

## **From below and in between. Narrating and Practicing the Cold War in South East Europe - A workshop report**

Janis Nalbadidacis and Matthias Thaden

Cold War research has evolved in recent years. The confrontation between the two superpowers is no longer unchallenged at the center of attention. Inquiries have been focusing increasingly on smaller states' scope for action. [1] In addition, the consequences of the world's bipolar division for many areas of life beyond the diplomatic field are now being discussed. New impulses have also been coming from Global History, which questions the nation state's primacy. Hence, the fields and agents of transnational interdependencies have been receiving new scrutiny. The same applies to exchange relationships that transcended the political blocs' boundaries. [2]

While historiography on the Cold War has benefitted from important new approaches, these have largely bypassed research into Southeastern Europe. This is particularly astonishing because the Cold War in the southeast of the continent produced a political fragmentation in a comparatively small area that was unparalleled in the rest of Europe. While Greece and Turkey became members of NATO early on, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania joined the Warsaw Pact, with Romania becoming increasingly independent of Moscow. The same applies to Albania, which left the eastern bloc in 1968 and isolated itself more and more into the 1980s. Yugoslavia, at the heart of the region, was also one of the leading states of the non-aligned movement. Initial studies explicitly referencing



the region have now been published. So far, however, "traditional" diplomatic-historical approaches have continued to dominate here.

The starting point of the workshop was therefore the realization that, as a region with so many historical rooted references, Southeastern Europe practically calls out to be examined in terms of demarcation and alienation on the one hand and of exchange and cooperation on the other. So it was the many reciprocal and exchange-based relationships between the structures of global order and regional and local dynamics and circumstances that interested us. Beyond the geo- and military strategic aspects, therefore, nine young researchers were invited whose work has focused on actor-centered approaches, thereby clarifying the concrete relevance and shape of the Cold War in Southeastern Europe.

In the first panel, the central question was how the geopolitical situation "translated" into everyday contexts and how it became relevant in the minds and actions of the actors. Furthermore, we were interested in how the reference to a bipolar world order functioned as a kind of resource with which different political, cultural or scientific actors in the region pursued their own goals and projects. For example, Florin Poenaru (Bucharest) used the example of travel reports about Western Europe in socialist Romania to shed light on the underlying "developmentalist logic," which, while compliant with the party line, also admitted criticism in this context. Beatrice Garapon (Bordeaux) explained how traditional anti-Russian sentiment in eastern Turkey following the First World War contributed to the formation of an anti-communist discourse. Szabolcs Laszlos' (Bloomington, IN) paper, using the American corporate-funded Iowa Writing Program as its basis, which enabled authors from socialist



countries to study in the United States, demonstrated what a broad spectrum of responses this kind of managed encounter generated among the participants, who in this case were from Hungary.

The second panel looked at alternatives to the binary logic of the Cold War. Unlike the first three lectures, the perspective "from above" now played a role. Using Greece as an example, Dionysios Chourchoulis (Athens) highlighted the influence of national interests and viewed these ultimately as crucial for the mostly peaceful and successful conflict moderation among different actors in the Balkans. In a similar vein, Corina Mavrodin (London) argued that Romania's aspirations as a regional mediator were evident in Romanian President Dej's failed initiative for a Balkan alliance. Finally, Bogdan Zivkovic (Rome) used a political history inspired by cultural history to analyze the contacts between the Italian Communist Party and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1956.

The third panel examined transnational ties and explored their influence on actors in Southeastern Europe during the Cold War. Using the mediator role of non-aligned Cyprus under Makarios III between Latin America and Greece, Eugenia Palieraki (Cergy-Pontoise) argued that Cold War historiography must take greater account of the relationships of states of the global South with one another. Leonora Dugonjic-Rodwin (Paris) went beyond the political dimension in her paper. On the basis of student exchanges that Yugoslavia maintained with other states of the non-aligned movement, she argued that Yugoslav education policy experienced a real internationalization through the presence of African and Asian students. The lusophone connections of socialist Romania



were finally dedicated to the lecture of Iolanda Vasile (Coimbra / Timișoara), in which she discussed representations of national independence, colonialism and internationalism through photographs of Ceausescu in Mozambique and Angola.

The contributions to the workshop all dealt with negotiation processes of identity and "otherness," which occurred during the Cold War in Southeastern Europe mostly along the blocs' frontiers. In doing so, however, they also referenced other self- and alien identifications, such as post-imperial categorizations. The central role of Yugoslavia in the non-aligned movement also opened up maneuvering spaces for state and social actors, through which systemic antagonism could sometimes be overcome.

Especially with regard to the first panel, it can be said that the scope of action initially opened up within binary frameworks. On closer examination, however, the reciprocal perceptions and interpretations of one other by the respective actors proved to be much more multi-layered and complex. Beyond propagandistic content, societal observations and descriptions sometimes became astonishingly differentiated and, with reference to the Habsburg Empire, sometimes pointed far beyond the Cold War in their region-specific interpretations. A binary framework was always present in this respect, but was also broken in many ways.

This is reflected in the diverse mediator roles and mediation offerings in the region, which are noteworthy especially in view of the sometimes very conflicted past on the one hand, and the strong political



fragmentation in a small space on the other hand. For example, the contributions negotiated at the workshop highlighted forms of rapprochement and de-escalation at the international level. Especially when it came to the question of alternative orders, the focus shifted clearly away from private actors or everyday life to significant political players in the region. How well the claim can actually be fulfilled, to ask for meaningful alternative orders and initiatives from a "bottom up" perspective, is to be re-examined critically in future research.

The workshop "From below and in between. Narrating and Practicing the Cold War in South East Europe" took place in June, 1-2nd 2017 at the Humboldt University of Berlin. It had been organized by Janis Nabaldidacis and Matthias Thaden and was supported by the Humboldt University of Berlin, the Southeast Europe Association, the Center for Modern Greece, and the Berlin Center for Cold War Studies.

[1] Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered. International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[2] See Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, Thomas Lindenberger (Eds.), *Cold War Cultures. Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (New York: Berghahn, 2012); Sari Autio-Saraso, Katalin Miklóssy (Eds.), *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011). At times, the relevance of system competition to other global developments was even entirely questioned. See Akira Iriye, *Historicizing*



the Cold War, in: Richard H. Immerman, Petra Goedde (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford: University Press, 2013), pp. 15-31.

[3] Svetozar Rajak, Konstantina E. Botsiou, Eirini Karamouzi et al (Eds.), *The Balkans in the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2017).

Autoren:

[Janis Nalbadidacis](#) is a doctoral candidate in Southeast European history at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He researches repression during the military dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983) and Greece (1967-1974).

[Matthias Thaden](#) is a doctoral candidate in the history of Western Europe and transatlantic ties at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He is researching the influence of Croatian political exiles in West Germany.

### **Recommended Citation:**

Janis Nalbadidacis and Matthias Thaden, From below and in between.  
Narrating and Practicing the Cold War in South East Europe - A  
workshop report, 05/23/2018,

<http://www.berlinerkolleg.com/en/blog/below-and-between-narrating-and-practicing-cold-war-south-east-europe-workshop-report> (please add the date of the last call to this page in brackets).