

In her master thesis Vanessa Horler studies the Visegrad 4 states and their ambivalent relations with the European Union. Horler reviews the historical development of the region from the early modern period, through the consolidation of modern Europe and the Soviet occupation during the majority of the 20th century, while stressing how the area repeatedly wavered between Western, Eastern, synthetic, and autonomous orientations. Horler employs the work of Jenő Szücs on the region as well as the Trotskyist concept of uneven and combined development, in order to show how and why the Visegrad 4 states developed a skeptical approach towards the Western politics and values of the EU, in the attempt to preserve and highlight their own identity, not unlike their previous attempt to distinguish themselves and preserve their autonomy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Horler's dissertation is very well researched, demonstrates a deep understanding of the topic and offers a broad perspective on a current topic, while illuminating its historical roots.

Nonetheless, lack of criticism is a recurring problem in this otherwise impeccable analysis. Horler's study of secondary research, as well as her use of established terms and concepts, is almost entirely lacking in criticism. In reviews of secondary literature critique of previous research is especially useful as a means of indicating the shortcomings of current research, and establishing the contribution of the present paper. Moreover, some of the ideas and conclusions of earlier studies are presented as facts, although they could easily be contested. For example, Krastev's assertion that today's European elites are cosmopolitan, "everywhere people" ignores the fact that historically this has been the general rule and not the exception. If anything, as Horler herself argues, many CEE intellectuals (such as Vaclav Havel and György Konrád) have emphasized the uniqueness of their nations and the region and sought to protect it from the overwhelming influence of the West. Horler could consequently refer to this problematic as a way to discuss the limitations of existing perspectives on the region. The lack of criticism towards secondary literature is all the more significant when considering the substantial attention dedicated to reviewing previous studies throughout the dissertation. In this rather short MA thesis, Horler's original ideas are rather limited in scope in comparison with reviews and overviews of other research. Fortunately, the synthetic presentation of the history of the region, as well as the original analysis in the final part of the paper, exhibit a clear understanding of the topic, as well as the ability to present new and original ideas on the V4–EU crisis. Horler's dissertation consequently offers a scholarly and well researched analysis of the V4 identity crisis from a rich and broad perspective.

Defense questions:

1. Szűcs also includes Austria and Germany in CEE, how would you explain the diverging of these countries from the block (excepting Soviet occupation)?
2. As mentioned in the dissertation, the refugee crisis exacerbated the differences between the Visegrad 4 and the EU. What influence has the Corona crisis had on the relations between the two bodies, if any?

Grade: 1