Introduction

The guiding idea of the seminar series on which the present volume is based was to analyse in a comparative framework the different meanings and importance of key concepts in Western and East European history – the latter, according to the German convention, including Russia. More than a decade after the breakdown of the Soviet Empire and the reunification of Europe, historiographies and historical concepts on each side still are very far apart. To be sure, contacts became closer. Russian historians did what their Polish colleagues had been doing for decades: they took up Western discussions and methodologies and participated in them. But there have been no common efforts yet for joint interpretations and no attempt to reach a common understanding of central notions and concepts. Appropriate plans never realised, leaving the initial demand unsatisfied. The seminar series consequently tried to make at least a small contribution to such a comparative venture.

Ulrich Herbert deals with an old problem, already brought up by the simultaneous development of both his themes: the problem of similarities and differences between National Socialism and Stalinism as variants of a dictatorial-totalitarian regime. In a meticulous comparative analysis, he scrutinises essential aspects of both regimes: in particular, their origin as answers to the crisis of pre-war 'bourgeois' society; the character and moulding of the ideological elites; the methods and instruments of the implementation of the central authority; and, last but not least, the goals and forms of political terror. Herbert concludes that in the last resort – in spite of accommodating both regimes under the roof of totalitarianism – differences between them clearly prevailed. This becomes especially clear in the case of political terror. Though comparable in dimension, National Socialist terror was directed against predominantly non-German victims, whereas Stalinist terror, despite all attacks on Muslims and non-Russian minorities, mainly hit its own Slavic population. Thus the author concedes a certain 'inner rationality' to National Socialist terror, whereas Stalinist terror, despite its special campaigns against 'class enemies', was totally irrational in practice. Of course, one may continue to argue about such an interpretation, but the fact that a comparative approach can produce hypotheses of this kind puts its value beyond doubt.

My own contribution reaches further back. Taking the city and townsmen as an example, it tries to tackle a fundamental problem of Russian history: the specificity of Russian society and the relative absence of initiative and self-government. The burgher estate made paradigmatically clear what was the

precondition for autocracy and – according to a widely accepted interpretation – what in the last resort produced the revolutionary upheavals of 1905 and 1917: the weakness of (civil) society in relation to the state. My deliberations do not call into question the diagnosis of a 'society as an organization of the state' (Dietrich Geyer, *Gesellschaft als staatliche Veranstaltung*), but they try to prove on the basis of regional archives (which can now be consulted for the first time) that a fundamental change happened during the last third of the nineteenth century. Centring on the newly created self-government in the cities (1870), a new elite developed which overarched the traditional 'estates' (*soslovie*). Merchants (*kuptsy*) becoming entrepreneurs, noblemen choosing 'bourgeois' professions, and early representatives of the developing social layer of academically trained persons (physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, teachers) merged into a socio-cultural milieu which organised associations and clubs as places of encounter and discussion and engaged itself in communal politics. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century a liberal local public space and public opinion emerged which not only was a clear analogy to similar developments in Germany during the second third of the nineteenth century, but at the same time contained the potential to broaden itself into a state-wide phenomenon.

Michael Müller discusses the received thesis that the development of the political structure of states in early modern Europe followed typical and different paths in Western and Eastern Europe. Comparing the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish *rzeczpospolita*, he is able to show that the conventional typologies advanced by Otto Hintze and others, which tried to distinguish each path from the other, discarded a lot of 'disturbing' similarities. Once we consider these similarities, the typologies lose a lot of their plausibility. Thus Müller is led to the conclusion that in the last resort it is hardly promising to base a comparison on the study of *institutions*. Much more important were the practices of political decision-making. When analysing these processes it becomes clear that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the idea of different developmental paths emerged, there was a tendency to mould the past according to the present and to construct differences which did not exist to the extent claimed for them. Therefore it seems more appropriate not only to pay more attention to the self-description of a given epoch, but also to look for 'mental geographies' which were specific only for certain sectors of historical reality and not for its totality.

Martin Schulze Wessel turns to a problem which until the 1980s was certainly marginalised as a consequence of the priority of social history. To be sure, contemporaries already realised the inner links between religion and revolution, between church and state (the old as well as the new). Still, a fresh view informed by a new history of ideas that has inspired several monographs published since the 1960s was necessary in order to ascribe new relevance to this problem. As far as I know Schulze Wessel is the first to consider it within the framework of a comparison between East and West by including the Russian Revolution. He analyses the role of religious minorities during the last decades of the *Anciens régimes* in both France and Russia, the relation of the church and the clergy

towards the old and the new states, and the religious mood and trends outside the churches. As a result it becomes clear that the impact of religious motives, even in the Russian Revolution, has been underestimated. The *intelligentsia's* specific sense of mission, as well as the utopian thought of Bolshevism, clearly show characteristic traits of a quasi-eschatology. Moreover, the Russian church was split by an oppositional group which tended towards the new regime and was used by it. Though the comparison also reveals many differences, it helps to consider them as variants of similar basic dispositions.

Jörg Baberowski concentrates on the cultural and political relations between centre and periphery in late Tsarism and the early Soviet Union. He interprets them as a forced and violent export of European civilisation, the norms and practices of which the Bolsheviks borrowed while adding a specific radicalism to them. Modernisation transformed itself into a politics of imposing foreign ways of thinking, norms and forms of behaviour. It merged with repression and terror, which could produce only opposition and resistance rather than consent and acceptance. Baberowski sees this perversion of cultural transfer not as an aspect of Russian imperialism and Soviet totalitarianism but as an example of Western arrogance which disqualified 'otherness' as backward. Modernity exhibited the characteristics of Western Europe and could not be separated from the attempt to subjugate and destroy it by assimilation. West and East, centre and periphery, not only remained isolated from each other; forced Europeanisation also prevented them from peaceful coexistence.

Karl Schlögel is interested in the effect and relevance of borders. Central and East Central Europe were an area of frontiers. Nowhere else were borders so close to each other; nowhere else did they change so often. Europe was used to borders, especially to a specific kind of them: territorial dividing lines which at the same time were mostly cultural and ethnical lines as well. During the second half of the twentieth century Europe discovered that more borders had vanished than were newly created, the most important case being the breakdown of the Soviet bloc. Deep caesuras of this kind not only changed the political maps and mental horizons: in the same vein, they changed the significance of borders. They had always existed, but the fact that they had not always been prominent, so to speak, came to the fore. Borders developed into border areas, more connecting than dividing; they widened into areas of common experience, as places of special means and intensities of communication. It is Schlögel's thesis and belief that these new borders need a new culture and a new practice binding East and West together.

Jürgen Kocka deals with the notion of 'civil society'. After tracing the development of its meaning he points out that in the nineteenth century civil society came to be seen as the opposite of 'state', but at the same time was directed against the dominance of the market and the retreat of the individual into privacy. Against this, the concept accentuates the notions and values of work, education and emancipation. The twentieth century brought further changes, adding to this meaning another two central aspects: the rejection of violence as a means of political dispute and the acceptance of difference. In contrast to the 'logic of the

market', the 'logic of civil society' required the recognition of pluralism and the elaboration of a specific form of communication which would be able to reconcile different interests in a peaceful and constructive way.

Pursuing this goal the concept of 'civil society' always contained a utopian 'surplus'. In the nineteenth century it displayed a growing affinity towards the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture, excluding peasants and workers; at the same time it kept aiming at integration. Later on, in the twentieth century, the concept did not conceal its Western European origins, but experienced a renaissance in Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, thus evolving into useful and promising tool of comparison.

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