

“On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe.”

An Interim Review Heavy with Wanderings

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Intro: Two attempts to become a historian of Eastern Europe

“On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe” was the title of the 1988 essay¹ in which the prominent British historian of Russia and Eastern Europe, Hugh Seton-Watson, offered a kind of balance sheet of his long professional life at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) at the University of London—in a volume edited by his students as a commemorative publication to their mentor. The essay begins with the following sentence: “I have been trying for more than thirty years to find out, but I am still not at all sure, what is meant by a historian or by eastern Europe.”² He mentioned, among the reasons for these doubts, the influence that the dramatic events of the twentieth century in Europe had had on his thinking as a historian and the increasing vagueness or even emptiness of the Slavic paradigm itself, i.e., the questions surrounding the precise meaning of the adjective Slavonic in the name of his institute.³

I myself have striven to become or be an Eastern European historian, following in Seton-Watson’s admittedly large footsteps, but I can understand his doubts about the Slavic paradigm, though I am a Slavacist myself.⁴ I do not, however, share his uncertainties concerning the profession of the historian. That the historian is responsible for the past and analysis of the past, and in a certain way also for interpretation

1 Translation of Troebst, “On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe.” For a translation into Russian see Troebst, “O popytkah stat’ istorikom,” Čast’ 1; Troebst, “O popytkah stat’ istorikom,” Čast’ 2.

2 Seton-Watson, “On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe,” 1; Seton-Watson, “Reflections of a Learner.”

3 Seton-Watson, “On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe,” 2–3, 5–6.

4 Troebst, “Slavizität,” 7–19; Troebst, “Post-Pan-Slavism.”



Figure 1 Prof. Dr Stefan Troebst in his office of the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig

of the past, is, in my assessment, hardly in question. In recent decades, however, the professional profile of this guild has expanded considerably, as the historian has also been tasked, in the meanwhile, with providing analyses of contemporary cultures of remembrance and the politics of history of governmental and parliamentary bodies, as well as of enterprises, trade unions, churches, cultural actors, civil society, and last but not least, the media, including bloggers. This has enabled the science of history to regain, first and foremost, its interpretative authority over the past, which was being continuously eroded, in the face of the instrumentalisation of history by the aforementioned competitors, at least in part.⁵ Seton-Watson, who was born in 1916, passed away in 1984, probably too early to realize this.

Eastern Europe versus Osteuropa

Seton-Watson's problems with regional terminology, here in particular, in the vernacular of his British academic and political environment, 'Eastern Europe' are also not surprising. Unlike the German term *Osteuropa*, the Anglo-Saxon equivalent is only a putative one, since it generally excluded the Muscovite, Russian, and Soviet

5 Diner, "Von Gesellschaft zu Gedächtnis."

empire-building projects of his lifetime, or in other words, it corresponded more to the German notion of *Ostmitteleuropa* [East-Central Europe] or the Austro-Post-Habsburg term *Zentraleuropa* [Central Europe], at most including *Südosteuropa* [Southeastern Europe]. During Seton-Watson's time as a formative instructor (and publicist), the Soviet Union was assigned to the 'Northern Department' in the organisational chart of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, while the region stretching from Poland to Albania was assigned to the departments for 'Central Europe' and 'Southern Europe', and the 'Eastern Department' focused on the Middle East. Seton-Watson's own concept of 'Eastern Europe', however, included the Tsarist Empire and the USSR, as one might well have expected from the historian who had held the SSEES Chair of Russian History since 1951.⁶ Thus, with a bit of a time lag, he followed the German model, which meant a "migration" of the perception of "Russia" from the "north" of Europe (as a cardinal direction) to the "east."⁷

However—and this is a weighty "however"—Hugh Seton-Watson's students and journeymen gave the book, which was arguably a gesture of homage to their mentor, the title *Historians as Nation-Builders*. In other words, it was a matter not of transnational frames of reference of a historical-mesoregional kind (the keyword 'Eastern Europe') or of cultural and linguistic provenance (the label 'Slavic'), but rather of clearly national, even nation-state concepts, in the shaping of which, according to the subtitle of the book, the profession of the historian played a defining role. The 'invention' by German-language historical scholarship of Eastern Europe as a "historical region" did not play any role in this.⁸ 'Eastern Europe' or, as it is called in the title of the commemorative book, 'Central and South-East Europe' was merely a generic term for a patchwork of small to medium-sized and usually rival nation-states which emerged in the wake of the collapse of empires.

No impressions from early childhood—but then...

Why did I ever set my mind on becoming a historian of Eastern Europe like Seton-Watson (who at the time was quite unknown to me⁹), and why so soon, in 1974, in

6 For a detailed biographical account, see Obolensky, "George Hugh Nicholas Seton-Watson," and for a bibliographical one Daly, "Bibliography of the Works of Hugh Seton-Watson."

7 Lemberg, "Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs."

8 This epistemologically revelatory and also globally transferable innovation has recently met with a positive response first and foremost in the social sciences, not, as one might have assumed, in the humanities: Delanty, "The Historical Regions of Europe," and Giordano, "Interdependent Diversity." See also Troebst, "Sonderweg zur Geschichtsregion."

9 It was not until 1983 that I had the opportunity to meet Hugh Seton-Watson, at least from a distance, when he gave a lecture at the Russian and East European Institute (*Osteuropa-Institut*) of the Free University of Berlin: Seton-Watson, "Nationalbewußtsein als historisches Phänomen."

the first semester of my studies at Eberhard-Karls-Universität in Tübingen? I should begin by mentioning a few autobiographical push-and-pull factors. For generational reasons, I had no clear family and certainly no personal ties that might have influenced my decision. I had no claim to status as a late Danube-basin Swabian, Transylvanian, Russian, or Kazakh German emigrant or expellee, and I certainly was not a former prisoner of war in the USSR or a survivor of the Gulag, as was the case with many German historians of Eastern Europe who belonged to the older generation.¹⁰ I did have a Russophone Baltic German great-aunt, Marie von Lueder, called May, the daughter of a landowner and timber wholesaler from near the city of Reval (pronounced “Refal,” not “Reval,” as she herself told me), now Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, but she left little impression on me apart from some details concerning phonology. True, my parents and paternal grandparents possessed numerous heirlooms which had belonged to my great-great-grandfather Gottlob Tröbst from Apolda, who had studied Russian at the University of Jena and had taken part in the first translation of Pushkin’s novellas into German (together with Stepan K. Sabinin, the archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church in Weimar)¹¹ and who, in 1840, like many other unemployed university graduates of his generation, had gone to the Tsarist Empire as a tutor.¹² He had not gotten along terribly well with his first Moscow housemaster, retired Major General Otto Friedrich op dem Hamme aka von Schöppingk, so he had taken a position instead with the family of Count Alexander Nikolaevich Soymonov, where he had been tutor to the son of the house, Nikolay Alexandrovich, and the daughter Ekaterina Aleksandrovna. As it so happens, he had more than a simple tutor-student relationship with Ekaterina, and when this came to light, he had had to leave the Russian Empire *tout de suite* in 1846 for his native Thuringia. This did not set him back professionally. He became the director of the Realgymnasium in Weimar and corresponded intensively with Ekaterina until the end of his life in a mixture of French, Russian, and German. Indeed, she once visited him in Weimar, an occasion which, unsurprisingly, met with only modest applause from his wife Elisabeth, my great-great-grandmother. When Leo Tolstoy, whom Gottlob Tröbst had met in Russia as a thirteen-year-old on the Soymonov manor in Teploe, paid a visit on him in Weimar during the course of his 1861 trip to Baden-Baden, he was shown a warmer welcome.¹³ I have inherited from Gottlob a collection of tobacco tins made of Tula silver, a gold-colored samovar from this same city, his decades-long correspondence with ‘Catherine de

10 Exemplary are Geyer, *Reußenkrone, Hakenkreuz und Roter Stern*, and Markov, *Wie viele Leben lebt der Mensch?*

11 Cappeller, “Erste deutsche Übersetzung.”

12 Troebst, *Gottlob Tröbst*.

13 Tolstoy, *Tagebücher*, 279; Seifert, “Leo Tolstois Besuche in Weimar.”

Soymonoff,' and a large portrait of him and one of his wife. Thus, I suppose I may have had an affinity with things from the eastern half of Europe in my childhood or early adulthood, but this was hardly something decisive in my professional life.

Things were very different, however, when I was in the ninth grade in my secondary school in Göppingen in northern Württemberg, for here I had to choose between either French or Russian as my third foreign language after Latin and English. This was, it is worth noting, in 1970, when the Minister President of the state of Baden-Württemberg was Hans Filbinger, a right-winger from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and the Minister of Education was his party colleague Wilhelm Hahn, who shared Filbinger's fierce conservatism. For the students who had been protesting in 1968 in Heidelberg, Freiburg, and Tübingen, Hahn was the hated figure at the time, not Filbinger.

As vehemently as Filbinger (who, it is worth noting, was outed by playwright Rolf Hochhuth as an obdurate Nazi naval judge who had handed down death sentences even as late as the spring of 1945) fought the new eastern policy of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr towards the Soviet Union, Poland, and the GDR, his comrade-in-arms Hahn nonetheless seems to have found reasonable the idea of setting up an educational experiment with parallel classes in Russian at five state grammar schools. Though I have no documentary evidence in support of the following conjecture, I cannot help but wonder if this decision was influenced at least in part by his own biography. Wilhelm Hahn was born in 1909 in Dorpat, which at the time was part of the empire of the Tsar and today is the city of Tartu in Estonia. He only came "home to the Reich" when he was ten years old.¹⁴ As the child of a Baltic German family, he was taught some Russian in elementary school, and may well have thought that knowledge of this language might serve the metal industry in northern Württemberg, which was already closely intertwined with the all-union state holding companies in the USSR, especially the machine tool industry. But this is, as I say, only a hunch.

Looking back now from the vantage point of a good half century, I can confidently state that Minister Hahn had a decisive influence on my professional career, since I chose Russian over French. At our grammar school, we initially had a strict and somewhat distant Russian instructor whose Russian, however, was fluent. (He may well have been a former soldier of the Wehrmacht and then a prisoner of war in the USSR.) He successfully pushed us through the standard textbook for Russian, including the volume on grammar, in two years of school with a mere five hours a week. At the time, it was recommended that German universities set aside the same amount of time, i.e., four semesters, for this task. Unfortunately, after his retirement, we had a Russian instructor who had been trained in the GDR and had no active

14 Hahn, *Ich stehe dazu*.

knowledge of Russian. She did little more than have us take dictation and torture us endlessly with tapes on intonation patterns in the language lab. Since almost all the parents of the kids in our class (and quite possibly also the school administration) feared that under these circumstances none of us would actually pass our final exams in Russian, in the summer of 1973, most of us were “sent” to a Russian language course at the State Pedagogical Institute A. S. Serafimovich in Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad.

The language classes there were so lamentably poor that, like many of my classmates, I started skipping them after the second day, though I was still given a certificate. But we quickly made friends with the Kalmyk, Russian, Ukrainian, and other students at the institute. We would get together almost every day to swim in the shallow waters on the eastern bank of the Volga (presumably polluted with heavy metals and other unpleasant additives), to visit the Mamayev Kurgan Memorial Complex (where it turned out that our local friends thought that ‘fascists’ were Martians of some sort and certainly not creatures who could have any connection with us ‘West Germans’), and to cook, eat, and listen to music (and, of course, drink), always in the evenings in their apartments, since for the most part their parents were on vacation.

The institute also organised excursions to the Don River, which did indeed seem quiet (as Russian writer Mikhail Sholokhov’s famous novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* suggests), but which, because of its shallowness, was quite rapid when trying to swim from one side to the other. As it so happens, we were right across from the famous battlefield of 1942/43, but we didn’t know that. We were also put in a student construction brigade for ten days in a tent camp on a mosquito-infested island in the Volga near Astrakhan. There, together with Komsomol members, we dug trenches in the morning, which we then had to fill in again in the afternoon. We ended up having a great deal of fun and forming good friendships, despite the terrible meals, the poor sanitary conditions, and, worst of all, the mosquitoes and other insects. When we returned to Württemberg, we spoke passable Russian (and also knew an array of jokes and swearwords), but we could not communicate with our teacher in Russian. We still managed to pass our finals, however, though perhaps not with the best grades, as we had no idea when to use the perfective or the imperfective aspect, and certainly not when or where to use a soft sign...

From Tübingen to (West) Berlin

Once I had passed (if just barely) my finals in 1974, I had to confront the unavoidable question: “what now?” The obvious answer was, “no idea.” So, I picked up a job as an unskilled worker in the sawmill in our village to get the money together for a hitchhiking tour through France, Italy, Malta, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and

Hungary. That was an economically sound venture at the time. I spent altogether an average of two Deutschmarks per day (not including trips on ships), perhaps four Euros or so in today's currency. Those were good times!

Since most of my classmates from the Russian class had enrolled in the state examination course "Russian for teaching purposes" at the University of Tübingen, I did the same, admittedly somewhat halfheartedly. The haunting uncertainties concerning my professional aspirations were finally dispersed on the first day of the 1974–75 academic year. We first-year students were gathered in the auditorium of the *Neuphilologikum*, also known as the "Bert-Brecht-Bau," where the director of the Slavic Department, the linguist Ilse Kunert, who had been born in Danzig, now Gdańsk, told us in no uncertain terms that the demand for Russian teachers in Baden-Württemberg was covered for years to come, and no new hires would be made in the foreseeable future.

That hit me like a thunderbolt. Suddenly, I realized that I didn't *have to* become a Russian teacher at all, but could now do whatever I *wanted*, and this was a prodding towards academic freedom beyond compare. I immediately switched to the master's program in 'history' with a second major in 'Slavic Studies,' and I attended my first lecture, which was held by the exceedingly erudite but utterly unapproachable Russian historian Dietrich Geyer. Things were quite different in Slavic literary studies, where the exceedingly approachable Ludolf Müller from Western Prussia procured for each of us first-year students an anthology of Russian poetry from Penguin Press (the original texts and line-by-line translations in English) and patiently instructed us in the art of interpreting poetry.¹⁵ Ilse Kunert also gave her best in the matter of Old Church Slavonic, which was exotic for us. Kunert used the grammar book of 1909 by August Leskien, a Slavist and Indo-European scholar whom I was to meet again later as the comparative linguist who was searching (as it turned out in vain) for an ancient, 'original' Slavic language and who was also the founder of the neogrammarian school of linguists in Leipzig.

In my second semester in Tübingen, I decided to leave the charming little idyllic town in Swabia and applied to the Freie Universität in West Berlin, where there was a large Institute for Russia and Eastern Europe with eleven departments and twenty-five professors. (Today, there are five.) I was prompted in part by my newly awakened interest in the history of the Balkans, which was represented at the university by the only professor who specialized in the history of Southeastern Europe at German universities at the time: Mathias Bernath. Bernath was an impressive post-Habsburg grand seigneur from a family of Lorraine settlers in the multi-ethnic region known as Banat, most of which lies today in Romania. In addition to his "four mother tongues" (German, Romanian,

15 Obolensky, ed., *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*.

Hungarian, and Serbian), he also spoke fluent French, Italian, and, amazingly, Russian.¹⁶ After the first consultation with him at the institute in Garystraße in Dahlem, it was clear to me that whatsoever you wanted to learn, you could learn it from him. And so I began to do just that, though initially only for two semesters, because at the same time the ‘Drang nach Osten’ in me grew stronger, which meant that I spent three years traveling (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, the United States), interrupted by four more semesters in West Berlin (the city most on the frontline of the Cold War), including opportunities to visit the communist eastern part, what at the time was the ‘capital of GDR.’

From West Berlin via Bad Godesberg to Sofia and Skopje

Alas, my plans to spend a year doing study abroad in the Soviet Union, which at the time was faltering along in its “golden age of stagnation,” came to nothing because the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) stipulated that scholarships were only available for graduate students. Students who had not yet graduated could however apply for scholarships in the East-Central and Southeast European satellite states of the allegedly “unbreakable union of free republics” known as the USSR. I sorted the states of the region in my head according to the following logic: Poland and the Czechoslovakia were Central Europe, i.e., not exotic enough; Hungarian and Romanian are not Slavic languages, so Hungary and Romania were out of the question; I had already been on vacation in Yugoslavia, i.e., had already checked that country off my list; the DAAD did not offer scholarships for Albania (also not a Slavic language) as there was no cultural agreement between the two; and this left only one country: Bulgaria. As I mentioned earlier, I had already spent two weeks in Bulgaria after having finished high school, in Sofia, Plovdiv, and Vidin, but also, for reasons that are no longer entirely clear, in Tolbukhin (which today again is Dobrich, after having born the name of Soviet General Fyodor Tolbukhin from 1949 until 1990), Karnobat, and Knezha, and I had managed to get by reasonably well with Russian. So now my goal was Bulgaria or, more precisely, Sofia University Kliment Okhridski, in the Bulgarian capital.

The interview at the DAAD in Bad Godesberg took place in front of a committee of about twenty people, headed by Alfred Rammelmeyer, a Slavic scholar from the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, who had been born in Russia in the days before the revolution. I knew ahead of time that the scholarship applicants would be greeted by him upon entering in the language of the country they wanted to go to and would be expected to respond in that language. What I did not know was that Professor Rammelmeyer had marked up the candidates’

16 Troebst, “Südosteuropäische Geschichte.”

standardized DAAD application forms top to bottom with different colored pens. On my form, I could see that one spot in particular was covered with red. It was the 'professional goals' section. Not surprisingly, he then posed rather pointed questions about this. In my youthful naiveté, I had scribbled the words 'university instructor' on the form, and in my reply to his question (which only made matters worse), I said that, on the basis of my profound university experience (which came to no less than three long semesters), I had determined that the position of high school instructor was, after all, a rather attractive and even passably paid profession. I failed to notice the smirks and sneers of the other nineteen or so committee members in the room, much as it also escaped me whether this was due exclusively to my hubris or also to the ill-tempered-professorial conduct of the good Herr Rammelmeyer.

Although it took a while before the final decision on the scholarship was made, at the time I regarded the invitation to the interview itself as a success. For applicants from West Berlin, this included a plane ticket from Berlin-Tegel to Cologne-Wahn and back (the first time I had ever been in an airplane) and—even more sensational—a per diem allowance of fifty Deutschmarks provided by DAAD. I spent most of this on a grilled beef filet at an Argentine restaurant in downtown Bonn together with a fellow Freie Universität student, also a first-time and, clearly, unforgettable experience.

As it so happens, the Japanologist Dierck Stuckenschmidt, who at the time was the DAAD Country Officer for Southeastern Europe and who came to Sofia in October 1976, shortly after my arrival in Bulgaria, to "check up on things" (as he told me), informed me that I would have gotten the scholarship for which I had applied no matter how stupid I had been during the interview. The explanation for this was simple. As a result of the 1973 West German–Bulgarian Cultural Agreement, several hundred Bulgarians wanted to come to the Federal Republic on exchange, but they were unable to come, because the exchange was based on principle of reciprocity. I was the first West German who had wanted to go to this Balkan country, which in the eyes of the average West German was still a gray Stalinist dictatorship.

My one year of study abroad, first at the Faculty for Foreign Students, then at the Philosophical-Historical Faculty at Kliment Okhridski University, had a formative influence on me and lifelong consequences. One grows up quickly living alone in a foreign country at the age of twenty-one and wrestling with a (still) foreign language. I discovered the topic of my master's thesis here,¹⁷ which later, in an expanded form, became the topic of my dissertation. I also realized that for me, as someone who was not entitled to payments under the Federal German Vocational Training Assistance Act ("Berufsausbildungsförderungsgesetz," or BAföG), the DAAD was the best solution to the problem of financing my studies. And finally, I made friends

17 Troebst, "Die »Innere Makedonische Revolutionäre Organisation«."

for life, from Bulgaria, France and Romania, but above all from the former GDR. It is not by chance that some of them appear as informants in the dossier on me kept by the Committee for State Security in the Ministry of the Interior of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the 700 pages of which I received in 2016. The dossier bears the thematically extremely appropriate case designation "Makedonets," or "the Macedonian."

At the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Bulgarian Communist Party Central Committee Institute of History I was supported by numerous renowned historians, despite the fact that I came from a "non-socialist foreign country." Perhaps the two most prominent figures among these scholars were Nikolay Todorov and Ilcho Dimitrov, but I should also mention Tsvetana Todorova, Milcho Lalkov, Vasil At. Vasilev, and Kostadin Paleshutski. They took risks on my behalf which were considerable, given the omnipresence of the Committee for State Security, which always had me in its sights, and not a single one of them is identifiable in my file as an informer. I should note, however, that this does not apply to several other historians and fellow students with whom I had close contact.

As helpful as these leading Bulgarian historians were, the management of the relevant archives, which was subordinate to the Main Office for Archives at the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, was every bit as obstinate. My request for the use of ten archives, officially submitted in 1977 through the Faculty of Philosophy and History, was answered after a delay of seven years in 1984 with a curt reply to the effect that only a few archival records had been found in the Central State Historical Archives that might be relevant to my inquiry. The fact that, soon after having received this news, I was standing in the reading room of the archives was obviously a less than pleasant surprise which caused a noticeable moment of panic. Nevertheless, only a few things were handed over. The situation was completely different in the fall of 1989, shortly before the Bulgarian variation on the 'Wende,' when a new message arrived from Sofia. Now that some twelve years had passed since I had first submitted my request, everything was clear, and all the archival holdings, including inventory lists, would be made accessible to me without restriction. On site, things again looked completely different, because the head office stonewalled as usual. But the news reached me in a roundabout way that the Central Party Archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party would now grant me access to all the archival records there, a claim which I only believed when, after a conversation over coffee, cigarettes, and aniseed schnapps in the reading room with director of the archives Slavi Georgiev, I found a voluminous stack of documents of breathtaking content prepared for me. When I asked why I had been given access to the party archives when the state archives continued to deny me access, Director Georgiev

replied with a wink: "Because the party is always at the forefront of social progress!" He had instinctively anticipated the "winds of change" that would blow through the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party a few days later and sweep away the longstanding head of party and state Todor Zhivkov.

But to return to the 1970s, the DAAD was, as I mentioned, the solution to my financial problems during my time as a student because of the bilateral treaties entered into by the Federal Republic on matters of culture and science. While I was in Bulgaria spending my lavish stipend of 120 lev, which at the time was the average monthly income (students from the GDR got only 40 lev), the monthly DAAD stipend of 650 DM was piling up in my West Berlin account, without me actually needing it or, for that matter, actually being able to access it from Sofia. In other words, when I returned from Bulgaria, I had a fat bank account that kept me comfortably afloat for an entire academic year in Berlin.

Thus again, perhaps not surprisingly, I decided I might as well give the study abroad thing another go, and I applied, now as a graduate student, for another scholarship, though not for the Soviet Union, but for the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or more precisely for its southernmost constituent republic, Macedonia. And lo and behold, again, it worked, not only with the promise of new gains in the world of scholarship but also with the financial benefits I had hoped to secure. The year I spent at the Institute of National History in Skopje had lasting consequences for me, both from a professional point of view and from a personal one. This was due in no small part to the support I was given by the heads of department there, Aleksandar Matkovski and Blazhe Ristovski, with whom my interactions were primarily informal (by which I mean that they took place over a cup of coffee or a cigarette or two by the institute's "bife" or snack bar), and especially by Ivan Katardzhiev, director at the time of the State and University Library. I had already known Katardzhiev, and I remained in close contact with him and his wife Nada over the course of the following decades. One of the consequences of the time I spent in Skopje was that, after having completed my unpublished master's thesis in 1979 and before having submitted my dissertation in 1984, I published a monograph in 1983, also on a Macedonian/Yugoslav-Bulgarian topic.¹⁸ It was published in 1997 in Macedonian translation. As it so happens, a Germanist from Skopje who had worked as a translator for the Yugoslavian secret service had illegally set aside a copy and later left it to the Institute for National History. The translation costs were thus eliminated, so the book could be published inexpensively.¹⁹ One sees the many uses of the secret services!

18 Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse*.

19 Troebst, *Bugarско-jugoslovenskata kontroverza*.

...westward bound for the United States

Clearly, the two DAAD scholarships I had managed to acquire went to my head, because I then applied for a graduate scholarship in the United States, and I did so with Columbia University in New York at the top of my list, followed by Stanford University in California and Indiana University in third place. Against all expectations, I again was granted a scholarship, though for my third choice, Indiana University in Bloomington. In retrospect, this turned out to be quite fortuitous, as the aforementioned Mathias Bernath, who in the meantime had become my dissertation supervisor, was well connected there, especially with the U.S.-Croat historian of Southeastern Europe Charles Jelavich and his wife Barbara Jelavich, who was also a professor of Russian, Soviet and Eastern European history at IU. When I arrived at what is unquestionably one of the most beautiful university campuses in the United States, I was given a kind of VIP treatment, though this of course did not induce the Jelaviches to show me any lenience when grading the numerous essay tests and map quizzes in their courses on “Habsburg History” and “Soviet History.” I did however win the History Department’s “Dan Armstrong Award for the best graduate paper of the year 1981” (an award which came with \$100) for a term paper in a course taught not by the Jelaviches but by Todd Endelman, professor of Jewish Studies, under whose direction I did an extensive study of the beginnings of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria.²⁰ The Herman B. Wells Library, which is the main library at IU, was a surprisingly valuable treasure trove for this purpose.

The two scholars who made the most lasting impression on me in Bloomington, however, were a Turk and a Hungarian. İlhan Başgöz, professor in the Department of Central Eurasian Studies and lecturer in Turkish, was at first glance an unassumingly friendly gentleman whose seminar reading, a folklore anthology which he had edited and which he used as a textbook, for the most part contained Bektaşî anecdotes with sarcastic jabs at the Sunni variant of Islam.²¹ As a pedagogue, he was brilliant. Within a few months, he had taught me to write postcards in Turkish on my own. Unfortunately, later, I was never really put in the potentially embarrassing position of having to use this knowledge, even in partially Turkophone West Berlin, so alas, my modest knowledge of Turkish today is exclusively passive.

The other impressive embodiment of scholarship at IU was Budapest economic historian and Auschwitz survivor György Ránki, the first holder of the newly established Bloomington Chair in Hungarian Studies, who arrived for the spring 1981 semester.²² Since his seminar on the history of Hungary from the Battle of

20 Troebst, “Some Aspects of Anti-Semitism in Bulgaria.” Expanded as Troebst, “Antisemitismus.”

21 Başgöz, *Turkish Folklore Reader*.

22 On György Ránki (1930–1988) and his formative influence on Hungarian and international historiography, see Pach, “Hommage à György Ránki.”

Mohács in 1526 to the 1956 Revolution was attended (apart from me) only by my fellow student polyglot the late James (Jim) Niessen, who served as chief librarian at Rutgers University in New Jersey, the visiting professor from Budapest suggested that the class be moved from Ballantine Hall (the largest building of classrooms at IU) to his campus apartment. This had one remarkable advantage for us: his wife and daughter prepared sumptuous Central European dinners for each class meeting, which were then enjoyed by the Ránki family, Jim, and me as part of private discussions on the history and present of the Danube-Carpathian region. I don't remember exactly what wine we drank to complement the meals. Certainly not a Hungarian Kékfrankos (or Blaufränkisch), but perhaps the California equivalent, Zinfandel.

At Ránki's suggestion, I wrote a seminar paper on academic relations between Nazi Germany and Admiral Miklós Horthy's Hungary, in which the DAAD, which had provided my scholarship, had played a prominent role. Somewhat to my surprise, the aforementioned main library at IU also had extensive holdings on this subject, including all DAAD periodical publications from 1933–1945.²³

In retrospect, I can say that this single year abroad in the American Midwest gave me an intellectual boost that equaled and indeed surpassed what I had gotten out of three years of study in Germany and two in the Balkans put together. In the cornfields of the Midwest, I first discovered the seminal works of Carl E. Schorske (*Fin-de-siècle Vienna*), Fritz Stern (*Gold and Iron. Bismarck, Bleichröder and the Building of the German Empire*), Eugen Weber (*Peasants into Frenchmen*), and Robert K. Merton (*On the Shoulders of Giants. A Shandean Postscript*), and these writings exerted a formative influence on me both personally and as a budding scholar.²⁴ This was due, on the one hand, to the committed professors (who were always open to discussion) and the body of highly motivated and also numerically manageable local and international fellow students in the master's program. It was also due to the trove of resources I found at the local landmark Howard's Bookstore (which has since gone out of business), the newspaper and magazine display at Runcible Spoon café (still thriving), the Lilly Library on the IU campus (which specializes, among other things, in the Cold War and is funded the pharmaceutical company whose name it bears), and, of course, the main library on the IU campus, which at the time was open day and night with its freely accessible stacks (this is, alas, no longer the case). In other words, "scholarship 24/7" was the order of the day in Bloomington, together with occasional excursions to Fred's Beerhouse, billiards at Bullwinkle's, and jogging, which had not yet taken off in Europe at the time.

23 Troebst, "Some Observations" Reprinted as Troebst, "Hungary's Academic Relations"; Troebst, "»Braune« DAAD-Geschichte."

24 Troebst, "Kryptomnesie, Koinzidenz und Kelvin-Diktum."

From the slopes of the Swabian Alps back to Dahlem, with a few detours

Back in Germany, I received a letter from the German National Academic Foundation with the good news that I had been awarded a doctoral fellowship. My short-lived euphoria was abruptly dispelled by a letter which arrived two days later from the same sender: due to the dramatic worsening of the circumstances vis-à-vis the Foundation's budget, the scholarship would only be available after a delay of one year. As devastating as this message was, its consequences were instructive. I submitted numerous evasive applications for all kinds of possible (and impossible) jobs, and I was offered a position by a U.S. army helicopter site in southern Germany as a food inspector. In response to my objection that I was a historian, not a food technician, I was told that my master's degree and my knowledge of English gave me all the necessary qualifications, and that I would be put in a relatively high salary bracket. In the end, I did not sign the contract, because a state surveying office in northern Württemberg also offered me a position as a so-called measuring assistant. The work was not well paid, and it involved physically strenuous labor in wind and bad weather, but since I, as a regional (hobby) historian, knew that in 1818 the Kingdom of Württemberg had become the first state in the world to carry out systematic land surveys, including the setting of trigonometrical points using stones, I jumped at the chance. The geodetic experience that I gained through this work proved immensely useful, financially, in the later phase of my work as a doctoral student, because back in West Berlin, I was able to supplement my doctoral scholarship (which by then was being paid out) by working for a surveyor and thereby got to know corners of the 'old' West Berlin into which I otherwise would never have ventured.

A positive late consequence of my year of study in the United States and the one-year break that I was forced to take by the Foundation was the completion of the aforementioned monographic research report, originally conceived as an essay, on the subject of a Macedonian nation (including language, history, church organisation, etc.), a topic of impassioned debate between the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I pursued this within the framework of a project of the Volkswagenwerk Foundation on the connection between ideology and historiography in the Soviet realm, the funding for which had been obtained by Günther Stökl, Chair of Russian and East European History at the University of Cologne.²⁵ In the end, instead of required 40 manuscript pages I handed in 300, got a proper honorarium, and ultimately my research report was published as a book.²⁶ I have enjoyed a close relationship with Stökl ever since, our age difference

25 Troebst, "Die Interdependenz von Politik."

26 Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse*.

notwithstanding, and I have come to know him as a historian of Eastern Europe with a flabbergasting breadth of knowledge, a conscientiously reliable and professional manager in the world of scholarship, and a Viennese Protestant with an admirable sense of humour.

After extensive travels to archives in Rome, London, Bonn, Sofia, and Skopje, I submitted my dissertation on Mussolini's Balkan policy in 1984, published in 1987.²⁷ I enjoyed not only the support of my doctoral advisor Mathias Bernath, who provided innumerable letters of recommendation and the guidance and advice of a seasoned expert, but also the assistance of several individuals at the archives I visited. I am thinking, for instance, of Jens Petersen at the German Historical Institute in Rome and Renzo de Felice at the University La Sapienza (also in Rome), Elizabeth Barker, Stephen Clissold, and Heather Yasamee at the Public Records Office in Kew Gardens near London, Richard J. Crampton at the University of Canterbury, and in particular Maria Keipert at the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office, which at the time was still in Bonn.

I did not have a job at first when I finished my doctorate, but then, thanks to an admittedly cryptic job advertisement in the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel*, I was invited to an interview with the British occupation forces, more precisely the "Slavic Unit of the British Military Government of Berlin," as a translator of Russian and Bulgarian, with an employment contract from the Administrative Office for Occupation Burdens of the Berlin Senate. The experience I had gleaned at a job I had had earlier during the breaks between semesters in a Württemberg machine factory, which had played an important role in the construction of a prestigious mammoth project run by the then Soviet head of state and party Leonid I. Brezhnev, helped. The project had involved the truck, tank, and engine plant Kamskii Avtomobilnyi Zavod (or KamAZ) in the new city of Naberezhnye Chelny on the marshy banks of the Kama River in what is now the Republic of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation.²⁸

I didn't stay with the British for long, despite the fact that my monthly pay slip was handed to me in a large brown envelope with the Queen's coat of arms and the inscription "On Her Majesty's Service," which from time to time made my heart beat faster. It was fascinating to have the opportunity, during the lunchbreak, to use the former Nazi Reichssportfeld, the sports complex which served as the Olympic Park for the 1936 Summer Olympics. It was of course now under British administration, but it was architecturally unchanged and still had, for instance, several statues by Arno Breker. In the indoor swimming pool that was part of the complex, the rallying

27 Troebst, *Mussolini, Makedonien*.

28 Meier, *Breschnews Boomtown*, and on the business relationship of the engineering company TRAUB AG in Reichenbach/Fils with KamAZ in Soviet times the autobiographical: Troebst, "My Globalization."

cry “Ewig mahnt vom Anbeginn des Werdens das heilige Wort Vollkommenheit” had been emblazoned on the front side by the Deutscher Reichsbund für Leibesübungen (the German Reich Association for Physical Exercise). This mantra could be roughly or ‘poetically’ translated as, “from the dawn of time, the holy word perfection has always urged us onward,” whatever that was supposed to mean.

I soon submitted my resignation to the British Empire and Commonwealth, and my decision was accepted without complaint and was also perfectly justified. I had been offered a position as a research assistant (*Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter*) in the Contemporary History Section of the Institute for Eastern European Studies at the Free University of Berlin, and I was promoted to research associate (*Wissenschaftlichen Assistent*). Those were good times: minimal teaching obligations, a decent salary (plus eight percent as an allowance for living in Cold War West Berlin, the so-called ‘Zitterprämie,’ meaning, roughly, “bonus for trembling in the shadows of Soviet tanks,” and exemption from compulsory military service), and enough research freedom to write a postdoctoral thesis. I was even able to travel to pursue research in archives and libraries in the USSR, UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, and other parts of Northern and Western Europe, and these trips were financed by the university, as were excursions with my students to Bulgaria, Albania, and the Arctic parts of Europe, including the Kola Peninsula, home to the port city Murmansk.

And then came perestroika in the Soviet Union, which captivated many of our students, some of whom today figure prominently in the German media landscape (Gerhard Gnauck, Stefan Scholl, Michael Thumann, and Markus Wehner) and in historical scholarship (Martin Schulze Wessel, Jochen Hellbeck). The Russian and East European Institute at the Freie Universität Berlin became a magnet for regional experts from all over the world, especially from the United States, who came as visiting scholars and with whom close personal contacts were established. I am thinking of scholars like Andrew Janos, Mark von Hagen, and especially Norman Naimark, with whom I have remained friends to this day.

From Berlin to Uppsala

The fact that Hans-Joachim Torke, head of the history department at the institute, was an expert on the early modern Muscovite State and its ‘state-centered society’ also proved a great advantage. After a few tentative attempts to arrive at a topic for my habilitation, I decided on something early modern (the Middle Ages were too foreign to me). The guiding principle was the ‘rule’ (at the time) in the subdiscipline of Russian and East European History, according to which the topic of one’s habilitation had to differ from that of one’s dissertation in four respects: (a) epochal, (b) historical-regional, (c) thematic, and (d) one of the two qualifying papers had to be

about the Rus', Muscovy, the czarist empire, or the Soviet Union. In my case, this meant that the Balkans and twentieth century were out, and I would have to come up with something East Slavic before 1900. But what?

This is where, unbeknownst to him, Wilhelm A. Kewenig, Senator for Science and Research in the Berlin State Government, came into play. Contrary to previous practice, Kewenig appointed several new professors directly to the Friedrich Meinecke Institute for History at the Freie Universität Berlin, i.e., without advertising the positions. Among the new appointees was Jürgen Kocka, the Bielefeld luminary of German social history, and Klaus Zernack, leading historian of Eastern Europe who until then had worked at Justus Liebig University in Giessen. A new chair for the history of East-Central and Northeast Europe was created for Zernack.²⁹ I had been friends with Zernack's colleague and assistant in Giessen Fikret Adanır, one of the few Turkish historians with knowledge of South Slavic languages, since 1978 (and with Jeanne, his U.S. wife of German-Jewish origin), since, like me, he was intensively involved in the history of the (post-)Ottoman region of Macedonia. Fikret gave me access to Zernack, who initially seemed very stern and professorially distant to me. This changed significantly when my wife Inga and I helped the Adanırs move from Frankfurt am Main to Berlin. Professor Dr. Dr. h. c. Zernack was another one of Fikret's friends who lent a hand lugging boxes of books, furniture, household appliances, etc. to the fifth floor of the building. Once we had finished the laborious work, he took out a Leitz binder labeled 'Schmierstoffe' (lubricants). The contents turned out to be a bottle of schnapps along with several shot glasses. That definitely helped break the ice.

In the intensive consultations that followed with Zernack regarding a possible topic for my habilitation, he suggested that I consider the subject of relations between Moscow and Sweden in the seventeenth century, in particular their mercantile-trade relations (he was, after all, someone who had maintained close ties with leading historians of Sweden since a study visit to the University of Uppsala in the mid-1950s). He considered the topic suitable in part because relations between the two were one of the essential factors in the rise of this peripheral and sparsely populated kingdom to a major European power in the early modern period and partly because there was more than adequate source material. The USSR and Sweden had exchanged archival materials on a large scale both in the 1920s and in the 1950s on the history of their respective relations since the Middle Ages. This suggestion turned out to be a veritable bull's-eye, both with regards to the Moscow source holdings available on microfilm in the Stockholm Imperial Archives and with regards to the extensive Swedish archival holdings both there and in the Carolina

29 Müller-Lissner, "Berlin als Logenplatz; Troebst, "Klaus Zernack als Nordosteuropahistoriker"; Troebst, "The Nordic Connection."

Rediviva Library at Uppsala University. Another stroke of luck came when I made the acquaintance (initially only by letter) with Örjan Sjöberg, a postdoc from the Institutionen för Öststatsstudier of his Alma Mater Upsaliensis, today Professor of Economic Geography at the Stockholm School of Economics, who opened all the doors on site for me—literally—though I was a stranger to him at the time. I also had the opportunity to establish personal contacts with Swedish experts of the early modern modern. Tragically, economic historian Artur Attman,³⁰ the most relevant among them for me, died two months before a meeting scheduled in Gothenburg, but the early modern experts Sven A. Nilsson and Stellan Dahlgren in Uppsala were extremely helpful, as were the staff of the research department of the Stockholm Imperial Archives, the archivists who worked there, and other members of the archive staff. After six months as a—formally—visiting scholar at the Institutionen för Öststatsstudier, I returned to Berlin with an enormous stash of sources. Now I had to turn these sources into a qualification paper.

I was also encouraged in this undertaking by two Soviet colleagues with whom I consulted on site: Igor' P. Shaskol'skij, section head at the Leningrad Department of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (LOII), and his colleague Valerij E. Vozgrin, who later came to the Freie Universität as a visiting scholar. I received the most committed professional support, however, from Elisabeth Harder-Gersdorff, professor of economic history at Bielefeld University and an expert on early modern Baltic trade. Unfortunately, though we maintained intensive correspondence (by written letter, of course), we never met in person.

Skopje again, then Chişinău, Tiraspol, and Comrat

As positive, from the perspective of unrestricted access to archives, as my experiences in Sweden were in comparison to the restrictive practices in communist Bulgaria, the switch from the Balkans to northeastern Europe was difficult, thematically, linguistically, and paleographically, but first and foremost in terms of current events. As was becoming increasingly clear to the outside world as of 1984, the upheavals that were underway in Bulgaria in its so-called 'process of rebirth' included the brutal repression of the country's large Turkish-speaking Muslim minority, and this, alongside the revolutionary changes which swept across the entire eastern half of Europe in the epochal year 1989, made it difficult for me to turn away from the present and immerse myself in the study of the seventeenth century. Added to this were the tragic events in the disintegrating Yugoslavia in 1991, where I had many colleagues and friends. Accordingly, my progress on my habilitation thesis was slow. Indeed, this work came

30 Troebst, "Artur Attman."

to a temporary standstill when, in 1992, I received an offer from the German Foreign Office to go to the young Republic of Macedonia as a German member of the first long-term mission of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now OSCE). Obviously, I could hardly resist. In 1993, soon after I had arrived back in Berlin, I received another offer, this time for the CSCE Mission to the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, where in 1994 and 1995 I was mainly responsible for the two separatist conflict regions in the Dniester Valley (Trans-Dniestria), where I was stationed in the 'capital' Tiraspol, and in Bugeac (Budzhak, Gagauzia), in the provincial town of Comrat, which similarly functioned as the local 'capital.' I did not accept a third offer to go to Chechnya, where a bloody civil war was raging at the time. It only would have been possible to leave the OSCE office in Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic, with bulletproof vest and Kevlar helmet in a BTR armored personnel carrier of the Russian armed forces, which would have made it virtually impossible to carry out the mission mandate.

The experience I gained in this international organisation, which stretched from Vancouver to Vladivostok, was comparable with a second area study program of a completely different kind: integration into a hierarchical structure, continuous reporting obligations, careful preliminary assessment of potentially dangerous situations, subsequent analysis of cases of conflict and investigation of incidents (some of which had fatal consequences), prophylactic and retrospective information-gathering by fostering a basis of trust among government, police, and military functionaries (who tended otherwise to remain tightlipped) and, above all, civilians from a wide variety of professions, such as shepherds, foresters, hunters, lumberjacks, farmers, winegrowers, priests, monks, nuns, cabdrivers, bus drivers, and, last but not least, journalists. My knowledge of the Macedonian and Russian languages and (in a broader sense) culture helped me a great deal, especially since my mission colleagues usually did not have either. I was able to rely, however, on their practical, technical, and military skills, and learned a great deal from them. I now know what the arcana of a state are and where the cybernetic 'nerves of government' run, and that, alongside Georg Jellinek's three essential elements of the state (as both social entity and legal institution), there is a third, similarly indispensable element: a functioning, nationwide, bug-proof radio network.

I also gained immensely valuable experience working as a member of a team of diplomats, military personnel, local forces, regional experts (like me) with relevant language skills. In acute conflict situations, crises, and incidents, everyone had to be able to rely on one another, and we had to use our different skills and fields of knowledge in a coordinated, goal-oriented manner. I learned a lot in this process; In Macedonia, first and foremost from the head of mission, the U.S. diplomat Robert H. Frowick, and his righthand man Marshall F. Harris (who, though a comparatively young man, effectively

steered his boss, at his boss's request, depending on the situation), and Major (ret.) of the Danish Air Force Pál Tersztyánszky; in Moldova, from the head of mission there, the Russophone Briton Richard Samuel (who for a diplomat had a notable phobia of neckties) and the Dutch Captain Jelle Marseille. From their "Letters to Whom It May Concern" issued for me, I gather that they may also have learned something from me.

The CSCE/OSCE missions were civilian in nature, i.e., unarmed, but we nonetheless sometimes found ourselves in extremely critical situations. In Skopje in December 1992, for example, we were in the middle of a prolonged firefight between police and organised crime in the Serava slum district, and in November 1994, we were involved in a violent confrontation between Trans-Dniestrian separatists and parent representatives of one of the last schools to retain the Latin alphabet in the city of Bendery by its Russian name or Tighina by its Romanian name (it lies within the borders of Moldova but is under the control of the unrecognised Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic). A man garbed in camouflage leapt on the hood of our car with a (presumably real) gun and told me through the windshield, "Ja tebe daju pulu," or "I'll put a bullet in you," and I confess, this threat seemed quite real. An encounter with a pack of wolves howling around the off-road mission vehicle when we found ourselves stuck in high snow in the Macedonian Baba Mountains near Bitola prompted us to ask whether it might sometimes not be wise to have a handgun at our disposal for self-protection. The replies we got to our inquiries on the matter from the CSCE headquarters in Vienna and the Foreign Office in Bonn were the same: forget it! The most formative experience for me, however, was a tragic one. Late in the afternoon, on 5 March 1993, Major Tersztyánszky and I were recruited *ad hoc* by the Norwegian UNPROFOR contingent in Macedonia to assist in the recovery efforts for a Dutch Fokker passenger plane which had just crashed on the grounds of Skopje's Petrovec Airport, with 89 fatalities. The airport was already shrouded in darkness, but those were images one does not forget.

But I also have not forgotten the many positive developments of these dramatic years. On 7 April 1993, for instance, when the Republic of Macedonia was admitted to the United Nations, as members of the CSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje we popped champagne to celebrate the occasion. And on 23 December 1994, the parliament of the Republic of Moldova, in a session attended by the leaders of the self-proclaimed Gagauz Republic in the south of the country, adopted in Russian a law on the territorial autonomy status of Gagauz Yeri (Gagauz Land) in the first and last reading, against, as it so happens, the advice of the CSCE/OSCE and the Council of Europe. To have been personally present in the visitors' gallery at this impressive act was a privilege that offered rich insights: ethno-political conflicts can be regulated, provided that both sides are willing, through internal self-determination and territorial autonomy, i.e., not only through external self-determination, or

put more bluntly, secession. The hope that, in the meantime, this might have served as a blueprint for a solution to the conflict with the eastern part of the country, the self-proclaimed "Moldovan Dniester Republic," has not been fulfilled.

From the Zauche via Hamburg to Southern Schleswig

Back in Berlin, it was becoming increasingly clear to me that I either had to finish my habilitation thesis or I would do better to abandon it altogether. I decided on the first option and started the final lap in a dacha far from civilisation in Zauche (from Slav. *sucho*, meaning dry) in the Potsdam-Mittelmark district. Thanks to the lack of postal and telephone connections there (fortunately, the internet, email, and cell phones had not yet become as omnipresent as they are today), the twelve months I had set aside for the task turned into only five. In the course of a long night in June 1995, I printed out the final version on a screeching dot matrix printer and then copied it, submitted it to the Freie Universität, and heaved a heavy sigh of relief.³¹

I had already gotten two pieces of positive news: first, the offer of a one-year professorship at the University of the Federal Armed Forces in Hamburg (now named after Helmut Schmidt), and second, the approval of the German Research Foundation for a five-year Heisenberg fellowship. However, I was only able to make use of this for a few months, as I was appointed founding director of the Danish-German European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) in Flensburg in 1996. This gave me the opportunity to continue to work intensively on my previous regions of interest, Macedonia and Moldova, as well as Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, and Kosovo.³²

There were, however, three prerequisites for this. First, I needed the political support of the three founders of the new center, i.e., the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the state of Schleswig-Holstein. But while Copenhagen and Kiel were fully behind the new foundation, Bonn put the brakes on in several respects, administratively, thematically, and legally. Second, and of immense importance, was the committed support shown by the three 'founding fathers,' all Danes: Lorenz Rerup, prominent historian and Consul General of Denmark in Flensburg; H. P. Clausen, his successor in this office and also a historian, minister several times, and parliamentary president; and Bent Rold Andersen, Social Democrat and likewise a former minister. Rerup and Clausen died soon after the founding of the institute, however, and Andersen resigned as chairman of the board of trustees shortly thereafter because of a controversy with his party. This put me in a difficult situation, but (and this was the third factor) a job advertisement

31 Troebst, *Handelskontrolle*; Zernack, "Dominium Mercaturae Ruthenicae."

32 Troebst, "Starting ECMI."

in the London *Economist* drew the attention of an array of highly qualified international experts to the center in the Danish–German border region, and this gave the whole undertaking a kind of vertical launch the positive effects of which can still be sensed today. The fact that the newly founded ECMI filled a serious lacuna in the now ‘larger Europe’ was proven by the extremely positive response shown by the OSCE and the Council of Europe, as well as by states such as Ukraine, Georgia, Ireland, Norway, Estonia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, and many others. Only the European Union was limited in its cooperation by member states such as Spain, Greece, France, etc., as the legal foundations were missing in these states for the participation of minorities.

But even the idyllic situation of the minorities on both sides of the Danish–German border was from time to time overcast by clouds on the bilateral horizon. This was due in part to the border, which had been determined on the basis of a referendum held under the aegis of the League of Nations in 1920, and in part, of course, to the memory of the German occupation of Denmark in 1940–1945, which continued to exert a strong influence. Here, the past intruded profoundly into the present, and this threw into question the notion that the relationship between Northern Schleswig, i.e., the Danish Sønderjylland with its (small) German (linguistic) minority on the one hand, and Southern Schleswig, the northern part of the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein, with its Danish and Frisian minorities, on the other, might serve as a model that could be used in other sub-regions of Europe with ethnopolitical conflicts. The usefulness of this model appeared even less convincing when one remembered that the high standard of living on both sides of the border was (and still is) incomparably higher than the standards of living in conflict regions in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and elsewhere in the eastern half of Europe.

From Flensburg to Leipzig

In Flensburg, I then received an offer for a full professorship at the University of Leipzig, which I immediately accepted. As exciting as I found practical conflict prevention, the exclusive focus on the present was increasingly limiting me as a historian. My dual functions at the Alma Mater Lipsiensis and the Humanities Center History and Culture of East Central Europe (GWZO), which in 2017 was renamed the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe, gave me the opportunity to pursue my historical interests again and indeed to expand them. My research on nation-building and region-building met with a phenomenal infrastructure here, supported in more than generous ways institutionally first by the German Research Foundation, then by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, but also project-wise by the Volkswagen Foundation, the German Peace

Research Foundation, the Thyssen Foundation for the Advancement of Science, and others. Though I had already fulfilled the formal criteria to qualify as a 'historian of Eastern Europe' in my career 'before Leipzig' (i.e., master's thesis, dissertation, and postdoctoral thesis), it was only here that I became a 'real' historian of Eastern Europe in the sense of covering the sub-discipline 'in (almost) its entire breadth.'

This was due not least to the fact that the funding for research projects at the GWZO was provided with tight time limitations, which meant frequent changes of project topics and research groups, and this in turn compelled us periodically to develop innovative research questions and quickly present results in the form of publications. Findings were presented for the most part not only in the form of articles and collected volumes, but also and especially in dissertations and postdoctoral theses, i.e., monographs, and sometimes even in new thematic book series, such as "Visuelle Geschichtskultur" [Visual historical culture], "Armenier im östlichen Europa / Armenians in Eastern Europe," and "Leipzig Studies on the History and Culture of East-Central Europe." And I would be remiss not to mention the literally 'transnational' cooperative series, such as "Moderne europäische Geschichte" [*Modern European history*, edited together with Hannes Siegrist, a colleague of mine at the University of Leipzig], and the continuation of the series "Gesellschaften und Staaten im Epochenwandel" [*Societies and states in transformation*, edited with Dittmar Schorkowitz from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in nearby Halle an der Saale]. There were also the GWZO innovations of the brochure series "Oskar Halecki Vorlesung – Jahresvorlesung des GWZO" [Oskar Halecki Lecture – Annual Lecture of the GWZO] and the popular-scientific GWZO annual booklet "Mitropa" (named after *Mitteleuropäische Schlafwagen- und Speisewagen Aktiengesellschaft*, founded in 1916 and operating sleeping and dining cars), as well as the significant thematic expansion of the GWZO main book series "Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa" [Publications on the History and Culture of East-Central Europe].

Genuine GWZO 'inventions' from this period include the innovative combination of the research fields of historical culture and visual culture (in the aforementioned book series "Visuelle Geschichtskultur"), the (re)discovery of the highly politicized and ideologized Slavic paradigm after nineteenth-century Pan-Slavism in the form of a 'post-Panslavism,'³³ the focus on the presence (along with Jews, Germans, and Roma) of Armenians which was a defining feature of Eastern Europe (in the form of the aforementioned book series), and, last but not least, the meticulous examination of the influence of the history of conflicts in Eastern Europe on modern international law, as well as the considerable impact by practitioners and theorists from the eastern half of

33 Gašior, Karl, and Troebst, eds, *Post-Panslavismus*; Gašior and Troebst eds, *Gemeinsam einsam*.

Europe on international law.³⁴ Similarly, a project on *lieux de mémoire* in East-Central Europe with religious associations (*antemurale Christianitatis*, *Cyrrillomethodiana*, and the cult of the Virgin Mary) has had an impactful reception.³⁵

The hectic project cycle of three to a maximum of six years, however, did not leave me time to do another monographic study myself, but I have regularly published collections of the various essays I have written as a member of various projects.³⁶ Also, a parallel biography in the Plutarchian sense of two prominent twentieth-century Balkan protagonists, one from the left camp, one from the right, the Macedo-Bulgarian communist Dimitar Vlahov and the extreme right-wing Bulgaro-Macedonian terrorist Ivan Mikhailov, who were direct adversaries from 1924 to 1944, is still in progress (and has been announced, with a touch of excitement, a bit prematurely). The opening of numerous previously inaccessible Bulgarian, post-Yugoslav, Russian, and other archives since 1989–91 and the renewed temporary closure of some of them in the course of the events that have unraveled since have caused a massive delay here. I have another plan for a monograph based on an examination of my aforementioned Bulgarian state security file, thus following a bit in the footsteps of my U.S. colleague Katherine Verdery, who analysed the materials kept on her by the Romanian Securitate.³⁷

Coda: On the usefulness of secret services for historians

The concerns at which Hugh Seton-Watson hinted, with regards to himself and his career, with the title of his essay “On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe” are in my case documented in detail in the Bulgarian volume of files mentioned for the years 1976–1989. These materials, of course, were compiled under the incorrect assumption that I was already a full-time employee of the West German Intelligence Service, despite my youth at the time, and that after my DAAD year in the United

34 Programmatically: Troebst, “Eastern Europe’s Imprint”; Troebst, “Speichermedium der Konflikterinnerung,” and also the exemplary work by Skordos, *Südosteuropa und das moderne Völkerrecht*; Trültzsch, *Sozialismus und Blockfreiheit*.

35 Kenneweg and Troebst, eds, *Marienkult, Cyrillo-Methodiana und Antemurale*; Halemba, *Negotiating Marian Apparitions*; Gașior, ed., *Maria in der Krise*; Gașior, Halemba, and Troebst, eds, *Gebrochene Kontinuitäten*.

36 Troebst, *Kulturstudien Ostmitteleuropas*; Troebst, ed., *Das makedonische Jahrhundert*; Troebst, *Erinnerungskultur*; Troebst, *West-östliche Europastudien*; Troebst, *Zwischen Arktis, Adria und Armenien*; Troebst, *Gewaltmigration, Globalisierung und Geschichtsregion(en)*; Troebst, *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia*; Troebst, *The Other Lung*. See also Jorek, ed., *Bio-Bibliographie Stefan Troebst*.

37 Verdery, *My Life as a Spy*; Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*.

States, I was also a full-time employee of the Central Intelligence Agency. During the Cold War, it was a common occupational risk for all 'Western' historians of Eastern Europe to be suspected of working as some kind of agent or informant or spy when pursuing archival research in the field or, worse, attempting to conduct field research as ethnologists. Also archaeologists, Byzantinists, Ottomanists, linguists, folklorists and religious scholars, Slavicists, and even Bulgarianists, including those from the 'socialist brother states,' were considered suspicious from the outset. The fact that the secret service dossiers created at the time in Bulgaria, Romania, the GDR, and elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc are accessible today (though unfortunately not those in the post-Soviet Russian Federation or in the tattered remains of the imploded federal Yugoslavia) is a stroke of luck for contemporary historians who deal with the East-West conflict of the time. This applies to me personally in a special way, since events and episodes from my post-adolescent years of wandering are recorded in these materials in a manner that sometimes clearly outstrips my own memories. For this, the meticulous officers of the Bulgarian State Security forces and their many unknown but then partly known unofficial collaborators deserve the belated profound thanks of someone who, despite the adversities created not least by this very group of people, tried to become 'a historian of Eastern Europe.'³⁸

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38 The translation of this study was supported by the Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa (GWZO), Leipzig.

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