

In this issue

For a long time Europe has been playing only a secondary role in research on contemporary history, but recently the topic has begun to attract a new kind of attention. In fact, numerous conferences, edited volumes, and book series have already tried to approach earlier centuries from a European perspective. But on account of the nation-state's dominance, twentieth century history is still mostly told from a national perspective, because the memory cultures of different nations are primarily based on the sufferings of their own people. Accordingly, in their recently published overview on "national traditions and perspectives of European research", Alexander Nützenadel and Wolfgang Schieder emphasize the differences in periodization and in topical interests in Western European countries, post-fascist, and post-communist states.¹ Still, studies focusing on the exceptionality of national "Sonderwege" are inadequate for the analysis of transnational wars, economic depressions, and social and cultural changes.

To tackle this deficit in historiography, contemporary historians from Eastern and Western Europe gathered in May 2004 to discuss ways of "europeanizing contemporary histories" ("Thinking Europe. Towards a Europeanization of Contemporary Histories").² They were able to make use of the extensive groundwork of integration studies by political scientists, the debates on school text-books among educationists, and the work of historians of the European University Institute in Florence. However, these initiatives have had only a limited impact on research in contemporary history so far. Thus, the participants of this conference tried to find transnational approaches and ways of interpretative networking to overcome the constraints of the dominant national perspectives. The results showed that at present a pan-European master narrative of contemporary history is not to be expected, and probably not to be desired either. However, it seemed that exchanges of information and discussions about interpretations of common research interests are more promising. Together with other related texts, this issue contains two of the main conference papers as revised articles.

The difficulties which scholars of contemporary history still experience with a europeanization of their research are not a result of ill-will but rather a product of several unresolved substantive problems.³ To begin with, definitions of "contemporary history" differ substantially: French researchers

¹ Alexander Nützenadel/Wolfgang Schieder (Hg.), *Zeitgeschichte als Problem. Nationale Traditionen und Perspektiven der Forschung in Europa*, Göttingen 2004.

² Cf. the conference report by Annelie Ramsbrock, *Patchwork Europa?* (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=498>).

³ Jost Dülffer, *Europäische Zeitgeschichte – Narrative und historiographische Perspektiven*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History 1* (2004), pp. 51-71.

define “histoire contemporaine” as beginning as early as 1789 and refer to the time after 1945 as “histoire du temps présent”. In Germany the epoch-making year 1917 has often been considered the starting point for “contemporary history”. However, the years after 1945 have also gained more importance, while the caesura of 1989/90 is only rarely crossed. Until recently, Dutch research had been focusing almost exclusively on the period of Nazi occupation. In contrast, for historians in Eastern European countries, “contemporary history” begins in 1945 with the liberation from one dictatorship and the introduction of another.

The question of the narrative subject is just as controversial, because a state-based history of Europe can at best begin with the Schuman Plan and the Treaties of Rome. It is a difficult challenge to develop a political history of an emergent polity that is just turning into a state, because the results of this development are not yet known. Further, in light of the dominant focus on Western Europe, the borders in Eastern Europe are often remaining undefined. This becomes apparent in the paradoxical talk of a “return to Europe” by countries that consider themselves to have always been a part of Europe in the first place. Another debate revolves around the question whether the crimes of Nazism or those of Communism should be given priority retrospectively. Although this question concerns identity politics rather than historical research, it still has considerable impact on historiography as the debates on the “Black Book of Communism”, for example, have shown.

Another serious obstacle is the controversy about the evaluation of current European development, which pits Europe-enthusiasts against Europe-sceptics. A significant number of researchers consider the progress of European integration a civilising step forward, away from destructive nationalism – a process that they are hoping to advance with their scholarship. As a result, their writings often contain a contradictory mix of rational analysis and emotional commitment. In contrast, other fellow historians are warning about the “Treitschke-trap”, i.e. an unreflected Europeanism threatening to repeat the Prusso-German understanding of writing history in the service of nationalist goals, only on a higher geographic level. Even if the objective of overcoming the nation-state may seem commendable, a historiography openly taking sides still runs the risk of being instrumentalized politically.

But how should one write a critical contemporary history of Europe while it is still in its making? First, this history would have to question the constantly changing connotations of the term “Europe”, making these shifting meanings the focus of research, instead of presupposing a fixed, normative version. Secondly, this history should not so much articulate hopes for peaceful togetherness as openly confront the numerous domestic and international conflicts, which have characterized the development of Europe throughout the twentieth century. Thirdly, this history ought not to present an impeccable

success story of the development of the European Union, but rather appropriately reflect the various false starts, setbacks, and problems of an open-ended process. Finally, this history should seriously try to avoid the danger of an autistic “Eurocentrism”, but instead discuss the manifold interactions of Europe with its former colonies and the rest of the world. The following texts present some of these approaches, experimenting with problem-oriented and self-reflexive methods instead of offering a teleological history of integration.

The article of the World-War One expert *John Horne* deals with the wars and escalations of violence in the twentieth century and thus does not present Europe as a harmonious, but rather as a conflict-ridden continent. Though this topic has been subject to detailed research for some time, it has been approached too little from a European and global historical perspective. Horne considers a polarizing view of war and civilization to be too simplified an explanation, as the causes of industrialized killing of millions are rooted in the intellectual movements of western culture themselves. In the eruption of unprecedented violence during the new “Thirty Years’ War” between 1914 and 1945 he observes a process of dehumanization of the enemy, pushed forward by totalitarian ideologies and programmes for ethnic cleansing. Although nation-states were the main agents, these processes cannot be explained on a national level alone, but can only be understood as the product of trans-national dynamics. As a result, the question of the more general European roots of wars of extermination and genocide will have to be faced.

The contribution of the French historian *Henry Rousso* discusses the issue of the conflicting memory cultures following these violent events in Europe. Across national frontiers, he observes a puzzling growth of interest in cultural memory during the past two decades. Rousso argues that this curious boom is fed by a turn to the recollections of common people, to national traditions and historical traumatizations, both in collective memory and scholarly research. Ironically, one can find a similar cycle of initial punishment of crimes, subsequent forgetting, and eventual struggles to remember across most nations. Today a dominant new Holocaust-sensibility is emerging, which can take on both superficial and serious forms. It appears in the trends towards reparation, juridification, victimization, and denationalization – processes that can be observed in the context of other crimes as well (e.g. the legacy of colonialism). How, Rousso asks, could a genuine European memory culture be developed between the extremes of a backward-looking fixation on historical traumata and an ahistorical negation of the past?

The view from the East onto the process of West European integration, that *Gregor Thum*, a historian of Eastern Europe, proposes, is of great importance as well. This perspective acts as a corrective for the Western trend toward a self-celebrating success story, as East Central Europe suffered most from the civil wars in the twentieth century. The construction of the Iron Curtain must be

understood as the most recent in a series of European divisions, which on the one hand facilitated western integration through making the Eastern Bloc appear as threatening enemy, and on the other subjected East Central Europe to Soviet hegemony for decades. Thum's article further emphasizes the slow re-linking of the torn connections through the policy of detente and the Helsinki process, which allowed limited intellectual exchange during the 1970s. The debate on Central Europe and the proposal of a "common European house" attempted to overcome the divisions of the Cold War and to reconstruct the unity of the continent as early as in the 1980s.

The interview with the historian of Eastern Europe *Karl Schlögel* addresses questions about the various transnational linkages constituting Europe culturally, politically, and socially. Schlögel is particularly concerned with "generating in a better sense of space" in order to recover the spatial dimension for historiography, which had been damaged by Nazi geopolitics. In his widely known portrayals of Moscow or the Russians in Berlin, Schlögel created vivid pictures of a lost eastern Central Europe of the past, in which different peoples could live together peacefully. To overcome the conventional view of a Europe divided into East and West, Schlögel calls for an examination of transnational cultural movements, political organizations, or collective migration processes. For him, Europe is not a fixed geographical unit, but a changing space of different, but closely linked networks. One central thread of the interview focuses on the question of what such a renewed, spatially oriented historiography would look like, and what this would mean for writing European histories.

The remaining texts in this issue explore in different ways further approaches to European contemporary history. The contributions to the discussion on "European History – Non-European History – World History" show that European contemporary history can in fact be connected to global history, which has been the subject of so much recent interest, and that it can even profit substantially from expanding its frame of reference. *Andreas Eckert*, *Biray Kolluoglu-Kirli*, *Dominic Sachsenmaier* and *Hartmut Kaelble* discuss how these different dimensions could interact in a more fruitful manner. In the section on sources, *Alexander Eisenschmidt* and *Jonathan Mekinda* present some unconventional thoughts on architecture by using examples of European post-war architecture as indicators for political and societal changes.

In the review section *Susanne Brandt* introduces an interesting online-project by six museums and institutions on the First World War, which offers virtual excursions to European places of memory. *David Rey* reports on how present-day Spain deals with the legacies of the Franco-regime on the basis of the popular Spanish movie "La Gran Aventura de Mortadelo y Filemón" that takes up elements of the cartoon-genre. In his critique of the exhibition on the First World War in Berlin, *Steffen Bruendel* complains about the lack of

sufficient annotations and calls for a stronger Europeanization of the exhibition's perspective. In the series on rediscovered classics *Christoph Cornelißen* presents Gerhard Ritter's influential polemic on "Europe and the German Question" of 1948, which tried to defend German history against the accusations of deviance from civilized norms by western critics during the Second World War. Finally, *Heinz Duchhardt's* review of a popular essay collection on Europe from 1955 deconstructs the intellectual limitations of the concept of the "occident" out of which the Institute of European History in Mainz emerged, which he chairs today.

In all, the writings in this issue intend to trigger a new debate on Europe among contemporary historians – not through moral appeals but with examples of issues that point to transnational contexts. At the most basic level, "Europe" is used only as an analytical category, as a space, in which certain developments on national and supernational levels have taken place. But due to the numerous wars and acts of violence, the old continent must at the same time be seen as a vision of peaceful and civilized togetherness of humans of different origin, languages, religions, class etc. Through the integration process the European Union can also be finally considered as a subject of its own, which is taking on a state-like character and thus can be examined as historical agent (though this ought not to be done affirmatively, but rather in a critical way).

The historiographical challenge of such a conception of "Patchwork Europe" lies in the presentation of common elements within its astounding diversity. Accordingly, the title "Europeanization of Contemporary History?" of this issue contains a question mark – its articles do not try to mark the end, but rather signal a new, intermediate stage of historical debates on Europe. The political enlargement of the European Union challenges particularly contemporary historians to explore this only little known territory.

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(translation: Paul Benedikt Glatz)