

Editorial Foreword

Silviu Miloiu

Revista Română pentru Studii Baltice și Nordice, E-mail: silviu.miloiu@arsbn.ro

Having been set up on November 27, 2008, the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies (ARSBN) has established as its fundamental goals the promotion of research activities in the field of Baltic and Nordic studies, the encouragement of knowledge in public benefit regarding this geographical area, including by the means of education, especially of higher education, the cooperation with similar institutions and associations from Romania and abroad, the promotion of the dialogue and cooperation on the axis the Baltic Sea – the Black Sea. In this regard, the establishing of a scientific publication to further our knowledge of Baltic and Nordic societies and to spread information about the Romanian society to Baltic and Northern Europe was essential. The magazine was also regarded as a springboard for the mutual acknowledgment of the bonds and relations between Romanians and the Baltic and Nordic peoples throughout their history and in contemporary times. It was our understanding and hope that the magazine will become a multidisciplinary publication hosting articles in fields such as history, history of international relations, international relations, literature and philology, economics and business, and various other sciences. When established, the editorial college also considered that it will be in the advantage of the magazine to include also book and article reviews, assessments of scientific conferences or notes of doctoral studies in the fields covered by the publication which will promote the dialogue between the two peripheries of the European continent.

A year after the project was decided upon, the first issue of *Revista Română de Studii Baltice și Nordice* (RRSBN) comes out bringing forth articles published by scientists from Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Romania. Although as it was expected to happen the articles included in the first issue are mostly dealing with historical developments, it must be pointed out that the themes and the approaches differ significantly. Chronologically, the articles cover the interwar period, the Cold War, and larger time periods as it happens with Alexandru Popescu's notes. Thematically, two articles focus on processes taking place in one particular

country, but with larger regional or international connotations. Thus, at a time when the scholarly research focuses on the transition to market economy, Olaf Mertelsmann goes back in time and shows how the opposite process happened. The large scale of changes in the structure of property and the gradual loss of private entrepreneurial skills as well as the human and economic costs should be remembered when dealing with post-1989 transition. In terms of outcomes, Mertelsmann concludes that "transition to command economy was something like the worst possible scenario". Instead, Elena Dragomir approaches the Cold War from a different perspective. With the Soviet Union collapsing and the self-censure gradually being renounced at, the recent past started to be reinterpreted in order to fit the new Finnish foreign and domestic policy aims. The debate over the legacy of Finlandization was passionate, but the mainstream political opinion tended to practice a sort of "protochronism" by inventing roots and traits to developments that have emanated in the post-Cold War environment. This kind of ideology rapidly acquired some sort of legitimacy and pass through to younger generation which could not be judged as pursuing a hidden political agenda.

Two articles carried in this issue of RRSBN approach, based on new archival findings, the intersections between the populations from Romania and those in Baltic area and Scandinavia. Cezar Stanciu's article focuses on the state relations between a Communist totalitarian regime and the democratic states of Northern Europe at a time when a rapprochement was contemplated. Desirous to reconnect to the words trade flow and acquire a more autonomous profile in the international relations, Romania was nevertheless wavering in the relations with Scandinavia and was more astute in relation to Finland, a country trusted in Moscow to a larger extent. On contrary, Vasile Ciobanu has approached the "transnational" approach between German minorities in Transylvania and the Baltic states. By sharing numerous common concerns and facing common challenges and nurturing common projects, the communities of Sibiu Saxons and Estonia and Latvia's Balts have developed networks and contacts of mutual benefit. Ciobanu's discoveries thus add to the recent publications by John Hiden¹ and Martyn Housden² on this topic.

The role of perceptions and the Danish travelers mindsets about Romanians are approached in Oana Lăculeanu's contribution. Although the article may be fitted into the same category of transnational history, it

¹ John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities. Paul Schiemann, 1876-1944*, Hurst&Company, London 2004.

² Martyn Housden, *Neighbours or enemies?: Germans, the Baltic and Beyond*, Rodopi, London, 2007.

brings forth no new conceptual interpretations, but contributes with interesting and sometimes hilarious facts to the encounters between Romanians and Danes. Citizens of Denmark, a developed agrarian country according to the European standards, were sometimes shocked when they encountered the Romanian realities, especially as they looked in some rural or town periphery areas. Their descriptions of Bucharest, of the Romanian peasant and of the dynamics of development in a “third world country” – to put it so – are rude expressions of the differences between Northern and South Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and a reminder of the reasons for which the relations between those societies were so limited.

Alexandru Popescu’s contribution enriches the chronology and bibliography of the Romanian-Finnish relations with new facts and is a testimony of the recent developments to which the author himself, a former diplomatic counselor in the Romanian Embassy in Helsinki, has contributed.

Nerijus Babinskas’ theoretical contribution compares the approaches to the concept of tributalism of Samir Amin, Hohn Haldon and H.H. Stahl., a Romanian sociologist and historian from Dimitrie Gusti’s school of thought. The author discovers a gap between the Western and Eastern historiography traditions by the importance the concept has acquired in West and emphasizes why the debate is still important and topical.

In the end, I hope that the novelty of interpretation and the new findings behind the articles included in the first issue of RRSBN will attract scholarly and public interest and give birth to fresh academic debates on the exchange of cultural values between the Romanian space and Baltic and Nordic Europe in the past and – as this new magazine shows – in the present. The new networks created between Romanian and Baltic and Nordic scholars can open new avenues of cooperation and contribute to the progress of our scholarly and public agendas and the magazine is ready to become a mirror of those developments.