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From Reality to Twilight Zones. Transition of Discourses and the Collapse of State Socialism

The discourse of rival modernities

In the late 1970s there was clearly a general shift within the discourses on East and West. We can even say that the idea of East/West civilizational slope was reborn after 30 years of discourses on rivaling modernities or modernizationist quantitative/ideological slopes. This evolved discourse replaced one type of teleological, Eurocentric discourse about the world and within Eastern and Central Europe with another, which had not been seen for at least three decades.

Until its collapse, the “Eastern” block was seen as something very “real” and “concrete” with clear geographical boundaries. This “reality” was embedded in a discourse of modernization and progress. Within this discourse everything was spoken of in terms of ideologies and quantitative “competition” with other systems. Socialism versus capitalism, “backwardness” versus “superiority”, “progress” (toward socialism or modern economic systems for instance) “modernization”, “industrialization” and “catching up” were the key concepts utilized in the framework of global competition between blocks and incorporated nation states. There were “real” regions in Europe, “real” collective actors and “real” walls between them. The link between the sense of “reality” and the aforementioned categories cannot be better shown than by the title of a recent conference paper by Daniel Chirot, author of the influential book, *The origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe*.¹ Focusing on the spread of “modern, liberal, Western, democratic, individ-

¹ Chirot, Daniel (ed.): *The origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe: economics and politics from the Middle Ages until the early twentieth century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 1991.

ualistic, capitalist way of life” this “nostalgic”, and with regard to the new, “postmodern”, anthropological approaches, overtly, critical paper has been entitled, “Returning to Reality: Culture, Modernization and Various Eastern Europes”. Here the return to reality is not just another way of saying that Eastern and Central Europe has returned to “normalcy”, but it is also a witty remark, suggesting we should return to talk of “real” things like economic progress.

What happened to the sense of reality longed for by Chirot? How was it lost and how should we interpret this “reality”? Was the socialist, Eastern European block more real? Or were observers just not reflective enough? The answer seems to lie less in the ignorance of the observers, or the actual “reality” of the Eastern block, but more in the change of discourses. It seems that sometime around the late 1970s an old/new civilizational discourse replaced a modernizationist discourse, allowing later discourses to constitute the world less as a competition between “real” powers in terms of quantitative economic and military capabilities, but as a descending slope of regional cultures. Through this transformation Eastern and Central Europe was vastly reconstructed as an object of dominant discourses, and hence, the shift of discourses, as well as that of integrated power, might have had a definite role in the “disintegration” or “decomposition” of Eastern and Central Europe.

As previously noted, until the 1970s Eastern and Central Europe, or rather the socialist block, was placed in a discourse of modernization, and the grand narrative of progress, which appeared sometime after the second world war.² This discourse, promoted both in the East and the West, produced mainly hard, “real”, “comparative”, statistical facts on population development and economic growth, different branches of industry, agriculture, and the production level of the different countries. These “concrete” facts were clearly linked to a measure of military capacity in assessing the possible outcome of a war. It appears clearly in reports of such organizations like the CIA, where the main aim of espionage is the production of “real facts” concerning Soviet modernization.³ A recent collection of declassified documents shows that most of the reports concerned new computer and „automation” technologies, industrial capacities, pipe lines, energy production etc.

² Böröcz József: Social Change by Fusion: Understanding Institutional Creativity. Manuscript. 2003. 76–89; Kuczsi, Tibor: *Szociológia, ideológia-közbeszéd* [Sociology, ideology-public discourse]. Budapest: Scientia Humana, 1992; Csizmadia Ervin: *Diskurzus és diktatúra. A magyar értelmiség vitái Nyugat-Európáról a késő Kádár-rendszerben.* [Discourse and dictatorship. The debates of the Hungarian intelligentsia in the late Kádár period] Budapest: Századvég, 2001.

³ www.cia.gov/csi/books/index.html

until the early 1980s when it was replaced by assessments of ethnic conflicts and religious dissent. The application of the same modernization discourse on both sides is generally described as a „cold” war, yet the actual fight was more like a discursive war over the measurement of progress between two political systems.

This modernizationist, “reality” discourse was coupled with a discourse on something “unreal”: negative utopias of total power, like the “brave new world”, “big brother” system, and “animal farm”. The combination of this discourse on ideology and that of modernization allowed for the establishment of a wide network of Eastern European Studies departments and institutes following the Second World War. An additional discourse on totalitarianism also had a history.

With regard to totalitarianism, according to the analysis of Rupnik, we can establish two discourses.⁴ The first of these discourses, initiated in the 1950s was focused on the total centralization of the social and economic systems- in which centralization was based on the rule of one party. This kind of single party rule was understood as a totally, centralized, “tyrannic” rule which led to the total atomization, and consequent total destruction of the individual subject, and the development of “mobs” seeking public appearance.⁵ Thus, totalitarian society became a collectivist power much to be feared by polities in the “West”.

In the late 1960s another totalitarianism discourse evolved creating a substantial break with previous ideas. At that time, the popularity of the aforementioned concepts declined radically in the West while the debate continued in Eastern and Central Europe. This new debate on totalitarianism among dissident thinkers deserves special attention as this criticism, coupled with the emergence of the idea of Central Europe, shows very clearly the discursive transformation at hand.

⁴ Rupnik, Jacques: Újraértelmezett totalitarizmus. [Reinterpreted totalitarianism] *Századvég*, No.1, 1990.; Csizmadia, 2001, 136–45; Bence György: Piszkos kezek: rezsímváltás előtt és után. [Dirty hands before and after the change of regime] In Balázs Zoltán and Melegh Attila (eds.): *Politika és etika*. [Politics and ethics] *Századvég*. Special issue, 1993. 7–16.

⁵ Arendt, Hannah: *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975; Orwell, George: *1984*. New York: New American Library, 1983; Kohn, Jerome: Totalitarianism: The Inversion of Politics. In *The Hannah Arendt Papers: Totalitarianism: The Inversion of Politics*. Part 6., 2001. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/essayb6/html>

Havel's greengrocer and the idea of Central Europe: Post-totalitarianism and discursive vacuum in the early 1980s

The “Eastern” perspective on totalitarianism, that is to say the one formulated by authors in the target area of debate, is interesting from several points of view. First, they sensed great social and political changes toward the establishment of discursive power in the East as well as the West. Second, the social system was not portrayed as a closed barrack, prison or isolated fortress in which new types of human beings (*Homo Sovieticus*) were created under the totalitarian squeeze. Instead, according to prominent ‘dissident’ thinkers, totalitarianism became a rather airy political power in which the central political machinery, the propaganda system, and militarization was not the core of the political power, but a web of small, subtle lies which deterred everyday people like greengrocers from “living in truth”.⁶ The most crucial point, however, was that dissident thinkers of Eastern and Central Europe envisaged a kind of discursive “totalitarianism” which was becoming less and less real due to the decreasing visibility of political and ideological control. Havel exemplified this in his fictional account of a Czech greengrocer, who, without any ideological belief, places a banner in his shop window urging workers of the world to unite.

Havel’s story is emblematic as the discourse of progress (symbolized by the banner) was declared to be “empty”. The greengrocer, lacking any motivation, hung the banner with one of the key slogans of Marxist, progressive thinking, pointing to one aspect of the small web of “lies”. Thus, totalitarianism became more and more discursive, maintaining only a dominant mode of speech. Political control existed in the minds of the people; wall in the head (*Mauer in Kopf*) as they say in the debates on post-totalitarianism.⁷

Regardless of what we think about the analysis, it seems texts like Havel’s sensed a change in the discourses creating a collective “subject”. As the debate on totalitarianism shows, around the early 1980s the previous dis-

⁶ Ash, Timothy Garton: Does Central Europe exist? *The New York Review Books*, 15 October 1986. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/4998>; Bence, op. cit.; Csizmadia, op. cit. 136.

⁷ Ash, op. cit.; Konrád, György: *Antipolitics: an essay*, translated from the Hungarian by Richard E. Allen, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984, or see also the brilliant analysis of Karnoouh, Claude: Kelet-Európa a kiábrándulás idején. A kommunizmus bukásától az elharmadikvilágosodásig. In Melegh Attila (ed.): Szürke zónák. Összehasonlított regionális másságok. [Grey zones. Regional otherness compared] *Replika*, No. 43–44, 2001. 171–192.

cursive system of modernization and progress collapsed, or withdrew, and revealed itself as *only* a “discourse”.⁸

On the “Eastern” side, in the case of Hungary, this change in discourses has been demonstrated not only on the basis of texts written by political thinkers, but also in party documents, expert analysis and newspapers. Two Hungarian, political scientists, Kuczsi and Csizmadia thoroughly documented how political discourses changed their vocabulary, their themes and the subjects involved in their work between the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹ Political debates were becoming less and less focused on reforms of socialism, and increasingly concerned with how to adapt the country to the “West” as a norm. Even Csizmadia has revealed that the emerging discourse was the basis of new constellations of social and political power through which new social groups could be incorporated into state socialist Hungary. As Csizmadia summed it up:

“...the texts, debates, opinions dealing with the role of Western Europe first got together as a latent and then as a more and more public discourse and probably this discourse became one of the most characteristic traits of the 1980s... these views were not only written down or told, but transformed public life and the whole system.”¹⁰

This discourse combining new objects, subjects, and styles first thematized the emptiness of the previous social and political categories, most notably the so called “socialist block”, the associated “cold world order” dividing Europe into two parts, and the related progress (modernization) narrative. It also (re)introduced new categories like the “West” and the idea of Central Europe.¹¹

The emergence of the idea of Central Europe reveals the aforementioned discursive transition at several levels. First, it is revealing as it was linked to the feeling of “untrue”/“false” discourses. Kundera, in his ‘seminal’ essay on the tragedy of Central Europe, speaks of Central Europe being hijacked West and being forced into an alien category of the “East”. According

⁸ Karnoouh, op. cit.

⁹ Kuczsi, op. cit; Csizmadia, op. cit.

¹⁰ Csizmadia, 135.

¹¹ Ash, 1986, Schöpflin, George and Wood, Nancy (eds.): *In Search of Central Europe*. Barnes & Noble, Totowa, N.J. 1989 1989, Kuczsi, 1992, Csizmadia, 2001, Bozóki András: *Rhetoric of Action: The Language of the Regime Change in Hungary*. In Bozóki, András (eds.): *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999. 142–166; Karnoouh, 2001.

to him, Central Europe is „situated geographically in the center, culturally in the West and politically in the East”.¹² Furthermore, Central Europe was discursively hijacked as it had been cut into two opposing categories politically and culturally. Second, the idea of Central Europe was a category, which came to life like a returning ghost. Several major authors involved in this debate repeat the „fact” that the idea of Central Europe was not heard for decades either due to historical sins or political censorship.¹³ Thus, there is a clear reference to discursive arrangements according to which “Central Europe” first disappeared after the second world war and then reappeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s in political, historical and cultural discussions.

Third, even after its rebirth there were problems concerning its existence: Schöpflin talks about the “ghost” of Central Europe, Timothy Garton Ash asked revealingly in his *New York Review of Books* essay “Does Central Europe exist?”, and as György Konrád put it “Compared to the geopolitical reality of Eastern Europe and Western Europe, Central Europe exists today only as a cultural-political anti-hypothesis (eine kulturpolitische Anti-hypothese)...”.¹⁴

The question of Central Europe’s existence provides a clue to the new discourse as well as the process of discursive “transition”. First, Central Europe did not exist because it had to cleanse itself of historical-moral sins (i.e. Holocaust, but also of communism and totalitarianism). Timothy Garton Ash for instance, after a reference to its non-existence in the present tense, argued that it shares the fate of Niniveh and Tyrus; two morally corrupt cities, one destroyed by God and one forgiven by Him. The first task in overcoming this “moral handicap” was the “whitening” of Central Europe (shedding themselves of red and brown hues). The second task was to overcome the view of Central Europe as a recently released prisoner under probation. An exclusion mechanism is also clear in this ambiguous, ghost-like character. Central Europe was at the border of existence- the twilight zone. Semi-human creatures exist in this arena, which to some extent are like us, but on the other hand are morally, and physically corrupt, presenting a danger to “normal” individuals. Ash utilized this metaphor and spoke of a dark forest full of wizards and witches:

¹² Kundera, Milan: The Tragedy of Central Europe. *The New York Review of Books*, 1984.

¹³ Ash, 1986; Schöpflin and Wood, op. cit.

¹⁴ see also Dancsi, Katalin: Kelet-Nyugat fogságában: Közép-Európa helye szövegek térképén. [Captured by East and West. The place of central Europe on the map of texts] In Melegh, Szürke zónák ..., 139–156; Ash, op. cit.

“an endlessly intriguing forest to be sure, a territory where peoples, cultures, languages are fantastically intertwined, where every place has several names and men change their citizenship as often as their shoes, an enchanted wood full of wizards and witches, but one which bears over its entrance the words: Abandon all hope, ye who enter here, of ever again seeing the wood for the trees.”¹⁵

The last crucial point in this emerging discourse is that the borders of Europe and Central Europe cannot be fixed and the expansion of “Eastern” countries is extremely problematic.¹⁶

“With no precise borders, with no center or rather with several centers, “Central Europe” looks today more and more like the dragon of Alca in the second book of Anatol France’s *Penguin Island* to which the symbolist movement was compared: no one who claimed to have seen it could say what it looked like. To speak about Central Europe as a homogenous geopolitical and cultural phenomenon entails risks. Even if we might agree with Jacques Morin’s affirmation that Europe is ‘a concept without borders’, the facts oblige us to remove from this concept the part of the European continent, with the exception of Austria, that under the name of Mittel-Europa organically belonged to it.”¹⁷

Another prominent dissident thinker, Mihály Vajda, also asked for a serious investigation with regard to drawing the Eastern borders of Central Europe. He asked, in his essay on the problem of Russia’s Europeanness, “Who has excluded Russia from Europe?”¹⁸ The answer is Russia itself, hence, the one found guilty shall first prove its Europeanness, if at all possible. In a sense this new discourse can only be understood as “a constant border fight over ‘Eastern Europe’ and an attempt to push out parts of it”.¹⁹ In other words, the idea of Central Europe was linked to the demonization of the more “Eastern” parts of Europe like Russia and the Balkans, which bore practical consequences. Concerning later developments, Todorova rightly observed:

¹⁵ Ash, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Antohi, Sorin: *Habits of Mind. Europe’s Post-1989 Symbolic Geographies*. In Antohi, Sorin and Tismaneanu, Vladimir (eds): *Between Past and Future. The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2000. 61–77.

¹⁷ Neumann quotes it: Neumann, Iver B.: *Uses of the Other: „The East” in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1999. 144.

¹⁸ Vajda, Mihály: *Who Excluded Russia from Europe?* *East European Reporter*, No. 4, 1986.

¹⁹ Neumann, *op. cit.* 206–207, 107–112.

“To summarize, the third round in the development of the Central European idea after 1990 witnessed its entry from the politics of culture into political praxis. Far from becoming a region-building notion, it has harnessed as an expedient argument in the drive for entry into the European institutional framework. It is during this stage that the Balkans first appeared as a dichotomical opponent, sometimes alongside with, sometimes indistinguishable from Russia. This internal hierarchization of Eastern Europe was born out of political expediency, but in its rhetorics it feeds on the balkanist discourse.”²⁰

We can safely argue then that discourses on Eastern and Central Europe changed dramatically during the 1980s. And that during this process, the old, “realist” modernizationist/ideological discourse setting up quantitative scales was replaced by a new discourse decomposing the Eastern block into several regions with ambiguous qualitative borders, ordered into a “sliding scale of merit”.

The function of the qualitative East/West slope in recomposing Eastern Europe in the 1990s

The world would appear drastically different without the idea of an East/West civilizational slope replacing the modernizationist version of competing socialist and capitalist modernities. Among other things, there would not have been a quick and ‘consensual’ burial of socialism by an elite longing for a ‘normal (understood as Western) society’ after 40 years of ‘abnormality’.²¹ And we would not have seen the break up of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and the subsequent civil war in the latter country.

Sorin Antohi rightly claimed that mimetic competition in imitating the West and for pushing aside other non-Western competitors leads to ‘fragile identities’, and hence to political disintegration.²² And along this line of thought, introducing the idea of chain Orientalism as one of the main mechanisms of the (re)emerging East/West slope, Bakic-Hayden correctly observed that “nested Orientalism” and the related change in power arrangements was a key to the Yugoslavian war:

“As a political entity, the former Yugoslavia encompassed traditional dichotomies such as east/west and their nesting variants (Europe/Asia, Europe/Balkans, Christian/Muslim) largely neutralizing their usual valorization. With

²⁰ Todorova, Maria: *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 159–160.

²¹ Melegh Attila: A nyugati modell. [The Western Model] *Híány*, July 1992; Melegh, 1997.

²² Antohi, op. cit.

the destruction of this neutralizing framework, the revalorization of these categories, now oppositions rather than simply differences has resulted in the destruction of the living communities that had transcended them.”²³

Also, without the valorization of this new slope there would not have been the ‘Eastern enlargement’ of the European Union in the way it was implemented. This has been demonstrated abundantly in the pioneering works of József Böröcz on imperialism of the European Union with regard to Eastern European candidates.²⁴

To show the legitimacy of this argument and the links to our examples we need only to quote the Copenhagen criteria as announced in 1993.

“In 1993, at the Copenhagen European Council, the Member States took a decisive step towards the current enlargement, agreeing that ‘the associated countries in central and eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union.’ Thus, enlargement was no longer a question of ‘if’ but ‘when’. Here too, the European Council provided a clear response: ‘Accession will take place as soon as an applicant is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required’.

At the same time, the Member States designed the membership criteria, which are often referred to as the Copenhagen Criteria.

As stated in Copenhagen, membership requires that the candidate country has achieved:

1. stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
2. the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;

²³ Bakić-Hayden: Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Winter 1995. 930.

²⁴ Böröcz József: The Fox and the Raven: The European Union and Hungary Renegotiate the Margins of “Europe”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2000. 847–75; Böröcz József: Döntés és indoklása – avagy miként szivárog a szubsztancia a formális jogba az Európa Unió keleti bővítése kapcsán. *Replika*, No. 43–44, 2001. 193–222. In English: Rationales for a Choice: How Substance Enters Formal Law in the ‘Eastern Enlargement’ of the European Union. <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jborocz/ration2.htm>; Böröcz, József and Kovács, Melinda (eds.): Empire’s new clothes. Unveiling EU enlargement. *Central European Review*, 2001. www.ce-review.org

3. the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

has created:

4. the conditions for its integration through the adjustment of its administrative structures, so that European Community legislation transposed into national legislations implemented effectively through appropriate administrative and judicial structures.”²⁵

As can be clearly seen, the EU enlargement process was not imagined as a negotiation between the assigned political body of the EU and certain nations states under a strict deadline, but as a timeless process (the question is just when) of achieving certain capacities such as the “stability of institutions guaranteeing” humanitarian liberal ideals guaranteeing “rule of law,” “human rights” etc. or the “existence “ of a “functioning market economy, or the “capacity to cope with” certain “pressures within the Union”. Even at first glimpse it can be seen that the criteria were vague and implied processes with no real end. Any country in the world could be found lacking some required conditions (see for instance the guarantee of human rights) and therefore, it is merely a question of “translating” these ideals into a multidimensional slope and measuring countries accordingly. This inherently leads to hierarchies not only between EU countries and the applicants, but also between the applicants, being the prime source of the divide and rule policy of the EU.

But the discourse and actions of the East/West slope not only facilitated and made “meaningful” the radical changes in the everyday life of more than 300 million people, it also became firmly rooted in late, modern social and political life with aims on future, local and global politics in the widest sense with regard to the region. The order of the discourse is and will be a core structure in reacting to the processes initiated by late-modern, capitalist expansion. We can hardly imagine ourselves outside this discourse in the near future as several functions, or mechanisms, which maintain this power arrangement persist.

The East/West slope has created an ‘unholy’ alliance of local and Western elites for dominating and disciplining East European societies caught in the mass uncertainty of late modern capitalism. This alliance, and the East/West dialogue at an institutional and individual level, is not without tensions, twists and conflicting interests. But there is a general agreement on promoting ‘European’ ideals, or more precisely, on promoting a move toward such

²⁵ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/intro/criteria.htm>

ideals. This has and will serve the ‘imperial’, downward perspective of American and Western European political elites in controlling the region, using it for different, global, political and economic strategies. These ‘half-civilized’ and ‘half-educated’ Eastern European countries can be played out against each other or can be used for major power games between the United States and the European Union. This is clearly exemplified in the game between US Defense Attorney, Donald Rumsfeld and French president Chirac, who, in the debate over the invasion of Iraq, confronted two images of Eastern Europe for their own purposes: “New Europe” as a defender of “Western values”, or Eastern Europe as an uneducated child, which does not know how to behave in accessing European Union.²⁶

Local elites, although occasionally protesting such treatment, nonetheless receive legitimacy and discursive material from the ‘West’ that helps to silence their opponents, or to engulf social, cultural and political problems into a debate on the sloping status of local societies. Due to the hegemonic nature of the East/West slope, those looking for step by step ‘modernization’, othering of local society, launching of petit imperialist projects, or fighting against the joint conspiracy of the ‘West’ led by Jews and /or liberals can portray each other as hindering advancement on the slope.²⁷

In one way this fight disguises and in another way directly serves and facilitates class projects and the establishment of control and dominance over local populations. This is why one of the most important functions of the East/West slope and the idea of flexible East/West borders is the recreation and maintenance of racism and other forms of exclusion. Sociologically, the East/West slope controls, or rather, filters movement between different areas of the world or between social groups; ‘Eastern’ floods of migrants can be stopped, or made illegitimate, or from a frustrated nationalist point of view, ‘pro-Western’ Jewish-liberal ‘traitors’ and Roma groups can be excluded from the local society. This clearly can be seen in a scandal related to Hungarian Roma families seeking asylum in France in 2000. The affair is worthy of an in-depth, case-study analysis as it demonstrates the complex interplay of Western and Eastern elites imagining themselves on the East/West slope. This also seems to be a perfect example of repressive-racist mechanisms of

²⁶ Melegh, Attila: Perspectives on the East-West Slope in the Process of EU accession. *OGRE* (l’Observatoire Géopolitique des Régions Européennes, Lyon, 2003. (accepted for publication)

²⁷ Melegh, Attila: Maps of Global Actors. In Carol Harrington and Ayman Salem (eds): *Critical Sociology*. Peter Lang Publishing, Bern, 2003. (accepted and edited)

the new/old qualitative East/West discourse following the collapse of state socialism.

The Zámoly case and everyday repression in late-modern capitalism East and West

A few years ago, Roma families were forced from their homes by the local government, allegedly on the basis that their homes could collapse. The families moved into a community house in a settlement called Zámoly, being one of the areas of Hungary booming in terms of foreign investment. After a year, they were forced to leave under the pressure of the local mayor. The Roma families asked for direct help in order to build decent homes. Without a satisfactory solution, their presence became a local, and later a national, scandal deepened by physical atrocities and the murder of a young person who threatened the Roma families. Later, in July 2000, under the supervision of a Roma activist named Krasznai, some of these Roma families left for France to ask political asylum on the basis of persecution and lack of defense by the Hungarian authorities. Krasznai wanted “to draw the attention of Europe to what happens in Hungary”.²⁸

Not long before the decision of the French Office for Refugee Affairs (OFPRA, March 8, 2001) on February 23, 2001, the well-known British security journal “Jane’s Intelligence Digest” published an article on “The New Russian Offensive”, claiming that under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, Russians tried to intervene into the affairs of soon-to be EU members. Among other accusations the periodical declared:

“And if surreptitious acquisition of industrial influence or illicit deployment of surveillance hardware were not enough, we have it on good intelligence community authority that recent events surrounding the Hague and the Zámoly Roma of Hungary has also been to a large extent engineered by Russian operatives. Members of the gypsy community of Zámoly appear to have been encouraged to plead persecution and violation of human rights before EU bodies and even to request political asylum so as to make Hungary look much worse than it is during the crucial EU accession negotiations which are currently taking place. This perhaps is one of the most damaging methods employed by

²⁸ Krasznai József: Valamit megmozdítok vele. [I change something with this] *Amaro Drom*. October, 3–7, 2000. 6.

Moscow of late, one that was tried in the aspirant Czech Republic first and subsequently transplanted to Hungary.”²⁹

The origins of this text are of course hidden, but certain circumstances are rather clear. As we have learned from the then deputy prime minister of the Czech Republic, Pavel Rychetsky, the then British Minister of Interior Affairs, Jack Straw asked the Czech authorities in 2000 to investigate “what forces are behind the exodus”.³⁰ Thus, on behalf of the British government, and presumably its secret services, there was a definite attempt to find those carrying impoverished, Czech Roma families into Britain. This investigation was probably extended to Hungary when the Zámoly Roma left for France. The timing of the publication could be accidental. But there might be an alternative reading of facts according to which the article was a warning to relevant French authorities not to grant political asylum to people being manipulated by the Russian secret service. This was later exposed in a follow-up article, which presented the case in the interpretative framework of a Russian-Israeli- French communist plot:

“What is interesting, however, is that the political patron of the Zámoly group in Paris and Strasbourg, is the French Communist Party, which according to credible military intelligence authorities is known to have had strong associations with the KGB in the past. Add to this the information that the Zámoly group appears to have been financed by sources from Israel, which with the recent influx of Russian émigrés is known to be highly penetrated by foreign intelligence, and the story takes on a new dimension.”³¹

This article was later published, with additional comments, in a Hungarian newspaper close to the previous, conservative, nationalist government.³² Demeter Ervin, the minister of security affairs, commented on the article. On a public television, news program the next day he indirectly supported the claims of JID. This was later widely commented on by Hungarian and international press organs. One week later JID seemed surprised by the interest they raised:

²⁹ www.janes.com/security/regional_security/news/jid/jid010226_1_n.shtml. The new Russian offensive.

³⁰ Ki szervezi a romák kitelepülését? A prágai kormány egy müncheni központot sejt a háttérben. *Népszabadság*, 14 August 2001.

³¹ Questions in Budapest – Jane’s Security News. www.janes.com/security/regional_security/news/jid/jid010309_1_n.shtml)

³² *Magyar Nemzet*, 3 March, 2001.

“Since we began publishing in 1938, it has been Intelligence Digest’s mission to investigate and bring to light important issues in security and intelligence. Many of our articles have attracted attention from the international media and from governments. Rarely, however, has one issue provoked national interest on the scale we have witnessed in Hungary this week.”³³

From a “Western” perspective the most likely meaning of the whole event is that JID, a British intelligence periodical, tried to manipulate the relevant French authorities by implicitly arguing that the case of these Hungarian, Roma families was not a refugee issue, but a foreign-service operation involving French communists. Perhaps the warning was a consequence of the late 1990s boom of Roma families from Central European countries asking for asylum in Britain. British authorities were afraid at that time to set a precedent in giving refugee status, which could then be used, against the British state when trying to control the number of asylum seekers. This further raised the general issue of handling persecuted people from politically safe countries, the citizens of which have free entry for a limited period into EU countries like France or the United Kingdom.

This fear of Roma groups reveals the anxiety of poor, uneducated refugees within the EU. As the quality of immigrants clearly creates the main problem in the case above, it falls in line with racist-biopolitical considerations.³⁴ Roma families are feared to be less capable of integration and thus immigration authorities do their best to stop them before entering the country in question.

This anxiety clearly appeared in the acts of the British immigration officers who were transplanted to the Prague airport to monitor passengers departing to London. Their main aim was skin-color control, as can be seen in the case of a Roma journalist who, claiming the same purpose of travel and same financial background as her colleague, could not board a plane, while

³³ Questions in Budapest, op. cit.

³⁴ Melegh, Attila: East/West Exclusions and Discourses on Population in the 20th Century. In *Working Papers on Population, Family and Welfare* No. 3. Demographic Research Institute, Hungarian Central Statistical Office. Budapest. 2002.

“the white” colleague was given a green light.³⁵ Thus, it can be supposed in the case of JID that British authorities were truly afraid a positive reply to asylum seekers might set-off a new wave of “unwelcome” political refugees.

Aside from the immediate concern of “low quality” immigrants, the alleged investigation and the whole atmosphere of the article fit very well into an Orientalist, mythological, discursive framework in which “Eastern” elements conspire against the West, or would-be West Central Europe. It’s interesting that all of the actors mentioned can be decoded as “Oriental”: the Russians, the Israeli Russians, Jews, and Roma, very much in line with Nazi allegations in the late 1930s and 1940s. The alleged Israeli connection is also a perfect example of 19th century Orientalism when Jews were treated exactly as Arabs, also being Semite.³⁶ The accusation against French supporters shows that communism can also be Orientalized due to the alleged links to the power system of the previous “East”.

Throughout the whole story the French connection is also revealing. That the entire operation was aimed against the EU membership of Hungary may be partly true. But it’s unlikely that the actors were employed by the Russian secret service. They were from the French left. Moreover, due to fear of a cheap labor source, and from a country promoting extreme, liberal, wild capitalism, most left wing parties within the EU were extremely suspicious of the “Eastern” barbarians who might be used as a Trojan horse by the European right wing.

The Hungarian reaction also clarifies important discursive mechanisms of the East/West slope. First of all, the overtly anti-Roma propaganda in the right wing, Hungarian press has been successful due to the fact that these Roma families crossed a border not allowed to them. They went to a region, the “West”, to which the whole country would like to move, and this “careless” action and the involved blame on Hungary, have brought to surface racist attitudes. This is emblematically shown by a current joke about the Zámoly Roma families according to which: “The Gypsies have come home. Why? Because they got their work permits.” The joke reveals an extremely normative image of the West as a “normal” region where everybody has to work. Roma are not capable of this- they only want money, and hence they have to come home. The main idea, however, is that they have taken the position of “white” Hungarians.

³⁵ Nem engedték utazni a roma újságíró. [They have not allowed the Roma journalist to travel] *Népszabadság*, 27 July, 2001.

³⁶ Said, Edward: *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978. 140–48, 232–35.

A normative image of the West emerges from the reaction to the Roma, who think that the West offers them much denied dignity. Hungarian liberal intelligentsia followed the same illusionary line by first blaming the Hungarian government for the whole affair, asserting that Ervin Demeter, the minister of security affairs, arranged the article during his visit to Britain. Thus, according to them, such a stupid accusation cannot come from the “normal” West. In addition, thirty or so representatives wrote a letter to the French government (not the Office of Refugees) thanking them for applying the principles of human rights and accusing the Hungarian government of risking EU membership by not doing enough for the Roma minority.³⁷ This idealization of the West was so obvious that one intellectual who signed the petition later withdrew his support following an excellent analysis of the whole affair.³⁸ Instead of idealizing the “West”, according to some governmental accusations, the socialists in opposition at that time attempted to retrieve the Roma families by allegedly offering money in the case of their return.

While these reactions show the “West” as the desired norm for the East, the reaction of the then Hungarian government, and the happy repetition of accusations by JID truly reveal the low position of the east on this slope. First of all, there is the feeling of inferiority that guides one to look for scapegoats in the tense process of joining the “West” and its institutions. In addition, in their view, Hungary was deeply “European” or rather “kidnapped West”, and therefore, could be pushed out of its proper place only by “alien” elements.³⁹ The Secret service, the communists, and Jews were once again playing a game with a small, “European” nation. Thus it seems they spoke from the perspective of an inferior position while trying to rely on European, white racism, even though “Eastern” racism, paradoxically, was later used against countries trying to join the European Union.

Altogether this story reveals several East/West exclusions: the Hungarians with regard to Roma; the Hungarian government with regard to liberals, its own Roma citizens, the Russians, the Jews; the British secret service and immigration officers with regard to the Roma, Eastern Europeans, communists and the Orientals, and the French left against East Europeans. The pieces of these repressive patterns add up to a meaningful story only in the

³⁷ see the brilliant analysis of Böröcz József: Goodness Is Elsewhere: The Rule of European Difference. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*: Forthcoming, 2003.

³⁸ Tamás, Gáspár Miklós: A botrány botránya [The scandal of scandals] *Népszabadság*, 29 March 2001.

³⁹ Kundera, op. cit.

form of discursive seaweed on the East-West slope. This discursive web helps bring biopolitical racism to life again and again and thus it cannot be separated from the issue of Eastern European difference. This is a complex web, a kind of epistemological sand trap, which sucks everything and everybody into it. Or in other words, we can see the workings of power arrangements of the new/old, East/West discourse whose construction per se leads to the rise of "Eastern" racism. In this French comedy all the roles are exchanged in a circle of false accusations masking the real sins. The Roma leave one prejudiced country for the sake of another in order to draw attention to their problem, "Western" racists are not seen as such by "Eastern" anti-racists who write a letter supporting the representatives of "Europe" as the protectors of human rights. "Western" racism is offered to "Eastern" nationalists, who, due to their humiliation and their own "instincts", happily grasp the possibility in order to be punished later for such a crime. Nothing is definite and everything is hidden. Only the faces of the victims are clear in the cognitive patterns experimented with in the modern/colonial systems emerging in the 18th century. With this, Eastern Europe has arrived from "reality" into the twilight zones of late modern capitalism.