

## Borders in Southeast Europe

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□ This year's International University Week of the Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft was dedicated to the topic "Borders in Southeast Europe". Five interdisciplinary panels considered borders from different perspectives taking into account different dimensions. Thus, the individual contributions addressed religious, social, political, spatial, and digital boundaries. The director of the Academy for Civic Education, Prof. Dr. *Ursula Münch* (Tutzing), and the president of the Southeast Europe Association, Dr. h.c. *Gernot Erler* (Berlin), opened the conference, which brought together young scholars and senior experts from 20 countries. In the year of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as Erler reminded, border topics dominated the political agenda both in the European Union as well as in the United States facing a rising migration from the 'global South'. Beyond that, the exchange of territory and its risk of renewing regional conflicts returned as an issue in Southeast Europe when Serbia and Kosovo debated a land swap. The academic conveners of the conference, Prof. Dr. *Christoph K. Neumann* (Munich) and Dr. *Jutta Lauth Bacas* (Köln/Athens), underlined in their introductory speeches that since the fall of the Iron Curtain many new fences have appeared. Contrasting the expectation that borders will become less important in times of globalisation and digitalisation, they became an omnipresent issue in recent years.

The first presentation and Keynote speech by Prof. Dr. *Isa Blumi* (Stockholm) about the "Balkan borderlands as history of the modern world" looked at Southeast Europe (SEE) from a wider perspective, taking into account imperial transition as well as capitalism. From the 1870s after the Congress of Berlin, as Blumi emphasized, borders changed in the Balkans pushed by capitalism and Great Power's interests in natural resources. He then requested to consider such forces of interest, the violence of new orders against local populations and their enduring precarity.

The University Week was then structured in five panels: Beginning with a chronological order, the presentations moved (I) "From empires to nation states" to (II) "Border conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and after its disintegration" and (III) "Border conflicts and border building today". Following a panel focused on (IV) "The European Union, migration and Southeast European borders", including "Migrations and delineation of borders", the last panel made (V) "Imagination and performance of borders" a subject of discussion. The conference ended with a session that summarized looking on "Citizens, consumers, nation-states and the neoliberal (b)order". Besides, the program included a poster session, in which researchers presented their work and gave individual introductions.

The different case studies presented in the poster session complemented the panels arousing specific questions and taking into account the historical dimension as well as nowadays' matters. To give an example, the movements of migrants and their interactions with state authorities was considered by *Maria Adamopoulou* in her work about border encounters between Greek migrants from West Germany and authorities during their return visits (1960-1989).

*Robert Rydzewski* showed a different perspective in questioning what movement within Serbia meant for migrants heading to the European Union in 2015 and 2016. He sees hope as a key factor, which leads migrants to move and often leave state protection in camps in favour of travelling around the country.

An insight into the practical aspects of border control gave Lt. Polizei-Dir. *Alois Mannichl*, Head of the Bavarian Border Police in Passau, which was established in July 2018. He demonstrated how not only European and German law but also the competence of the Federal Border Guard and Bavarian Border Police determine the frame of action.

Furthermore, an excursion to Munich allowed the participants to visit the "Bellevue di Monaco", a residential and cultural centre for refugees and interested people in Munich. It was opened in June 2018 as a consequence of border control and migration politics and appears as a place of cultural and social border crossings. At the same place, a meeting with *Jana Weidhaase* from the Bavarian Refugee Council in Munich gave insight into refugees' experiences with migration politics. She commented on the so-called 'ANKER-centres', which have also been installed in August 2018 to speed up the application process for asylum. She criticized the lack of information and bad living conditions for the inhabitants, who in contrast to the target often have to remain for a longer period.

A variety of the presented papers addressed **political borders**, mostly but not exclusively between nation-states. These talks covered topics like political and social orders and the shaping and redrawing of boundaries, explaining a political border as a process.

*Claudia Laštro* (Graz) and *Ivan Laškarin* (Jena) focused on the drawing of new or the reshaping of old borders by independentist or irredentist secessionism. Laškarin asked in his paper ("Kin minorities between unification and independence: The case of Serb separatism in Croatia and Bosnia (1990-1995)") why minorities demand union with a kin group in a neighbouring state or the creation of an independent state; while Laštro showed the turn of the Montenegro ruling DPS to a pro-independence party between the 1990s and 2006 ("Building the nation, reinforcing rule: Insights from Montenegro's path to independence"). *Frederik Lange* (Regensburg) presented the quarrel on the exact definition of a political borderline in the course-changing river Drina ("How to make a border? The dispute on the boundary on the Drina and the antagonism between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, 1878,1914"); while Dr. *George Kalpadakis* (Athens) explained with a Cold War focus the bilateral relations, cross-border cooperation and communication between socialist Yugoslavia and Greece ("Deactivating the Torpedo: Athens, Belgrade and the making of the Macedonian name dispute").

The different shapes and patterns of these borders and orders are not only visible on a national level, but also on smaller scales. Accordingly, *Vincent Thérouin* (Paris) presented the evolution of urban borders by reshaping and shifting urban periphery, namely by describing the evolution of the margins of the city of Sarajevo ("Sarajevo city borders between the Ottomans and Habsburgs: A case study").

Political borders between nation-states are forming borderlands and the shifting functions of borders form changing borderland realities. Dr. *Lumnije Jusufi* (Berlin) had a precise view on

a specific borderland region, the Dibra/Debar valley between nowadays North Macedonia and Albania. She explained how the character of a border changed from a dynamic border zone to a linear border by the transition from large empires to national states and by this, how deeply national borders are ingrained into societies ("Restructuring of common law in the wake of the drawing of national borders").

Related to this, Dr. habil *Carolin Leutloff-Grandits* (Frankfurt/Oder) presented a functional approach of studying Southeast European borders ("State sovereignty and the status of citizens: Towards a functional approach to the study of borders in South Eastern Europe"). With examples from the Knin area, she described the changing social order by the changing meanings of the border. Stating that there is not one single order or border, she showed the overlapping layers of border functions – on the nation-state, regional and local levels. According to her, the example shows that these social orders are not binary contested but between different stakeholders – between national groups like Serbs and Croats, intra-national between local Croats and Croat newcomers, and by institutions like veteran organizations or the Catholic church. Prof. Dr. *Rozita Dimova* (Ghent) introduced into the concept the porosity of borders by expressing the permeability of the Macedonian–Greek border in different historical periods ("Border porosities in the Balkans: Historical disputes, political claims and consumer bliss"). Due to this permeability, the borders are leaking, yet traversed by people, ideas, services and objects, she stated.

Also, very actual topics on political borders were discussed in the papers as well as in the debates afterwards – like the already mentioned land swap between Serbia and Kosovo proposed from different international and regional actors. *Robert Lämmchen* (Bamberg) gave an insight view on the approaches of geographical conflict research as a sub-discipline of political geography, using as an example "Geographical conflict research of the border conflict Kosovo–Serbia". In his talk with the same title, *Basri Saliu* (Tetovo) asked the research question "Can the redrawing of the borders between Kosova and Serbia reignite the ethnic violence in North Macedonia and have an impact on our multicultural English classes at South East European University?", in which he took a clear position against the swap.

Another wider issue that was thematized at the University Week was the **impact of changing (historical) borders on** how people come to experience their **identity**. In line with this, *Catalina Hunt*, Ph.D (Ohio) considered how in the borderland of Dobruca the Muslim population constructed its group identity during the shift from empire to nation-state ("19<sup>th</sup> century borderland identities: The transition of the Muslims of Dobruca from Ottomans to Romanians"). Her main claim was that during both Ottoman and Romanian regimes, Dobručan Muslims were not objects of state or empire sponsored (national) policies but active agents who shaped the national discourse to serve their needs and priorities. Offering a historical approach to borders and (group) identities in SEE, Prof. Dr. *Ulf Brunnbauer* (Regensburg) traced the effects that the emergence of modern states – characterized by the Holy Trinity of Westphalian sovereignty: the monopoly of violence, people, and territory – had for various populations of SEE ("Where actually is the border? Migration(s) and the state in Southeastern Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century"). As he demonstrated, the emergence of new polities often implied violent practices (mass deportations and displacements) and policies (foreign ministry strategies) that had as a goal the (re)defining of (un)desired elements of the imagined community. The session concluded with the work of *Iemima Ploscariu* (Dublin) who presented a case study of a

multi-ethnic community of Jewish Christians in Chişinău organized around a Baptist Church ("Challenging all types of borders: The Jewish Christians of Chişinău 1918-1938"). Her main contribution was in showing that hegemonic (national-) identitarian projects (in this case that of Romania) never completely succeed in creating homogenous communities, rather the latter inevitably remains fractured along the fault lines of fluid religious, ethnic, and even spatial boundaries.

Focusing her studies on the changing identity dynamics in the border regions of Petrich (Bulgaria) and Strumica (North Macedonia) – which before the 1944 delimitation between Bulgaria and second Yugoslavia constituted a space of an intensive interaction – *Violeta Periclieva*, Ph.D (Sofia) argued that people develop a strategy of adaptation to new borders, namely pragmatism ("Pragmatic vs. traditional forms of cross-border relations between the regions of Petrich, Republic of Bulgaria, and Strumica, Republic of North Macedonia"). She argued that the establishment of a border did not completely erase ties among those living in "borderness" although a shift from former "real regional identity" to the current "various degrees of familiarity" did take place. In contrast to the deconstructed region explored by Periclieva, Dr. *Ivaylo Markov* (Sofia) considered practices of common space-making that take place among religiously different social groups ("Memory and rituality in a changing religious landscape: Orthodox-Muslim interactions at the Albanian-Macedonian borderlands (the region of Pole)"). More precisely, he demonstrated how alleged confessional borders are crossed by attending and practising inter-religious rituals in the Albanian-Macedonian borderlands, thus evidencing the dynamics of religious landscapes.

Taking the question of identity and border to the level of political elites, *Anna-Lena Hoh*, Ph.D (Maastricht) raised the question of whether identity claims based on the results of national census can serve as a pretext to the ruling party in Republika Srpska to "shift borders through numbers" ("Shifting borders through numbers: (Mis)using census outcomes in Bosnia and Herzegovina").

Furthermore, the relationship between borders and identities was examined through the prisms of the so-called migration crisis, which uncovered different degrees and regimes of (im)mobility and sovereign control. Prof. *Marta Stojić Mitrović* (Belgrade) critically examined the case of Serbia as a part of the wider EU border regime – consisting of various practices, discourses and transnational tools for movement control ("Captured in Transit: Serbia as a part of the Western Balkans borderscape"). She concluded that the latter partly immobilized (or captured) migrants and refugees in Serbia (and the Western Balkans), thus constructing the region as an EU borderscape where hierarchies of citizenship are laid bare. Shifting the focus to the geographical East, *Eda Kirişcioğlu* (Istanbul) showed how the mobility of refugees found in Turkey was not only conditioned upon external constraints and physical borders but also on their subjective experiences ("Tracing the effects of uncertainty and migration policies: Risk perceptions of refugee communities in Turkey"). More precisely, she highlighted the role of the perceived risks during a potential journey to the EU as one of the most important determinants of migrant's decision to stay in or leave Turkey. Next, Dr. *Jutta Lauth Bacas* gave an insight into the informality that characterizes migrants' mobility and the intensified strategies of surveillance deployed on the borders of the EU ("Informality and surveillance: The case of the Hot Spot Lesbos").

Contemplating the increasingly important nexus between technology and borders, Prof. Dr. *Gabriel Popescu* (Bloomington, Indiana) explored how the digitalization of EU's security and its de-territorialisation result in the concurrent digital strategies developed by migrants subverting the practices of control ("Fences and smartphones: Digital topologies of migration in Southeastern Europe"). According to him, this interplay creates new digital topologies that need to be understood beyond the frameworks of a nation-state and fixed coordinates of time and space.

Moving **the complex of migration 'crisis'** to a single national framework, contributions by *Kemal Obad* (Zenica), *Marija Ivanović* (Sarajevo) and Prof. Dr. *Anna Krasteva* (Sofia) explored how the 'crisis' is used by certain (political) actors in order to redraw and re-affirm (intra-)national, territorial and identitarian boundaries. Obad ("In between political lines: The migrant crisis at external and internal borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina") demonstrated how migrants coming to Bosnia and Herzegovina find themselves caught in the political divide of the state, and explore the possible consequences this might have for the redefinition of border security in SEE and wider. Ivanović ("Where imagined community meets imagined geography: Border regime in Republika Srpska in light of the migration 'crisis'") focused on the case of Republika Srpska, and the ways in which the ruling party in the entity uses migration 'crisis' to expound its vision of the entity as a homogenous national space with well-guarded borders. In her work on Bulgaria ("If borders did not exist they would have been invented by the leaders of the post-democratic migration crisis: Imaginaries and politics of borders in Bulgaria"), Prof. Krasteva explained how the migration 'crisis' enabled the political elite to legitimize and prioritize the bordering policy, which entailed simultaneous processes of bordering/ordering/othering in Bulgaria. She did not limit her notion of border to a material manifestation but also included inter-group boundaries, which in the case of Bulgaria privilege strong male (Orthodox Christian) bodies over multiple others (migrants, Roma, and other minorities).

Departing from the instrumentalisation of migration for narrow political interests, Prof. *Nikolaos Kosmatopoulos* (Beirut) criticized the demoralisation of nowadays politics and invited to think about maritime borders, movement and "geo-morality" looking at them from the sea ("Maritime borders and geo-morality: Reflections on contemporary Eastern Mediterranean"). This is what a group of academics, artists and activists were doing on a floating laboratory that Kosmatopoulos portrayed in his film "Sea Whistles".

Once again confirming the omnipresence of borders, Dr. *Irena Šentevska* (Belgrade) explored Serbian Hip-Hop as "interdisciplinary cultural phenomena" that provides insight into the imaginary geography and identity of Serbia in relation to the EU ("How popular media culture communicates the geopolitical position of Serbia in relation to the EU"). She argued that the statement "Serbia is ghetto" – popular during the 1990s – was still valid today as it communicates the notion of 'second classness' some inhabitants of Serbia feel about EU citizenship and the overall peripheral geopolitical position of the country with regards to the larger block.

The conference showed a big variety of borders and boundaries in Southeast Europe as well as the various perspectives from which research considers them. Above all, it became clear that it is necessary to ask further questions about borders and the consequences of demarcation because they constantly affect nature and people's life.