

## **XVIIIth French-language Summer University in the Humanities**

**Border Crossings (the real, the symbolic, the imaginary), 5 - 25 September 2001, Strasbourg (France)**

Transeuropéennes - Paris ; Co-organised with Marc Bloch University. In collaboration with: La Maison de l'Image, The Council of Europe. With the support of: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Council of Europe, The Robert Bosch Stiftung, Alsacian Regional Council, Lower-Rhineland General Council, Charles Veillon Foundation.

### **General Assessment**

The summer university, organised for the sixth year in a row in conjunction with the Marc Bloch University, brought together twenty-nine third or fourth-year students in the humanities and political science from all the countries of the region, with the exception of Cyprus, where one is hard pressed to recruit French-speaking students. As every year, students were chosen on the basis of their deep-seated involvement in their field of study and research, and their degree of involvement in civil society.

This year, Transeuropéennes and the Marc Bloch University were able to take real satisfaction in hosting a remarkable group, avid for knowledge: many individuals distinguished themselves through their great curiosity, high level of skills and theoretical knowledge, as well as a good command of the French language. They also expressed the wish to pursue the work undertaken during the summer university by creating research and discussion groups, planning future meetings in the region, and putting forth ideas for writing and collaborating both in existent journals and in others that remain to be founded.

One point must nevertheless be pointed out: the participants had a hard time developing open discussion around real political problems, especially at the beginning of the summer university. They seemed to try and avoid conflict or to hide behind a logic of oversight, forgetting or feigned indifference. Nevertheless, when confronted with the urgency of a discussion – through a talk, a document or an event that came up in the course of the summer university – strong tensions came to the fore, which could only be articulated and resolved through the laborious involvement of the speakers and moderators. A sign that given the extent of pent-up wounds and resentment, the development of a culture of discussion requires a great deal of effort and patience.

### **The on-going issue of borders**

The question of borders came up often in the course of discussions during the summer

universities held in 2000, entitled “Putting the past behind us”. The very topical nature of the issue thus spurred the need to devote more in-depth research and studies to the question. This intuition was confirmed by the interest and enthusiasm with which the guest speakers reacted to the proposed problematic, elaborated by a preparatory work group with faculty members at the Marc Bloch University.

On the formal level, the inter- or transdisciplinary orientation – which has been one of the fundamental principles of our summer universities right from the beginning – was presented as an initial response to the exigency of questioning the evidence or “natural” character of borders, in particular those between disciplines and spheres of knowledge. On the level of content, this approach made it possible to multiply the approaches to the chosen problematic. Transeuropéennes and the Marc Bloch University thus sought to take advantage of contributions from speakers working in fields as varied as geography, political science, history, philosophy, anthropology, religious studies, literature and art. The diversity of the research proposed thus contributed to complexifying the notion of borders and to showing it as “floating” between the dimensions of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary.

The actual border situation of the summer university project itself made it possible to draw attention to the complexity of borders – whether visible or invisible, outside or inside – in South- East Europe as well as in Alsace, and to thereby establish a parallel between difficult collective or individual histories. It also gave way to a cross-examination of ways of getting beyond or of conserving memory, in two regions which were both the sites of major conflicts in more or less recent European history.

### **Students’ thoughts on borders**

Each student had to give a presentation of their thoughts on the theme: “Border Crossings: the real, the symbolic, the imaginary.” These presentations, done in written form, resulted in a fairly homogeneous picture of how borders were seen by students from the Balkans. In the same way, in parallel to theoretically postulating ideas, students’ descriptions of real border experiences overlapped with one another.

*The border as arbitrary separation.* Borders appear above all to be arbitrary. Though set up as a separation, thereby establishing a distinction between the inhabitants on both sides, they are never anything but a means of separating commonality – a phenomenon which is particularly noticeable in the Balkans region. The border does not therefore correspond to a relevant line of separation between cultures, but quite to the contrary is established in arbitrary fashion for political reasons (MY).

EM, from Macedonia, described to just what lengths of absurdity this limit could go. During the Greek civil war, part of the family – from the so-called “Aegean” part of Macedonia – fled to Yugoslavian Macedonia. The establishment of borders made relations between separated families very difficult, not only during the communist era, but right up into the 1990s, when Greece stalled the adoption of normalised relations with Macedonia, after it split from the former Yugoslavia (FYROM). Despite its artificial nature, however, the border nevertheless produces intellectual schema which are just as difficult to throw into question. The similarity between neighbouring peoples is expunged in favour of differences that are established after the fact.

*Internal borders.* Borders are therefore also present in people's minds, as a number of students projects made clear. DD drew attention to the demarcation of internal borders in and around Sarajevo during the conflict. Even when peace returned, habits of where one would go lingered, implying spatial segregation.

Marked by segregation, the question of Romany communities in the Balkans and Eastern Europe was not left unattended to by the students of the summer university, who were remarkably conscious of the problem. SS emphasised the effort required if this extremely marginalised population was to be integrated. However, though other students dealt with the question, they were less successful in avoiding the pitfalls of stigmatising the differences of "minorities" in general.

Interior borders were also audaciously identified within the European Union by MY. In Paris, notably, where the different tariff zones in the public transport system establish borders for commuters. To go beyond them without authorisation (without the required ticket) is a potential source of conflict with the authorities and the law.

*The border as sanction and domination.* The extreme case of possible penalties when crossing a border was raised by DD in regard to dangerous displacements when the city of Sarajevo was held hostage by sniper fire and hidden gunmen. But penalties usually play themselves out through expulsion or the authorities refusing passage across the border.

Penalties and passage convey domination. Considered stable, the border makes it possible to identify the people wanting to cross it, requires authorisation for their passage and puts them in a situation of inferiority with regard to the border authorities and the inspection forces, and to the same extent reduces their freedom (MD).

MH's childhood memories are punctuated with such domination. Crossing the border between Yugoslavia and Italy was often frightening and humiliating, taking place beneath the prying gaze of the Yugoslav customs officers and the contemptuous gaze of their Italian counterparts.

In fact, obtaining a visa and crossing a border most often manifest themselves through a frustration that quickly turns into a resentment toward the countries "desired" by the populations of the Balkans and Eastern Europe (EM). This attitude refers directly to the relations maintained with the European Union.

*Integration into the European Union and borders.* The communist period broadly contributed to closing the borders between eastern and western Europe. The most extreme case was that of Albania, a country where the border was made most "sacred", leading to a sanctification of what lay within and a quasi execration of the outside - an outside world that remained, moreover, mysterious for the majority of the Albanian population. The end of communism went hand in hand with a will to open the country and its people's minds to the outside, but, this time, it was the borders of the other countries which proved impermeable (NR).

Thus, after having been a point of friction and separation between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian states of Europe, and subsequently between the communist world and the capitalist world, the Balkans and Eastern Europe represent the limit beyond which lie the wealthy lands of Europe - the similarities of their peoples notwithstanding. The new

border is identified as being that established by Schengen (AK).

The relations between borders, the European Union, the Balkans and Eastern Europe were recurrent themes in much of the work done by the students. The questioning centred around the contradiction between the discourses concerning the integration of all of the countries of Europe into the European Union and the free access for citizens of Eastern Europe and the Balkans to the member states of the Union. What, therefore, does integration into the Union suppose? What compromises, or even sacrifices are required in order to join the Union and see borders abolished? Does the European Union really want to integrate the countries of eastern and southeastern Europe?

## **Work methods**

Lectures, followed by discussions with the speakers, were given once a day, with a different speaker each time. The courses given the most attention were those which dealt with the realities most closely concerning the participants, whether in terms of the history, geography or anthropology of the Balkans, urban issues or the question of religion. However, the courses which were more conceptual in appearance, and which required a great deal of concentration, were acknowledged as being necessary and truly contributed to enriching and honing reflection and debate.

Prior to the participants' arrival in Strasbourg, they had each been asked to prepare a narrative about crossing an actual border, whether visible or invisible. The material which was brought in response to this proposal was both rich and diversified: some participants did indeed bring narratives of their experience, whereas others proposed more theoretical texts dealing with the issue (sometimes in distanced fashion). The lack of visual material and the absence of objects able to evidence the reality of borders in their environment was unfortunate, for the presence of such material could have stimulated what was otherwise purely theoretical research. The workshops were largely devoted to the presentation of this material and the discussions they led to. Other workshops were devoted to discussions of current events, particularly after the 11 September attacks in the United States, and of the films which were screened.

## **Germany: converging cross-border gazes**

Particular emphasis was put on crossing the border on the Rhine, a border which is today open but which was, as we know, the stake and symbol of violent conflict in the past. The extramural activities essentially had to do with creating possibilities for meeting with institutions and individuals in Germany whose activity is devoted to co-operation and cross-border exchange projects.

The cross-border activities of two German universities were thus highlighted. Freiburg University, involved with the Marc Bloch University in the EUCOR programme – whose operations were explained to the students – hosted the group for a particularly rich half-day of work. One speaker – professor of history at the European Viadrina University of Frankfurt am Oder – drew attention to this remarkable project which combines the acquisition of knowledge and European consciousness, and which, on the border between Germany and Poland, may be seen as “a bridge between Eastern European and Western Europe”.

At the Akademie Schloss Solitude (near Stuttgart), an internationally oriented cultural and meeting centre, the students had the opportunity to engage in discussion, exchange and common imagination with the artists in residence. Thanks to the latter, and to their taste for meeting with the participants in the summer university, and thanks to the warm welcome and involvement of Jean-Baptiste Joly, this experience was remarkably rich. Lastly, it was with a young Strasbourg-based artist, Nicolas Boulard, that the students had a playful experience of crossing the French-German border on foot, as documented in a video film made by the artist himself.

## **Interdisciplinarity and cinema**

In Strasbourg, the project once again profited from a rich collaboration with the Maison de l'Image and the Vidéo les Beaux Jours association, which looked after the documentary-film programme based on the theme of the summer university. Once again too, the co-ordination team noticed how the overall project was enriched by integrating documentary and fiction film, which often led to deep discussion by dislodging the pre-established position of the viewer, opening lines of thought beyond the field of self-censorship and so on.

In Strasbourg to present his latest (documentary) film *Fortress Europe* (2001) to the students of the two summer universities, Novi-Sad-based filmmaker Zelimir Zilnik was able, in the course of discussions with the students, to connect the work of a filmmaker with the real, questioning the students regarding their link with the realities of their own societies and with Europe, inviting them to cast their gaze on the latter and to position themselves in relation to these realities. Involvement in a less schematic, more debatable vision of Europe: such was the objective of a visit to and discussion at the Council of Europe as well as at the European Court of Human Rights.

The students became very heartily involved in the discussion proposed on the subject of the current political events in South East Europe, notably around the issue of minorities. They were also able to link their inscription in Europe to an existent political reality – which is a reality of actual integration.

*Summary prepared by Ana Samardzija and Christophe Ingels*

## **Instructors**

*Roselyne Baffet*, lecturer in comparative literature, Marc Bloch University (Strasbourg) ; *Antonia Birnbaum*, philosopher (Toulouse) ; *Nicolas Boulard*, artist and graphic designer (Strasbourg) ; *Montserrat Enrich Mas*, research team leader, European Human Rights Court (Strasbourg) ; *Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes*, editor in chief of *Transeuropéennes* (Paris) ; *Luc Gwiazdzinski*, geographer, associate professor of geography at the Louis Pasteur University in Strasbourg (image & city laboratory), Director of the Maison du Temps et de la Mobilité, in Belfort (France) ; *Marc Crépon*, professor of philosophy and researcher, Ecole Normale Supérieure (Paris) ; *Georges Heck*, director of the Maison de

l'Image (Strasbourg) ; *Hans Peter Furrer*, special correspondent for the FRY, Council of Europe ; *Jean Hurstel*, Director of the Centre for emerging creation "La Laiterie" (Strasbourg) ; *Michael Ingledow*, programme counsellor, Department of Political Affairs, at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) ; *Jean-Baptiste Joly*, Director of the cultural and meeting centre Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart) ; *Claudia Luciani*, division leader, chef de division, Department of Political Affairs, at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) ; *Jean Luc Nancy*, professor of philosophy at the Marc Bloch University (Strasbourg) ; *Daniel Payot*, professor of philosophy, president of the Marc Bloch University (Strasbourg) ; *Maurice Sachot*, professor of education, director of the Department of Philosophy, linguistics, Computer Science and Education (Strasbourg) ; *Svetlana Slapsak*, professor of anthropology at the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis (Ljubljana) ; *Léon Strauss*, emeritus professor of contemporary history at the Institute of Political Studies (Strasbourg) ; *Georges Prevelakis*, professor of geography, Marne-la-Vallée University ; *Helga Schultz*, professor of history at the Viadrina University (Frankfurt am Oder) ; *Zelimir Zilnik*, filmmaker (Novi Sad).

## Partners

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Extramural co-ordinator: Sanja Lucquet-Basaric.

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