

# Abstracts

*Sonja Priebus*

## **Robert Fico and His Politics of Revenge – Autocratization in Slovakia**

In autumn 2023, Robert Fico returned to power in Slovakia for the fourth time. One year into office, the government led by Fico has seemingly embarked on the Hungarian path of autocratization. The government has decriminalised corruption and destroyed the country's anti-corruption structures, exerted increasing influence on the judiciary, reformed the public media services, and increased pressure on NGOs and independent media. Yet while Fico seems to emulate the Hungarian and Polish authoritarian playbook, his increasingly illiberal rule is more strategic, driven by self-protection and revenge on perceived enemies. Meanwhile, the European Commission has adopted a wait-and-see approach and seems not to have learned from the Hungarian and Polish cases.

*Jens Bastian*

## **50 Years „Μεταπολίτευση“ / Metapolitefsi – Achievements and Tragedies of Greece**

23 July 2024 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the transition from military dictatorship to the restoration of democracy in Greece. It is a special date in the culture and politics of remembrance in post-1945 Greece. The “Μεταπολίτευση” / Metapolitefsi represents the founding period of the third Hellenic Republic. For all the recognition of the institutional consolidation and social anchoring of parliamentary democracy in Greece, this year's celebrations were also accompanied by a dose of scepticism in light of domestic challenges and geopolitical risk factors. The following contribution addresses the combination of achievements and tragedies during Greece's decades-long “Μεταπολίτευση” / Metapolitefsi.

*Adamantios Theodor Skordos / Naum Trajanovski*

## **The Two Museums of the Macedonian Struggles – Contested History Displays in Thessaloniki and Skopje**

The article deals with the founding history, the historical-political objectives, and the contents of two museums that bear (almost) the same name and refer partly to the same period: The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Thessaloniki (founded 1982) and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Independence in Skopje (founded 2011). Between the founding years of the two museums lie almost three decades, during which the collapse of

Yugoslavia, the declaration of independence of the Republic of Macedonia (from 2018: Republic of North Macedonia) and the outbreak of the Greek-Macedonian name dispute took place. The juxtaposition of the two museums shows the competing and different perspectives on the Macedonian Question (or Macedonian Issue) in the memory cultures and the master historical narratives of Greece and North Macedonia. However, despite their different historical expositions, the article argues that the two institutions are very similar regarding the exclusivist manner in which they employ the past to achieve their goals in the present.

**Christian Voß**

## **The Laughing Bag in the Mirror – Bulgaria’s Arrival in the West in the Novels by Alek Popov 2001–2021**

With effervescent humour, Alek Popov (1966–2024) writes about Bulgarian encounters with the West since the fall of the Iron Curtain. This article compares his novels “Mission London” from 2001 and “Mission Turan” from 2021, which has recently been translated into English. Whereas the book about the Bulgarian Embassy in London in times of pre-EU accession is a self-ironical description of the gap between the Bulgarian self-perception of a proud past and the reality of a corrupt diplomatic staff, “Mission Turan” ridicules the megalomaniac Balkan nationalisms since the 19th century claiming ethnic continuity to antiquity, in the Bulgarian case to the Protobulgars of Khan Asparuch. The book reflects on the impact of science instrumentalised by populist politicians. Although Popov lives in Sofia, he takes the perspective of transnational authors and is able to describe his homeland from both within and without: “Mission Turan” transposes the normative hierarchy between EU-Europe and Bulgaria to a symbolic and fictitious topography. In the end, even the reader does not know whether Bulgaria is meant to be the patronising European country that freely distributes EU-passports, or the marginal post-Soviet country of Turan whose inhabitants have been identified as the alleged descendants of the last Protobulgars.

**Diana Ivanova**

## **Photos Closing a Historical Gap – A Visual Archive on the Assimilation of Minorities in Communist Bulgaria**

A new private initiative in Bulgaria has recently succeeded in collecting previously unknown photographs on the assimilation of the Turkish and Pomak ethnic groups during Bulgarian socialism (1945–1989). This closes a historical gap. Until now, these photos documenting the long years of renaming, expulsion, and resettlement have been stored in private or public archives in either Bulgaria or Turkey, while others are scattered all over the world. This posed a serious problem to the research, understanding, and the transfer of the memory of what happened. The first open digital archive of its kind is supposed to change this.