Social Actors, Practices, and Conceptions of Revisionist Politics in Europe, 1938-45

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The international conference on social actors, practices, and conceptions of revisionist politics in Europe, 1938-45 took place from 10 to 12 September, 2009 at the University of Bern, Switzerland. The meeting was organized by Marina Cattaruzza (University of Bern), Stefan Dyroff (University of Bern), and Dieter Langewiesche (University of Tübingen) and gathered historians from the USA, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Germany, France, and Switzerland. Due to illness, Dieter Langewiesche unfortunately couldn't attend the conference.

As MARINA CATTARUZZA (Bern) pointed out in her introduction, the aim of the conference was to raise new questions about the alliance around Nazi-Germany and particularly about the policies of territorial revisionism as well as of ethnic and racial resettling implemented by most allies of the Third Reich. It was the intention to address issues of common patterns in the representation of nation and citizenship and national territory and boundaries in countries which were otherwise fiercely competitive one with another. Two major questions were to be answered: a) which social groups took part in revisionism? And b) how were revisionist practices – that is effective control over the occupied territories – actually carried out? It is safe to say that these questions are of vital importance since East-Central-Europe became the heart of territorial revisionism after the fall of the Habsburg Empire in 1918.

The first session focussed on political elites of irredentist minority groups, Slovak and Ukrainian separatist movements and their ideological allegiances to Nazi-Germany and conflicts among the Allies themselves, which arose from competition for territories. The second session was devoted to revisionist practices with a focus on ethnic cleansing and genocide in Romania and the so called Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

MIROSLAV TEJCHMAN (Prague) dealt with the Croatian, the Slovak, and the Romanian collaboration against Hungary from 1941 to 1943. After the destruction and division of royal Yugoslavia in April 1941, these three states and puppet-states respectively (in the cases of the NDH, and Slovakia) were all united by territorial demands against Budapest and tried to form a revisionist bloc within the Axis powers: The Slovak government sought to get back Southern Slovakia while the Romanians were eager to regain the part of Transylvania ceded to Hungary after the Second Vienna Award in August 1940. Zagreb wanted to get back Međimurije annexed to Hungary in April 1941. Tejchman underlined that the policy of mutual fraternisation of the three states never disputed the Axis. They always acted within the given framework and respected potential German or Italian grudges. The conspired tripartite fraternisation never had an offensive character. What remained was inability to create an alliance in defending their interests and an episode of the satellites' desire to do more independent policy, Tejchman concluded.

FRANZ HORVATH (Ludwigslust) analyzed and compared the revisionist actions undertaken by Sudeten German and Transylvanian Hungarian elites before and during WWII. He asked what kind of revisionist plans were developed during the interwar period, what their reaction looked like when they became a majority in September 1938 (Munich Agreement) and August 1940 (Second Vienna Arbitrage) respectively, whether it is legitimate to speak of a specific responsibility these groups (or its representatives) held for the holocaust and how they treated the former majorities, that is the Czechs and the Romanians. He legitimately pointed out that ethnic minorities (as any other social group) can't be seen as a homogenous unity. If (minority) leaders had made political demands in the name of Germans or Hungarians they merely constructed an allegedly unified ethnic group. In order to avoid generalizations, Horvath suggests mentioning the name and political direction of each person

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from case to case. He detected a lot of similarities in the ideological attitude and revisionist behaviour of the Sudeten German and Transylvanian Hungarian elites: Both group leaders treated the former majority population in a way which contradicted the demands they made in the interwar period.

One of the most inspiring and innovative speeches was delivered by HOLLY CASE (Ithaca, N.Y.) on interactive history of revisionism. Her main question was how the East-Central European members of the Tripartite Pact (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, NDH) viewed and reacted on each others' revisionist aspirations during WWII, assuming that this entire region was revisionist and that none of these states felt its territorial demands fully satisfied. Case asked for a longer, wider, more complete and more transnational approach in the history of revisionism and raised the interesting question, whether revisionism should be regarded as an ideology of its own. She depicted the revisionist solidarity between Bulgaria and Hungary, described the fear in Hungary that the Little Entente somehow or other might be revived, specified some aspects in the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the NDH as well as between Bulgaria and Romania and finally revealed how the territorial reshuffling in the Balkans impacted on handling citizenship, property concerns, and national identity matters in the occupied and annexed regions. By taking into account the interactions and exchanges between multiple revisionist states we discover that the behaviour and attitudes we have come to expect from revisionist powers is changed and new priority hierarchies, partnerships, and tensions emerge, as Case pointed out in her final remarks.

IGNAC ROMSICS (Budapest) devoted his contribution to the plans, expectations, and reality of Hungarian revisionism in the interwar period (1920-1941). With the Treaty of Trianon (June 1920), Hungary had lost 71 percent of its pre-war territory and 64 percent of its pre-war population. More than three million ethnic Hungarians (Magyars) now lived beyond their „motherland" in Czechoslovakia, Romania, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929), and Austria. These facts must be considered the preconditions both for the revisionist foreign policy of interwar Hungary and the revisionist attitude shared by a large part of the Hungarian population. In his analysis, Romsics depicted the argumentations of the revisionist-minded actors and differentiated between a more moderate, ethnical-based revisionism (e.g. Miksa Fenyő) and a more radical, historical-based one (e.g. János Karácsonyi). Apart from these revisionist movements there also existed voices demanding a peaceful co-existence of the people inhabiting the Danube basin within a confederation (e.g. Oszkár Jászi, Dezső Szabó). The question of Transylvania (Transylvanism) was of vital importance for almost all politicians and intellectuals in inter-war Hungary and somehow connected revisionist ideologies with confederal, „Danubian" initiatives, as Romsics pointed out. By relying on Nazi-Germany after autumn 1938, Budapest managed to fulfil large parts of its revisionist dreams: Between 1938 and 1941 Hungary's territory expanded from 93.000 to 172.000 square km and its population from 9 to almost 15 million.

TATJANA TÖNSMEYER (Berlin) took a closer look at the two most influential and powerful Slovak organizations during the existence of the formally independent Slovakian state (1939-1945). These were a) the nationalistic Slovak People's Party (SPP aka Hlinka party) led by the catholic priest and head of the (first) Slovak Republic, Jozef Tiso, and b) the anti-Semitic/anti-Jewish Hlinka Guard of Alexander Mach. While the SPP perceived itself as the only legitimate representative of the Slovak people and – according to German ideas – was to be remodelled along the lines of the NSDAP, the Hlinka Guard can be regarded as an imitation of the German SS. As a third topic, Tönsmeyer examined the Slovak involvement into the Holocaust. Tönsmeyer clearly showed that the SPP successfully resisted German influence. The German advisor sent to Slovakia in order to reorganise the SPP had to give up this project eventually. The same conclusion is in principle true for the Hlinka Guard, although one radical group around the newspaper „Náš boj" committed itself to the German conception of a „New Europe". Tönsmeyer concluded that altogether the behaviour of the Slovak elites wasn't qui-

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te satellite-like, since even harsh anti-Jewish legislation was enacted without any pressure form Berlin.

FRANK GRELKA (Berlin) talked about the politics and the military action undertaken by the ethnic-Ukrainian nationalists and their collaboration with Nazi-Germany. Most of the Ukrainian nationalists were gathered in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist, the OUN, which was originally founded in 1929 and split apart in 1940 in a moderate (OUN-M) and a more radical wing (OUN-A). The Ukrainian national party expected an independent Ukraine, and an independent Ukrainian army. As elsewhere in Europe, Germany used Ukrainian nationalists for reaching its aims. Grelka raised the question why Ukrainian nationalists between 1938 and 1944 almost unconditionally committed themselves to German promises of a „New European Order". He stated that the basic motivation for collaboration was ethnical and not political by its nature. In their struggle against Polish, Jewish and Soviet domination, Ukrainian nationalists accepted the Nazis as unsatisfactory, but at the same time indispensable allies. Grelka concluded that in the Ukrainian case collaboration was not a moral choice but an opportunity to establish its own regional powers over Polish and Jewish population.

STEFAN TROEBST (Leipzig) dealt with the Macedonian Emigré Organizations and Bulgarian Revisionism. After a concise and helpful overview on the territorial history of Bulgaria from 1878 up to the present, he took a closer look at three intertwined developments: These were a) Bulgarian revisionism in the interwar period, b) the influence of Macedonian emigration organizations on Bulgarian foreign policy in the interwar period, and c) Bulgaria and Macedonian organizations during WWII. As to the first and second topic, Troebst differentiated between the official (this being the Bulgarian governments) and the unofficial (this being the Emigré organizations in general, but the powerful IMRO in particular) face of Bulgarian revisionism. He underlined that the interaction between the Macedonian Emigré organizations and Bulgarian revisionism was intense and decisive. In the 1920s and early 1930s, IMRO pushed the Bulgarian government away from the policy of a 'peaceful revisionism' in the direction of tolerating the organization's own militant revisionism in the form of guerrilla warfare and terrorist acts. As to the third topic, Troebst pointed out that relations between official Bulgaria and IMRO from April 1941 to September 1944 remained close yet tense: While the pro-German government under Bogdan Filov saw its revisionist program almost fulfilled, IMRO under Ivan Mikhailov now sought to establish a 'free and independent Macedonia'.

TRAIAN SANDU offered a lively and theoretically intriguing approach on the methods and actors of revisionist policy in Romania as well as the impact of revisionism on the genocide against the Jewish population. By taking a closer look at the Hungarian-annexed Northern Transylvania region, he compared the revisionist policy of Marshall Ion Antonescu („leader of state") with the one of Iuliu Maniu (leader of the oppositional National Peasant Party). Both politicians were totally involved in revising the new boundaries, but with exactly opposite international links and sociopolitical options, Sandu emphasized. Sandu developed an interesting three-fold typology of Romanian revisionism: 1) Eastern revisionism in Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina as a „fascist" ideologically driven revisionism, 2) the „traditional" and less brutally conducted Western revisionism in Northern Transylvania and finally 3) Balkan revisionism (Eastern Banat, protection of the Romanians in Serbia and Macedonia) as a combination of the Eastern and Western revisionism. As a third topic, Sandu described the moderating role of traditional Transylvanian revisionism upon the Antonescu's refusal to send what was left of Romanian Jewry to the extermination camps.

CONSTANTIN IORDACHI successfully embedded the theoretical discussion led in Western European historiography on Intentionalism and Functionalism into the history of the holocaust in Romania. In his sophisticated presentation, Iordachi suggested speaking about personal responsibility when referring to Intentionalism and impersonal responsibility when referring to Functionalism. To combine these two approaches and go beyond them would contribute to a better understanding of the Romanian Holocaust.

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In the discussion, Iordachi rightly underlined that the definition of what a Jew is was also an instrument of social transformation. He furthermore supported a comparison between the Romanian and Bulgarian holocaust in order to present a more balanced picture, since 250.000 Jews in Romania survived the war.

The interaction between revisionism, population policies and mass violence in the so-called Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was the topic of ALEXANDER KORB's (Berlin) speech. He intended to offer a different approach that leads away from the paradigm of „tribal hatred" by debunking the NDH as an agent of ethnic and social engineering. By doing so, Korb detected a significant portion of independence the Croatian actors enjoyed both from Germany and Italy in fulfilling their dream of an ethnically „homogenous" greater Croatia. The actions undertaken by the leader of the NDH, Ante Pavelić, and his consorts clearly indicate that both mass and massive violence was perceived as a legitimate instrument in order to reach their goals. The persecution of „Serbs" radicalized the Ustaše conceptually and practically, thus leading to the detention and killing of the two other undesirable communities in the NDH, namely the Jews and the Roma population. Korb concluded that mass violence in 1941 and 1942 followed Ustaša concepts, and was not German-ordered.

Both the discussions subsequent to the speeches and the final discussion turned out to be most rewarding. With consideration to the main topic of the conference, the term „revisionism" was paid special attention to by the participants: Whether revisionism should be treated as a separate ideology or be regarded as a part of nationalism was controversially disputed. To answer this question, Cattaruzza suggested looking at the existence of revisionism in early modern times and argued for a narrow or at least distinctive theoretical conception of revisionism. Case generally put the question, what we consider an ideology. She pointed out that one of the most important criteria in defining any ideology is that the main goal of the respective ideology (e.g. socialism) should never be achieved completely. If done so, the ideology would obviously lose its right to exist. She also stated that revisionism is subjected to geopolitics to an extent that nationalism is not and asked, whether „real" revisionism is limited to small states only. Sandu thus proposed to set up revisionism as an interdisciplinary study at the cost of nationalism and geopolitics. Iordachi would combine revisionism with other ideological approaches and would especially search for links between nationalism and revisionism. When talking of revisionism, one mustn't forget the people inhabiting the territories in question, since revisionist demands are often based on the ethnical affiliation of the population, as Korb rightly stressed. Tönsmeyer's idea of looking at revisionism as a cultural history met with general approval. More contested was the question raised by Gerlach, whether „collaboration" is an accurate term for describing the actions of the pro-German regimes in Eastern-and Southeastern Europe. According to him, collaboration has the taste of doing the job of the Germans which is – as the cases of Slovakia and NDH have illustrated – not necessarily true.

The conference fulfilled its objectives: Some questions were answered; others were raised –maybe even more important ones. Revisionism is a topic that definitely deserves more methodical, theoretical and practical consideration. If the contributions that are to be published will contain some fundamental reflection on revisionism from all the different points of view – as Sandu suggested – then this volume will be a basic for further research into the history of revisionism in Europe.

Conference overview:

Marina Cattaruzza (Historical Institute, University of Bern): Introduction

Miroslav Tejchman (Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague): Attempts to form antirevisionist Alliance inside the Axis: The Croatian, the Slovak, and the Romanian Collaboration against Hungary 1941-1943

Franz Horvath (Ludwigslust): Sudeten German and Transylvanian Hungarian political Elites as Actors of Revisionism before and during WWII

Ignac Romsics (Eötvös-Loránd-University,

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Budapest): Hungarian Revisionism in Thought and in Action, 1920-1941 (plans, expectations, and reality)

Holly Case (Cornell University Department of History, Ithaca, NY): Revisionism in Regional Perspective: How Slovaks, Croats, Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs, and Bulgarians viewed each others' revisionist aspirations during the Second World War

Tatjana Tönsmeyer (Humboldt University, Berlin): Tiso's Party and the Influence of German National Socialism

Frank Grelka (Berlin): Politics and military action of ethnic-Ukrainian collaboration

Stefan Troebst (Centre for history and culture of East-Central-Europe, Leipzig): The Macedonian Emigré Organizations and Bulgarian Revisionism, 1938-1944

Traian Sandu (University of Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris): Revisionism and Antonescu's Regime in Romania – the Transylvanian Syndrome

Constantin Iordachi (Central European University, Budapest): Beyond Intentionalism and Functionalism: Agency and Context in the Holocaust: The Case of Romania

Alexander Korb (Humboldt University, Berlin): Nationalizing War and the Holocaust. Croatia 1941-1945

Ottmar Traşcă (Cluj): Hungary's Policy in the Territories ceded by Romania after the Second Vienna Award (cancelled his participation due to illness)

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