

Summary

The myth of state and nation

The nation-state idea using the example of selected Central European countries

Using the examples of several Central and Eastern European states (Poland, Czechoslovakia and its successors the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Belarus, Ukraine), the book presents the issue of national consciousness and the need for one's own state together with its mythologisation. Though often diametrically opposed and with their own distinct characteristics, the states and nations presented here also share common historical experiences. Some were deprived of statehood in the modern era or even the late Middle Ages, while others had never experienced statehood before 1918. All of them took advantage or sought to take advantage of the end of the First World War, when several regional empires (Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany) were defeated or simply disintegrated. The Hungarian case was somewhat different, because in the dualist Habsburg monarchy, the Hungarians had co-ruling status. They paid a high price for this, losing most of their historic territories under the Trianon peace treaty. The trauma of Trianon implied revanchist tendencies and the seemingly sole rational choice was to associate with the Third Reich on the eve of and during the Second World War. After the collapse of communism imposed by the Soviet Union, as in the other states in the region, Hungary's right-wing and populist Fidesz government, headed by Victor Orbán, reverted to making references to the injustice of Trianon.

With the exception of interwar Czechoslovakia, all states in the region, including those newly created after 1918, experienced problems in sustaining the democratic system, and authoritarian tendencies prevailed there. In the case of Belarus and Ukraine, which failed in their attempts to gain independence, a totalitarian system was introduced by Moscow. In the aftermath of World War II, right up until 1989, this totalitarian order also imposed itself on the Soviet bloc states, or those subsumed into the Soviet Union (the Baltic states). Following the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the USSR, the countries mentioned above had the opportunity to build real independence and restore or establish democracy. Ukraine, and especially Belarus, encountered the greatest problems with this process, having long been within either White or Red Russia, and also being subject to growing pressure from Moscow.

In the face of mass protests after the rigged elections in August 2020, Belarus's dictator (Alexander Lukashenko), a long-time advocate of a policy of appeasement, decided on a course of vassalisation to Russia, a course which would guarantee him power. The dramatic situation in this republic also concerns its citizens, who are not fully educated as a result of the waves of terror and Russification. The processes of consolidating identity and of identifying with the state, processes taking place in other countries, including Ukraine, have had minimal impact in Belarus and have been slowed down. Ukraine was and remains an intriguing example. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it finally achieved its longed-for independence, but Russia gave little respite to the country, which had numerous problems of its own. Besides the economy, the most significant difficulties involved bridging the split between the nationalist option and a bias in favour of Russia. This was demonstrated by the so-called 'two Maidans', especially the second one, called the Revolution of Dignity (2013/2014). However, through its 30-year existence, this state has shown its value; in the face of brutal aggression, Ukraine's population stood by their government and the defenders of the motherland for the most part, resisting the imposition of the 'Russian World.' It is undeniable that without the help of the West, Ukraine would have collapsed. However, it was this will to fight, alongside geopolitical calculations, that forced the hand of the 'free world' to some extent, albeit not without their hesitation.

All the states and peoples presented in the publication drew their will to build and consolidate a nation or state from the resources of their culture and history, of which they have good reason. The majority of states who succeeded in 1918 in creating their own organisms, the successes they enjoyed also provide further reasons for pride. Yet it is undeniable that even after regaining independence as a result of the problems of transition, the young democracies were still in the grip of populist tendencies. All but Ukraine and Belarus have found themselves in the EU and NATO. Though struggling, Ukraine aspires to be in this group.