Stalinism Revisited
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Understanding the nature, dynamics, and consequences of Stalinism in Eastern and Central Europe remains an urgent scholarly and moral task. The present volume compiles the proceedings of the conference “Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in the former Soviet Bloc” (29–30 November 2007, Washington, D.C., USA). The event was envisaged as an opportunity for synthesis and comparison under the favorable circumstances of temporal distance and new available sources. The two decades that have passed since the 1989 watershed brought about an archival upheaval and, consequentially, a scholarly explosion within the field of communist studies. The result was an opportunity for reinforcing and/or retesting many of the assertions produced in academia throughout the years of both the Cold War and the immediate post-communist euphoria. Equally significant, a certain sense of closure and atonement at the local level, created new motivations for coming to terms with the first decade of communism’s existence in the area, one fundamentally defined by trauma and repression. The year 2007 symbolized a historical threshold that marked six decades since the establishment of communist regimes in Eastern Europe (though it can be argued that this process took place earlier in some countries, such as Bulgaria, and later in other, e.g., Czechoslovakia). The experience of recent years shows that the 21st century is still following upon the footsteps of the previous one. In many respects, it is only a formal convention to speak of a new century. Once Daniel Chirot stated that in the 21st century “the fundamental causes of revo-

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1 What Sheila Fitzpatrick defined as “an abrupt and radical transformation of the universe of sources and the conditions of access to information” in her “Introduction” to *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.
volutionary instability will be moral.”2 If one concurs, then the study of Eastern Europe’s Stalinization remains an important source of pedagogically and cathartically rich examples for the present.

The initial premise behind the above-mentioned event was that we are now better equipped for understanding and interpreting the complex circumstances behind the Stalinist expansion in Eastern Europe. We had in mind such dynamics as the early history of the Cold War, the Stalinist revolutionary project in the region, the participation of local communist elites, the impact of Titoism on these elites, the rivalries between “Muscovites” and “home communists,” and the first attempts at constructing, via the Cominform (the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties, founded in 1947), a Moscow-centered supra-governmental communist organization. Additionally, many contributors historiographically contextualized the problems singled out in their papers. The volume, subsequently, attained a retrospective facet as well. It familiarizes the reader with the domestic scholarly literature from the various Eastern European countries dealing with the aspects of the establishment of communist regimes in the region. One could also argue that this book discusses and revisits the main hypotheses regarding the inception of the Soviet Bloc as formulated in the classic work on the topic by Zbigniew Brzeziński.3

It should be noted, however, that our intention was not to produce a grand narrative about the first decade of the communist experience in Eastern Europe. We purposely chose to create a composite framework reflective of the fragmented discourse about the various political and historical issues discussed. The volume highlights the political, ideological, and personal variables that characterized the post-1945 decade. It emphasizes the complexities, ambiguities and contradictions which affected both the rationality of the actors involved and the predictability of historical events. Consequently, the volume embraces a multi-directional perspective, mirroring the tremendous diversity of domestic and international processes present in each of the cases in the individual papers.

The comparative method is the common denominator for all contributions and a fundamental feature of the work itself. It is the direct result of the overall thesis, unanimously adopted by all the authors, namely, that there was no unique path to Stalinization in Eastern Europe. There was no master plan that was designed some evening in the Kremlin by Stalin and his inner circle. Alternatively, however, one would be mistaken to believe that this possibility was not une idée fixe for Stalin and the other Moscow magnates. Eastern Europe did indeed become a cordon sanitaire for the fatherland of socialism. There may not have been (as far as we know) any blueprints clearly stating USSR’s intentions in the region. The increasingly perceived reality of communist takeover during those years is nevertheless an indicator of Stalin’s concerted actions of domination over Eastern Europe. Subsequently, four axes of analysis can be identified in the volume: (a) the heterogeneous nature of communization; (b) the role of the “Moscow Center” in the interplay between Sovietization and satellitization; (c) the ambivalent symbiosis between continuity and change in the societies upon which the communist regimes applied themselves; and (d) the (il)logic of Stalinism’s infernal reign of terror, purge, co-option, manipulation, and indoctrination, its consequences and legacies in the region.

Despite the multifariousness of the first decade of the communist experience in the region, the researcher can certainly rely on one valid generalization: it all happened along the lines of a presupposed set of ideological premises (maybe not so distinct at the time, but obvious by means of historical hindsight). What these countries experienced was not merely institutional import or imperial expansion. They went through what one could label, using Stephen Kotkin’s wording, a “civilizational” transfer that transplanted a secular eschatology (Marxism-Leninism), a radical vision of the world (capitalist encirclement

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and the touchstone theory or proletarian internationalism formulated by Stalin in the 1920s), and, ultimately, an alternative idea of modernity (based upon anti-capitalism and state managed collectivism) self-identified as infallibly righteous; in other words, Stalinism. The latter was a fanatic, pre-established idea of how society should be, in the name of which the movement dispensed with as many human lives as needed while frantically pacing radical transformation. The personality cult (and the ensuing post-Stalin patrimonialism) combined with the intrinsic and increased traditionalistic outlook of communism (as “a lived system”\(^5\)) spun Bolshevism utterly and irrevocably out of control in each and every case of these countries. As in the case of the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe Stalinism itself was the revolution\(^6\) it broke through the already frail structures of the ancien régime and laid the groundwork of state socialism in each of the region’s countries.

The period of communist takeover and of “high Stalinism” in the region was fundamentally one of institutional and ideological transfer based upon the premise of radical transformation and of cultural revolution. This is why it is important to clarify first the bedrock of this historical process and then put the preliminary conclusions into a comparative, regional, cross-country perspective. As recent scholarship on a variety of topics related to the 1944–48 period has shown, there certainly was a strategic orientation for these multiple takeovers (i.e., Sovietization). At the same time, a series of local developments appeared providing each of the cases with a distinctive character in the process. The early history of post-war East European communism can be divided in two distinct periods: (a) 1944–47, that of Leninist takeover

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and accelerated annihilation of democratic pluralism in the region’s countries; (b) 1948–53, that of communist transformation and offensive development, characterized by institutional and ideological transfer (Sovietization), cultural regimentation, domestic terror, and international bi-polarism (Andrei Zhdanov’s “Two Camps” theory). The fateful years 1944–48 must be also understood in the context of the prior developments during the Second World War. One has to take into account the domestic politics framework of each of the region’s countries. What I have in mind are issues such as the rise of the extreme right and of anti-Semitism, nationalities policies, and the activity of local communist parties, especially of the Comintern. At the end of the Second World War, a new state system was emerging. It was the product of two simultaneous processes: Sovietization and satellitization. The “Iron Curtain” was mainly the result of the alternation of what Caroline Kennedy-Pipe called “strategies of occupation and of consolidation.”

The field of communism studies presently boasts quite a few case studies (some more general, others more topical) of the Bolshevization of Eastern Europe (1944–53). They are accompanied by important

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collective volumes on the nature and facets of Stalinism as the cornerstone model for Soviet-type socialism. There is, however, only a limited list of titles that deal with both general and specific issues related to the impact and manifestations of Stalinism in the region. Two contributions of such character do stand out, with the caveat that over a decade has passed since their publication: François Fejtö, *Histoire des démocraties populaires, tome 1: L’Ere de Staline (1945–1953)* (Paris: Seuil, 1992) and Norman Naimark & Leonid Gibianskii eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). The last ten years, however, brought about no such books focused on this specific part of Europe. We believe that the present collective effort fills this void within the scholarly literature. The conference and the volume were imagined along the lines previously sketched by two other significant academic projects that came about at the time, for very similar research purposes as those of the event organized thirty years later in Washington, D.C. The more significant of the two was the 1975 conference on Stalinism organized at the Rockefeller Foundation’s conference center in Bellagio, Italy, and which had as result the seminal volume edited by Robert C. Tucker, *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1977). The second, more area studies focused, is the series of seminars devoted to the topic of communist power in Eastern Europe (1944–49), held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London (1974–76) and which resulted in the influ-


ential volume edited by Martin McCauley, *Communist Power in Europe 1944–1949* (Barnes & Noble Books, 1977) (among the contributors were Hugh Seton-Watson, George Schöpflin, and Norman Davies). We identified with these two projects’ commitment to methodological re-assessment, comparative bias, transnational grasp, and non-linear/self-complacent argumentation.

The structure of the present volume provides grounds for both re-interpretation and an input of fresh insights and research. It contains three types of contributions: (a) general analyses of phenomena associated with the category of Stalinism; (b) case studies focusing upon aspects of establishment of communist regimes in each of the Eastern European countries; (c) historiographical evaluations of the literature dealing with the targeted period of time. The authors focus on the following issues: the relationship between domestic and external factors; factionalism and ideological orthodoxy; institution-building as part of the post-war European outlook; terror and transformism; and the impact of the first decade in subsequent dynamics within the Soviet bloc and after its dissolution.

Therefore, the key-issues to be dealt with are: interpretations of Stalinism in the light of the similarities and dissimilarities among the new regimes and their individual path to power; the Cominform and the emerging bloc (dis)unity (the genesis of the Titoist challenge and the birth of “national communism”); the role of local communist leaders, the little Stalins as it were (e.g., Rákosi, Gheorghiu-Dej, Chervenkov, Ulbricht, Gottwald); the incumbent legacies of early post-war communism on later developments within state socialism; and the present perceptions of the Stalinist experience. Additionally, the reader will also find four articles concentrated upon particular elements of Romania’s transformation into a communist regime. The explanation for such bias is, in a way, a sub-plot in the justification of the present project. Besides the intention of constructing a comparative and general framework, the conveners of the conference\(^\text{10}\) conceived the event as

\(^{10}\) Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu (Director of the Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies at Government and Politics Department, University of Maryland, College Park), Mr. H.R. Patapievici (President of the Romanian Cultural Institute, Bucharest), and Dr. Christian Ostermann (Director of the Cold War International History Program at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars).
a chance for reinserting the Romanian case in the Anglo-American academic map.\textsuperscript{11} Under circumstances of a rejuvenation of communism studies in Romania\textsuperscript{12} and considering the existent scholarship dealing with the Romanian case,\textsuperscript{13} I believe it is high time to re-introduce the Romanian case to the general debates about communist takeovers and the impact of Stalinism on Eastern Europe. The importance of this pioneering enterprise is heightened by the fact that three of the researchers included in the volume were members/experts of the PCACDR,\textsuperscript{14} their contributions being integral parts of the Commission’s \textit{Final Report}. It should be noted, however, that this slight Romanian bias does not dilute the overall focus of the volume on regime-change, societal transformation, and international positioning across the entire Soviet Bloc.

The first part of the volume provides a diagnosis of the blueprint model implemented in Eastern Europe in the first post-1945 decade. Kenneth Jowitt argues that the idea of transformation in Stalinist regimes was based upon a “castle” mentality, in the sense of minimizing “the contact with the old data,” while simultaneously pursuing revolutionary breakthroughs. This practice not only destroyed the elites, but also shattered institutions and the very potential for political opposition. According to him, Stalinism obliterated, absorbed, and sub-

\textsuperscript{11} Significantly, the excellent volume by Naimark & Gibianskii does not have any contribution dealing with the Romanian case.

\textsuperscript{12} Signaled among other things by the publication of the \textit{Final Report} of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCACDR). It first appeared in e-format on December 2006, when the Romanian President Traian Băsescu officially condemned the communist regime as “illegitimate and criminal,” in a speech during a joint session of the Romanian Parliament. The \textit{Final Report} was published in volume format in November 2007 at Humanitas publishing house.

\textsuperscript{13} Among the names that come to mind are Henry Roberts, Ghiță Ionescu, Robert King, Ken Jowitt, Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, Robert Levy, Michael Shafir, Dionisie Ghermani, Catherine Durandin, Walter Bacon, William Crowther, Daniel Nelson, Stephen Fischer-Galati, Mary Ellen Fischer, etc.

\textsuperscript{14} Cristian Vasile was the scientific secretary, Dragoș Petrescu was member, Dorin Dobrinăcu was co-editor of the Commission’s final report (along with Vladimir Tismaneanu and Cristian Vasile). Another conference participant, professor Virgil Târău, was expert of the Commission. Vladimir Tismaneanu was the president of the investigatory body.
stituted both the state and the public. However, Jowitt insists that pre-communist political culture was only reinforced by Stalinist rule in the region. The danger for the present, incumbent on the legacy of the ambivalent communist past, is that Eastern Europe can become “Europe’s ghetto.” In the second article of the first section of the book, Vladimir Tismaneanu emphasizes the centrality of the culture and politics of purge to Stalinism. He argues that communist dictatorships were established on sheer terror, permanent propaganda warfare, and personalized power. Subsequently, their fundamental weakness was the chronic deficit of legitimacy. Stalinism imposed a different structure of commitment and consent. One which was based upon the unification of victim and torturer, the abolition of the traditional moral taboos and the codification of different set of communal values, with different prescriptions and prohibitions (“socialist ethics”). The ideologization of morality led to a specific (il)logic of authority consolidation that turned Leninism into a political religion. An exterminist hubris complemented communism’s proselytic reach over Eastern Europe. The third contribution of Part One analyzes the origins and the intensity of the Cold War. Mark Kramer emphasizes the importance of domestic politics in the USSR, which, along with Stalin’s external ambitions, were the decisive factor shaping Soviet ties with Eastern Europe. Stalin’s heightened repressive campaigns and xenophobic appetites at home reflected themselves in his embrace of a harder line vis-à-vis Eastern Europe. The direct consequence of these developments was the abandonment of initial initiatives for cooperation with the United States and Britain. An important section of Mark Kramer’s paper deals with the impact of Stalin’s rift with Yugoslavia, his attempts to cope with the split and to mitigate the adverse repercussions upon the “monolithic unity” of the newly born Soviet bloc. Alfred J. Rieber follows a similar path, in the sense that he examines the relationship between the expansion of Soviet influence and the inception of the Cold War and the theoretization and instrumentalization of the idea of a “popular democracy” at the level of the communist elite in the USSR. According to the author, the concept became an illusion because of (a) the incapacity of the local communist parties to adapt to certain rules of the parliamentary game; (b) the perceived hostility of Soviet representatives toward non-communist members of the post-war communist governments; and (c) the internationalization of internal conflicts in this region’s countries.
Part Two turns to individual cases of communist takeovers. It opens with an autobiographical piece by Thomas W. Simons, Jr. By presenting his personal experience and background in American foreign policy, Simons constructs a big picture of the US attitude toward Eastern Europe during the Cold War. The author makes a very important observation in relation to the history of the bi-polar period in the 20th century. The US had no strategic interest in that part of Europe and its involvement there remained rather ideological. The causes of this situation lay in the lessons of the Second World War, as learnt differently by Americans and Soviets. The 1944–47 crisis, in Simons’ opinion, was one of perceiving appeasement of tyranny vs. democratic capitalism, on one side, and degeneration of capitalism vs. socialism, on the other. The region then became “a canary in the mineshaft for Americans.” Agnes Heller’s contribution investigates, using the case of Hungary, the nature of the legitimacy deficits that plagued the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. She identifies two factors of difference when comparing the Eastern European “periphery” and the “Moscow center”: the initial position and the speed of transformation. Communist parties in the region were faced with two impossibilities: one of escaping the label of alienness, and second, that of not being able to produce charisma out of fear as Stalin had done in the Soviet Union. She then turns to the Hungarian case, showing how the mid-1940s period imprinted upon its generation a “nostalgia of the beginning” in contrast with the Rákosi years. This set the ground for the legitimacy of the post-1953 Nagy government, which basically relied on this generation’s hope for wiping the slate clean. She then concludes by contrasting the 1953 moment with the 1956 one. She points out that the former was still one dominated by consensus (the no’s hid the conflicting yes’s) over the necessity to reject Stalinism as outwardly illegitimate. John Connelly’s contribution analyzes the paradox of the German communist regime, which despite not having gone through a Stalinist revolution (to the extent that all the other countries in question here did), it “succeeded” in becoming one of the foremost Stalinist regimes within the Soviet bloc. The paper shows, in contrast with some of the literature on the topic, that the GDR turned to Soviet-style socialism at an early date. Moreover, Connelly also emphasizes and certifies the importance of studying the SED dictatorship in the context of the overall transformations within what became the Soviet
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bloc. The East German structures of centralized rule can be fully understood only in comparison with the other cases in Eastern Europe. Antoni and Bartłomiej Kaminski propose a different point of view for the interpretation of the imposition of Soviet-style government in Poland. First, they argue for the identification of pre-1945 stages in the process of takeover, namely the Nonaggression Pact in 1939 and the 1941 Teheran conference. Furthermore, they go on to state that from 1939 on a coherent plan of imposing Soviet domination over Poland can be outlined. The two authors notice though the lack of a full-fledged Stalinization of Poland after 1947, which in its turn signals the incomplete transition to socialism of this country. Antoni and Bartłomiej Kaminski stress that this phenomenon would later prove to be an Achilles heel for the entire Soviet bloc. Poland turned into a source of constant crisis that affected the entire region and which ultimately peaked with the Solidarity movement.

Part Three contains both analyses of some aspects of the communization process and historiographical reviews of these issues. János Rainer draws attention to two periods in the study of the Stalinist period in Hungary. The first, during the 1980s, was characterized by weak conceptual employment. The pre-1956 years were used to legitimate Kádár’s rule. Evidently after 1989, the memory of 1956 and Stalinism played a key part in Hungary’s change of system. Moreover, as Rainer further states, the theory of totalitarianism became the framework of interpretation. This situation gradually changed; presently, new research on social and cultural history is altering the ethical commitment typically attached to the academia in the 1990s. Additionally, János Rainer summarizes some of the most important points of reconsideration on the basis of the inevitable archival “epiphanies” with reference to the Stalinist years in Hungary. Bogdan Iacob’s paper similarly adheres to the call for new directions. The author argues for the clarification of the Stalinist model of academia and cultural revolution under circumstances of its application upon the Romanian case. Using the example of the Romanian Academy’s “reform,” and particularly that of the “historical front,” he accentuates the double dichotomy of destruction–reconstruction/change–continuity at the level of the higher education and of the historical-production in the first decade of the communist regime in Romania. The study concludes by pointing to two directions that ultimately intersect, namely, that of institutional
and paradigmatic shift. The third contribution, by Ekaterina Nikova, proposes a revision of the long-established tenet of a supposedly more benign communist transformation of Bulgaria. By making use of the avalanche of new materials and sources about the Stalinist period, she stresses “the true meaning of communist political violence.” The latter imposed a modus operandi that explains the later peculiar features of Bulgarian communism: the preservation of a strong grip upon society, economic adventurism, and grotesque megalomaniac distortions in all spheres of life. Nikova concludes by stating that the people’s democracy was a stillborn child and that, despite the leftist equalitarian tradition, the domestic factor in Bulgaria had minimal influence on the unfolding of the events of those early years. In the same vein, Dorin Dobrincu pursues in his article a disenchanted approach of Romania’s anticomunist armed resistance. He provides the reader both with a detailed presentation of the historical phenomenon itself and a historiographical record of the topic in the domestic literature. He identifies two periods (1944–7 and 1948 – the early 1960s) differentiated from the standpoint of both the domestic and the international context. In contrast with many of his peers, he questions the existence of a clear political commitment of the resistance leaders. He does however minutely describe the partisanship of some of these groups. One of his main ideas is that the partisans’ leaders were mostly people invested with an important symbolic capital in the action areas, but mostly unknown on the country’s territory as a whole. By means of comparative history, Dobrincu also dispels the impression of the uniqueness of the phenomenon (apparent in most local scholarly output). He proposes a re-historicization of the topic in a regional context as the only solution which would not breed the same anticomunist myths that often find themselves on the wrong side of the barricades with democratic values.

The last part of the book looks into the role of domestic politics and tradition in the establishment of a communist regime and into the legacy of those years in the later stages of the communist experience in Eastern Europe. In the case of Czechoslovakia, Bradley Abrams marks two distinct stages: that of the Czechoslovak road to socialism (1945–47) and that of “the Czechoslovak road from socialism to Stalinism” (1948–53). The first is reflective of the domestic desires for radical social change and the domestic political actors’ emulation of the Soviet Union and/or conformity to the latter’s plans. The second is character-
ized by the turn toward similar developments as in other countries of the region: party recruitment, nationalization, collectivization, purges in the bureaucracy, army and elsewhere, and, finally, show trials. Nevertheless, this notional difference was the origin of the Czechoslovak specificities, throughout the country’s history as a Soviet bloc member. The second paper in this section of the volume is Cristian Vasile’s analysis of the early history of the Propaganda and Agitation Department in Romania. It focuses upon the role of this institution in the development of a discourse regarding culture, arts, education and in the harassment of the more or less refractory intellectuals and artists. Cristian Vasile discusses the mechanisms by which the guidance of the regime’s politics of culture effectively became synonymous with political censorship. Using newly declassified archival materials, he contrasts the dynamics of the Romanian agitprop networks with those established in the Soviet Union both before and after Stalin’s accession to power. One important aspect of this article is the attention paid to the local institutionalization of propaganda in the country. Additionally, the author does not shy away from raising the alternate question about the readiness of large numbers of Romanian intellectuals in accepting the ideological terms set up by communist cultural policies. Svetozar Stojanovic develops, in his contribution to Part Four, an interesting typology of Stalinisms. His taxonomy relies upon the internal dynamics of Yugoslav communism in the aftermath of the split with the Soviet Union. A culmination of a few elements distinguishes the Yugoslav case from the countries in the Soviet bloc: the pre-communist period (in parliamentary opposition, underground, under foreign occupation, and not in power); the anti-fascist and civil war/revolution; and the idealism in relation to the Soviet Union during the immediate post-war period. Subsequently, by 1948, important practical differences with Moscow had already accumulated despite a complete Stalinization of the Yugoslav Communist Party’s ideology. After the Tito–Stalin split, Yugoslavia ironically turned more orthodox than the Moscow center. It generated a vicious circle of self-enlarging and self-justifying mass terror that indiscriminately targeted both the uninformed Stalinists and the informed ones. Stojanovic points to three main deviations from the original model, each corresponding to specific periods in the history of the federation and of its relations with the Soviet Union: diffusive Stalinism, anti-Stalinist Stalinism, and Jugo-Stalinism (based upon an-
tifacist patriotism). Dragoș Petrescu closes the last part of the volume with a reconsideration of Gheorghiu Dej’s internationalism and commitment to Soviet objectives. By means of examining the most representative moments of the Romanian Workers’ Party history from 1948 to 1965, with the related identity-discourses promoted at the level of its leadership, Petrescu evaluates the phenomenon of building a new political community in communist Romania. After a period of random terror conducted by the state against the majority of its citizens, by 1964, this phenomenon turned into an all-encompassing nation-building process. The contribution emphasizes not only the similarities in the emplotment of the “Nation” between Gheorghiu-Dej and his successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu, but it also examines the equivalence in the former’s political discourse employe during the inter-war period.

The editor would like to express his gratitude to H.R. Patapievici, President of the Romanian Cultural Institute, and to Mircea Mihăieș, the Institute’s Vice-President, who have enthusiastically embraced the idea of a series of conferences on seminal political-intellectual issues, in Washington, D.C., with the purpose of strengthening and developing the already existent connections between the Romanian scholarly community and American academia. The contributors are also grateful to Ivo Banac (who presented a reconsideration of some of the main points developed in his seminal book With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist splits in Yugoslav Communism, Cornell University Press, 1988), Claudiu Secașiu (who presented a paper on “The Destruction of the Democratic Anti-Communist Opposition in Romania and the Trials of 1947–1948”) and Virgil Țârău (who presented a paper on “The November 1946 Elections and the Consolidation of the Communist Power in Romania”). Charles Gati, Charles King, and Christian Ostermann were superb discussants for the conference panels, offering excellent insights and enriching suggestions. Special thanks to Bogdan Cristian Iacob, a graduate student at the History Department of the Central European University and project coordinator on behalf of the Romanian Cultural Institute. He decisively contributed to the successful organization of the conference and the subsequent editorial efforts in putting together this volume.