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Tradition and Modernity in South-Eastern Europe – the Balkan Countries' Search for Their Own Way of Social Development in a Modern, United Europe

Sterbling, A. 2010 *Entwicklungsverläufe, Lebenswelten und Migrationsprozesse. Studien zu ländlichen Fragen Südosteuropas*. Aachen: Shaker Verlag, pp. 213.

Anton Sterbling's book is an interesting study about social and political changes taking place in South-Eastern Europe, using the example of Romania and its Schwab German minority in the Banat. The book covers a variety of issues so the author divided it into three sections for greater clarity.

The first – *Development paths in South-Eastern Europe (Entwicklungsverläufe in Südosteuropa)* deals with three issues. The author begins with the specific particularism characteristic of the development of nations and societies in this region. The second topic is about agriculture, the development of rural areas. The third is time, the anthropological perspective of its social construction and perception in the Balkans.

The second section – *Banat and the Banat Schwabs (Das Banat und die Banater Schwaben)* is devoted to a discussion on the functioning of the German minority in Romania from the theoretical perspective of identity and identification. The author also mentions the legacy of the secret services in communist Romania – the Securitate.

The last section – *Migration processes and their social consequences (Migrationsprozesse und soziale Folgen)* concerns migration processes in Europe and their consequences, both in the internal (national) and external (international) dimension. Here too we see the topic of identification, identity and interesting considerations about the transnationalisation of social inequalities as an effect of migration processes.

It is worth mentioning that the author's knowledge is not only theoretical. Anton Sterbling was born in 1953 in Sânnicolau Mare, a town in the Banat region of Romania. He was a member of the so-called *Aktionsgruppe Banat*

organisation of Romanian writers of German descent founded in 1972 which was critical of the government and persecuted by the Securitate. He emigrated to Germany in 1975. Such a biographical perspective provides the book with an even more valuable source of information.

The author begins his analysis by showing the close link between the diffusion of particularistic norms, outlook and forms of behaviour in Southern Europe with a noticeable, past and present 'neo-patrimonial' state control with appropriate clientelistic relations, crossing traditions and modern elements of social structures. This is connected with the specific nature of 'social trust' typical to this part of Europe, characterised by a considerable reserve towards others (citizens) and public institutions, as well as the dominance of social relations based on personal connections, largely particularistic patterns of differentiation, distance, isolation from others. The communist period did not in any way contribute to the building of more open (civic) societies.

The awareness of the specificity of particularism in this part of Europe is a key to understanding the problems with political and social modernisation in these countries, one of the more important being the so-called agrarian question analysed on the example of Romania.

The end of the Ist World War brought significant political change to Southern Europe. Large multi-ethnic nations fell apart. Romania belonging to the victorious countries acquired new territories which required allocation. Being a peasant society¹ as in other countries in the region, peasant parties soon gained importance, underlining the significance of agrarian reforms which meant transferring expropriated land primarily to existing peasant families². The further social and economic development of these areas during the interwar period was influenced by the fact that during the agrarian reform political or nationalist interests played a greater role than clear economic goals.

After the 2nd World War the economy was nationalised in Romania's rural areas as well as in the neighbouring so-called socialist countries (Yugoslavia being an exception), farms underwent collectivisation as a result of which about 90% of the land passed under state and collective control. After the fall of Ceaușescu (after 1989), re-privatisation processes began in a very different form. Sterbling raises the question about how far this was a return to the past?

¹ As the author notices, during the period after the Ist World War, in the countries of Southern Europe the percentage of people employed in agriculture was between 70% and 80%.

² Sterbling provides the figure of about 1.4 million families who acquired land as a result of the reforms

Large farms remained in the hands of former farm managers who became their leaseholders or owners. Nearby small farms which are not economically sound produce for private consumption or for the local markets. Such agriculture – according to Sterbling – cannot function well or be competitive on the common European market.

A further topic significant to the author is that of time which '*passes differently*' in Southern Europe (*Anders rinnt hier die Zeit*). The issue of time – as opposed to that of agriculture, territoriality or others is hardly present in literature. Time considered as a social construction and is consequently socially redefined. The author therefore asks about the perception of time in the past and the present, noticing that in this part of Europe it is a question of traditionally 'measured' time, as opposed to western societies whose clocks run in the rhythm of modernity. In addition this region is characterised by the coexistence of many perceptions of time, resulting from the coexistence of many different religious (Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims, Uniates, Calvinists, Pentecostalists etc.) and ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, Ukrainians, Germans, Russians, Turks etc.) As Sterbling notices amusingly, the diversity of perceiving and defining time is illustrated in scenes of pensioners strolling unhurriedly in the parks dressed in sixties' and seventies' suits while the young find themselves in a global world due to the Internet.

As has already been mentioned, the second part of the book is about the German minority living in the Banat region of Romania. Referring to the theoretical perceptions of culture, cultural identity, identification, mythical thinking (serving to uphold ethnic diversity), the author presents the destiny of this group of people, particularly complicated after the 2nd World War. As a result of escape, resettlement, imprisonment, deportation, transportation to camps, the population dropped to approximately 1/3 of what it had been during the interwar period (in the 1977 census 348,444 people stated being of German nationality). Sterbling describes how the tradition of this ethnic group was used immediately after the 2nd World War, useful in solving practical problems rather than identification as such. In the fifties and sixties escaping towards traditional values was a reaction to the distancing from the real homeland, divided into two separate nations (FRG and GDR). In addition to these processes there was also Romanian policy (e.g. land expropriation), which forced traditional peasant families to search employment in industry, destroying small, homogenous ethnic rural communities. The destruction of traditional ties as well as the nationalist policy of Romanian communists towards minorities led to the mass migrations of Germans to the Federal

Republic of Germany. It so happened that returning to the homeland was not always problem-free. Many people suffered from cultural shock and had problems with assimilation. In this section Sterbling analyses the tragic influence of the Securitate on the fate of many representatives of ethnic minorities.

The third and final section concerns current migration, presented from the historical perspective, against a background of past experiences of selected countries in Southern Europe: Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. Sterbling begins with a presentation of various theoretical approaches, analyses various types of migration, concluding that in research practice it is generally a question of their compilation through adjusting to a kaleidoscope of concrete facts.

Southern Europe is a significant place on the map of migrations which have long been connected with the compulsory displacement of people triggered off by the striving for power and control in the region, as well as tensions between many ethnic and religious minorities. Sterbling briefly recalls certain examples from the past three centuries, illustrating the displacement of the inhabitants 'from' and 'to' Southern Europe, as for example the migrations from West to East of the so-called *Donauschwaben* German colonists. The 19th and 20th centuries saw migrations from Southern Europe to the USA, being mainly of an economic nature, although some were compulsory and connected with ethnic anxiety. Approximately 1.2 million people emigrated from the Austrian part of Austro-Hungary to the USA. Further migration phases were the effect of the Russian-Turkish war in 1877/1878 and the first Balkan war in 1912. The Turks and other groups professing the Islamic faith were deported. Unfortunately modern nationalist ideologies, inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts are so powerful and intense that the 20th century was also the arena of many compulsory migrations in the Balkans.

After the accession of two South European countries (Bulgaria and Romania – 2007) to the European Union the internal migrations (within the EU) have become an interesting issue, discussed by the author.

Bulgaria is a country of external migration – to Western Europe and the USA. Those who migrate are generally people from large towns whose numbers were compensated by internal migrations. The largest migrations accompanied the movement of the population from rural areas to small towns, which partly led to the depopulation of rural areas. Motives for movement were of an economic nature – in the social research the rural inhabitants generally gave their economic position the worst evaluation. The lack of prospects inclined them to migrate to both small and large towns. The consequences of

that direction of migration were reflected in the age and education structure in rural areas. Only 3% of the people living in the countryside had higher education whereas a third of Sofia's inhabitants had higher education. People aged over 60 constituted over 40% of the rural population, whereas 28% of them inhabited small towns and they constituted a quarter of the large town population.

Migration in the next discussed country – Romania, until the fall of communism primarily affected the ethnic groups: Germans, Hungarians and Jews. It is currently estimated that there are as many as 2 million migrants. As in Bulgaria and other countries of the so-called eastern bloc, mainly young and well educated people migrate (in 2002 research carried out at the University of Bucharest showed that 88% of students considered migrating from their country). Apart from these similarities Romanian research on migration indicated another fact: there are entire villages where the majority of men migrate to work and only come home for holidays. This type of migration makes it easier to function abroad, where networks of friends and families are created, groups of people supporting one another, ghettos in the chosen countries.

The next country of 'migrants' discussed by Sterbling is Albania, the poorest in the region (which has only just applied for EU accession). After the fall of communism about 20% of its inhabitants left Albania and scenes of migrants on boats on their way to Italy became a symbol of the wave of European migrations in the nineties. Albania was also characterised by dynamic internal migration, mainly to the capital, Tirana whose population has doubled in recent years. One-way migration – mainly to large towns, has considerable consequences for rural and mountain areas which are emptying. Whereas the towns are undergoing so-called hyper-urbanisation.

The mentioned examples of migration processes from three South European countries are becoming a basis for discussing the trans-nationalisation of social inequalities, for which Sterbling suggests assuming both a time and a geographical framework (the EU area). He draws attention to both the positive sides of migration, such as specific families acquiring financial resources, which helps them as regards financial stability, social advancement (and also generally improving the country's financial condition), and also its negative effects. The migration of people who are generally well educated and of working age is a considerable drainage of social capital. For some regions this means problems with manpower, for the country as a whole complications with integrity of currency. Foreign migration also has an influence on

emphasizing social irregularities within the given countries. The section of the population without contacts abroad is particularly prone to impoverishment and social degradation. This particularly affects elderly people and those living in rural areas. Internal migration from the countryside towards towns leads to the depopulation of rural areas, aging of the rural population, dying of local infrastructure (the closure of schools, health centres etc.). All these processes lead to a concentration of poverty in some regions of Europe, the reproduction of social status based on poverty and social inequalities.

Another phenomenon connected with migration is the *deprivation of recognition of social needs*. Migrations include and exclude certain people, social groups from/to other communities/groups. This causes problems with individual and collective identification. Sterbling concentrates on three chosen types of social affiliation: religious communities, classes and the nation and tries to answer the question about what is (can be in the immediate future) the basis of identification and building of identity in Europe.

In his opinion, religious communities play a role, above all for migrants professing the Islamic faith, particularly in the context of religious conflicts taking place in the world. However, as regards behaviour or political choice they do not have a decisive role. Social classes are, according to the author who refers to the example of Germany, an element of identity which is losing significance. For example, when looking for life partners people rather refer to education, although such needs are not expressed explicitly. Language, culture, ethnicity connected within the national framework no doubt continue to be significant in social identification. On the other hand, there are nations for which fulfilling such a role is becoming increasingly difficult. Questions arise about the process of functioning of nations – does this take place on national foundations or beyond? Will European identifications continue to dominate or perhaps regional ones will take their role? The author mentions multi- identifications which will probably play a growing role. However, he does not forget totally opposite phenomena, extremely nationalist behaviour resulting from the processes of social exclusion of migrants.

Sterbling's book is about many diverse important current social problems which may appear as though some of them have not been examined extensively enough. The author emphasises however, that his arguments and examples are often of an illustrative nature and a starting point for discussion rather than a conclusion. The book is not only an abundant source of information about Southern Europe but also an inspiration for whoever is interested in searching certain specific and universal features of the discussed social processes.

An example of such use of the author's thoughts is the issue of migration, referring to Poland, a country from another region of Europe (Central Europe) with a totally different culture, yet with an equally dominant presence of peasantry in the social structure during the pre-2nd World War period and also historically 'marked' with the stigma of migration.

After the defeats of the national uprisings in 1794, 1830, 1863 there were the so-called independence migrations. The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the inter-war period were mainly peasant money earning emigrations. The next large wave of departures took place in the 1980s (political persecution, refugees and displaced persons as well as money earning emigrations as a consequence of martial law). Foreign departures also took place in the nineties, mainly to Western Europe. In Poland as in Southern Europe the movement of the population was not only of a voluntary or economic nature. If we look at a typical migrant going abroad from Poland nowadays, *he is young (under 35), has a short work experience in Poland, does not have children, is better educated than the national average. He generally does work not requiring high qualifications* (Duszczuk, Wiśniewski 2007: 3). The portraits of "typical modern migrants" from Bulgaria, Romania and Albania referred to by Sterbling and the portrait of the "typical Polish migrant" are therefore very similar. So the geographical point of reference proposed by the author in the analysis of migration (the EU area) works well. If we look at the current distribution of migratory destinations on the map of Europe we see that *the emigration of Bulgarians and Romanians to the countries of the "old" Union is significant here, since it seems as though the citizens of the EU-2 countries can "push out" the Poles from those job markets. (...) At the same time there is a clear shaping of geographical preferences of Polish citizens (Great Britain, Germany, Ireland, Norway i.e. the countries of Central and Northern Europe) and the citizens of EU-2 (Greece, Spain, Italy, in other words, the countries of Southern Europe)* Duszczuk, Wiśniewski 2007:16).

These two simple sets of examples presented by Sterbling and typical for Poland, show how many inspirations to further analyses of the issue of migration can be drawn from the book *Entwicklungsverläufe, Lebenswelten und Migrationsprozesse. Studien zu ländlichen Fragen Südosteuropas*.

References

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