

Ján MILČINSKÝ

Modern History of Central Europe: What we Have in Common

The Cosmopolitan Central Europe of Yesterday

While looking for an appropriate structure I realized that I should start with the street I live in, as with an example of what Central Europe means in practice. Some time ago, I happened to inherit a flat in the old town of Košice, today's second largest city of Slovakia. When one visits Košice today, one gains the impression of a predominantly Slovak city with some Magyar-speakers that one meets every once in a while on the main street in the shade of the beautiful Gothic cathedral. But if you notice that the main square has the shape of an eye and you have a closer look at the files in the city archive you discover that the history of the city is much more intricate than it seemed at the first glance.

The city was founded by German craftsmen from Saxony and it had a Magyar, German and Slovak population. From my window you can see the birth house of the renowned Magyar writer Sándor MÁRAI, you can walk to the birthplace of the wartime Prime Minister of Hungary Ferenc SZÁLASI or to the residence house of the Magyar nobleman Ferenc RÁKÓCZI II. It is just round the corner from the house where the Slovak national revivalists L'udovít ŠTÚR and Jonáš ZÁBORSKÝ met to discuss the revolutionary demands of the Slovak nation, and from the palace, in which the President of Czechoslovakia Edvard BENEŠ resided after the liberation of Košice in 1945.

Ján Milčinský (1967) is a Roman Catholic, born in Košice, Slovakia. He is a graduate of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He participated in research projects in Berlin, Paris and Zagreb. His main focus is the modern history of Slovakia and above all Czecho-Slovak relations in the times of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1939). He is primarily concerned with the issues of the Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakia, Slovak political thinking in the mid-war years and the relations between Slovak and Czech political parties in the 1920s and 1930s. Currently he is involved in a research program at the University of Chicago.

But if we are to be just, we should mention similar facts about other Central European cities, such as Budapest, Vienna, Bratislava, Prague, or Krakow. We might mention that Budapest, except for being the most important political, cultural and scientific centre of the Magyar intellectual forum, was the home of many Slovak intellectuals, for example the later Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Milan HODŽA, and the city saw the birth of their literary works.

We might mention that Vienna was not only the natural centre of the German-speaking part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but also the place where the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue MASARYK, or the President of the Slovak State, Jozef TIŠO, studied. It is a city in which Magyar noblemen such as the ESZTERHÁZYS or PÁLFFYS had their residences and in whose cafés and theatres Magyar artists presented their works. Even today lots of the names of shopkeepers in the shopping streets of Central Vienna show their Slavic or Magyar origin. Also the famous Viennese artistic style “art nouveau” (known as Jugendstil or Secession in Central Europe) was often co-shaped by artists such as the Slovenian architect Jože PLEČNIK, the constructor of the Zacherlhaus in Vienna and of the National Library in Ljubljana.

Bratislava, apart from its ancient Slavic substrate, always had a large German-speaking population and in the 19th century, especially after the Austro-Hungarian Reconciliation, the influence of its Magyar population was becoming stronger and stronger. It hosted such musicians as Joseph HAYDN, Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART, Ferenc LISZT or Béla BARTÓK and retained its trilingual character until the end of the World War II.

Praha with its rich history and culture has always attracted artists and scientists. It's mixed Czech and German character made Prague an important place of Slavic-German dialogue. Just like Vienna and Bratislava, Prague lay on the language border between the Slavic and the Germanic world and was a place of exchange of experience and expertise. Even if the relationship of the two nations was antagonised by the Hussite wars and the subsequent Counter-Reformation (and Catholic Renewal), it retained its double identity. In the 19th and 20th century it was not only the undisputed capital of the Czech national revival movement, but also the home of well-known German writers as Franz KAFKA, Franz WERFEL or Gustav MEYRINK. The sophisticated artistic audience of Prague was and is known all over Central Europe. This was also one of the reasons why Prague was for example the first city to host MOZART's opera Don Giovanni.

The ancient seat of the Polish kings – Kraków – seems today to lie quite far away from the German border. From an historical perspective, however, the language border, or rather the language-belt, had a different struc-

ture than it does today. It is not only the Marienkirche of Kraków that draws our attention to the city's German inhabitants. The city as an important trade centre used to be a Hansa city (Hansestadt), connected by the Wisła River with the Baltic sea and thus with the Baltic Hansa cities, such as Szczecin, Gdańsk, Rostock, Lübeck and many others. It is also worth mentioning that Kraków as the royal city of the Kingdom of Poland witnessed many important events connected with the marriages between Polish and Hungarian royal families in the Middle Ages.

Before we end our discourse on the character of Central European cities in the past, it is vital to mention one more element that contributed unmistakably to the character of the mentioned cities, namely the Jewish element. Up until the World War II the Jews played an important role in several economic sectors and constituted a distinct cultural element. The Jewish ghetto of Prague, the Jewish city of Kazimierz in Kraków, the Great Synagogue of Budapest or the Klezmer music revival of today are reminiscences of the unique cultural input of this ethnic and religious group in Central Europe.

From Cosmopolitan to National

Before we answer the question when and why the character of the Central European cities changed from cosmopolitan to national, we have to examine the reasons for the Central European national revival as such. It is quite understandable that in the Middle Ages the societies of Central Europe were structured differently than in the 19th and 20th centuries. The difference was mostly based on the hierarchical status and divided people into two basic classes: the privileged ones and the subjects. This division began to lose its exclusivity with the rise of the bourgeoisie and strong towns. But the ideological basis for a reformation of this division came with the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the constitution of the United States of America.

It is at the end of the 18th century that the Central European thinkers start to produce more and more political, linguistic and ideological works, connected with the idea of nation. It is in this period that in the Kingdom of Hungary the first voices against the usage of Latin and German appear. It is in this period that the Slovak Society of Learning is established to promote publications in the Slovak language. It is in this period that the Czech historian and philologist Josef DOBROVSKÝ submits the Czech language claims to the Austrian Emperor LEOPOLD II. And it is in this period that Polish revolutionary Tadeusz KOŚCIUSZKO leads the Polish fight for independence.

In the 1820s and 1830s the national movements develop more and more. Now there is more intelligentsia, consisting especially of students,



lawyers, doctors and lower clergy. The revolutionary year 1848 brings about a violent outburst in most of the Central European countries at the same time. The interesting thing is, however, that these nations often conflicted with each other, since the smaller nations feared that they might be swallowed by the nationalism of the larger ones, and the larger feared that the nationalism of the smaller might cause the disintegration of "their" state units.

In general we can say that in this decisive hour of national formation the nations of Central Europe listen very little to each other. Even the warm relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks are overshadowed by disputes as to whether the Slovak language needs its distinct grammar, or

whether a 'slovakianised' form of the Czech language should be used. It is in this period that the largest part of the Slovak national revival movement refuses the idea of one Czechoslovak tribe with two branches.

The Magyar revolution, even if crushed brutally by the Russian invasion, showed the maturity and strength of the Magyar nation, regarding its national aspirations. The Austro-Magyar dialogue that developed later and brought about the Constitution of the Dual Monarchy was one of the few political dialogues between the nations of the Habsburg Empire that produced high-level political results.

The national movements grew stronger in the second half of the 19th century. Even the smaller nations, who could not rely on stronger national nobility, found gradually an important ally. Since the number of emigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire was very high especially among the subject nations, their leagues and unions formed in the United States often played an important economic and political role. The activities of the American leagues of emigrants were not censored by any central power, so their ideologies often developed more quickly, as well as more radically than those formed in the Habsburg Empire or in the divided Poland.

The end of the World War I. and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the territorial losses of Germany and Russia, brought about a large-scale territorial reorganisation of Central Europe. Smaller nations were joined into corporate state units, on which they partly agreed and that the Allies accepted (Czechoslovakia; Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians) and Poland emerged as an independent country. At the same time especially Germany, Hungary and Turkey suffered not only territorial losses, but large numbers of their populations found themselves in the newly formed states, cut off from their homelands. But before we touch the very difficult and painful period of the 1920s and 1930s, let us first observe for some time the reasons for the rise of the Central European nationalism, both in its positive and negative sense.

Theory of Nation, Theory of State

The first President of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue MASARYK, maintains in one of his interviews that the questions of nationalities emerged in Europe as political problems only after the Reformation. He maintains that before the Church with her universalism was the chief connecting element, and states were either dynastic or territorial.

Even if we might consider this statement as just a partial explanation of the rise of national movements, it contains a very important message. It is generally agreed that the free market economy developed most quickly and thoroughly in Protestant countries, mostly with a strong Calvinist-Zwinglian

Reformed tradition. Such examples can be seen in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and the United States. Because of the radically reduced authority of the Church hierarchy, the civil hierarchy started to play a new role, too.

The idea of predestination forced people to concentrate more on their terrestrial life and placed a stronger emphasis on economic relations and the human well-being here and now. In other words, the human happiness was not postponed into the life after death, because it could not be directly affected by human actions – by merits, as it was expounded in the Roman Catholic dogmatics. This restructuring brought about more developed market relations and most notably a very important idea of the equality of opportunity. Of course this equality was not complete, but for the market's sake it was observed.

These ideas combined with the refusal of the rule of the civil British hierarchy shaped in America another very important idea, which later played a decisive role in the formation of modern Central European nations, both nationally and internationally – the idea of self-determination. We can say that in the course of the 19th century, this was the main idea of all the Central European national movements. The Poles searched equality with the Germans and the Russians, the Magyars fought for an equal position with the Austrians, the Czechs tried to assert themselves in their relations with the Germans and Austrians and the Slovaks tried to retain their specificity in their relations first with the Magyars and later with the Czechs. As we can see today, the principle of self-determination resulted finally in the formation of national states all over Central Europe.

Another important idea, which touched the hearts of many Central European national revivalists, was the idea of nation as a person. This idea had as a consequence that national philosophers required that the process of democratisation liberates not only individuals, but also nations, since they have the same rights as physical persons.

This idea of nation as a person is closely linked with another idea, namely the idea of the vocation of nations. On the basis of the philosophies of HERDER and HEGEL, many Central European national philosophers claimed that every nation is called to a task and has a vocation. This vocation cannot be fulfilled by any other nation and therefore it is indispensable that this nation be given complete freedom to put into practice all the necessary steps.

It is not necessary to mention that all these theories placed the nation above the state and gave it the right to oppose the state, if it blocks the nation from enjoying its natural rights. Against these theories, the theories of etatism, elevating the state above the nation, were promoted, as well as the ideas of French liberalism, but finally national self-determination was supported by a broader forum.

It was the principle of self-determination that constituted the basis for the reorganisation of Central Europe after World War I, as the suggestion of the USA president Woodrow WILSON was understood. This principle was applied also in other parts of Europe and contributed largely for example to the constitution of the independent Republic of Ireland.

It must be mentioned however that the application of this principle faced serious problems in practice, since at this very point of time certain nations did not crave for a complete independence and in Central Europe there were still many mixed or even cosmopolitan areas, in which this principle had to favour one of the parties and neglect the other. It is also necessary to say that the after-war territorial reorganisation of Central Europe took into account also many other factors, for example economic, strategic and infrastructural, and thus the right of self-determination played in certain cases a secondary role.

Nevertheless the principle of self-determination of one's own nation has been up to the present a philosophical dogma in all the national philosophies of Central Europe, even if its interpretation has often produced very controversial results, especially when applied to other nations. It can be however maintained that the nations of Poles, Czechs, Magyars, Austrians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croatians, Romanians, etc. have stuck to the principle of their own self-determination ever since they discovered it and applied it to their national conditions.

Equally, the idea of a total national assimilation into another nation has been jointly rejected by all of them. All the nations of today's Central Europe have this in common. They all fight for the equality of chances and equality of relations. How these ideas applied to minorities and national enclaves is a more complicated story, which transcends the scope of this paper.

Times of Confrontation

The years following World War I up until the end of the World War II were in many aspects the years of open or latent hostility. There were also notable exceptions however, which are also to be mentioned.

This era is in Central Europe linked with such phenomena as suspicion, accusations, feelings of being wronged, etc. Hungary retained its territorial claims and often accused Czechoslovakia of being an artificial, Czech-dominated state. Czechoslovakia often presented Hungary as a totalitarian and irredentist country, where the Slovak minority almost totally vanished. Poland had territorial disputes with Germany, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and Russia and its positive relations with Hungary were at times based on the dissatisfaction of both countries with the territorial status quo.

The relations between Czechs and Slovaks were strained by the increas-

ing Slovak aspiration for autonomy and by a large German minority, whose total number was higher than the number of Slovaks in Czechoslovakia. The political and economic situation in Austria was unstable and internationally the country suffered certain isolation and later Hitler's pressure and occupation.

It is clear that the media in the respective countries focused mostly on the failures of the other countries, pointing out their immaturity, evil intentions and conspiracies. But in this atmosphere of mistrust there were also points of light that are worth mentioning. Let us make a mention of two cases illustrating the positive side of the burdened Magyar-Czechoslovak relations of those times.

In the strained year 1918 the Slovak national revivalist Jozef ŠKULTÉTY mentions in one of his articles the death of the president of the Slovak Museum Society Andrej KMEĎ. In this connection he also mentions the letter that the Museum Society received from the Magyar politician and journalist Lajos MOCSÁRY. In this letter Lajos MOCSÁRY expresses his deepest sorrow over the death of Andrej KMEĎ and states that he had hoped to see KMEĎ become the bishop of the oldest Slovak bishopric of Nitra.

On the other hand in the year 1930 the President of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue MASARYK during his visit to South Slovakia also visits the grave of the famous Magyar writer Imre MADÁCH in Dolná Strehová and lays a garland on his tombstone. On this occasion he also sets up a fund supporting the activities of a scientific, literary and artistic fellowship of Magyars in Slovakia. This gives rise to the later Masaryk Academy supporting Magyar artists, writers and scientists in Czechoslovakia. Also this activity contributes to the popularisation of Magyar writers in Czechoslovakia, such as ADY, SZABÓ or MÓRICZ.

These two cases remind us of an important historical fact that also in times of tension there is place for gestures of friendship and recognition, or that such times need such gestures even more than the times of peace and co-operation. Gestures of this kind have a great symbolic value in the periods of ghetto-building and official political confrontation and can contribute to a gradual change even of the political climate. They prove that not only politics affects culture, but also culture finds its ways to affect politics.

Times of Socialist Co-operation

The first years after World War II are about paying the war bills. It is in this period that Central Europe loses its cosmopolitan face to a great extent. But this process has its roots undoubtedly in the events of the war. During the war, the tragedy of the Holocaust happens. It is brought about by a sys-

tematic suppression and gradual elimination of the Jewish element in the Central European countries. Relations between the nations of Central Europe are antagonised and the territorial face of the region changed.

The wartime antagonism is continued in the immediate post-war years, when the positions of power change. As a result of the post-war anti-German measures the German presence in the Visegrad region is radically reduced. The deportations of Germans into the territory of Germany and Austria push the language border further to the West. Similar measures are intended also for other nationalities, who are accused of helping the enemy, but are realised only to a limited extent.

Nevertheless the war and the immediate post-war period bring about a large restructuring of the population of Central Europe and it is obvious that this concerned in a great measure also the cities and towns of this region. At first glance the socialist times seem to be the opposite of the pre-war and war times. Especially after the consolidation of socialism the Visegrad countries become a part of a bigger whole, namely the Eastern Bloc, which comprises countries of very different structures, traditions and stages of development. In spite of these differences the Bloc tries hard to present itself to the international public as a balanced, mature and dynamic unit.

Even though the socialist system brought about new and undiscovered dimensions of co-operation in Central Europe, in general it never really succeeded in persuading the peoples of Central Europe that this co-operation comes from the grassroots. The permanent presence of the Soviet control inhibited the practical implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and free co-operation. The presence of the political element in non-political activities often created a grotesque greenhouse atmosphere, in which party affiliation played a more important role than education or expertise.

The idea of an international central planning gave rise to such organisations as the Comecon or the Warsaw Pact. It is not necessary to mention that these organisations had their negative side as well, as for example the Warsaw Pact helped to crush the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The political will of international co-operation opened, however, also other doors of mutual understanding.

Cultural exchange resulted not only in summer camps of politically organised youth, but also in the rise of Central European tourism, translations of national literatures or discovery of each other's national heritage. The countries opened their historical archives to each other, which was in the field of historiography a noteworthy precedent. Even if conflicting items were mostly omitted, a great progress was made in mutual scientific assistance and in the field of research.

A lot of these positive fruits of the socialist projects have survived up to

the present day, as they have proved to have been based on the solid ground of equal and intentional co-operation. An important connecting element in the area of politics was the existence of underground movements in all the Visegrad countries. These movements attempted either the reformation of socialism and the elimination of its totalitarian aspects or a total elimination of socialism in its Soviet form.

The Magyar revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, led jointly by Slovak and Czech politicians and the Polish movement of Solidarity, have greatly contributed to the awareness of joint Central European fight for freedom. It was also on the basis of this tradition that the post-communist co-operation has been built up. In this respect it is worthwhile to mention the fact that the Christian Churches represented in all these countries important elements of opposition against the totalitarian practices of the political systems and thus had a great opportunity to contribute to the restructuring of Central Europe after 1989. It is obvious, however, that this potential of the Churches has in the 1990s and 2000s remained largely unused, with the exception of Poland.

Present State of Affairs and the Perspectives

As our journey through the modern history of Central Europe approaches the present, it is worthwhile to stop briefly and consider recent historical developments. These, however, still need time to bear their long-term fruits, so their analysis often cannot be made to its full extent. Nevertheless the events following the wind of change of the early 1990s have already given birth to many new ideas, visions and projects. Even if the misunderstandings of the past are the issue of the day again, it is necessary to say that the conditions of the Europe of the late 20th and early 21st century differ greatly from the times when confrontation among the Central European nations was at its peak.

The official foundation of the Visegrad region in 1991, the regular meetings of the Prime Ministers of the V4, joint cultural presentations of the region abroad and common scientific forums, seem to be the signs of times, as they follow the European trend of transcending local and regional disputes, in order to create a long-term vision for Europe in its wholeness. Gestures such as the recent opening of the symbolic bridge between Hungary and Slovakia in Esztergom–Štúrovo are not only political, but have important practical impacts.

The societies of the Visegrad countries have in recent years been subject to significant structural changes, which have created completely new platforms of dialogue. The most important factor is that the Central European societies have at present a historically unique chance to live as

non-divided societies. The historical divisions into classes and ghettos have lost their relevance. The privileged classes of nobility and gentry have disappeared, as has the class of subjects. The strict division into radically rightwing or leftwing political units has lost its ghetto character. This goes similarly for the religious segregation, which has been largely eliminated by the world-wide process of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and cultural restructuring. The notion of class enemies, which was the stumbling block of the post-war Socialist system, disappeared with the advent of democratic society.

Although the Central European countries still need some time to overcome the heritage of the negative nationalism of the past, they have, to a great extent, realised that their future is necessarily going to be co-shaped by their neighbours. The experiences from Soviet times show clearly that becoming a member of a bigger unit cannot solve local disputes, even if it can place them into a broader context. In this sense even, the accession of the Visegrad countries into the European Union cannot take away the historical burden these countries carry on their backs.

It is mutual co-operation in the fields of politics, economy, culture, religion, etc., that can bring the members of the different nations together and help them overcome prejudices that are continuously shaped by political radicals and by people who can profit from them, or who are bored.

The Importance of Positive Stories

The history of Central Europe offers both examples of dangerous prejudices and examples of equal dialogue and good knowledge of other nations. History teaches us that the deconstruction of prejudices is a long process, which has no end, because it is not linear, but cyclic. New prejudices are always formed and new untrue stories told. But if the importance of prejudices in popular awareness decreases, there is a chance that nations will not enter into conflict easily.

If popular clichés about other nations include a lot of positive stories, examples and pictures, they can help people to realise that other nations want the same as their own, namely equal opportunities, national self-determination and international justice. Therefore everybody can contribute to the reduction of dangerous prejudices by telling positive stories about their experience with another nation and by balanced criticism, which does not exaggerate the faults of the other and hides one's own faults. In connection with this, the great importance of such gestures of friendliness and non-aggression is manifest, as they are very precious sources of positive stories about other nations.



Ján MILČINSKÝ: Közép-Európa újkori története: ami közös bennünk

Minden közép-európai országban föllelhetjük a régió más országai felé irányuló együttműködési törekvéseket, a történelem ugyanis szorosan összekapcsol bennünket a politika, a gazdaság, a kultúra és a tudomány terén. Közép-Európa újkori történetét követve tanúi lehetünk annak a lassú mozgásnak, amely a kozmopolitizmustól a nacionalizmus felé tart a XVIII. század vége óta, majd az ezt követő nemzeti újjászüléseknek a XIX. század folyamán. Az Európa térképét átrajzoló első világháború és az ezt követő évtizedek a második világháború idejére szembeállították egymással az összes, viszonylag kisméretű közép-európai országot. A nacionalizmus gyökereit Közép-Európában ugyanis az önmeghatározás gondolata és a személyként, a maga sajátos föladataival és hivatásával körülírt nemzet fogalma táplálták. Ám még ezekben a feszült időkben is megtaláljuk a barátság és a megbecsülés jelképes gesztusait. A szocialista időszakban például a Varsói Szerződés, vagy a kulturális és egyéb cserefolyamatok erősítették a keleti blokk államai közötti kapcsolatokat. A mai együttműködést a Visegrádi Régió hivatalos megalapítása (1991) segítette elő, ennek keretében különféle közös projektek, fórumok jönnek létre. Ma már bárki hozzájárulhat a kölcsönös kapcsolatok gazdagításához, és csökkentheti a negatív előítéleteket azzal, hogy pozitív történeteket mesél a másik nemzetről.



Ján MILČINSKÝ: Współczesna historia Europy Środkowej lub co mamy ze sobą wspólnego

W każdym kraju Europy Środkowej możemy zauważyć powiązania z innymi krajami regionu; historia wiąże nas silnie na polu polityki, ekonomii, kultury i nauki. Sięgając wstecz od najnowszej historii Europy Środkowej, odnajdujemy stopniowy zwrot od kosmopolityzmu do nacjonalizmu od końca XVIII wieku oraz wynikające z niego zrywy narodowościowe w XIX stuleciu. Idea samostanowienia i koncepcja narodu jako osoby ze specjalnymi zadaniami i powołaniem formowały korzenie nacjonalizmu w Europie Środkowej. Mapa Europy zmieniona przez I Wojnę Światową oraz kolejne dekady aż do końca II Wojny Światowej stawiały wszystkie stosunkowo małe kraje Europy Środkowej przeciwko sobie. Mimo to w tych napiętych czasach obecne były symboliczne gesty przyjaźni i szacunku. Podczas okresu socjalistycznego powiązania pomiędzy krajami należącymi do Bloku Wschodniego były dodatkowo wzmocnione przez np. Układ Warszawski, jak też kulturowe i inne wymiary. Obecna współpraca została nawiązana przez oficjalne ustanowienie w 1991 roku Regionu Wyszehradzkiego, w którym realizowane są różne wspólne projekty. Każdy może przyczynić się do wzbogacenia naszej współzależności oraz zredukowania uprzedzeń poprzez opowiadanie pozytywnych historii o innych narodach.

Ján MILČINSKÝ: Novodobé dejiny Strednej Európy alebo čo máme spoločné



V každej stredoeurópskej krajine môžeme badať prepojenie s ostatnými krajinami regiónu, pričom významne dejinné spojenia existujú v oblasti politiky, hospodárstva, kultúry, či vedy. Pri pohľade na novodobé dejiny Strednej Európy môžeme na konci XVIII. storočia vnímať začiatok posunu stredoeurópskych spoločností od kozmopolitizmu smerom k nacionalizmu, ktorý v XIX. storočí dozrieva v pohyb národného uvedomenia. Idey národného samourčenia a národa ako osoby so zväštnou úlohou a povolaním formujú korene národného pohybu v Strednej Európe. Mapa Strednej Európy sa po Prvej svetovej vojne mení a desaťročia, ktoré po nej nasledujú, sú charakterizované konfliktnými vzťahmi relatívne malých stredoeurópskych krajín. Avšak aj v týchto časoch napätia je možné nájsť gestá priateľstva a uznania. V období socializmu sa prepojenia krajín Východného bloku posilňujú napr. na základe Varšavskej zmluvy, kultúrnou výmenou apod. Súčasná spolupráca sa zakladá na rôznych spoločných projektoch a fórach, ako aj na symbolickej proklamácii Visegrádskeho regiónu v roku 1991. Vzájomnosť stredoeurópskych krajín je možné obohacovať šírením pozitívnych príbehov o druhých národoch, čím sa postupne redukovujú desaťročia existujúce predsudky.

Ján MILČINSKÝ: Neuere Geschichte Zentraleuropas: was wir gemeinsam haben



Jedes zentraleuropäische Land ist mit den anderen seit je her durch Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur und Wissenschaft verbunden. In der jüngeren Vergangenheit kann man in Zentraleuropa seit dem späten XVIII. Jahrhundert eine Tendenz zum Nationalismus finden. Im XIX. Jahrhundert resultierten daraus die nationalistischen Bewegungen. Die Wurzeln des zentraleuropäischen Nationalismus liegen in der Vorstellung, dass die Identität selbst bestimmt werden kann und dass die Nation eine Person mit bestimmten Fähigkeiten und einem vorbestimmten Schicksal ist. Die Neufestlegung der Grenzen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg bis hin zum Zweiten hatte zur Folge, dass die verhältnismässig kleinen zentraleuropäischen Länder zu Gegnern wurden. Aber sogar in dieser Zeit voller Spannungen gab es symbolische Gesten der Freundschaft und Anerkennung. In der Zeit des Sozialismus wurde das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl der Ostblockländer durch den Warschauer Pakt, aber auch durch kulturellen und anderen Austausch gefördert. Heute geschieht das auf der offiziellen Seite durch die Gründung der Visegrad Region 1991. Hier finden etliche gemeinsame Projekte und Foren statt. Jeder kann dazu beitragen unsere Vielfältigkeit zu bereichern und negative Vorurteile abzubauen einfach indem positive Dinge über die anderen Länder weiter erzählt werden.