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Is History Doomed to Divide or May It Unite? The Role of Memory in Shaping International Relations in Central Europe

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Abstract. The main research question is whether history is doomed to divide or whether it may unite. The author argues that, on the one hand, the rejection of the concept of truth in historiography may lead to treating history as a reservoir of selective argument in political struggles. In this sense, history will always divide. However, on the other hand, truth may be achieved. Scholars have several ways to test how far from the truth is a statement concerning history. There are six basic rules to test it, which are discussed in the article. The concept of national identity, culture perceived as the backbone of national identity and the regional co-operation context are examined.

Keywords: *memory, national identity, Central Europe.*

Anotacija. Pagrindinis tyrimo klausimas – ar istorija pasmerkta skaldyti, o gal atvirkščiai – gali suvienyti? Autorius teigia, kad, viena vertus, tiesos sąvokos atsisakymas istoriografijoje gali paskatinti istoriją traktuoti kaip selektyvių argumentų rezervuarą politinėse kovose. Šia prasme istorija visada skaldys. Kita vertus, tiesa gali būti pasiekta. Mokslininkai turi kelis būdus patikrinti, kiek toli nuo tiesos yra teiginys apie istoriją. Egzistuoja šešios pagrindinės tikrinimo taisyklės, kurios aptariamos straipsnyje. Nagrinėjama nacionalinio tapatumo samprata, kultūra, suvokiama kaip nacionalinio tapatumo pagrindas, ir regioninio bendradarbiavimo kontekstas.

Esminiai žodžiai: *atmintis, tautinis identitetas, Vidurio Europa.*

Introduction

In dealing with the role of memory in international relations one is surrounded by concepts that are hard to define, almost impossible to measure and whose influence evades precise description. According to Paul Riceour, human consciousness is based on memory which allows to anticipate intentions. Therefore, memory is the foundation of human consciousness and human relations. The French philosopher provided some fundamental reflections on memory and on social aspects of memory politics, so his ideas may be very useful in the forthcoming considerations.

Another concept frequently used in reflections on memory politics is identity. It may be defined as the essence of a human being or a social group. In the case of inhabitants of a state, things get more complicated. The legal status of citizens is more or less clear, while the rest of the population may include migrants of various kinds. The society is more of a demographic or sociological concept, while the nation may be understood either as members of the state in purely political terms or in terms of its cultural identity. The concept of a nation has been compromised by 20th-century nationalism but still is often used in terms of national identity. Things get more complicated when some of the citizens belong to a national minority not attached to the national identity of the majority of citizens.

Memory is always, to some extent, social. Francis Fukuyama has recently contributed a lot to the analyses of national identity referring to the Greek notions of *thymos*, meaning, according to Plato, this part of the human soul that desires dignity, *isothymia*, meaning the desire for equal respect with others, and *megalothymia,* meaning the desire to supremacy. Nevertheless, the national identity is a very complex phenomenon, that, apart from the three components mentioned by Fukuyama, also includes a fundamental human necessity to belong to a group. This necessity may be explained by the need for safety and attachment to common values, people or even places.

Therefore, the national identity differs from the identity of a civil society. In most cases, the national identity is based on the common language, religion, history and statehood. However, there are nations created by some and not all of these determinants. The Americans are united by the English language, common history and statehood, while the Swiss are defined by history and statehood but they use various languages and belong to various denominations. Countries that emerged as a result of the decay

of colonial systems in Africa, Asia and even Latin America have specific national identities. In most European countries, such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain or Portugal, the national identity is still mostly shaped by the language, history, and to a diminishing role by religion, and this identity is expressed in many occasions, not only during the association football World Cup matches. This also refers to the countries of Central Europe, whose national ambitions have been oppressed by their neighbours, sometimes even for centuries.

Memory is the foundation of the national identity. Is it a common memory or a sum of individual memories? Although there are theories based on the existence of common memory, it is very hard to prove, so the assumption made here is that individuals belonging to a nation share some but not all elements of the language, religion and historical tradition constituting national identity. However, Riceour has rightly stressed that individual memories are influenced by the common tradition. This is due to school education and participation in public manifestations of national tradition.

The self-image of a nation tends to be improved if not sacralised. This process is connected with the degree of national success. But there is no simple correlation between the self-image of a nation and its fate. National chauvinism may be a product of imperial successes but also of failures and disasters. It seems the final result largely depends on the political culture of a nation and on the way it was shaped in recent history. Therefore, the politics of memory is a very important factor in the creation of national identity and in international relations. It really matters how we shape our national traditions. This is why nations establish institutions that are aimed at protecting these elements of the national tradition which they consider particularly important. Obviously, the politics of memory is politics and thence the danger of ideologisation of the national memory. This appears especially important in confrontation with the national memory of other nations.

Nevertheless, Ricoeur's phenomenological approach is not sufficient to explain what we should remember and what we should forget and why. In other words, the question remains what the goals of remembering and forgetting are. Advisability or expediency is almost a taboo in contemporary literature on national memory. But the way societies remember is crucial in fixing the goals of politics of memory. Riceour's stress on truth is, however, very important. Most historians would raise doubts about whether a historical narrative may be true. But the opposite statement is even more dangerous. If historians and politicians are not guided by the pursuit of truth, then what is their ultimate reason? Success? At all costs? We shall come back to this issue at the end. The purpose of this article is to point at the risks in specific political uses of historical facts and to suggest methods of avoiding these risks.

National identity in Central Europe

Considering the national identity, one immediately comes across the question of the content of memory. In Central Europe in particular, this content is shaped by a number of specific factors. Each of these nations has a number of historical landmarks which shape their identity. In the case of Poland any schoolboy or schoolgirl will refer to the baptism of Prince Mieszko in 966, to the establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Union by virtue of the marriage of Saint Hedvig d'Anjou and Jogaila, to the Golden Age of noble democracy, the partitions of Poland-Lithuanian in late 18th century, the national risings of the 19th century, restoration of Poland after 1918, the Second World War disaster, the Sovietisation of Poland after 1945, the "Solidarity" trade union and restoration of freedom after 1989.

A similar statement of historical landmarks in the case of Lithuania will be different and to some extent competitive with the Polish one. Lithuanian schoolchildren would rather refer to the first mention of the name Lietuva, to the Gediminas dynasty, the Polonisation of the Lithuanian gentry, the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, national risings, creation of the Lithuanian republic after 1918, the conflict with Poland over Vilnius/Wilno, German and Soviet occupation, anti-Soviet guerilla and the 1989 Baltic Chain of Freedom. While the Poles fondly remember Saint Hedvig, Nicolaus Copernicus, Tadeusz Kościuszko, Fryderyk Chopin and Adam Mickiewicz, the Lithuanians would rather remember Vytautas Magnus, Kristijonas Donelaitis and Adomas Mickevičius (their version of Adam Mickiewicz). In the introduction to his poem "Pan Tadeusz" the latter wrote "O Lithuania, my homeland!" but he wrote it in Polish and this is a problem for both the Poles and the Lithuanians.

Similar statements of historical landmarks may be quoted in all other cases. Such a statement will be long in the case of the Hungarians who frequently refer to their inroad into the region in the 9th century, King Stephen the Saint, kings and princesses of the Middle Ages, the King Matthias Library, the Battle of Mohacs, the national rising of 1848, Ferenc Liszt and other famous artists, the Ausgleich of 1867 and the disaster of the 1920 Peace of Trianon. The list of Romanian national heroes may be a little shorter, but the Romanians perceive the Treaty of Trianon as their success, and they are proud of their language based on Latin foundations. The Romanian memory frequently goes back to ancient Dacia and the Roman conquest of the Dacian principality. The ethnic history of Transylvania will perhaps always divide the Hungarians and the Romanians but the membership of both countries in the NATO and the European Union eased the conflict, and the Three Seas Initiative may make things even easier.

There will always be different perceptions of some of these national heroes. The famous Slovak poet and dramatist Hviezdoslav was born as Paul Ország into a Hungarian noble family. Nikola Zrinski was a Croat aristocrat but later, as Count Zrinyi, he became a hero of the Hungarian struggles against the Ottoman Empire. Just like

the Poles and Lithuanians have a different perception of Mickiewicz, Slovaks, Croats and Hungarians will always differ on Hviezdoslav or Zrinyi. However, the intensity of the emotions involved is slowly reduced due to the multilateral cooperation within the existing international institutions and within newly developed projects, such as the Three Seas initiative. At the end of the day: what good is it fighting over Mickiewicz or Zrinyi where there are wider prospects in sight? Heroes of national memory may after all become heroes of a joint memory.

Due to the foreign domination, in some cases continued for a very long time, the memory of most nations of this region has been suppressed and thence deformed by outside oppressors. Social tensions frequently survived between the dominating identity and the minority group, especially if it constituted the former oppressors. Sometimes in the course of a longer period of time, the bad memory may disappear, as in the case of the Estonian and Latvian Germans who are long gone. But this bad memory is more vivid if the former oppressor group survived among the dominating nations, as in the case of the Russians in the Baltic states. In the case of Lithuanian Poles or Slovak and Romanian Hungarians, these animosities disappear more quickly because of the common membership in NATO and the European Union, nevertheless, the relationship between these groups and the Lithuanian, Slovak and Romanian majorities remains a very subtle matter.

The national identity is sometimes mixed up with the national character. The very substance of the national character has been questioned by such authorities as Antonina Kłoskowska, Jerzy Topolski and Hieronim Kubiak. An important exception was Jan Szczepański, who accepted "historically created, typically Polish attitudes, patterns of behaviour and hierarchies of values". Noteworthy, one of the promoters of the term "national character", Edmund Lewandowski, failed to give his own definition of the term. He supported his analysis of the national character of the Germans, Russians, Jews, and even Bosniaks not by sociological inquiries but by statements of a literary nature.

Whereas the national character implies the existence of a psychological community, the term "national identity" refers to an objectified memory of people belonging to a community treated as a nation. Therefore, the term "national identity" will be preferred in this study. However, this does not mean that human memory is perfect or that it is resistant to myths and self-suggestions. An expert in Romanian history, Lucian Boia, found that myths are frequently used and abused for political reasons, as for instance in the case of the Hungarian-Romanian disputes concerning Transylvania. While the Romanians claim to be descendants of the Dacians who ruled in the Carpathian bend in Roman times, the Hungarians claim to have ruled in this region since they came in the 9th century and found only scattered groups of nomads. The historical reality of Transylvania is more complicated then both stories. However, since politics is about power, myths may be dangerous if directed against "the other side". In this case it will

not matter if a myth refers to any historical reality or not, as long as it is used according to the political logic of power.

Due to their peripheral location in Europe and to their complicated history between Germany, Russia, Austria and Turkey, nationals of East Central or Central Europe feel a rather strong need to express their national identity. Three categories may be distinguished here. There are people for whom the national identity is a supreme feeling, while others recognise it as an important part of their outlook or downgrade this feeling. The first group may be called nationalists or national chauvinists, the second group are patriots and the third group are cosmopolites. As history shows, extreme nationalism may be dangerous while the third group, accepted as they are, should not provoke the patriots to become chauvinists.

There is a widespread opinion that Central Europe is a cradle of nationalism. This opinion ignores the fact that nationalism as a political ideology was born in France and Britain and that it is a common phenomenon all over the world. At the same time "nationalism" is an ambiguous word. For some people it may mean a justified attachment to a state, for others, it may be an ugly national chauvinism. This Janus-faced nature of nationalism is also present in Central Europe. At the time of dynastic states what consolidated state was loyalty to the ruler. With the growth of mass societies in the 19th century, more and more conscious of their ethnicity, nations handicapped by history in terms of state formation, such as the Germans, Italians, Greeks, Poles and others, developed a kind of "romantic nationalism", also called in Italy the "Risorgimento nationalism". The climax of the era of "romantic nationalism" came with the Spring of Nations and was perhaps best expressed by the Polish battle cry "for our freedom and yours". In this atmosphere, some of the Central European nations, such as the Czechs, Hungarians, Serbs or Bulgarians experienced a national awakening, while others, such as the Estonians or Latvians were born as modern nations. Since most of these nations, such as the Poles, Czechs and the Baltic nations, failed to satisfy their aspirations or, as in the case of the Germans and Italians, were eager to make up for the lost time, the "romantic nationalism" changed into integral nationalism which put own national feelings on top of the cultural agenda but also became a political tool in the struggle against real or imagined enemies. Although it cannot be compared with the horrors produced by the integral nationalism of the Nazi German Third Reich, persecution of national minorities in independent Central European states between the two world wars show the dangers of integral nationalism. On the other hand, the economic nationalism of these nations between the wars is sometimes justified even by critics of integral nationalism.

A strong national identity is also typical for the Central European nations that emerged from under Soviet domination. It ended up with a tragic outburst of integral nationalism in the Balkans, resulting in a war and horrible atrocities. The Serbian and Albanian nationalist feelings are still a great danger to peace, while Croat nationalism

has been moderated to the degree that allowed Croatia to join NATO and the European Union. Elsewhere integral nationalism is a marginal phenomenon. Whether integral nationalism in Central Europe or elsewhere may grow again as a political instrument is an open question. The recent outburst of Russian chauvinism in the shape of *russki mir*, surprised many authors. Considering the complicated historical relations of the Central European nations with their powerful neighbours, there is always a danger of using the past for the sake of a political future. In some cases the price for compensating bad memory in relations with big powers may be paid by smaller neighbors. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness that the overall safety and prosperity of the small and medium-sized Central European countries depend on easing neighbourly conflicts. This is clear when we analise the improvement of Polish relations with Lithuania and Ukraine, as well as Hungarian relations with Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania.

Nationalist feelings will always remain a potential political instrument. The fundamental question is how to deal with this instrument. Suppressing national feelings seems counterproductive and may even feed the fire. Common respect for a healthy degree of national identity is necessary. It may be achieved through a better understanding of different or even contradictory historical experience. In other words, it is necessary to treat national identity in terms of culture and not in terms of politics. Only then will the national identity play a positive role in politics.

Culture as the backbone of national identity

The term "culture" comes from Latin and was initially used in the context of cultivation. The first to give this term a wider meaning was Cicero who, in his "Tusculum Conversations" reflected on the "cultivation of the spirit". Afterwards the term "culture" was used no sooner than in the 17th century by Samuel Pufendorf who wrote about culture as a means to overcome barbarity. The first theoreticians of culture were the German philosophers such as Johan Gottfried Herder whose reflections resulted from his study of Central European identitites. In the 19th century the term "culture" was already used with reference to a wider spectrum of social phenomena. The 19th century considerations were often a result of the clash of civilisations of that time, that is from the confrontation of the colonisers and the natives. Matthew Arnold and William Butler Yeats used the term "culture" in the sense of the advancement of human nature.

The contemporary meaning of culture is a result of the development of sociology and anthropology. Some sociologists use this term in the sense of human abilities. Ellsworth Huntington defined this term as any subject, custom, idea, institution or way of thinking produced by people and transferred to other people. Contemporary social sciences use "culture" in the retroactive sense in order to show the development of individual and social behaviour. Comparative studies often show specific features of

national, regional or local patterns of behaviour in everyday life as well as in literature, arts and music. There is no universal definition of culture but one thing is clear: it is culture that makes people different from animals. John Paul II wrote that "all nations live by the products of their cultures".

In the classic handbook of sociology, Jon M. Shepard distinguished the "cognitive", "material" and "normative" dimensions of culture. Most of the scholars dealing with culture have traditionally distinguished "high" culture, including sciences, arts, literature and concert music from folklore. In the mass societies of the 20th-century "mass" culture developed including simplified products of literature, plastic arts and "pop" music" serving mostly entertainment. While traditionally it was folklore that frequently inspired "high" culture, recently "mass" culture seized everything and reduced folklore to unprotected scansens. Another important question is whether there is one culture or many cultures. Singular would stress things that are common in human experience, plural would stress differences. Many scholars stressed the nation-building role of culture.

The fact that East Central or Central Europe has not been precisely defined makes the tasks of the contemporary Three Seas Initiative somewhat easier since realisation of this project may to some extent ignore the historical obstacles and limitations. The region has been usually understood as located between Germany and Russia but the Black Sea countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, and the Adriatic countries, such as Croatia and Slovenia make things more complicated. Generally speaking, geography plays here a significant role in making some countries of the region more inward-looking and others more outward-looking. In early modern times, the distance from the Atlantic Ocean prevented the countries of the region from participating in the competition for colonies but in modern times the major geographic challenge resulted from German and Russian imperial plans. Recognition of East Central or Central Europe as a sphere of German and Russian influence has found indirect proof in the works by Western historians who simply ignored the early history of the region. For instance, in his best-selling book on the rise and fall of great powers, Paul Kennedy made no mention of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth although he published a map of the regions as of 1500 showing the size of this power.

The Three Seas Initiative and the national identity problems

One of the reasons why the Three Seas Initiative is surrounded with doubts is that the countries involved in this project have little in common in terms of their past and, what is worse, some of them may have to overcome bad memory in relation to their neighbours. If language, religion and history are the foundations of national identity, then each of the nations in question has been shaped in a different way. The Three Seas Initiative is a serious project and a challenge to the national identities in Central Europe

as well. It is to be seen to what extent different or conflicting national identities will impede realisation of the project or, the other way around, to what extent the common interest will ease these differences or conflicts.

There can be no doubt that history is the major factor that creates problems in Central Europe. In Roman times the borderline (*limes*) between the civilised world and the barbarians was on the Danube. In this case, contemporary Bulgaria, Hungary and the Balkans should be rated as the civilised world while the rest lay beyond along with Germany and Scandinavia. The barbarian migrations of early Medieval times dramatically changed the ethnic and cultural nature of Europe. New dynastic states, such as Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Hungary, Croatia or Lithuania, rose in East Central Europe only a little later than those of Western Europe. Christianity broke up into its Roman and Orthodox structures, while Eastern and Central Europe were invaded by the Mongol and Turkish invasions. These developments gave reasons to divide modern Europe into three parts: the Catholic and Protestant West, the Orthodox East dominated by Russia and Turkey, and the central part where conflicting interests of Germany, Austria, Russia and Turkey clashed and no political settlement was stable. Thence foreign domination and the continuing desire for freedom have become a strong common factor influencing national identities in the region.

Another common denominator of Central and Eastern Europe is its relative economic backwardness as compared to Western Europe. However, this is a relatively recent phenomenon. At the end of the 15ᵗʰ century, the economic prosperity of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy brought these areas to the level of economic development of Western Europe. Colonial conquests, trade benefits, urbanisation and commercialisation were strong incentives for economic modernisation of Western Europe but until the end of the 17ᵗʰ century, the economic progress was impeded by here religious wars and depopulation. It was not until the early stage of the industrial revolution that the substitution of labour by capital pushed West European economies forward while the remains of feudal relations in the countryside stopped progress in the Eastern part of the Old Continent. The Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Turkish domination was also an impeding factor. Central Europe sank into the "vicious circle of backwardness" which was even more devastating in the easternmost peripheries of Europe and under the Turkish yoke.

At the beginning of the 19ᵗʰ century, the whole of Central Europe was under the political control of Russia, Prussia, Turkey and the Habsburg Monarchy. The Balkan nations started to liberate themselves from Turkish domination, inheriting social and economic backwardness unknown in the West and the political culture of the lawlessness of Western Europe. It was hardly better in the territories controlled by Russia. If Western Europe may be called Europe A, the Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Croat and Slovene lands could be called Europe B, but countries emerging from under the Turkish yoke and still controlled by Russia should be called Europe C. As a result of World War

One countries of Europe B, including most of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, most of Romania, Yugoslav Croatia and Slovenia were liberated along with a part of Europe C including eastern Poland, Romanian Bessarabia, Bulgaria and the rest of Yugoslavia. The rest of Europe C, including Belorussia and Ukraine were located under the Soviet regime and a modern feudal system of command economy.

The Versailles system established after World War One proved to be unstable. In 1939 two totalitarian regimes—the German Third Reich and the Soviet Union—divided the whole of Central Europe, either by incorporation or by indirect control. Ultimately World War Two brought the whole area under Soviet control. The consequences of Sovietisation of Central Europe proved to be very far-reaching. Countries of the region were imposed a totalitarian political rule, overwhelming nationalisation, central command, as well as terror and propaganda that were the foundations of the Soviet system. Class hatred was recommended as a virtue that was to dominate the social and cultural life. Civic virtues were suppressed as "reactionary". The communist times left in the societies of the region a specific mentality combining passiveness and complaining with a sense of impunity among the elites. In brief, the Soviet Union kidnapped Central Europe into the Far East.

In the West citizens of the Soviet Bloc countries we treated as second-category Europeans. East Central Europe was studied as a part of "Soviet and East European Studies" as if the whole Soviet-controlled area was one. This attitude climaxed with the Sonnenfeld Doctrine in 1975: a high US official, Helmut Sonnenfeld claimed that in order to strengthen peace East Central Europe should be more closely connected with the Soviet Union. This was not only against the will but also against the nature of the countries of the Soviet Bloc. The communist glacier has not destroyed the memory and the identity of these countries. This refers not only to such deviations from the Soviet orthodoxy as the Yugoslav self-government system or the range of private agricultural property and the role of the Catholic Church in Poland. This refers to deeper layers of national identity. When the Soviet glacier retreated these deposits of national identity came out into the open. Under normal circumstances, these deposits are more and more visible and important despite the participation of the countries of the region in Euro-Atlantic structures.

The basic differentiae between the Central European countries are ethnic. The Poles, Czech and Slovaks are Western Slavs, the Slovenes, Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians belong to the South Slavonic family. The Belorussians and Ukrainians are Eastern Slavs. Although the Romanian language has been influenced by Slavonic and Hungarian vocabulary, it is basically a Romance language. The Lithuanians and Latvians speak Baltic languages, while the Estonian and Hungarian are Ugro-Finnish languages. Apart from the Serbs, Bulgarians, Belorussians and Ukrainians, all other nations use the Latin alphabet.

In terms of religious traditions, which are still important in some cases, there are similar differences. Estonians and Latvians belong to the Protestant tradition while the Lithuanians have been mostly Roman Catholic. In the Polish, Slovak, Slovene and Croat traditions Roman Catholicism is also dominant. On the other hand, the Czechs and Hungarians are divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants. At the same time, the Czechs are one of the most secularised European societies. Belorussians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Montenegrins are mostly Eastern Orthodox just like East Ukrainians, while West Ukrainians mostly belong to the Greek Catholic Church. In Romania, the Eastern Orthodoxy is mixed with the Greek Catholic tradition. Denomination marked ethnic frontiers in the case of the Poles, Belorussians and Ukrainians, Serbs and Croats, and the Jews all over the region. Although other factors mattered, denomination was not crucial in the case of Polish-Slovak, Polish-Lithuanian, Hungarian-Romanian and Hungarian-Slovak borderlands.

Most important problems result from very differentiated historical traditions in Central Europe. The Lithuanians, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians, and to some extent also the Romanians, may refer to early statehood. Nevertheless, the relations between these states were sometimes very complicated. Serious conflicts refer to the territories claimed by the neighbours on the grounds of certain periods in history. This is the case of Poland and Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, to a lesser degree Poland and Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, Hungary and Croatia and even Slovenia and Croatia. The fall of the Soviet control of Central Europe opened entirely new prospects for countries of the region. Despite widespread pro-independence feelings, people realistically thought of their limited capabilities and sought support in the West.

This is why some authors notice a phenomenon they call "self-colonization". In view of the fact that Western contemporary "modernisation" has not been rooted in Central Europe in any local tradition or imposed from abroad—Soviet "modernisation" was no pattern to follow—people of the region treat Western patterns without criticism and are ready to follow them without hesitation. This kind of "self-colonization" may be not only a result of the entry into Euro-Atlantic structures but also a reaction to the decades of Soviet colonisation which checked economic progress and tried to uproot cultural traditions.

The systemic transformation in Central Europe has brought a threat of unfreezing old conflicts but the common desire to join the Western security structures moderated these dangers. The "velvert divorce" of the Czech and Slovaks in 1993 may be quoted as a good example, while the decay of Yugoslavia has brought opposite results: a bloody war and delay in the westward march. After years most of the Balkan countries joined NATO but only Croatia and Slovenia managed so far to join the European Union.

The accession of some of the Central European countries into NATO and the European Union created new differences in the region. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova found

themselves in a "grey" security zone under growing Russian pressure and economic stagnation due to their own hesitations but also due to the German plan to somehow share the spheres of influence with Russia. From 2003 on, it was a clear plan of Berlin to increase its influence among the new member countries of the European Union at the cost of increased dependence on Russian power raw materials and leaving the East of Central Europe under Russian patronage. The Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 was a result of this shortsighted policy and a beginning of a new era in which Central European countries are to choose: either participation in the German plan or closer cooperation among themselves in the shape of the Three Seas Initiative or the Bucharest Nine. The Russian invasion of Ukraine not only increased the determination of this country to join the EU and NATO but also increased pro-Western feelings in the Western Balkans, Moldova and Belarus. So far, Belarus is under a strong grip of Lukashenka dictatorship but the Belorussian society seems to be ready to go West.

It seems that the changing fortunes in Central Europe are far from conclusion. This region probably will remain the East of the West and not the West of the East [1]. From the point of view of Western countries, this is understood in a specific way. The "Old Europe" frequently treats the new member countries of the European Union and NATO not only as a natural market for their advanced goods but also as poor cousins who should be told how to behave despite an apparent crisis of Western civilisation. To top it all, the German policy of approachment with Russia failed, so the countries of the region have to find their own ways. Under these circumstances, the Three Seas Initiative is a promising project, especially since it was supported by the United States.

Despite these favourable circumstances the Three Seas Initiative has serious short-comings: differentiation of social and economic potentials and, in some cases, conflicting identities. While the Estonians know very little of the Bulgarians and the Poles hardly know the Slovenes, the relations between some of the neighbouring countries are complicated by historical and territorial problems.

Conclusions

Reconciliation between nations is not only an academic question. The answer offered by politicians may be far from theoretical considerations. This boils down to the title question: is history doomed to divide or may it unite? The truth is that history may divide. This is one of the reasons that contemporary Europeans avoid discussing difficult historical questions. This is however an illusive solution. Oblivion opens the grounds for ignorance and ignorance allows for manipulation. The empty space in memory may be filled with some nonsense and lies. Some politicians may play with

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[1]   RUPNIK, Jacques. *The Other Europe*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988, 4 p.

the fire of nationalist feelings while others may believe that the common European memory may be constructed by downgrading or eliminating of national identities. Both are dangerous solutions. Drawing national feelings usually brings opposite results. This world is a forum of conflicting interests and national emotions. Politicians frequently use or abuse these emotions. Scholars are more likely to refer to the Christian idea of not doing to the neighbour what you do not want to be done to yourself or at least to the ethics of Immanuel Kant.

Is there a way to reach truth in historical analyses? People who deny the concept of truth in historiography are close to the politicians who understand history as a reservoir of selective argument in political struggles. In this sense, history will always divide. Although the whole truth about the past could only be achieved if we could reconstruct the whole past, scholars have a number of ways to test how far from the truth is a statement concerning history. Firstly, we need to precisely describe the subject, secondly, we need to complete reliable evidence, thirdly we need to measure the importance of facts, fourthly we need to avoid *pars pro toto* judgments, fifthly we need to define the criteria of judgement, sixthly we need to take into account the context of individual happenings, and, seventhly we need to use logics.

Therefore, should the politicians deal with history at all? We frequently hear that they should leave history to the historians. In fact, when resolutions concerning history are voted, they do not disclose the truth about history but rather the truth about those who vote. Since politicians usually pursue immediate or practical goals, they should see international cooperation as a positive goal and therefore follow the scholarly methods of reconciliation with the truth about the past. This may be useful when we think about the peaceful future and the feasibility of the Three Seas Initiative.

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Ar istorija pasmerkta skaldyti, o gal atvirkščiai – gali suvienyti? Atminties vaidmuo formuojant tarptautinius santykius Vidurio Europoje

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Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – atkreipti dėmesį į riziką, kylančią konkretaus politinio istorinių faktų naudojimo atveju, ir pasiūlyti būdų, kaip šios rizikos išvengti. Pagrindinis tyrimo klausimas – ar istorija pasmerkta skaldyti, ar gali suvienyti? Autorius teigia, kad, viena vertus, tiesos sampratos atmetimas istoriografijoje gali paskatinti istoriją traktuoti kaip atrankinių

argumentų rezervuarą politinėse kovose. Šia prasme istorija visada skirsis. Kita vertus, tiesą galima pasiekti. Kitaip tariant, išlieka klausimas, kokie yra prisiminimo ir pamiršimo tikslai. Tiesos sampratą istoriografijoje neigiantys žmonės artimi politikams, kurie istoriją supranta kaip selektyvių argumentų rezervuarą politinėse kovose. Šia prasme istorija visada skirsis. Nors visą tiesą apie praeitį būtų galima pasiekti tik tuomet, jei sugebėtume rekonstruoti visą praeitį. Mokslininkai turi keletą būdų patikrinti, ar teiginys apie istoriją yra toli nuo tiesos. Norint jį išbandyti, yra keletas pagrindinių taisyklių, kurios aptariamos straipsnyje. Pirma, turime tiksliai apibūdinti dalyką, antra, surinkti patikimų įrodymų, trečia, įvertinti faktų svarbą, ketvirta, vengti *pars pro toto* sprendimų, penkta, apibrėžti sprendimo kriterijus, šešta, atsižvelgti į atskirų įvykių kontekstą ir, septinta, naudoti logiką. Nagrinėjama tautinio tapatumo samprata, kultūra, suvokiama kaip tautinio tapatumo stuburas, bei regioninio bendradarbiavimo kontekstas.