

INTRODUCTION

THE SECOND WORLD WAR BEGAN WITH THE attacks of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union on Poland in 1939 and ended in Europe in 1945, with the Allies victory, on whose side lined up none other than the Soviet Union. A totalitarian force gained an important place among the winners. Democracy has not defeated totalitarianism. During the last decades, the prominent members of the intellectual elite, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, tended to relativize liability, crimes, and the political and economic victims destiny of Soviet and other similar totalitarian regimes – as fascism and Nazism were defeated definitively, at least in the twentieth century.

*Stéphane Courtois in the **Black Book of Communism** stated that communist regimes have killed, deliberately or through their socio-economic collectivist experiments “approximately 100 million people in contrast to the approximately 25 million victims of Nazis”, and “turned mass crime into a full-blown system of government”. Rudolf Höss organized the death camp in Auschwitz on the model of the Soviet Gulag. Stalin had its share of Europe occupied by Soviet troops, considering his domain on the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*. In particular, the separation from Germany had to be clearly defined, although it was obvious that this issue will be very challenging. From Finland to Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union was facing a fragile reality of relatively recent states that in the interwar period were Soviet enemies, although in many cases the Soviet troops were welcomed a liberators, not just new occupation forces appearing after the Nazis and the Axis allies. Sometimes, as in Yugoslavia, the communists were becoming popular as winners, and as being rooted in social masses. Their exact position was defined, in the postwar years, only in France and Italy, where the free elections were held. During the following decades, developed and historically responsible Western cultures cherished the beliefs that were denying the other side of the Iron Curtain realities, including collectivist crimes in Eastern and Southeastern Asia. In the famous song Nathalie French singer Gilbert Bécaud compared romantic scenes of Red Square with Parisian milieu, where hot chocolate “chez Pouchkine” was enjoyed as on the Champs-Élysées.*

Similarly, the contemporary Cold War studies are facing the dominant cultural models in Serbia and former Yugoslavia. Yugoslav communism was also the subject of nostalgia for the era that was better organized, and probably happier in comparison to what occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In contemporary Serbian, perhaps post-Yugoslav cultures, such a vision of recent past was transposed to the whole Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Would it be possible to talk about a crypto-nostalgia that developed during the post-Cold War transition in the decade of brutal

military and paramilitary aggression, and profound social and moral disorder? Dominant Yugoslav nationalisms otherwise originated from the system. Rarely and only extraordinary, Yugoslavia was revealing compassion to the rest of Eastern Europe, and the new members of the lower middle class sometimes expressed disdain of the isolated and miserable real communism. Furthermore, the separation of Belgrade and Moscow in 1948. contributed to the repression of those who carried out repression against the defeated remnants of the civil society and quislings (though the war in Yugoslavia at times was fought as war of everyone against everyone). The confrontation of communism with itself left the Yugoslav, and particularly Serbian and Montenegrin societies dangerously traumatized, feeding the old, pre-modern Russian myth. Yugoslavia was later reproaching Moscow in each occasion when the leaderships were facing challenges of openness and democratization.

*This Limes Plus issue emerged from the international conference **Challenging the Shadow of the Iron Curtain** with a general thought that such comparative Cold War studies dedicated to urban culture and the everyday life should contribute to a sharper insight into the character of our post-communist and post-conflict societies. Especially in this particular case, as the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav disintegrating forces, still tend to keep out of the current European and regional integration process, while being still vital and resilient. And it's a rarely mentioned assumption that approaching the Southeast modern European civilization implies convergence with the Eastern Europe, primarily comprehending its Cold-war realities.*

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