

Editorial Foreword

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The theme of the 2019 conference of the Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies was crafted with our regretted colleague and distinguished academic Leonidas Donskis. In the meanwhile, conformism seems to have pervaded larger categories of public in East-Central Europe and beyond, and new “illiberal democracies” evolved. A composite of authoritarian leader and godfather have taken the reins of power in the area. Populist parties and movements are on the rise. Resurgent nationalisms are again offered as a substitute to solutions. The refugee crisis lingers on and no common decisions have been adopted within the EU to solve it on the basis of the European values. The EU institutions are in need of reform and decisions on the course of the organization and its future enlargement process are still pending.

The conference aimed at analysing two often interrelated phenomena: dissent and conformism. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars nationalism and eventually modern political ideologies became the main competitors for power and control in Europe. Nationalisms unleashed the forces of destruction during the world wars while the clash of ideologies set off ahead of the French Revolution shaped the destiny of Europe during the 20th century. Dictatorships and even more so totalitarian regimes required unwavering conformism and full devotedness from their subjects, while encouraging dissent in the competing camp.

Conformism has shown many faces from the Antiquity to Contemporary Age, from pretence to obedience, and an individual person could evolve during his/her lifetime between the two extremes. Sometimes, as many dystopian novels reveal, the conformist grows into dissident and even becomes a major target of his/her former patrons. Conversely, former dissidents can return to loyalty, and often the prize to be paid is betrayal of former affined spirits. The archives of Scandinavian, Baltic and Black Sea regions preserve numerous documents of such instances. Conformism can also take the form of what Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis called “liquid modernity”, the situation of an individual who flows from one

attitude to another, from one perspective to the other, from a set of values to an opposing one:

The liquid modern variety of adiaphorization is cut after the pattern of the consumer–commodity relation, and its effectiveness relies on the transplantation of that pattern to interhuman relations. As consumers, we do not swear interminable loyalty to the commodity we seek and purchase in order to satisfy our needs or desires, and we continue to use its services as long as but no longer than it delivers on our expectations - or until we come across another commodity that promises to gratify the same desires more thoroughly than the one we purchased before. All consumer goods, including those described as 'durable', are eminently exchangeable and expendable; in consumerist – that is consumption inspired and consumption servicing – culture, the time between purchase and disposal tends to shrink to the degree to which the delights derived from the objects of consumption shift from their use to their appropriation.¹

Dissidence also embraces a great spectre of attitudes from simple acts of disloyalty to open resistance as it happened in Norway or Denmark during World War II, in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Black Sea region during the dictatorial, totalitarian and occupational regimes, etc. Again, the boundary between these extremes is narrow and simple disloyalty can grow into acts of armed resistance. The archives in the region are filled with documents regarding dissident movements, samizdat literature and transborder cooperation of dissidents, which can offer fresh empirical, methodological and conceptual perspectives to this issue.

The first issue published in 2019 of *Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* embraces some aspects of dissent and conformism tackled during the conference from how these attitudes had manifested back in the 13th century Iceland to the issue of contemporary migrants and their interaction with their new home societies in Scandinavia, while also paying tribute to key manifestation of dissent and conformism during World War II, the Cold War and Iron Curtain. The second issue of the journal will continue to offer our readers access to new approaches on dissent and conformism in modern and contemporary Northern and Baltic regions.

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, and Leonidas Donskis, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity, 2013), p. 15.