

THE RENAISSANCE OF BALKAN STUDIES

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A BALKÁN-KUTATÁS RENESZÁNSZA

Összefoglalás

Megalakult a Balkán-tanulmányok Központja Budapesten 2005. októberében. A Központ virtuális kutató- és menedzserintézet („falak nélküli” intézet), amelynek a budapesti Európa Intézet keretében saját tudomány-szervezői, gazdasági és publikációs adminisztrációja van. A Központ a budapesti Európa Intézet, valamint az MTA Stratégiai Kutatások és az Európa-történelmi Kutatócsoport (MTA Társadalomkutató Központ) pénzügyi és infrastrukturális támogatásával jön létre. Márisult hozzá több akadémiai intézet, egyetemi tanszék és az alapítók a szakmai és vállalkozói közösség és egyének csatlakozását várják.

Jelen tanulmány röviden bemutatja a Balkán földrajzi, történelmi és kulturális sajátosságait, és megvilágítja a térség etnikai és vallási sokszínűségének történelmi hátterét. Emellett vázolni kívánja a térségre vonatkozó kutatások új irányait és a Balkán-kutatásban rejlő lehetőségeket, különös tekintettel annak európai integrációs vonatkozásaira.

Summary

In October 2005, the Center for Balkan-Studies had been established in Budapest. The Center is a virtual research- and management-institute (an institute without walls), operating within the Europe Institute, Budapest, having its own administration for scientific research, and a financial and publishing organization. The Center had been created with financial and infrastructural support by the cooperation of the Europe Institute Budapest on the one hand, the Strategic Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), and the Research Group for European History (Research Center for Social Studies of the HAS), on the other. Several academic institutions and university departments have already joined the project and the founders are expecting further adherence by experts and communities of entrepreneurs, as well as individual researchers.

The following paper aims to give a brief description about the geographical, historical and cultural characteristics of the Balkans, the historic background of its ethnic and religious diversity. It also strives to outline the new perspectives of research related to the balkans especially with regard to the European integration process.

South-Eastern Europe, Revaluation of the Balkans

Concerning our Concept of the Balkans

We understand South-Eastern Europe to be a region including the Carpathian Basin and the Balkans, the latter of which is stretching southeast from the Danube and the Carpathians.

All researches must begin with the determination of the boundaries of their subjects in space and time. This is especially important when the boundaries of time and the respective names of the subjects in question are disputed. This is even more important when we know that the names and times, as well as the geographic borders, will probably change as an outcome of the research. The focus of our study will be the area southeast of the Carpathian Basin, extending to the seas. We call this region 'the Balkans', a name created by a 19th century European geographer. (He borrowed the name of the Bulgarian Balkan-Mountains to name the entire region, and we continue the usage.) We use the geographical category that defines the northern boundary of the Balkans region as the line of the Rivers Drava and Sava, the Southern Carpathians and the River Danube. Thus, it includes the territories of today's Croatia and Greece and certain parts of Romania. But we also accept the narrower cultural-historical interpretation where the dividing factor is the Ottoman-Turkish occupation lasting for 400 years. (This precluded the major Western intellectual trends from the region, i.e. the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment.) Similarly, the division of the Western and Eastern (orthodox) Christianity became a cultural-regional determinant. (According to this interpretation Croatia belongs to Central Europe and Romania is to be ranked partly to Central Europe and partly to the Balkans.)

Naturally, we are familiar with the scientific and political disputes of the past 200 years, raging around the concepts of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans. We are also aware of the fact that the concept of the Balkans accepted by West European intellectuals, has not been simply a geographic term. It is a term of discrimination by which people, living to the west of the region, consider themselves more advanced, and living under „better“ political organization; this way they wanted to distinguish themselves from their southeastern neighbors. The label „Balkans“ has been synonymous with the „lack of culture,“ „political anarchy,“ a „cask of gun powder,“ and these derogatory notions continue to survive in intellectual circles even into our days. On the other hand, historians and politicians of the peoples living in the region of the Balkans liked to emphasize their belief that they are intellectually part of the technologically-economically more advanced Western nations, (or that they want to be such). This was the reason for their rejection of the label „peoples of the Balkans.“

In our usage the term „Balkans“ is not a category denoting certain qualities. For us, the Balkans region means a diverse geographic and social unit, both in its natural-geographic character and the ethnic and religious composition of the population and its settlement structure. The region's specific nature is determined by the geographic structure of the landscape, which largely contributed to the development of isolated small communities and the conservation of the ethnic and religious diversity. Its location, the fact that geographically it provides a connecting link between Europe and Asia Minor gives its unique character among the great regions of the continent. Its location determined – and continues to determine – its place in the world economy. Its location was also the reason for its role as a western border region for the Ottoman Empire for 500 years, a constant area of contact between the Holy Roman-German Empire and the Ottoman Empire. This period of 500 years of history determined – and continues to determine – the social composition of the area, and its ethnic-religious stratification. The consequence of this inheritance is the social polarization of the region, and the fact that its ethnic-religious differences are unique

for the European continent. The territory is populated by peoples of Roman catholic, Greek orthodox, and Muslim religions, and ethnically mixed populations. (Similarly to the ethnically mixed populations of the borderlands of the larger economic-political empires in contact with one another for centuries.) Paradoxically, the ethnic-religious complexity (the uniquely diverse culture of the area), had survived much better than those that had existed in Western Europe, because the Ottoman Empire was much more tolerant about ethnic and religious differences than were the Western- and Eastern European Christian states. This state did not de-nationalize peoples living in its territories as did the great European empires. As the result of their traditions, the peoples of various ethnicity and religions interacted much less with each other than did peoples in Western Europe.

The Concept of 'Historical Osmosis'

The diversity of religions and ethnicity, and the different customs of peoples living on the borderlands of cultures is a well-known fact. Such differences are evident in the Carpathian Basin, as well as in areas lying between Southern Europe and East Africa, and in the Near Eastern- and Central American lands. We are using the concept of „historical osmosis“ for this phenomenon.

The process of osmosis is well known in chemistry; it occurs between two substances touching at their outer reaches. The characteristics of the two substances become mixed while existing side by side. When this happens, they assimilate each other, are „married,“ or „live together“ by „moving to a joint settlement,“ and create a new quality. If they do not do so, then they will live in constant tensions. In Southeastern Europe, the coexistence, or osmosis of Western- and Eastern European peoples is a fact of life (this is true even for peoples of Near Eastern cultures).

The cultural diversity of the region is without parallel. Our forerunners considered this to signal the „backwardness“ of peoples living in the area; on the other hand, we are inclined to regard it as „developed differently“ from us. We are observing the multicolored cultures of the region with curiosity; wondering if the technical modernization of our age would respect such wonderful cultural diversity? We are wondering, whether the diverse ethnic groups that had been at war with each other for 600 years, could become a model of cultural diversity in the 21st century? The adherence to the European Union will undoubtedly speed up technical-infrastructure developments, the mobility of the population will accelerate, and this process will undoubtedly contribute to the dissolution of traditional communities. Traditions will also dissolve in everyday life and religious commitments will decline. Ethnic interaction will accelerate in the settlements and even within individual families. These processes will undoubtedly reduce ethnic-religious tensions. The question is, of course, „what will be the outcome of all these changes? „Would they result in what had occurred in the past 200 years in the Carpathian Basin, namely, in the case of the Hungarians? The outcome is a Hungarian nation, ethnically mixed in its origins, yet it had been able to create a Hungarian national culture and a national language? Or will the region be composed of cantons on the example of Switzerland, where the various linguistic-cultural communities are organized strictly in territorial-cultural units, but live side by side in exemplary state-associations? Or will they create a new territorial-administrative system? A system with which we are not yet cognizant?

The Eastern Extension of the European Union; Beyond the 2000-year-old Borders

The peoples of the Carpathian Basin and of the Danube River Valley had become part of a new sphere of interest of global culture and economics through the expansion of the European Union.

The eastern expansion of the Union is the greatest European enterprise of our times. On May 1, 2004, ten East European states had joined the Union, among them two states of the Carpathian Basin, Slovenia and Hungary. In April, 2005, the European Union signed an agreement with Bulgaria and Romania, projecting their admission to the Union in 2007. On October 3, 2005, negotiations for the same purpose have begun with Croatia and Turkey, and preparations began with Serbia–Montenegro for stabilization of the two joint states and their eventual admission to the Union. At the same time, surveys began (for Albania, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia–Montenegro, and Kosovo) to ascertain the extent that these states conform to conditions of admission to the Union, based on the agreements in 1993, arrived at Copenhagen, Denmark. The declaration of the leaders of the Union made it clear that currently they do not want to consider other states for admission.¹

Politics in Europe for the next two decades will be centered on two issues of global-historical significance. One of these will concern the position of Europe in the global economy and politics (USA, Near East, China). The other will be issues concerning Southeastern Europe and the Balkans. The extension of the European Union concerned, until now, territories that had been loosely or even closely connected for 2000 years to Western European or other integrating political units, (or cultural-religious organizations).² However, since 2004, the European Union had expanded beyond the territorial borders of the former Holy Roman Empire, and it continued to draw into its sphere other lands containing Western Christian cultures and traditional political institutions.

After 2007, the European Union will include societies that possess other political traditions and religious customs. Therefore, the years of 2004 and 2007 are historical turning points in the history of the European continent and its culture. The new lands will certainly have their impact on the future of the entire continent. They will also have an affect on the structure of the Union.

At the present time, 28 states are involved in the European integration process. If previous experiences were signals for the future, the new member states will have an active role in interacting with states bordering on the Union. (The name of this process is called „new and active neighborhood-policy.“) This also offers new opportunities for individuals, citizens of neighboring states, challenges for citizen-entrepreneurs, and intellectuals.

Carpathian Region, Balkans Area; Common Interests

The expansion of the European Union provides opportunities for peoples of the Carpathian- and Balkan-regions for participation in the global economic and cultural markets. Peoples and individuals of the region will therefore become partners and, at the same time, competitors.

New communities of interests may be formed in order to enable people to approach regional-, settlement-, and state-wide issues. Common interests of the region dictate that not only large regional investors, but local entrepreneurs as well should become winners in global economic integration, participants in the opportunities offered by the opening of local markets. It is a common interest to provide work and shelter for peoples now freely moving around in the region, and that the cultural products of the territory should be added to those of the various other cultures of the globe (cultural diversity). It is imperative

¹ Documents about these discussions were published on November 9, 2005.

² Maps drawn about the archeological finds of the Hallstatt-culture that had existed from 800 BC, covers almost perfectly the current map of the European Union. Cultures of common origin - mostly Western Christian in character - and territorial-administrative institutions had existed in these lands.

that, besides the products of the economic and cultural world market entering the region, our own cultural and economic endeavors should also be able to enter the world market.

There have always been common interests. Some of these included the handling of inter-state natural processes that respect no state borders, the development of a strategy for interaction between men and nature, environmental protection, transportation, the regulation of water management. Ethnic-political-religious obstructions have, for many centuries, impeded the recognition of such common interests. This was the reason why intellectuals and scholars have seldom shaped such common interests, not to speak of the politicians. But every right-thinking person knew that the production of food, the organization of capital investments and financial markets, the development of settlements, investments in infrastructures, would require the establishment of joint institutions. Common regional interests – we speak about this only at scholarly conferences – are to find solutions for social conflicts so characteristic of the region (including minority-policies) and public security.

The eastern expansion of the European Union will gradually abolish impediments in the way of the recognition of these issues. Consequently, new types of political-cultural associations should be created. It is likely that the creation of institutions monitoring these processes will accelerate and they will establish strategies available for the region's use; in an age of global warming, the region will probably suffer of droughts, which will demand new strategies for water usage and food production. Regional commercial and financial institutions will overtake the role of national and private concerns. The area will probably be one of the targets for European and Chinese-Arab marketing- and financial transactions. It will be necessary to create a common basis for regional politics in order to dissolve existing ethnic-religious and social conflicts, the conflicts between customs and behavior.

All these projects will necessitate the development of long-range politics that will have an impact on several generations.

Efforts to revitalize researches about South-Eastern Europe

Economic-military Interests and Research

With the expansion of the European Union, the Southeastern region of Europe will probably attract the interests not only of international investors and politicians, but also those of the scholars scrutinizing societies and cultures.

During the last millennium, the region has been a crossroad of military-strategic conflicts. These included the rift between Roman and Byzantine Christianity, and political alliances built on either (1054–1453); conflicts between Ottoman Islam and Western- and Orthodox Christianity (1453–1878), and, finally, the latest cold war between the Soviet and Western spheres of interests (1945–1992). Interests in the region naturally followed military-political affairs.

1878–1920. After the retreat of the Ottoman Empire the region aroused the interests of the British, German, and French researchers, as well as that of Austrian and Hungarian scholars. Thanks to this development, the traditional British interests (centered earlier on Greece), were now enhanced by German-Austrian-Hungarian explorations of history, archeology, folklore, and geographic research (1878–1920).

1920–1992. At the time of the extension of the Soviet sphere of influence (and the existence of Yugoslavia), interests in the region had been determined by relations with the Soviet Union. (1920–1992) This resulted in the global exploration of the conditions of Slavic peoples, and generated attention for Balkans studies, bringing about the establishment of research institutions, conferences, etc.

1992–2007. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, interests in and research about affairs of the region had collapsed. Research institutions were closed down, because the respective states no longer considered the support of experts in the region and their institutions and journals politically necessary. It is true that there have been a great many political analyses written about the latest Balkans crisis between 1992 and 1999, yet these could not keep existing East European Studies Institutes alive. General interests in the Russians, as well as peoples of the Balkans, had declined both in the US and in Western Europe, especially as these concerned the formerly occupied small states of the Soviet Zone (including Hungary).³

However, the situation may change after 2007. Southeastern Europe will continue to be the immediate point of conflict between Russia and NATO. This fact – and it cannot be denied – influences and even helps the admission of the states of the region to the EU and NATO. But the major decisive element for the peoples of the region will be their admission to the Union. This situation is providing Southeastern Europe with a new significance: the region represents a new market for global capital and goods. This will be similar to the attraction that Russia, as its consolidation proceeds, will achieve for Far Eastern and European investors.

No matter what the economic-military-political future will hold, it is certain that the expansion of the Union will once again focus attention on the region. As a consequence, research institutes, university departments, and projects analyzing the region will again be developed.

We expect that studies analyzing the region's markets and other aspects will be revived, and they will reexamine current conditions related to previous religious-ethnic developments. Without such research, there is no hope for the solution of local conflicts. (Unless one believes that social conflicts may be eliminated without cultural-political efforts, in other words, that they will be solved automatically by economic progress.) We had already mentioned the effects of historical traditions on current developments. The Southeastern region of Europe had preserved its ethnic-religious diversity as a result of the Ottoman domination. In Western Europe, the majority nations eliminated the national-religious diversity of small groups in the course of the 18th–19th centuries. In contrast, the Ottoman authorities did not suppress national and religious identities. (It is also a fact that the other great power active in the region at that time, the Habsburg Empire, did not follow a policy of suppressing nationalities until the turn of the 19th–20th centuries.) For this very reason, the South-East European region continues to be the scene of ethnic and religious diversity and, at the same time, the area of ethnic-religious conflicts. At the present time, the overall regional characteristics can only be examined fully through comparative studies. Such examinations are necessary in order to enable us to develop a code of behavior for ethnic-religious minorities in South-Eastern Europe, including the Balkans.

We could go on to cite other examples in order to further strengthen our arguments for the need of special support for research, directed toward the exploration of Southeastern Europe, including the Balkans. Such exploration is in the interest of entrepreneurs and politicians of the region and of Western Europe – and of Russia.

³ Compound the process was the general reorganization of global power-relations; the international investors as well as military-political strategists concentrated and continue to concentrate on the emergence of the regions of the Far East, especially China.

The Emancipation of Local Researches

We have been repeating it for decades that „the societies of the region must jointly determine their common local interests within the framework of the large continent-wide and global reorganization taking place in the world. They must press for the realization of local interests at international forums.“ The intellectuals, economic entrepreneurs, and politicians of the region must jointly explore and achieve the realization the interests of the new communities. For this reason it is necessary to establish institutions of regional authority and joint forums in the Southeast European states.

We must be grateful to West European – British, German, French researchers, and American and Russian scholars – who have completed studies during the past century-and-a-half, analyzing and summarizing developments in Southeastern Europe and edited scholarly journals. At the same time, scholars of the respective local countries have produced a tremendous amount of partial historical, folkloristic, musical, literary, and economic analyses. Yet, the tasks of synthesizing, the creation of comparative studies, had been left for outsiders. The scholars of the region seldom managed to get together; they produced mostly basic material for comparative studies to be completed by Western colleagues. This means a deficit for local research organizations. (This lacunae may have been caused by enmity among the local national states.)

While preparations for the eastern extension of the European Union are in process, the time had come for syntheses, for comparative study-programs, for the establishment of local institutions and journals. There is need for joint research by scholars living in the region, for the creation of a network of their local institutions. We are thinking of several networks to be established around specific tasks, of several projects proceeding in parallel with each other, exploring such areas as the natural sciences, economics, history, folklore, political science, etc., and synthesizing their results.

We consider the raising of new talents for such tasks as being critically important. We count on the emergence of a new generation of Balkans-specialists. The new Institute for Balkan Studies of Budapest wishes to help the education of a new generation of scholars. The physical basis will be the Europe Institute (established in 1990), founded exclusively by private capital, which provides a home for post-graduate researchers. The Europe Institute has its own apartments available for visiting professors and has a college for young scholars. Hopefully, similar Institutes will be established in the next decade in other states of the region. An institutional network will thus emerge, dedicated to Balkans-studies, and there will also be university departments, specialized journals and scientific associations dedicated to the task.

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