

TEACHING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HERE AND NOW

GASPAR BIRO

The greatest danger which confronts our subject is to regard it as a subject for beginners.
Sir Alfred Zimmern, 1935

The creation in 1919 of the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at Aberyswyth University in Great Britain - the oldest chair in the subject –marks the recognition of a new academic discipline. In the following years an increasing number of similar institutions have been created at universities in the United States and a specialized institute in Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations. In these days the mere mapping out, not to speak of an overall evaluation of the global network of chairs, institutes, and other scholarly accredited institutions, including reviews, regular conferences etc., would require a serious enterprise, and it is very likely that with the best resources it would not produce neither a substantial nor an exhaustive assessment. A recent study into related topics based on a survey in ten countries stated that

A large minority of IR scholars around the world teach courses on area studies, comparative politics, and the international relations of a particular region. This trend is strongest in Israel, South Africa, and Singapore; robust in the New Zealand, Hong Kong, United States, Australia, and United Kingdom; and weaker, but still significant, in Ireland and Canada.¹

Talking about international relations (IR) in our region, Eastern- and South-Eastern Europe carries difficulties and occasionally requires compromises. By talking I mean discussing the subject before the largest possible audience, including teaching it as a subject in university classes under this name or some related title, or debating it publicly, for example in the part of the media willing to give space to such exercises. I skip here the far reaching question of audiences' individual or collective motivations and take for granted that certain individuals have an existential interest to learn more about IR, in their individual capacity or as representatives of various organizations, including a particular state. The problems are not restricted to the basics: lack of well supplied libraries and of tradition in teaching or research, the relatively minor circle of genuinely interested individuals and the like. It is also of substance.

One possibility is to adopt the vocabulary of 20th century's traditional British and American schools of IR. That means teaching it to students and also using it in explaining specific situations and predicting events to come. If the outlook is sufficiently broad, for example the state of the world in general, this specific vocabulary seems appropriate. But what about explaining, or placing your country's foreign policy goals in context, especially if this country is a weak state?² How would you define such a country's national interests in a globalized world? Do weak states have national interests at all, since according to realists such things exist only when are defined in terms of power?

¹ One Discipline or Many? TRIP Survey of International Relations Faculty in Ten Countries. Richard Jordan, Daniel Maliniak, Amy Oakes, Susan Peterson, Michael J. Tierney. Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project. The Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations. The College of William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia. February 2009. http://irtheoryandpractice.wm.edu/projects/trip/Final_Trip_Report_2009.pdf

² I mean here by weak state a state that cannot guarantee alone its security, and in addition is exposed economically to the ups and downs of world economy.

It goes without saying that teaching traditional international theories makes sense at academic institutions in all countries where there is a request for that. Students should be able to interpret others' aspirations and policies and understand that monopoly over international discourse, including theory making and shaping is – among other things - a great power privilege.

The general view is that theories of IR proper are a product of the past century. In the framework of the academic nomenclature this is correct, but one should not go back as far in time as to quote Thucydides or Sun-Tzu, Machiavelli or Hobbes to arrive at the conclusion that by the 18th, and especially the first half of the 19th century, knowledgeable people knew and wrote virtually everything on relations between established political units (be it city-states, empires, kingdoms, or nation-states). The list is long, starting with the conscious preservation of (democratic) peace, the balance of power and *Realpolitik*, from restricted warfare to total war, and so on. The revival and application to ongoing events of their languages and vocabularies is, however, a risky operation, as for example the fate of Hegel's views on the state has shown over the 19th and 20th centuries.

The last hundred years have produced theories and vocabularies on IR adjusted to the new realities of warfare, global crises, expanding international organizations, etc. Having said that, I must point out also that challenging the 20th century dominant IR theories and their language has not produced original and acceptable results. Nothing is on the horizon as a viable alternative and convincing *grille de lecture*, although some remarkable efforts have been made in the Francophone world to this end. Uncritical adaptation to local needs may lead to grotesque consequences; it is sometimes disappointing, sometimes amusing to hear small country leaders giving their vision on international affairs using a terminology reserved to great power discourse.

In the next pages I will try to briefly point out some of the difficulties in teaching IR following a line of thinking that tries to avoid the options outlined in the previous paragraph, while emphasizing the pretention to make the study of IR attractive by convincing students of its usefulness, should they pursue a career in international or foreign affairs. For the time being, I don't think that anything unheard of so far can be said. What is clear to me is that in this field, as in many other areas, there is a *décalage*, or time lag between the "West and the Rest". How this can be bypassed, because it surely will be one day, I do not know.

Because the problems – especially in college and university level teaching – are numerous enough to make impossible to address them in more details, I will focus on two questions: the issue of universality/universalism/globalism, and the question of political discourse and corresponding vocabularies. To address them a certain level of abstraction is unavoidable – this may encourage those critics who maintain that teaching in this region is concentrated mainly on theory, offering less practical knowledge. This is certainly true. However, a pure pragmatic approach may easily end up in an "unprincipled pragmatism", characteristic to the conduct of foreign policy in former dependent states: "these are the facts, and we just have to fully comply", whatever that meant. In any case a healthy balance between theory and practical knowledge should be maintained, as claimed by the art of compromise in international negotiations.

Universality/universalism/globalism

These notions are not synonyms and this is not a study about them. The point is how they are understood and interpreted in the region. The definitions below are taken from widely read dictionaries. Quoting their primary meanings is to stress only that they are indeed not interchangeable.³ My point is that confusion around these concepts is widespread in this region. To pinpoint this I will sometimes use the three words like in the subtitle, separated by slashes.

³ Universality is according to one dictionary: state of being universal, meaning present in all places and all times; worldliness, generalness. Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary of 1913 defines universality as: „The quality or state of being universal; unlimited extension or application; generality; -- distinguished from particularity; as, the universality of a proposition; the universality of sin; the universality of the Deluge.” According to the same source universalism means “the doctrine or belief that all men will be saved, or made happy, in the future state.” The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia writes that „Universalism is the belief in the salvation all souls Arising as early as the time of Origen at various points in Christian history, the concept became an organized movement in North America in the mid-

Let us admit as a working hypothesis that one of the most important questions to deal with continues to be the fact that the speaker, any speaker or writer, regardless of belonging or not to the mainstream, must take at least implicitly position with regard to the question of universality in IR. Various “universalisms/universalities”, be it religious, philosophical, moral, political-institutional, or even more prosaic like economic-financial have converged in the past two decades into an indefinable “composite universality” claiming basically not only that the world is interdependent, everything is connected with everything, but also that the way it operates at present is the ideal state of affairs in the world. At the same time, the normative approach promises something good for each and every individual, me and you, that is “us”, as well as “them” included.

While assertions of an interconnected world have been repeatedly made over the millennia (to recall only Heraclitus), technological development has created by now the perception (partly backed by reality) that interdependence is accessible at the dimension of a pocket-size device and can be used to instantly serve individual, group or corporate interests. The assumption is that interdependence, as an effect of the “revolution” in information technology is not anymore a concept describing the state of the world but a self-developing transpersonal entity. It lives under various names, like cyber-space or virtual space; fantasy has plenty of room here.

The world, however, has entered since the late nineties of the past century into something what I would call the new technological civilization, based after all on genetics, nanotechnology and artificial intelligence, domains that have digested and transformed creatively the peaks of the former phase, that is engineering, space and information technology. What was in the past centuries the reserved domain of esotericism and magic, is now, and it will be more and more in the future commercially, that is privately available. The next step is the radical transformation of the human body and probably, prolonged life.

The old question, however, is still with us: who gets what, when, and how from the benefits of all this, or on the other side of the medal how the real burdens or potential negative effects will be distributed, who gets protection, and how? Control over territories, peoples and resources extended not only to the virtual space, it conquers step by step the invisible components of matter. Nevertheless the core issue – for our purposes here – continue to be overtly political, with the unprecedented difficulty that the resulting hierarchies must be stabilized at the level of mankind, not a state, an empire, or a group of companies or other formal entities, like an international organization.

At this junction we are back to our question: how issues related to universality/universalism, etc. shall be approached on the regional or state level? After all: universality or universalities *of*, or *in* IR? It can be minimally assumed that politically there is one single that counts: superpower’s, or as it was called in the past, the universality of power politics. In most part of the 20th century, the term globalism, not universality/universalism, was used to designate a foreign policy with global aims, or in the words of Raymond Aron, the creation of a peacekeeping universal empire (*la paix par l’empire*). But the latter was a circumscribed concept, springing from a limited spectrum of means and the fact that after 1945 there have been two competing globalisms. A benign great power universalism will still be organized around keeping international (world) peace and security through inter-state cooperation and afferent international organization(s), a less benign will straightly seek world domination. From a regional, and especially from a weak state perspective the question whether world peace is possible without *a de facto* hegemonic domination of one or another great power, may persist for a long time despite all verbal assurances to the contrary.

In a global context domination has a much broader content than rule or (global) governance. And here is one of the hardest point to sell. Imperial practice was after all domination, among others by

18th century. It maintains the impossibility that a loving God would bestow salvation on only a portion of humankind while dooming the rest to eternal punishment. It stresses the use of reason in religion and the modification of belief in light of the discoveries of science. Thus, the miraculous elements of traditional Christianity are rejected, and Jesus, while a worthy teacher and model, is not held to be divine.” Globalism, according to the widely read Wikipedia English Free Encyclopedia “can have at least two different and opposing meanings. One meaning is the attitude or policy of placing the interests of the entire world above those of individual nations. Another is viewing the entire world as a proper sphere for one nation to project political influence.”

military rule. Memories of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and the Ottoman empires, not to speak of the Third Reich, and then the Soviet Union, left people wary and, especially the elderly, fearful when hearing the above mentioned words and anything related to them. That globalization is a good thing was one of the dominant views within the mainstream in the 1990s, while the word itself is like a red scarf for those who claim to represent the losers, real or perceived. However, there is a big “but” here that occurred after 2008. The financial crisis and its aftermath seriously multiplied misunderstandings related to universality, universalism and globalization, perceived as globalism.

The unrestricted movement of goods, ideas and people could certainly have, as it has indeed had, universal effects but the number of people left out from the benefits of the process is much higher than the winners – something well known and proved many times over the past decades. The globalization launched in the 1980s by America, unlike political universality is a largely spontaneous process, incompatible with a conscious, planned and systematically pursued rule over the world. Globalization understood in this sense can be put to the service of universal empire building, but as a tool it is like military technology: interactive. If one party deploys the most advanced weaponry at a certain moment in time, it is sure that sooner or later others will possess, or at least pursue the same technology.

Political universality: superpower burden

It seems next to impossible for the time being to convince audiences in this region that what has been so far a “natural”, inherent great power tendency towards universalism, it has become a burden in what is still called the Western world.

Of religious origin, as some of the modern key political concepts, Western style universalism still maintains its primordial meaning: salvation cannot be reserved for some, it is bestowed “upon as, all”. In secular translation this means here and now: the realization of fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, the establishment of conditions under which justice and respect for obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law, and the promotion of social progress and better standards of life and larger freedom - at least according to the Preamble of the United Nations Charter of 1945. Briefly: liberty, justice and progress have become objectives of universal politics, with no reference to any specific great or superpower.

On a different note, by the advent of the 21st century the state of the world and mankind in general, both physically and spiritually deteriorated to such a degree that formulating the problems – perceived rightly as global - and the attempted answers necessarily involves a universalistic language. The challenge of “all encompassing” ideologies, politics, or means, is not new. However, the status of great power (superpower, global power) not only required but imposed in the past 200 years a universalistic outlook and a corresponding behavior. This was called the already mentioned universality of power politics.

But what if the universality of power is destined to function as the nucleus of a “composite universality”? The experience of the United States in international affairs in the past 20 years is telling. As the “sole superpower” America returned in the early 1990s without hesitation to an audacious universalistic discourse (the announcement of a new world order in 1992, trade without borders, the uncompromising implementation of universal human rights standards during the nineties, to name only some of the essential components), while in its actions showed great discretion and selectivity, due to inherent limitations and sometimes to arbitrary political options. The net result is that the US is made nowadays responsible for all the evils, while the rest of the world is happily declining responsibility. Criticism is widespread, often degenerating into hatred of America and violent anti-Americanism. This is difficult to grasp since it is about instincts, feelings, and prejudices, or a mix of all. Apart from all these, while everybody is ready to share the benefits of peace and prosperity promised by the UN Charter and the US as its main guarantor, opinions widely differ on the way of reaching these goods.

The law of unintended consequences, the cunning of reason in “Hegelian”, continues to operate indiscriminately in international relations. Separating within the realm of IR the sphere of

international politics, and treating it as a relatively autonomous field of “existence”, it is not difficult to agree that the overwhelming part of activities specific to this domain is talk: promising, agreeing or quarrelling, cajoling, threatening, manipulating, deceiving, or simply repeating well established slogans. Diplomacy is where this “talking” occurs in a concentrated form, with its own rules and the afferent paraphernalia. History provides plenty of examples that this kind of talk carries a set of risks. One can become quickly the prisoner of his own words that place him on a compulsory trajectory. Sometimes words are hotly debated, new concepts are rejected, others are considered taboo, or used to excommunicate opponents. Verbal offense, or even inappropriate wording can degenerate in violence. To reconcile “political” talk with any normative system it was always an extremely difficult task, but in these days the cover-up of failures is almost impossible.

The idea of the universality of power politics regarded in a historical perspective leads many people (not only in this region) to think that preparation for the next war and international politics overlap, or in other words peace – as it has been defined before the 18th century – is simply the period between two wars. Theories of balance of power and the way the game was played in Europe for centuries support such views. However, it is not difficult to explain to various audiences in this region that against this background of empirical evidence, discussing the issues of war and warfare shall better be restricted to a normative framework (humanitarian law). What is more complicated is to make them regard war as one of the institutions of international politics – meaning that the warring parties are bound by rules and should go to war in exceptional and legally determined situations, since the past century, and unfortunately events up to these days prove the contrary.

A normative secular universalistic language comports the risk of raising expectations proportionally with its spread worldwide. Soviet ideology promised paradise on earth (Communism), while various liberal doctrines from Kant onward maintained that perpetual peace is possible provided some conditions are in place. Now, various religious universalisms operate the same way, claiming that salvation shall be for all (the normative aspect), but differ on conditionality, namely the way conditions emerge (by external action or individual behavior), and how the inclusion of all will take place. Taking the secular view means that we do not assign any role to God in the process, everything depends on the individual. This is the translation of the traditional Christian view that salvation will take place only through individual effort and there is always a last chance.

What makes a difference between various religious universalisms and the contemporary Western secular perception is the conditionality attached to salvation into the individual. The latter has evolved by the end of the 20th century in a phase whereas no condition *in persona* is formulated: e.g. we are all humans and enjoy the same rights only because we are humans. It claims that salvation is within reach here and now. Philosophically this may be a valid and morally legitimate claim, but its translation and implementation by and through institutions, whether states or international organizations, is made extremely difficult by a) the great variety of individuals in social origin and status, ethnicity, race, language, gender etc., and b) the way individuals differ in thinking, mentality, customs, and local social and cultural norms. At this level, however, there is no difference between “us” and “them”.

The (unbearable) lightness of words

Thus, the vocabulary of secular universalism is largely normative. The best example at hand is the notion of international norm, which has incorporated so far international law in its classical meaning (treaty law and customary law), besides accepted or just proclaimed values, principles, specific standards, outlines, recommendations, and opinions referred to in international organizations. In addition, this discourse contains a number of inherent contradictions. The quests for liberty and equality, for instance, are real and legitimate claims, in addition during the 20th century have been repeatedly proclaimed as universally valid principles guiding the practice of IR. Liberty, both *in abstracto* and in practice is a dualistic idea: freedom from something, oppression for instance, and freedom to something, to free speech, religion, etc. Equality as a universal principle and right is homogenous, does not allow to any distinctions. Along this lines, one of the

declared basic principles of international relations, codified also as a fundamental collective human right, the self-determination of peoples was rendered either inapplicable, or if applied, the practice was highly selective and discriminatory.

As mentioned, international politics is mostly talk. Widening publicity and access to what is happening on the scene, sometimes instantly, by real-time electronic coverage on the one hand, and on the other, the opening of previously well-guarded sources to anyone interested led necessarily to an inflation and fraying of key concepts of political vocabularies. The process was catalyzed by morally questionable practice that was covered-up by otherwise neutral words (just think about the passions raised by ‘humanitarian intervention’, ‘collateral damages’, ‘surgical strikes’ etc. employed to designate war and warfare) , or the change of the meaning traditionally assigned to others.

The latter is illustrated best by the word “nationalist”. Educated people in the region knew that in the Europe of the 19th century and several decades into the 20th to be a nationalist was largely a matter of proud, a designation of an individual who loved his country and his nation, and was ready for the supreme sacrifice. The liberal principle of national self-determination has been one the great universal ideas of the nineteenth century.

In the name of a different universalism advocating the “brotherhood of peoples and nations”, Socialist regimes in the region have been after the II World War particularly ruthless in harassing and persecuting those individuals, groups and organizations who were deemed nationalistic.

After 1989, the same people have been informed that national self-determination was the order of the day, marking the collapse of Soviet influence in the region. At the same time, the 19th century interpretation of this principle, that is every nation has the right to its own state, led to painful consequences as the break-up of federations, like the former Yugoslavia. Parallel to the advance of the disintegration of this country, the raising of the “national” question started to be considered as a growing threat to international and regional (European) peace and security. Politicians and organizations talking within the parameters of the “nation” have been black-listed, this time by Western governments.

Teaching international relations here and now cannot avoid addressing this problem. The fact is that it takes time and a well-built set of arguments to convince audiences – with more or less success - that there is a reason and a well documented factual evidence accumulated over the past two centuries for not only being cautious with this subject, but also for the changes in its international evaluation.

To state that who is a nationalist depends not only on who speaks, but also on who is mastering the discourse, may not be enough to close the issue, although is in line with one of the certainties of international politics: two mutually exclusive statements may be true on their own, depending on who are the speakers. The problem of interest here is that the indiscriminate use and abuse of this term in the past decades has led to the devaluation of two key concepts of European political thought and practice: the state and the nation. In this region often the concept of “nation-state” is substituted by “national state”, meaning in principal that the state as an institution and its territory is the exclusive property of the nation (i.e. the majority ethnic group). All nations have the right to their own state, sounds the 19th century version of self-determination, that is all nations shall possess their own state.

The “lightness” of these words became “unbearable” at the beginning of the 21st century. Kundera’s man became “lighter than air” once he was relieved by burden. “The absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, (...) his movements as free as they are insignificant”, he wrote in the first chapter of his book, entitled *Lightness and Weight*.

In Western Europe there have been situations where the state was in place and the nation came into existence later – gradually or at once, by acclamation, molded or created within its boundaries, like in Britain or France. In Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe the nations were first and their states have been created respectively, usually by non-conventional means.

The state and the nation have been in the past two centuries the focal points of political mobilization, loyalty, security, culture, and society in the largest sense. The break-up and even the disappearance of states did occur before 1945, but the nation, thanks to its language, tradition,

history, and will, ensured continuity and kept hope alive. Because after World War II the principles of territorial integrity of states and inviolability of their borders have become the “unwritten constitution” of the international system, the territorial *status quo* sanctioned by the peace treaties and the corresponding political map of the region was perceived as eternal.

The shock caused by the break-up of federations and the resurging problem of national minorities in the 1990s have challenged the trust in the state and the nation, both in general, and in particular states, their usefulness or even viability.

As the European integration progressed in the 1990s, the nation-state was more and more loudly considered in the West, but not only, as obsolete. It had fulfilled its historic role and shall be relegated to the archive of history, the judgment went on. Several man made and natural disasters, however, and most boldly the financial crisis of 2008 had questioned the validity of these claims. The confusion is greater than ever, and confusion leads to frustration and desperation, and all these produce no good at all.

The “lightness” of the concept of the state and the state itself, has been exacerbated by mismanagement, big and petty corruption, neglect, abuses of power, and a general sense of irresponsibility. Its impotence is “unbearable”, while appeals to the unity of the nation sounds more and more hollow. Times would require however, self-confident, self-respecting (which means respecting others as well) nations and stable, efficient states working for the common good of their citizens and regional prosperity and security.

Teaching and discussing IR can help in establishing the diagnosis and, if anything else, contribute to the retrieval of the meaning of the key terms evoked above.

Vocabularies and languages

For this latter task we should be aware here about the nature and significant distinctions of various ways of talking and writing on IR and the mainstream political vocabularies. As pointed out before, the rejection of the existing theories of IR would require a replacement preceded by the introduction of a new conceptual apparatus, an enterprise that looks impossible for the time being. It is known for a long time that attempting a radically different political rhetoric could be successful in rare moments of great historical upheavals, but even in such cases most old concepts survive long after the events are consumed. Like in the case of dramatic changes in the international system: some of the old system’s elements survive, sometimes without alteration in the framework of the new setting. As one author dealing with the question of political vocabularies in IR stated:

There is therefore a form of path-dependency involved in the choice of legitimation vocabulary, for although it is of course possible to attempt to manipulate the principle again, this can be done only in reference to other existent sets of concepts and arguments, and so forth. This would at first seem to indicate that change is possible, if at all, only gradually and incrementally. The (potential) pliability of the moral-political concepts through which action is structured is a matter of pressing importance for international political theory, yet it is one that all too often is left behind in favor of excessively abstract discussions concerning the nature of justice or the desirability (or possibility) of cosmopolitan or communitarian governance.⁴

Thus, the interaction between the dominant language of IR in a certain period of time and the political vocabularies used in the daily practice is necessary. Research agendas sometimes are shaped according to the language of politics, while policy-makers are “consumers” of theoretical results – this sounds as a superfluous remark for mainstream practitioners of both sides. It may not be so obvious for those who are involved in teaching IR in this region.

First, there are deep confusions in basic terminology. Some terms in English may mean different things in different local languages, and vice-versa.

⁴ Duncan S.A. Bell, "Language, Legitimacy and the Project of Critique," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27.3, 2002.

Second, meanings may vary from country to country. For example: one of the hot issues here is the question of autonomy of national minorities. (Since the term “national minorities” is used in European regional institutions like the Council of Europe, I will not elaborate on its possible alternatives.) The notion of minority autonomy is different depending on who uses it (and generally is not equated here with sovereignty), moreover, there are places where it is a taboo concept in the locally dominant political discourse. The lack of consensus is not limited to this particular term.

Second, the terminological problem contributes to the growing rift between theoretical research, the way of talking, and daily policy making. Misunderstandings on all levels are the result.

In order to briefly illustrate some further difficulties in teaching IR, related to language and vocabulary, whether in English or local languages, I propose the following distinctions. Regarding the approach, one can be made between preponderantly descriptive and normative languages. Both can be conducted at the level of abstract, mid-level and common categories and terms. The main feature is the mixing in various proportions of approaches and categories. One can find rarely a normative text written exclusively in highly abstract terms, although for example John Rawls’ “The Law of Peoples” could be mentioned in this sense. The subject would be of first rate importance for the region, but its use in teaching requires a degree of detachment from specific regional historical and actual precedents or case studies. A degree, and not full detachment, since as Rawls explained in the Introduction:

Two main ideas motivate the Law of Peoples. One is that the great evils of human history – unjust war and oppression, religious persecution and the denial of liberty of conscience, starvation and poverty, not to mention genocide and mass murder – follow from political injustice, with its own cruelties and callousness. (...) The other main idea, obviously connected with the first, is that, once the gravest forms of political injustice are eliminated by following just (or at least decent) social policies and establishing just (or at least decent) institutions, these great evils will eventually disappear.⁵

Constructivists have had an important role of bringing to the forefront of the IR research agenda, among other things, the issue of actors’ identity, also of distinctive importance in this region. Once again, the issue cannot be discussed ignoring local examples, and that makes difficult a treatment in general or on the level of abstract categories. John Gerard Ruggie in the Introduction to his collection of studies on international institutionalization explains the contribution of social constructivism to the study of international relations as follows:

What is the social constructivist contribution to the ideational research program? (...) Social constructivists have sought to understand the full array of systematic roles, as neo-utilitarians do. Because there is no received theory of the social construction of international reality, constructivists have gone about their work partly in somewhat of a barefoot empiricist manner and partly by means of conceptual analysis and thick description – in addition to expressing ‘understandable frustration’. (...) The major venue for constructivist explorations of the impact of causal beliefs has been via ‘epistemic communities’ or transnational networks of knowledge-based experts.⁶

This is certainly not a text for “beginners” in the sense of the motto quoted ahead of this writing. As certainly not for beginner “consumption” is the following excerpt from a book on the very important “agent-structure” problem in IR:

Beyond the intrinsic significance of the methodological agent-structure problem, this problem {methodological agent-structure problem - GB} is of particular importance in the critique of prior metatheoretical analyses of theories of international politics. More specifically, some scholars of international relations have called for theories which endogenize both agency and structure, characterizing those theories which do not meet

⁵ John Rawls: *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press, 1999, 6-7.

⁶ John Gerard Ruggie: *Constructing the World Polity. Essays on International Institutionalization*. London-New York, Routledge, 1998, 18-19.

this criterion as degenerative. Given the inevitable need to bracket, however, failure to exogenize all key elements of both agency and structure is a methodologically necessary element of theory itself rather than an ipso facto sign of theoretical degeneracy.⁷

If the agent-structure complex is exemplified by the intensively debated question of who can exercise and on what grounds transnational justice the risk is that the discussion will go far away from the initial subject.

History looms large in the region and this is sometimes good, sometimes bad. The problem is that there is not one history here but, even within the same country, competing historical narratives. Teaching normative theories cannot avoid the issue of political responsibility, which as histories, is always in the plural, burdened with incompatibilities.

Going back to the question of language and vocabularies we should not omit the fact that Socialist regimes have employed a their own discourse on IR. Claims of a new international economic order, the whole vocabulary of anti-imperialism, aggressive as it was, compensated with the more mild talk of mutual advantages, solidarity and the brotherhood and friendly relations between Socialist countries and their working classes – this is not anymore a living reality. What people learned from all this is that such language was a cover-up for a more prosaic, sometimes bloody reality. The doctrine of limited sovereignty, the brotherly help of governments in trouble etc., thought generations that the language “of the state” cannot be taken at face value. Something is behind it, and what that is, would be anyone’s guess.

It is a fact that the language of international politics was, it is and it will be in the foreseeable future one in terms of promising, threatening, deceiving, cajoling, or outright lying. For a large number of people in the region manipulation and lies are obvious part of politics, including inter-state interactions. It would be interesting to test against this background one of John Mearsheimer’s thesis on the subject, stating that “while lying among states is a permanent fixture of international politics, it is not commonplace”, however

{The} most dangerous kinds of international lies are those that leaders tell their own citizens. They are more likely to backfire and damage a state’s strategic position than the lies that leaders tell other states. Moreover, they are more likely to corrupt political and social life at home, which can have many harmful consequences for daily life.⁸

While conspiracy theories have been made part of the public discourse by representatives of older generations, consumers of such theories are to be found everywhere, regardless of age, social status, ethnic background and so on. Their number outweighs by far the number of those who spend their times reading academic literature on IR.

Instead of conclusions, let me state that this is a serious handicap for everyone in the business of teaching IR here and now. To avoid discussing it is to worsen the situation. To take it head on would require a clear vision and strategy on all the issues listed here, from universality to lying in politics.

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Contact us: institute@southeast-europe.org
www.southeast-europe.org

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⁷ Gil Friedman - Harvey Starr: *Agency, Structure, and International Politics: From Ontology to Empirical Inquiry*. London, Routledge, 1997, 132.

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer: *Why Leaders Lie? The Truth about Lying in International Politics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 13.