The ‘Identity Reader’ Project

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INTRODUCTION

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The present volume is the second one of the series entitled *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*. The history of this venture goes back to the meeting of a group of young scholars at the Balkan Summer University in Plovdiv in 1999. Step by step, a research project, hosted by the Center for Advanced Study Sofia, was formed with the intention of bringing together and making accessible basic texts of the respective national traditions. The ensuing ‘Reader’ was envisioned as a challenge to the self-centered and ‘isolationist’ historical narratives and educational canons prevalent in the region. On the whole, the ‘Reader’ is expected to fill in the lacunae concerning the knowledge of Central and Southeast Europe pertinent to the very core of the schooling process and academic socialization in these countries. It is hoped that our project will broaden the field of possible comparisons and make researchers look at the process of nation-building in Central and Southeast Europe from a comparative perspective.

The grouping of the texts follows neither the national provenience, nor *stricto sensu* chronological order. It is determined more by thematic similarities and resonances. The four ‘meta-themes/periods,’ around which the four volumes are organized, are the following: Late Enlightenment (the emergence of the modern ‘National Idea’); National Romanticism (the formation of national movements); Modernism (the full development of national movements and often the creation of national states); and Anti-Modernism (concentrating mainly on the radical ideologies of the inter-war period).

Within these thematic units the project analyzes various aspects of identity-formation, such as ‘symbolic geography’, the symbolic representation of the national community, images of the past and the production of cultural markers (i.e., national language or national character), as well as the images of the other and the ‘construction’ of identity in religious and socio-
cultural contexts – domains that themselves exhibit revealing similarities. This framework challenges the usual taxonomies through the \textit{dis-aggregation} of a nominally unified past. In particular, this perspective questions the idea of a single point of departure that we are confronted with in nationalist histories. In fact, most of the texts selected consciously participate in many registers of identity-construction, seeking to turn the entire symbolic framework of identities into a more dynamic configuration.

In order to create a common basis for the analysis of the collected texts, each entry has a similar structure. The first section refers to the bibliographical data containing the language in which the text was written, its author and the publishing house; this data is complemented by short information about the author, such as his (her) place of birth and death, a concise biography, and main works. The second section contains a short ‘contextualization’ of the text, describing its political and social background and the intellectual environment in which it originated. Then, a textual analysis, a description of its ideological tendencies and historical influence and its function in the respective canon follow. In addition, the most important interpretations of the text are provided. All this is followed by the translated texts. If possible, we chose to publish them in their entirety, but in many cases their length exceeded the dimensions of the volume, and thus we strove to present the most characteristic excerpts.

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A natural focus of any comparative research in the region, the Central
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