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Közép-Európa magyar szemmel [Central Europe 2020. A Hungarian Perspective].

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Iván Bába, Iván Gyurcsík, and Csaba Gy. Kiss have published their book Közép-Európa magyar szemmel in 2020, an English translation is under way with the title *Central Europe 2020. A Hungarian Perspective*. The three Hungarian authors understood the book *Mitteleuropa revisited* by Emil Brix and Erhard Busek as an invitation for debate. They try to give a Hungarian 'national democratic' response on the liberal approach of the Austrian authors. Instead of following the structure of Mitteleuropa revisited, the Hungarian book explains notions like nation, stereotypes, empire, fall of communism, minorities, remembrance, cooperation, integration. Some closing remarks answer the question in the subtitle of Brix and Busek, why the future of Europe will be decided in Central Europe. As Kiss takes note, the perception of 'nation' understood as a new framework of identity that suddenly appeared after the French revolution, can easily be bound with a quick process of outdating due to globalisation and European integration. For Hungarians and others in the region, modern nation has a dual nature: political and cultural. In the time of the French revolution, the 'birthday' of modern nations, there were no nation states in the central part of Europe ruled by the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman and Russian empires (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was about to be abolished, some limited autonomy existed in some states and provinces). Unlike in France, attempts towards the linguistic homogenisation of the Kingdom of Hungary were contested by non-Hungarian ethnic and religious groups from the late eighteenth century. Czech, Hungarian(-Croatian) and Polish-Lithuanian medieval kingdoms lost their sovereignty, still these have been part of the political (legal) heritage of the region. Balkan states with eastern Christianity have some medieval tradition of independence, too. Albanian, Slovakian, and Slovenian nation-builders also found some less evident historic legacy serving for the base of modern statehood. Kiss draws our attention to the processes of unifying linguistic norms of peoples of the Central Europe and explains the role of churches in community building. Csaba Gy. Kiss presents a series of examples how political boundaries and cultural communities could not be matched in the framework of a nations state.

As the same academician further explains in the next chapter titled 'Myth and Symbols – Mutual Stereotypes', nation is a symbolic community. Some literary men in the time of romanticism (re)formulated mythologies of the beginnings of the nations assumed to be many centuries earlier. Symbolic rivers and mountains appeared in the literary 'national' landscape. Golden eras with glorious heroes were poeticized. Later, two centuries of freedom struggles coming to an end with the fall of communism became

part of the mythology, too. Kiss also describes martyrology of these nations – influencing auto-stereotypes. The year 1848 brought some mutual stereotypes reflecting conflicting interests stemming from different social conditions and geographic situation. Professor Kiss traces a set of prejudices – some of them have proved not be eternal.

'Imperial Integration or Federation' – asks the same author. Empires taking control of the Gdańsk-Rijeka line could become dominant on the continent. The 1335 meeting of the Czech, Hungarian and Polish kings in Visegrád was a reaction to the emerging role of Vienna. Some personal unions in the forthcoming two centuries made the cooperation even closer. Almost four hundred years from 1526 were marked by the success of the Habsburgs' imperial integration. The threat (of Christians) by the (Muslim) Ottomans as an identity building factor is also mentioned. Ideas of national independence often appeared without the wish to dismantle the empires in the region. Initiatives for cooperation of Central European nations to achieve and preserve independence also have a relatively long history. The appearance of Russian soldiers in Hungary in 1849 and the German unification made the people under Habsburg reign to rethink their relation to the empire. Some considerations of Karl Renner may be relevant even today. German ideas like List's Zollverein and Naumann's Mitteleuropa are mentioned as well. The states created after World War I could not stand against the influence of Nazi Germany, later the Soviet Union. Until 1989 there was no room for a third Europe, but some intellectuals rediscovered Central Europe already before the changes making Visegrád cooperation viable.

Iván Bába writes on the fall of communism in Central Europe revealing some interesting details and connections, recalling the role of writers and poets. He also looks back to the border and population changes after World War II, emphasising the Soviet motives behind. 1953 (in GDR) and 1956 (in Poland and Hungary) brought massive actions against communist dictatorship with mixed long-term impacts. Prague Spring of 1968 was preceded by intellectual movements. Charter 77 of Czech intellectuals gained support in Poland and Hungary where some smaller islands of free thinking existed. The election of the Polish pope in 1978 was a sensation for the region. Relative freedom of organisation in Poland did not last long, the strikes beginning in 1980 were ended by the military coup 1981, resistance was repressed. In 1987 workers of Brașov (Romania) revolted. In 1988 and 1989 there were more and more protests tolerated by communists in power. Gorbachev himself made it clear several times that Brezhnev doctrine is over. Mr. Bába gives a detailed narrative how communist leaders of Poland gradually handed over the power, and the responsibly to solve serious economic problems, to freely elected politicians. A similar description of the 'peaceful transition' in Hungary is provided. The last period of the German Democratic Republic is recalled, too. Czechoslovakia's process from the 'Velvet Revolution' to the disintegration of the country is animated as well. The events in Timișoara and București parallel to a Romanian 'TV revolution' are explained in detail. This chapter goes on with a particular portrayal of the economic legacy of communism and with some 'was there an alternative' questions. Iván Bába concludes with a summary focusing on the role of social groups, Reagan and Gorbachev, also mentioning Western European politicians cautiously following the events.

Iván Gyurcsík, in his chapter on minorities and democracy, starts with reciting good practices after World War II in the western part of Europe. He also recalls the beginnings

of multilateral protection of national minority rights between the two world wars without any continuation within the UN system. Communist dictatorships tried to force the change of language of minority groups arousing resistance. 'To build peace, respect minorities' was the title of the papal New Year's message in 1989. National minority groups regained freedom to express their claims to ensure the preservation of their identity, but the social and economic changes did not favour them, partly because of their exclusion from the restitution of property. The most numerous national minority groups (Hungarians in Romania and Czechoslovakia) played an important role in the events of 1989, but already in 1990 demonstrations (in Romania in March, in Slovakia in October) against minority rights showed the limits of co-operation between minority and majority. In former Yugoslavia ethnic tensions led to tragic events in the nineties. Several political parties were formed by national minorities. This helped them to parliamentary representation, but they rarely could influence the formation of constitutional frameworks based on nations-state concepts. Only Hungary and some former Yugoslav republics established self-governing bodies of national minorities elected by popular vote. Mr. Gyurcsík gives an overview of the developments of the international (bilateral and multilateral) legal framework, and the role of minority political parties in governments of the region. He gives an analysis of the Euro-Atlantic integration from the perspective of minority rights. An explanation of interactions of governments, minorities, kin-states and international organisations is given. The Hungarian perspective is described in detail. The author points to the need of further reconciliation process in Central and South-Eastern Europe to be united with the inclusions of national minorities. According to his conclusions, ignoration of national identities question the future of the European Union as a community of values.

We can welcome back Csaba Gy. Kiss in the next chapter on dilemmas of remembrance. In the time of Soviet dominance even public holidays and coats of arm had to welcome the Soviet rule. Professor Kiss mentions some harmful developments in approaching history like exclusivist views in Romania and Bulgaria but draws more attention to an 'iron curtain' between European memories excluding the sufferings of Soviet times from the memory of Western Europe. The people of Central Europe have also just partially outbraved communist past. There has practically been no retaliation. Former communists have just been welcome political and business partners all over in Western Europe, too. Historians are late with processing recent past. Cultural proximity of Visegrád nations is explained by parallel phenomena in literature and music. Visegrád nations' memory has much in common, even if some events and persons have different evaluations. The communist era produced the most recent and most common elements of memory.

After World War II the Soviet Union organised 'cooperation' in Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, accession to NATO and EU were on the top of the foreign political agenda, and democratic cooperation within the region got a new momentum. Iván Gyurcsík gives us an overview how many ways the European countries, previously under Soviet rule, established new forms of cooperation. Austria and Italy organised some limited ('Alps-Adriatic') cooperation with their eastern neighbours already from the late seventies, the start of the Central European Initiative dates to 1989. Visegrád cooperation is in the focus of the analysis but the frameworks covering the Baltic Sea region, the Black Sea region and the Balkans are dealt with, too. Weimar and Slavkov triangles with Western partners

just like 17+1 cooperation with China are mentioned as well. US interest around the Three Seas Initiative appear. Macro-regional strategies of the EU are presented. In Mr. Gyurcsík's evaluation, regional cooperation helped Central European countries to understand each other, to articulate common interests, to reach their integration goals, to identify projects of common interest, to be recognised as economic partners as a group, to preserve identity and independence, to turn from followers into initiators.

Iván Bába devoted a chapter to Central Europe within the European Union. He recalls the after war challenges the European integration successfully met. He reminds that today's circumstances are different, and united action needs deeper understanding of each other. The Central European perception of security seems to be neglected when projects like Nord Stream get high level support in the Western part of the continent. Mr. Bába gives a thorough explanation how NATO and EU (CSDP) contribute to security. In his analysis of Brexit's consequences, EU without UK may be able to step forward in defence and security integration. Central European views on migration are explained in detail. The causes of emigration from Africa and Asia, as well as the legal background (Schengen, Dublin) are presented. He reminds that, a few decades earlier, refugees from Central Europe wanted to fit in the societies of Western Europe and meant no security risk, unlike newcomers from Africa and Asia today, especially Muslims. Iván Bába closes with a short description of Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical role for Central Europe.

The book is closed with the common answer of the authors on the question: Will the future of Europe really be decided in Central Europe? They present three scenarios. In the first, communication between West and East will improve leading to a real human community going beyond economic terms. Another scenario envisages Central Europe gaining economic power enough to influence the fate of Europe. In the third scenario 'core Europe' limited to the West succeeds in further marginalising the role of new members, at the same time marginalising EU's role in the world. It is up to the Western politicians if they can and want to transcend labelling 'post-communist' 'new democracies', to realise common values stemming from our common historic legacy, and to build a real partnership for a stronger, fully united Europe.

This book on Central Europe gives more than a Hungarian perspective. Hungarians may have soft spot for the rights of indigenous national minorities, but this is part of the Central European story anyway. The authors help the reader to draw some own conclusions from history. For them, some events of the 1790s and 1990s are equally important. The eight chapters support the reader in approaching the same Central Europe from eight different perspectives. They allow us to approximate the topical issues of the region by deepening our knowledge on the institutional framework that gives a chance to Central Europe to grow in peace and prosperity without forgetting inherited values. Those who prefer volumes alienating Central European societies by depicting them with expressions like antisemitism, populism, obscurantism etc., should look for another book.

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