. CEU's local rootedness gives us a comparative advantage, as broader global tendencies are particular expressions of local experiences. Due to its strategic position at the 'crossroads' of Europe, Central Europe in general, and Hungary in particular, have always been at the forefront of political and societal changes in Europe, functioning as a bridge between East and West. Thanks to its location in Budapest, CEU has been uniquely positioned to take advantage of this cultural environment to create a place of research and learning that is truly transnational and interdisciplinary in character. We very much hope to continue our activity in our home.

¹¹ See Maciej Janowski / Constantin Iordachi / Balázs Trencsényi, Why Bother about Historical Regions? Debates over Symbolic Geography in Poland, Hungary and Romania, *East Central Europe* 32, no. 1-2 (2005), 5-58.

What We Stand For. A Space for Self-Reflection

Adela Hîncu

In summer 2012, a small group of CEU history graduates, scattered across Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe for their holidays or fieldwork, photographed themselves holding the sign 'Free Čačak' in celebration of a joke they had shared repeatedly while pursuing their MA. The invented secession of the Serbian district of Čačak/Ceaceac/Csácsák/Tschatschak—a region overwhelmingly inhabited by Serbs—had become, for us, an absurd and versatile shorthand for nationalisms of all kinds in the region. In acknowledgment for holding up the sign in Revolution Square in Timișoara, Romania, I was thanked for proving the Romanians' commitment to the secession cause and was ensured it would not be forgotten when the time came for the Transylvanians to break their bonds. The sign appeared in photographs taken in front of the Serbian embassies in Kiev and Bucharest, the portrait of our university's founder at CEU, the Mathias Corvinus House, the amphitheatre in Pula, the streets of Lviv, the center of Belgrade, and Istanbul. 'Čačaka un Brīvībai' ('Čačak and Freedom'), reads the inscription on the Freedom Monument in Riga in one of the photographs.

The story of Čačak's fight for secession (it might as well have been Severodvinsk or Vaslui) resonated with the work of deconstruction we were all doing with respect to our nation-building foundational narratives: cultural, political, and historical. At the same time, it also spoke to a crucial sense of responsibility that we shared in understanding our region from each other's perspectives, and also by learning each other's languages. There must be countless stories such as this one in the history of our department, and of our university, which have provided over the years a space for such responsible irreverence. It also allowed us to rehearse the political thinking behind some of the most spectacular historical arrangements in the region, some of which were yet to happen.

This is partly made possible by the engagement with historiography in all its guises, postmodern penchant for irony and play included. It subsists on a constant exchange of information about our region, which requires an appreciation of strangeness, and estrangement, too, as well as empathy and historical imagination. As for the work of reconstruction, which we attempt in our theses as much as in everyday interactions, it rests on our ability and willingness to allow conversation—which also means seeking and giving space to voices that have not been heard in the past or that have been marginalized in the present.

For many, this is at the same time a work of self-emancipation from the economic, social, ethnic, and cultural hierarchies played out within regions, within Europe (variously defined), and as part of global regimes of inequality. For those who shared their experience with me, the formative challenge was

not having to change one's deepest convictions (the always unfulfilled threat—and promise—of propaganda) but acknowledging the social responsibility for self-reflection. One might have to face their own ethnocentric biases when part of an ethnic minority attuned to the ubiquitously reproduced majority bias. Translating one's critical position, self-evident in its local context, might require first defending the object of criticism itself. Solidarities based on the shared social experiences of transition, austerity, or war, and class identification, might first develop in the process of social mobility; at the same time, the diversity of social backgrounds in a transnational setting might highlight unacknowledged local privilege. In a post-Yugoslav, postwar setting, the constant play of divergence and identification calls for shared methodologies. Conversely, for those investing in the aspired-to neutrality of methodology, it simultaneously makes overt enduring inequalities and the layered reproduction of cultural hierarchies within and outside Europe.

As an MA and PhD student in the Department of History for the past six years, I have found it to be a privileged place for such self-reflection, not just as a personal but also as a shared social practice across different generations. In his last lecture at the Department of History in 2014, the late Professor Jacek Kochanowicz reflected on his academic career as 'an escape into history'—not a flight—the carving of space to understand the present within the various academic, social, and political arrangements that he had lived through. Many of the research topics pursued by my colleagues require the same boundary work, both within their respective academic traditions and also within the existing epistemic assumptions of their field. This need not be done in isolation, but with support and inspiration from others passionately immersed in seemingly remote research. To conclude this article, I would like to briefly discuss the example of one of the many fields of research pursued in our department—by necessity, the one I followed the closest—the history of state socialism in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe.

My own research is on socialist Romania, a period I have only known because of the strange quality of historical time to pass at different speeds across the region, and exceptionally slow where people are otherwise busy surviving poverty. 'There is just a small step from picking mushrooms to political activism', once joked Prof. Kochanowicz about the belief, in 1950s Poland, in the permeability of seemingly mundane collective actions to political engagement. This insight was largely lost to most of the local historiography of the state socialist period at the time, invested as it was in a region-wide drive for retroactive justice. Research into women's, workers', artists', and youth collectives in the region in the postwar period found a place, however, in our department. The conversation extends over several cohorts of students and across disciplines, and speaks to what are becoming, again, formative generational concerns. The

rediscovered interest in purposeful political engagement and in democratic, collective self-organization against oppressive political and socio-economic arrangements, we found, had its own history, fraught with hope, disillusionment, and an ethics of care and solidarity.

Research on practices of collective action has been coupled with interest in the political languages of the state socialist period and their postsocialist afterlife. This requires a collective work of translation across the different temporalities in the so-called Eastern Bloc, the insight and tools for which came from an impressive body of work on the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century intellectual discourses in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, and the ensuing five-volume collection of source texts and commentaries prefaced by Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček.¹² Among the most spectacular works of rediscovery inspired by it are feminist and women's rights discourses in the region, starting with the former Yugoslavia and extending through comparative, collaborative research to intellectual discourses across the Eastern Bloc.

Much of the work on state socialism is heavily based on painstaking archival research, which has proceeded in parallel to the opening (or, in some cases, closing) of repositories of documents from the recent past across the former Eastern Bloc. These have been in an asymmetrical but closely intertwined relationship. Almost every thesis I have read was simultaneously a reflection on the social practices of archiving and archival research, memory politics, the epistemology of the archive, and the historian's craft today. An ongoing conversation with students of the Department of History on issues of evidence, the production, collection, and classification of knowledge, truth and objectivity, and the role of different media, as well as the social embeddedness of archives, has also been sustained by the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, holders of the archives of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute. It can also happen, however, that a course with the title 'Archives of Living and Dead Things', already surrounded by mystery and promise, becomes mid-way a passionate discussion about the role of academic libraries, plans of the future CEU library in hand, where students meet the architects of a building several years from being built and make their own case for a self-reflexive institution, exhibiting its own conditions of knowledge production and democratizing knowledge through its practices.

Now sitting in the very building the future of which we imagined four years ago, surrounded by the many visible and invisible traces of the past, and ponder-

¹² The series is entitled 'Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770-1945' and comprises five volumes by varying editors, <http://www.ceupress.com/books/html/DiscoursesOfCollectiveIdentity.htm>.

ing yet again about its future, it is difficult not to appreciate the freedom that we enjoyed and that we stand for—the freedom to explore, to reflect, and to create.

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