

# Uncovering the Past, Reconciliation, Global Competitiveness

(Editor's Introduction)

The peace treaties of Europe are no success stories. Neither the one from 1918–1920, nor from 1945–1947. Out of this reason we need to reconsider the consequences of the two wars, which have left a lasting imprint on our youth. And we said: we need to do something, something with future dimensions, something to be accomplished in our life-time. (Especially, since this accomplishment would be considered the contribution of history and social sciences to public benefit of our age.) Rethinking the history of the 19–20<sup>th</sup> century in its complexity. This being a programme to mark our present and future. Up until this very day. Until tomorrow.

In an attempt to summarize our findings, we have come so far with our conclusions...

## **On the Borders of the Settlement Areas of Nations and State Administrations**

As to rethinking of history, our starting point was the age of the rise of industrial-technical revolution and the engraining of modern national languages going back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The borders of *the settlement areas of Europe's nations and the borders of state administrations* have never overlapped. This is especially true for the region sided with the Ottoman and German Empires, i.e. the settlement areas of our nations situated between the North Sea and the Mediterranean. The emergence and development of national communities in the 19–20<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in the surfacing of century-old conflicts. (We considered this contradiction – the separation of the borders of settlement area and state administration – to lie at the bottom of the circumstance that the outbreak of the two world wars originated here in this region, in East-Central Europe. Both, in 1914 and 1939.) Each and every nation – including their leaders: politicians, intellectuals, military officers – wanted state borders of their own, they wanted to establish what they needed for deriving their own state tax revenues, to be represented in the world on their own grounds as sovereign states. The old state administration – having the Austrian–German or even the Hungarian in mind – would not relinquish its territorial-administrational position. Nor its social position or role in building economy. In 1867 and 1914, this was the case with the German and Hungarian middle classes; and later in 1938 with the new – Serbo–Croatian, Romanian, Czech–Slovakian – middle classes. For the national communities living

in the preceding 150 years this meant real-time controversies. But the middle classes preceding us got the wrong end of the stick – with wars – when it came to reconciling conflicting interests. The wars fatally crushed the competitiveness of the European continent on the world market, both in terms of economic output and scientific achievement. The peaces in need of repeated revisions devoured the last intellectual and mental reserves of European culture. Leading to series of inhumane conduct, unprocessed genocides, and demolition of entire production units. These became after all the determining factors of European history in the period between 1830 and 1992, despite the periods of peace. So far to the conclusion we arrived at.

### **We have more Common than Contrasting Interests**

In the 1970–1980s, we set forth with thinking things over. As members of a young generation being raised in Europe, in the world and enjoying the atmosphere of this new side-by-side existence. And here follows the outcome of our thinking-it-over...

The new production organisations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of new contact systems for everyday use, and the new planetary challenges provide new opportunities to local-national communities all over the world, including the communities in Europe and our small-nation-communities in East-Central Europe. Those who are able to take full advantage of this new intellectual-economic world market, i.e. the opportunities offered by the geographic location, the potentials of soil, waters, climate of their region, will become global players and augment as a community. Both, in terms of culture and material well-being. Those, however, who are not capable of adjustment awaits the new poverty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our task in this respect: *preserving-advancing the benefit of local-national cultures* – i.e. *high-level* of national “Berührungskultur” – elaborately constructed and refined from bottom-up over the past 150 years –, the national vernaculars, and systems of traditions and customs. (The Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, Germans living in the Danube region, and certainly the Jews who identify themselves once as a minority group, then as a denomination or based on their common customs and habits...) Our task being in this respect: *to open up our minds to and awaken our interest in the world, to up-date and modernise ourselves so as to live up to global standards. For the first time in the past 150 years the peoples living in this region have more common interests than contrasting ones.* We, the new and young middle class, shall pursue the following programme: calling attention and claiming that the wars fought during the past 150 years were the wrong step to take, especially, since each and everybody turned out to be on the side of the losers. Even the peaces ended up in producing nothing else than losers. (No matter what our predecessors, victoriously bringing about “territorial gain”, may say. No matter how many monuments they set up, how many streets they name, or books they write for commemoration...) Instead of fighting wars, we shall launch open debates by drawing the middle classes in our discussions; instead of drafting peace treaties, we shall promote the reconciliation of societies, of the peoples living in the region.

## Impediments to the Recognition of Common Interests

As to our conclusions: There are two impediments in the way of recognising our common interests: *national minority conflicts and the vivid memory of the wounds we inflicted on each other in the course of our history*. For generations these conflicts generate in us *mutual distrust* making us incapable of thinking and working together. The second, historical memory, being a factor that belongs to the realm of mass psychology; the first, minority conflicts, being a factor of social dimensions and representing serious threat to others' interests.

As to our explanation: ethnic minorities rightfully perceive of themselves as being also in a socially disadvantaged position, since their children as compared to the children of the majority nation start out with a handicap in the social-cultural competition due to the lack of a full-scale education at all levels in the mother-tongue. (Careers in technical fields, production organisation, or service industry are no exception to that, either. They experience the same disadvantages as most of the children of the non-German and non-Hungarian families preceding 1918 within the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy and within the borders of historical Hungary.) *The solution to this being – at least as in our minds – neither territorial revision, nor the relocation and re-settlement of masses, as was the advice of the intellectuals of the majority of preceding generations, but the granting of ethnic-cultural autonomy within the present constructs of state*. Human rights do entail minority and denomination related collective rights, which are to be granted by every state. Or to be more precise: everywhere within the administrative framework of the newly forming European integration.

As to our explanation: deeply entrenched distrust is stirred up by unprocessed and unspoken memories of the repeated ethnic and inter-state wars of the past 150 years. It is not so much the memories of the states being at war and the army fights but the memories of the accompanying and subsequent bloody genocides carried out along ethnic and denominational lines. This is equally true for Hungarians, Serbs, Romanians, Slovaks, Croats, but also for Germans and Jews, who do not constitute nation-states here.

The families of us all are overtaken by loads of memories not only of the devastations caused by the wars but also by the memories of the mass relocations, misappropriations, and the mutual instigations. By the memories of fear. Heavily loaded with emotionally entrenched distrust. The solution being – in our minds – the re-initiation of discussions on the national histories of the region, the voicing of what was left unspoken, the exposure of the mutually inflicted wounds. Not for the reason of tearing them up again but with the intention of gaining forgiveness and forgiving. *Memories shall be preserved but the dead shall be buried with grace, and we shall become witness to the discussions on restitution in the moral and material sense. And then the time may come for reconciliation*. And all this takes place within the new administrative setting, the framework provided by the European integration process, the European Union. This was the very reason why we became devoted promoters of European integration.

## The Programme Paving the Way for Reconciliation

In 2007, the year of the second wave of south eastern enlargement of the European Union, we launched the programme of national reconciliation. By this time almost all nations of the Carpathian Basin and in the Danube region had gained entry into the new administrative setting, the European Union, and the EU-accession of the region inhabited by southern Slavic people was put on the agenda. And it was time for the intellectuals of the various nations in the region to come together and re-think prospectively what new opportunities will open up for them on the global market. It was the turn of our national Academies of Sciences to initiate coordination talks on the strategic interests of national settlement areas with respect to their natural cover and human society. (We, historians, cultural politicians, politicians specialised in minority questions, had in fact been active in this field ever since 1989, the time of the region's liberation, the first years of re-establishment.) Parallel to the history discussions intended to pave the way towards historical reconciliation, we put the assessment of new, EU-based opportunities for minority policy on the agenda; and we put the discussion of new regional strategic programmes on the agenda, as well. These regional programmes included water management, policy for rural development and transport, information technology and trade, etc. (In fact, these programmes function also as a means for bringing the middle-classes of the region employed in technical fields and farming closer together and for accustoming them to mutual cooperation. And these regional programmes also teach us to think continentally, what's more they teach us to think planetary.)

Looking back at these times today, in January 2013, the *reform-politicians of our region in power deserve our praise*. They either promoted our incentives or, if they didn't, they did not hamper us either, in none of the states. Without the political leadership, we would not have achieved more than drafting studies and organising conferences. In 2009, we issued a proposal to political decision-makers and academics concerning the assessment of the most sensitive national controversies of the region – the ethnic and denominational controversies in the southern Slavic region – in an institutionalised form. (Serb and Croat intellectuals as well as intellectuals of the local Hungarian and German minority had repeatedly put the disclosure of the conflicts of historical memory on the agenda since the dissolution of Yugoslavia; and it was since 1992 that local minority politicians pursued the issue of contemporary autonomy models and their political application.)

There followed in December 2010 the setting-up of the commission for the disclosure of historical past, a joint incentive of the Serbian and the Hungarian Academies of Sciences, and also the joint programme aiming at the survey of the victims of the genocides committed during and towards the end of the Second World War was launched. (We should add here that the renewing reform political setting in Serbia and Croatia performed an action of historic relevance by gaining social acceptance for their programme: the assessment of the history of unprecedented political and ethnic cleansings committed on the territory of former Yugoslavia, disclosure of graves, rehabilitations, accessibility of archival materials for academic

research. And they had to face the recently committed mass killings of the 1990s, as well...! Undoubtedly, the previous and present political elite in Serbia and Croatia can perform a historic act with European dimensions...)

### **2010–2013: Organised Research, Debates and Long Awaited Reverence on the Part of Political Decision-makers**

On 30 September 2011, an international conference in Budapest discussed the memory of the genocides committed during the Second World War. (The present volume is the outcome of the conferences organised with the participation of the academies of the region.) This was the first summit with the joint participation of academics from Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Austria, and Slovakia since 1945. Here, we had a team – its members mostly of our generation – which had paved the way for national reconciliation in the region right from the beginning back in the 1980s, later during the time of system changes (after 1989) when its members were already high-ranking officials employed in academic and cultural political administrations, and following 2007, when they were regularly invited to join academic actions and initiatives with regional scope. And it was this team which even succeeded in establishing cooperation with the political decision-makers of the region. (And these decision-makers have to perform other historic acts besides ethnic and denominational reconciliation, as well: getting along with production units to be integrated into the new world order and the effects of social restructuring caused by the new division of labour.) We would like to believe that we have achieved better in this respect as the intellectual and political middle classes of the previous generations. Maybe... The test of the historian-academic intellectuals lies only to some extent in their recognition by the present public, and much more in the future life of upcoming generations...

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Ferenc Glatz