

## EUROPEAN COOPERATION WITH DISPARITIES

*Interview with György Schöpflin University Professor<sup>1</sup>*

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*South-East Europe:* Our first question is whether the differences between West- and Eastern-Europe can be reduced, and if so, how?

*György Schöpflin:* There's indeed a difference in surface between Eastern-Europe, most precisely Russia and the western states, which mostly manifests in Russia's energy and security policy.

Russia's relationships with the neighboring countries is characterized by the fact that it tries to build up a post-soviet model for keeping its putative security, in the place of the inoperable soviet model (annexation). This notion nowadays can be detected at Armenia, which is a sovereign state but the Russian influence dominates. We don't know how many percents of the GNI go to Russians, but Armenia still has limited sovereignty. Basically that's obvious that since Russia declares itself as a traditional superpower and has different perceptions of power and economics, frictions can appear with the EU.

One of these friction points is the above mentioned energy policy. The Soviet Union created a severe energy dependency by building up the pipelines (east-west), which means that if today Russia turns off the gas valve, there's no gas for the majority of Central-Europe. Of course none of the countries wants to be vulnerable. To solve this problem the region started to build up interconnectors north to south. Poland is in the making of liquefied natural gas terminals at the moment as well. When it's finished and the access wires get ready for operation, then Hungary will be able to get natural gas from all over the world. An integral part of the subject is the fact that the market doesn't work here: Germany pays 25% less for the same gas as Poland. Here politics dictates the economy. When the agreement between multiple states was made, the interconnector of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania, Hungary can join with a participation of 25%. The pipeline connecting Arad and Szeged is already set up, so when the terminal of the Black Sea is ready, the dependence will be reduced. The whole network isn't prepared yet, but we already have the Polish-Slovakian and the Czech-German section is built up, and a similar is planned at the Croatian Krk-island. It's planned to become the southern substitute of the northern pipeline, but the international development is on hold because of the Russian intervention.

### *Middle-European Unity*

*South-East Europe:* Specifically Middle-Europe could become more united?

*György Schöpflin:* We could only speak about cooperation opportunities at most. A Middle-European confederation won't come into being; the nations of the region won't get into such a relationship. There are big possibilities hiding in the fields of energy and north-south transportation between the Visegrád Four and Romania. For example that's extremely hard to get into Krakow from Budapest, but a French type train track would solve the problem. In about 7-9 year it could come true. There are conflicts in political dimensions, but we take the eastern partnership seriously just like the nations of the region of the Mediterranean Sea take their own community. According to the professor the most difficult is to keep the bilateral relationship. In this dimension many conflicts harden the cooperation (Latvian-polish, Hungarian-Slovakian).

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<sup>1</sup> György Schöpflin, delegate of FIDESZ at the European Parliament, member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), substitute member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET). Former Jean Monnet Professor of Politics at University College London (1998 – 2004). Repatriated from London at 2004, where he moved at his childhood. After the transition at Hungary he planned to move back multiply times, but hasn't had the chance till 7 years ago. Responding to our question he claimed that the events of '56 made a big impact on him at Scotland. He first visited Hungary in 1964, for a short period of time. He is currently Visiting Professor at the Department of Political Sciences, the University of Bologna's Forlì Centre. In March 2010, he was awarded a doctorate honoris causa by the University of Tallinn. This august he won the recognition for the International Relations of the Hungarian Republic. The prize was handed over by János Martonyi minister of foreign affairs. Hereby we congratulate him!

*South-East Europe:* What kind of role can Hungary take?

*György Schöpflin:* It's important that Hungary can play any role, but we have to pay attention not to undertake too much. The geographical place of the country is good, it can be considered as an acknowledged and serious actor in the region, we have great diplomatic relationships and knowledge, an interesting way of thinking represents our solutions, so we can get into mediatory positions as well. Only a few know that while the Libyan events were taking place, only the Hungarian embassy was open. For our diplomatic work we got the praise of the European Parliament. We have to be clear about when there's a need for our knowledge of capita, and when we have to stop. We have to keep up a general discussion about this at home.

*The native minorities and the southeast countries*

*South-East Europe:* Let's move on to the representation of native minorities at international forums. How can Hungary contribute to help their situation?

*György Schöpflin:* It has already happened. The Charter of Fundamental Rights was created, and a discussion forum was started, which focuses on the minorities. The other important factor is the bottom-up civil initiatives, like the AGORA initiative<sup>2</sup>. Its aim is the modification of the legal system, but partners are needed for this.

György Schöpflin wrote about these issues in his work titled "The modern nation", which is a volume of essays. We were curious about whether the work is for the professional audience, or for the layman. As we've learnt, the work is for both, but rather a scientific book of essays.<sup>3</sup>

*South-East Europe:* The question rises how much such a heterogeneous community as the EU can be a model in the southeast nations' modernization.

*György Schöpflin:* The EU, besides its many aims, was created as a conflict management mechanism. Like this the culturally different countries can sort out their natural disagreements. This can be applied at Southeast-Europe as well, if they want it. The pretension is only partly: Croatia would like to join the European community, but that's not sure if it acted according to this in the Croatian-Slovenian border dispute. The problem became a matter of prestige at both sides, just like in the case of Kosovo and Serbia.

György Schöpflin thought it's important to highlight that the rational compromise isn't submission. In these cases both sides feel that they got something, starting from which a new agreement can be build up in the future.

*"Arab Spring"*

*Southeast-Europe:* Our last question dealt with the professor's speech at Brussels at September. We were curious that what kind of affects the "Arab Spring" and the transformation in the Arabic world can have on the European community.

*György Schöpflin:* The military intervention of Great-Britain and France, as well as the USA's limited participation is a new phenomenon. It represents that Europe uses the tool of hard power sometimes, despite the fact that usually it prefers the peaceful resolution. He added that we have to face the fact that for the solution of certain situations the military action is needed.

The professor highlighted Egypt's case: Egypt doesn't hold that leading role what he could economically and culturally. In this country, contrary to Libya, at Egypt a fundamental change didn't happen, since the dominant institution is still the army. In the future it's possible that friction will appear between Egypt and Turkey, who seems to give up its EU aspiration, and rather turns to south and east. Prime minister of Turkey, Erdogan didn't even mention the European community in his speech after his electoral winning. Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkish political scientist wrote a book at 2010 about that for Turkey North-Cyprus is more important in a strategic sense than Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> AGORA is an ancient type of forum with the participation of 500 civil organization, it holds its conferences half a year at Brussels.

<sup>3</sup> George Schöpflin: *Nations, identity, power*. The new politics of Europe. London, Hurst, 2000. 442 p.