

## INTRODUCTION

The present volume gathers together presentations offered to the third Historians' Workshop, held at New Europe College, Bucharest in collaboration with the Center for South-East European Studies, University College London, the British Council and with additional funding from the British Academy. Twenty-five participants from universities and research institutes from all over the region met to discuss "History and Society in South-East Europe since 1970". This followed on sessions in London (March 2000) and Belgrade (November 2001) which treated "The writing and teaching of Balkan history" and "History of the Present".

Why history and society? A number of excellent works have appeared about the *production* of history in South-Eastern Europe, its myth-making capacities (usually interpreted in an exclusively negative sense), its role in the construction of (usually national) identities. The relation of these processes to the study of the recent past – not only the analysis of what happened not long ago but its (often contested) relation to the present and the future – had been the object of the previous workshops. But other questions remained: how are people consuming this historical production? The historian's work has an obvious relation to time and images of the past, but what conceptions of societies are being formulated? What is the institutional context of these formulations? Do historians control history any more? If not, is this a good or a bad thing?

The contributions that follow do not amount to anything like a treatise – they display all the drawbacks of a set of workshop papers. But at the same time their heterogeneity will, the editors hope, help people to grasp unexpected aspects of an apparently familiar problematic and, in short, to think about the relationship between history and society in new ways. While some contributions (Mihalache, Zachariah) address more general questions of the importance of theory and method, others take us to varied but specific contexts: editorial and sociopolitical changes (Gasić in 1980s Yugoslavia, Ardeleanu in 1990s Romania); power strategies and their connection to gender and generational relations within the historical guild (Dimitrova); the tectonics of the Church and state historical discourses (Moşneagu); what people try to make history mean in Macedonia (Stefoska); institutional changes and popular attitudes to historical truth in Romania (Deletant); contested paint schemes and pedagogical scenarios in Transylvania (Szabó); mandates, intentions and outcomes in Western and

Balkan ethnographies (Duijzings); the relation between causality and consumerism in recent accounts of life in eighteenth-century Britain (Hitchcock). The interesting questions of the demise or ongoing validity of socialist history in the British and Indian contexts are also discussed (Williams, Zachariah).

No unitary solutions – let alone recommendations – emerge from the various essays. Balkan society's relation to history emerges as a complex one, with a range of do-it-yourself techniques for constructing the past competing with the state enterprises and the semi-private establishments. The partial collaboration here with researchers of an anthropological (Duijzings) or literary (Szabó) training might help historians situate themselves in the post-positivist, post-industrial, proto-capitalist landscapes of South-Eastern Europe today. An analysis of the conceptualisation of the region in Anglophone historiography – a problem raised but hardly exhausted by Maria Todorova's widely-discussed essay *Imagining the Balkans* – is missing here, but would certainly help us clarify the statues of a number of discursive enterprises. If the reader is able to use our contributions alongside other regional efforts to think about these questions<sup>1</sup> to reach a more contextualised understanding of at least some of aspects of our chosen problematic, then the work that has gone into this issue will have been worthwhile.

The organizers are extremely grateful for the opportunity to publish a selection of these contributions as a special issue of *Xenopoliana*, which in its eleventh year is still as far as I know the only specialist review in South-Eastern Europe dedicated specifically to historiography and a conceptual approach to history.

Stephan Roman (British Council Bucharest, Regional Director for South-Eastern Europe) and Snezhana Daneva (British Council London) gave the green light and a lot of organisational support to this project. Andreea Pulpea inputted ideas and (with Oana Macovei) an enormous amount of time and effort: the British Council offices in Belgrade, Sofia, Skoplje and Tirana did their bit with great efficiency. Gabi Massaci and Dragoş Bucurenci are brilliant publicists; Anca Oroveanu (New Europe College) a generous host and an astute interlocutor. Last, but not least, I am grateful to my old acquaintance, Professor Alexandru Zub, for opening the pages of his review to us; to Andi Mihalache for his prompt and efficient collaboration; to Mihaela Daniluc for extremely professional copy-editing, and Adrian Cioflâncă for putting his shoulder to the wheel at the last minute.

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<sup>1</sup> Among recent productions we may note the volumes *Istoria recentă în Europa: obiecte de studiu, surse, metode: lucrările simpozionului internațional organizat de Colegiul Noua Europă, București, 7-8 aprilie, 2000* [București]: New Europe College, 2002; and *Nation-building and contested identities: Romanian and Hungarian case studies*, edited by Balázs Trencsényi et al., Budapest: Regio Books / Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2001.