

Introduction

This volume is a collection of articles pertaining to the sinuous topic of European Construction in the East-Central European area, throughout the 20th century and beyond, from a dual perspective, as decided by the intricate course of history: disintegration and integration. The contributions presented hereafter were upheld by their respective authors during the colloquium entitled “Disintegration and Integration in East-Central Europe (1919 – post-1989)”, which was hosted by the Faculty of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, in Cluj-Napoca, between the 20th and the 23rd of February 2013, in collaboration with the European Union’s Liaison Committee of Historians of European Integration.

The 27 scientific papers cover a broad range of perspectives that make up the main topic, which have been divided into four major sections, following the configuration of the aforementioned colloquium. Hence, the introductory article, signed by Wilfried Loth, performs a thorough investigation into the avatars of the broader Pan-European project in this part of the continent. On the other hand, the Rector of Babeş-Bolyai University, PhD Professor and member of the Romanian Academy Ioan-Aurel Pop, aims to provide a historical framework for the area that hosted this scientific event, namely the culturally and linguistically affluent region of Transylvania. Surprising projects aimed at the ideal of European Integration stem from the history of this place, which render the city of Cluj-Napoca, located in the very heart of Transylvania, an optimal location for discussing the origins and outcomes of European Construction in the complex area of East-Central Europe.

The first section of the volume is designed under the auspices of the End of Empires, i.e. the tumultuous period surrounding the First World War and its aftermath, one that ultimately led to the creation of what we have referred to as “a new balance” on the stage of European affairs and beyond. The interwar period fostered numerous attempts at cooperation amongst states in Central and Eastern Europe, which our contributors have analysed from a plethora of viewpoints. Amongst the latter we should outline endeavours of regional cooperation, such as the “Little Entente”, skilfully presented by Lucian Leustean. The synergy between integration projects in the East and West relies on multiple similarities, one of which being the ideal of peace, promoted on both sides of the continent, as proved by Gérard Bossuat. An evident merit of this collection of ideas is not to have left aside the prominent economic perspective, which ultimately turned out to be the driving force of European Construction, albeit the balance between the political and the economic realms has always yielded controversy, in terms of primacy. Thus, Sylvain Schirmann takes the focus on the interwar period to the level of agricultural regionalism and investments, which played a major role in the development

of East-Central Europe at the time, given the predominantly agrarian character of the vast majority of states in the area. Moreover, the undersigned identifies the principles of what we are entitled to call a genuine paradigm of economic development in the region, during the 1920s and 1930s, which relied massively on foreign investments, a veritable linker between the two sides of the continent, as it emerges from the case study presented on the topic of French capital in the Romanian economy. Last, but most certainly not least, two interesting contributions by Vladimír Gonč and Roumiana Preshlenova have the merit of explaining the framework for cooperation in East-Central Europe in the interwar period, whilst assessing the feasibility of projects stemming from the Czechoslovakian area and the Balkans, respectively.

The second section of the volume follows the course of history, moving beyond the atrocities of the Second World War and the dissolution of the so-called Nazi Empire, in order to focus its attention on the modelling of a new “Empire”, in the Eastern part of the European continent. Its existence, spanning the interval between 1945 and 1989, triggered the particularly intricate phenomenon generally referred to as the Cold War, marked by the unnatural separation of the Eastern and Western sides of the continent by an Iron Curtain. The alternatives provided by the Soviet Bloc to the much more effective Marshall Plan nevertheless proved to be resourceful and definitely worthy of in-depth scientific analyses. Therefore, initiatives such as that of the European Movement in 1952 attempted to sketch valid perspectives for the future of this dynamic area, as outlined by Gergely Fejérdy. From an economic standpoint, the parallel development of the Comecon and the European Economic Community exhibits notable differences and approaches to successful integration, all of which are pertinently analysed by Nicolas Badalassi. Furthermore, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance manifested a series of trends that can only be deemed autarkic, in the opinion of Jerzy Łazor and Wojciech Morawski, with complex economic consequences on the entire Eastern Bloc, whose prosperity and overall level of economic development began to lag behind the more dynamic Economic Community under construction in the West, beginning with the Treaties of Paris and, chiefly, Rome. As case studies illustrating the various levels of economic integration in the area of the continent that interests us, the volume boasts two interesting perspectives, namely the exchange between East and West resulting from the Italian-Polish relations, analysed by Sara Tavani, on the one hand, and the question of monetary integration, portrayed in the controversy over the transferable rouble, pictured by the research of Janusz Kaliński and Łukasz Dwilewicz, on the other hand.

The end of communism and the beginning of the so-called transition in East-Central Europe have prompted us to include a separate section dedicated to the New Europe and its attempts at integrating into the European Union, thus marking the historic end of division on the continent. Several of the contributions paint the

picture of accession endeavours by various states in the area, so as to underline the challenges arising in the process, as well as the contributions of the latter to a reunified Europe. A case in point is previewed by Michael Gehler, who performs an analysis of revolutions in East-Central Europe, from the viewpoint of the international community and, in particular, Austria, boasting the preliminary framework for comprehending the future course of action undertaken by the states in the region. The complex dossier engendered by Yugoslavia holds an esteemed place in this chapter, thanks to the research conducted by Benedetto Zaccaria, whilst Serbia's perspectives of European integration are weighed in the balance by the introspective study signed by Branislav Radeljić. Once the way to integration became paved, examples of more or less successful endeavours are provided in ample analyses, such as the one performed by Georgi Dimitrov, on the cases of both Romania and Bulgaria. An additional perspective lies within the framework of the Visegrád Group, whose contribution to the process of integration of not only Poland, but also the rest of its members, is pinpointed through numerous pertinent qualitative analyses performed by Ewa Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka. This context would be incomplete in the absence of the transatlantic partnership, which translates to cultural relations, as well as to the issue of security, in the view of Marius Jucan and Michael O'Neill, respectively. To elaborate on the subject, Valentin Naumescu brings into the equation current matters pertaining to the economic agenda and strategic security, so as to further this ample section dedicated to the relations between the European Union and the United States, with a particular focus on the role played by East-Central Europe in this mutually beneficial partnership.

Needless to say, the integration of East-Central Europe into the European Union would have been inconceivable without the support of the West and its willingness to pave the way for enlargement, in an ultimate feat of what we may perhaps call historical reparation. For this reason, the final section of the book is dedicated to the support provided by Old Europe to the newest member states of the EU, albeit this endeavour has met with considerable hurdles, revolving around the institutional, economic and identity crises of modern European Construction. Our contributors have provided two important studies focusing on the Italian and German attitudes towards Eastern enlargement, thanks to the research of Antonio Varsori and Wichard Woyke, respectively. Nevertheless, in the intricate context fostered by Euroscepticism, opt-out mechanisms and institutional dysfunctions, the prospects of differentiated integration are looming on the horizon, as it has been accurately portrayed by Georgiana Ciceo in her original article, centred on the idea of "hard core Europe". The overview of the current state of affairs within the European Union would certainly be incomplete without a comprehensive approach to the crisis it is experiencing, whose roots may be traced to the very essence of the European Model. A welcome scientific contribution by Iordan

Gheorghe Bărbulescu and Andra-Maria Popa explores the core of this peculiar phenomenon and paints a realistic picture of a potential outcome of the current crisis. Ovidiu Pecican then conducts an interesting exploration of the universe of Emil Cioran. The ending of this book has been entrusted to Alberto Gasparini, whose exploration of civil societies and social classes within the European Union at this time enables the author to propose a plethora of scenarios which are likely to draw the guidelines of future European Integration, moving along the sinuous and unpredictable path to political union.

This historical thread, pursued due to the research of reputable scholars in the area of European Integration, has the merit of providing a comprehensive insight into the state of integration of East-Central European countries. The chronological perspective adopted by the four sections of the book enables the reader to explore the roots of this phenomenon, the numerous obstacles that have arisen amid political and social turmoil, the various alternative models proposed by the dominant political class and, ultimately, the option for reconstructing a united continent. The thesis of the Two Europes, deeply rooted in the interwar period, witnesses a recalibration following the collapse of the dreaded Iron Curtain, with the emergence of a New Europe, in a quest for identity and recognition. The synergies between the latter and the more experienced Western part of the continent in terms of integration have enabled the European Union to become stronger, more united and more representative in a world driven by globalisation, with the fresh empowerment of a regained East-Central part, overflowing with ambition, eagerness to make a stand, but also with challenges and facing a long way ahead before it achieves its ambitions.

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