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Editorial

Efforts are now being made to connect the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with a transportation network that will allow for efficient movement and transport of goods. In some parts of the region, convenient connections already exist. In others, the problem is that the transportation network between actors outside the region is transit-oriented, with Central European exchanges taking place incidentally, so to speak.

The construction of roads and railway lines forming part of the trans-European transport corridor, such as the Via Baltica, or the Via Carpatia, which links the notoriously difficult north--south belt (connecting Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece), responds to needs that were recognized a century ago. From the perspective the authors have taken, it is clear how important a factor in overcoming the economic difficulties of the independent Central European states was the maintenance, sometimes the reconstruction, and in some cases the creation of new supply chains and channels of trade. The importance of this issue can best be seen from the example of Bessarabia, which experienced a peripheralisation resulting mainly from deficiencies in transport infrastructure. The region experienced powerlessness in this regard and even succumbed to resignation despite the efforts made at the beginning of the period in question.

The texts, written in different countries, which we have collected in the second issue of *Trimarium*, bring insights common to the region: the period of severing ties with empires and creating new ties coincided with the need for internal stability, especially getting state finances in order. The elites of the time were aware of the value of a country's own currency and the need to monitor the state's financial system, a fact that sounds surprisingly up-to-date. The effects of the measures taken to this end, despite some stumbling blocks, were felt positively throughout the region, as trade figures show. Individual countries handled the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s in different ways: the crisis hit them at different times and affected vulnerable sectors of the economy to varying degrees. As the economic conditions improved noticeably in the mid-1930s, further plans were made, including the intensification of trade between the partners. However, all this was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Because the supply chains were disrupted by the Great War and its aftermath, and, in some cases, trade became more difficult and expensive, economic relations had to be redefined, and new ways and solutions had to be found. Sometimes this meant renewed cooperation with states that emerged after the break-up of empires. These processes can best be seen in the example of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. The four texts on economy in this issue contain quite a few examples from the Czech, Polish, Ukrainian and Bessarabian perspectives. They show yet another phenomenon: how countries that found Central Europe slipping away from their direct influence after the Treaty of Versailles and related treaties obstructed its economic integration efforts. Particularly striking is the attitude of Germany at the time, which, on the one hand, waged a tariff war against Poland, and on the other counteracted attempts to intensify Czechoslovak cooperation with the Balkans under the so-called Little Entente ("Malá dohoda"). We can also observe something we know so well today: successful attempts to take over lucrative enterprises and even control of

certain industries by new economic partners, namely countries that were already well established and had more resources.

At a time when societies were grappling with successive phases of transition in their economies and attempts to stabilize, develop and expand regional cooperation, they still wanted to participate in cultural life in a unique, distinctive way.

One notable figure from that epoch was Józef Albin Herbaczewski, who persuaded two neighboring nations a century ago to always remember that without the independence of one of them, the other had no right to exist. He wrote in bitter terms that he was used as a battering ram to tear down the Polish or Lithuanian wall in mutual relations between these nations. Today, perhaps, he would be more forgiving of that metaphor. Being a battering ram is not terrible, as long as one manages to unblock the channels of communication interrupted by various prejudices. The alternative is pessimism, a sense of impending disaster, a failure of understanding, a return to a life based on simple instincts, which, admittedly, can be made true, but by creating a world of primitive happiness, furnished comfortably and elaborately, but planned by an outsider. One that leaves no freedom to ask questions about fundamental matters, about the search for one's own path and that reduces people to "human resources." Witkacy created similar visions in Polish interwar literature, and it is astonishing how accurate some of the views were in light of later political and sociological analyses of the state of Western civilization, including the Chinese rhetoric to justify the position of the Middle Kingdom in conflict with the West that the writer imagined almost a century ago.

Such sensibilities were not unfamiliar in other parts of the Trimarium either. The Czech writer Karel Čapek also noticed serious cracks in the state of Western civilization at the time. And although, unlike Witkacy, he had a much more cheerful disposition and more optimism about the future, he similarly occupied a unique place in the literary landscape of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Čapek realised the ideal of an author who influences social life not only with his work, but also by example. The round table – an intellectual community with

diverse views that gathered around Čapek – also attracted those in charge of state affairs.

What was possible in Czechoslovakia was becoming unimaginable in the Ukrainian territories under Soviet rule. Even discussions on style in literature were fraught with risk. Expressing one's views, at best, carried the risk of being forced to submit a statement of self-criticism and, often, of being sent to a labor camp and living in oblivion. In such circumstances, even the most tenacious scholars and writers lost motivation to work. If they wrote texts, even whole books at first, only to put them away into a drawer, it often happened – as in the case of Hryhoriy Maifet – that they gave up on writing, considering such efforts superfluous at a time when there was no possibility of publishing what one had written.

The same system had similar effects among Moldovan authors who tried to create literature in the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Here, too, one could not count on literary influences similar to those in Czechoslovakia, or even the free exchange of ideas in rather hermetic circles of literary experts and fans gathered around a literary periodical. Self-criticism, persecution, arrests and, finally, the death of many writers in the purges of the late 1930s provide a picture of the diversity of writing conditions in Central Europe between the wars.

Thus, while the post-Great War economies of the Trimarium countries tried to overcome the problems caused by the disintegration of the former empires, the most interesting phenomena in literature faced different problems. To raise awareness of cultural and social values in one part of the region, it was necessary to influence elites in society, which was done with varying degrees of success. In the part of Europe under Soviet rule, this mission faced an existential difficulty: it was no longer just a matter of the consequences of departing from civilizational norms, but a painful struggle with the effects of such a process.