

French Research on Eastern Europe

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French social science research on Russia and Eastern Europe bears the marks of its origin. French visitors and social scientists have always had a strong fascination for Russia (among the best known are the Marquis de Custine and Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, but also include Durkheim's followers Marcel Mauss and Célestin Bouglé and even occasionally Emile Durkheim himself¹). After 1917, the Soviet Union, and afterwards, from 1945–1948 on, the whole Soviet bloc gave rise to lots of divisions about correct interpretations, with strong ideological contents (aggravated by lack of information), and motivated by partisan purposes, involving often political exiles.

However, an upsurge of research marked the late 1960s to early 1970s. Three sets of facts caused the scholars' interests to change: first, the arrival of new generations of social scientists who were able to get their inquiries free of certain inherited ideological burdens; second, increased transparency in East European countries; and finally, the entry into the field, beside linguistic studies and classical studies of civilisations, both related to area studies, of social science approaches which, instead of emphasizing the specificity of this part of the world, applied to it their own paradigms and methods. Thus, economists, sociologists, historians, demographers, and political scientists have contested the validity of culturalist paradigms or more simply culturalist hypotheses. This modernised approach has questioned explanations grounded on the uniqueness of political systems or on ethno-historical causalities. Since the 1980s, the scientists that have been studying this area have become increasingly aware of its complexity and diversity, as well as of the necessity to place their hypotheses into particular contexts. Moreover, French scientific work has gone international and French scholars, often invested with leadership roles, have become involved in multinational teams, particularly those with European Union funding. However, as regards financial resources, British research has an advantage over the French as it has a better foothold in Brussels, whereas German research has another advantage, that of enjoying better funding thanks to semi-private semi-public foundations.

A Short History

Before 1989, as regards the development of studies on Soviet Russia, the USSR and Eastern Europe, different periods can be distinguished. The first period goes from the 1917 revolution to the creation of the Soviet bloc in the wake of World War II. Thus, in 1917, the review *Le Monde slave* was started in

¹ See *Sociologues et politistes français face aux révolutions russes*, ed. by Dominique Colas, Cahiers A. Leroy-Beaulieu, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, No. 1, 1998, p. 80.

Paris, which permitted Ernest Denis to bring together people for whom the Russian upheavals were worthy of scientific investigation. This period was marked by two kinds of empirical resources: evidence produced by émigrés and visitors back from the USSR.² In both cases, suspicion about partiality of analyses caused their audience to be limited. As for the émigrés, 'wrapped up in their personal tragedies, overcome by their bitterness, paralysed by the recent date of the event, haunted by the hope of a possible about-turn, (they) were only rarely able to go beyond plea and passion and achieve scientific objectiveness'.³ The evidence presented by French intellectuals (Jacques Sadoul), as well as Russian-born ones (like Victor Serge or Boris Souvarine) was suspected of being partial and in consequence rejected, because 'passion – be it admiring or horrified – outweighs objectiveness and the science has nothing to gain by it'.⁴ Let us note for that period the strong intellectual ascendancy of somebody like Pierre Pascal, a friend of the Bolsheviks, who reportedly 'deliberately chose to keep silent'.⁵

In the aftermath of the 1939–1945 war, a new state of political affairs marked the beginning of a new period, but France, in spite of its traditions, showed little interest in East European studies. Yet the stabilization of the Soviet regime, its extension to Eastern Europe, followed by the Cold War, provided sufficient reason not only for scientific studies but also for public support of such an undertaking. By contrast, such support was largely provided to scientists in the United States and Germany, while their French colleagues had to wait for the changes that occurred in the sixties when De Gaulle's particular political views on the question (based on the convergence theory) made French foreign policy independent of its American ally. But intellectual curiosity appeared before this, perhaps with the first big crisis of the Soviet bloc in 1956 that in a roundabout hit the pro-communist French elites. It was after the revelations at the 20th Soviet communist party congress and their consequences for the satellite countries that the stranglehold on French research and university work got relaxed, so that the availability of new documentary resources (the spread of Soviet documents, liberalization of scientific exchanges, increasing numbers of personal accounts, and, since the beginning of the sixties, proliferation of dissident literature) opened new avenues to studies of the Soviet world. From that moment, historical studies made much progress in France (Georges Haupt, Marc Ferro, Michel Heller), as well as the studies of ethnic groups in the Soviet Union (Alexandre Bennigsen, Chantal Quelquejay, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse), of the social, political and juridical system, of geostrategy (Basile Kerblay, René Girault, Michel Lesage, Henri Chambre, Jean Laloy, Pierre Hassner, Moshe Lewin before leaving for the United States), of the

2 See the introduction by Hélène Carrère d'Encausse to the research guidebook *L'Union Soviétique*, by Lilly Marcou, Armand Colin, 1971, pp. 11–29.

3 *Idem*, p. 13.

4 *Idem*, p. 14. In fact, these statements also reveal how demanding the political arena was in the sixties as to carefully chosen words, the major argument being that of positivism, for those who aspired to become specialists of the Soviet Union.

5 *Idem*, p. 14.

economic system (Eugène Zaleski, Georges Sokolof, Marie Lavigne, Pierre Naville), of the cultural activity (Georges Nivat, Jean Bonamour), of the satellite countries (Pierre Kende, François Fejtö, Georges Mond, Pavel Tigrid, Zdenek Strmiska, Thomas Lowit), and of international communism (Annie Kriegel, Ylios Yananakis).⁶

The seventies and eighties brought about various incentives for research work, such as: the appearance of democratic opposition leading to the epic Solidarity upsurge (that produced a major impact on French public opinion and the elites), the regime liberalization in countries such as Hungary and Poland after attempts made at openings which had resulted in the Helsinki Conference, and a contrario, the Brezhnevian stagnation that reached its highest point with the invasion of Afghanistan, Ceausescu regime, and the Czech and German gerontocracies. This is the period when certain institutions, such as French government agencies condescended to grant some additional funding to research groups, as for example P. Kende's and Z. Strmiska's Group for Inequality Studies, or Sociological Observatory for the USSR and Eastern Europe (Z. Strmiska and G. Mink) inside Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, or even Alain Touraine's research team which studied Solidarity (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales).

But some weaknesses inherited from that period had consequences for the state of mind of scholars and their readiness to undertake research work after 1989. Among teachers and inside the French educational system there has been little interest in the outside world, a tendency that only recently began to be reversed thanks to European challenges and educational pressures of globalisation. Another reason for this state of affairs was a double-ideologisation of the Sovietology research field, mostly turned to the study of the political system to the detriment of the observation of particular national societies, while the political elites in power were convinced that the Soviet empire was immutable. As a result, for the research policy, there was a lack of interest on the part of institutions and therefore a lack of funding for studies focused on national specificities and breakdown dynamics.

After 1989–1991: Actors and Scientific Activity

There are several actors in France dedicated to and involved in studying and doing research work on Central and Eastern Europe, and in teaching about and specializing in it. They can be divided into two categories:

- institutional actors (universities, public research institutions, government institutions)
- non-governmental institutions, actors coming from civil society (associations ruled by the 1901 law, as for example the Association of Slavists at Institut d'Etudes Slaves (founded in 1919 by Ernest Denis), Transitions – a grouping of former students of Central and Eastern Europe, the ex-USSR included, from Paris Institut d'Etudes

⁶ This enumeration is not, of course, exhaustive.

Politiques⁷).

The first category includes more or less important actors (for their human potential, the scope of their activity, their impetus capability, their financial resources, the latter determining all the rest).

Universities

Many French universities have Slavic languages or Slavonic studies departments, coupled sometimes with civilisation studies. At some of them the teaching staff have created research teams. In our field, certain universities have assumed leading roles. In Paris, these are University Paris IV, Institut National des Langues Orientales (INALCO), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), and similarly, in all university towns there are universities that have developed area studies (as, for example, Polish studies at Lille University). Particularly worth mentioning is a doctoral degree course at Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris, now led by Dominique Colas (after Hélène Carrère d'Encausse), comprising multidisciplinary teaching covering the whole of the geo-political space of the former Soviet bloc.

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)

This is an institution completely and exclusively dedicated to scientific research. Though it possesses its own research teams, its present policy tends to co-finance joint teams.

Interface teams

It is common practice in universities to house research units (called joint or associated units when they are backed by funds and personnel coming from Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). Among the best known, doing scientific work on Russia and/or Eastern Europe, is Centre d'Etudes des Relations Internationales (CERI), a part of Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, that is specialized in international relations and area studies (P. Hassner, Anne de Tinguy, Jacques Rupnik, Marie Mendras, Kathy Rousselet among others). A laboratory associated with Nanterre University Paris X, Laboratoire d'Analyse des Systèmes Politiques (LASP) has brought together a number of sociologists and political scientists interested in Central Europe's developments (Michel Dobry, Aleksander Smolar, Georges Mink, Jean-Charles Szurek, Myrianna Morokvasic, Mihnea Berindae). As for the economists, one of the most important laboratories is ROSES at University Paris I (founded by M. Lavigne, headed afterwards by Wladimir Andreef, Xavier Richet and now Gérard Duchêne). At Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) there is a unit specialized in historical, demographic and sociological research on the ex-USSR, the Centre Russe, headed by historian Wladimir Berelowitch

⁷ The relative weakness of professional association activity prevents me from speaking about it in this paper; it will be enough to mention that, though a Slavists' association exists inside the Institut d'Etudes Slaves, there is no global unifying association like the AAASS in the United States or other European countries that could bring together all social sciences disciplines dedicated to that geo-cultural area and could, for example, take responsibility for organizing national congresses, etc.

and demographer Alain Blum, with, among other associates, Nicolas Werth. When necessary, other specialists may be invited to join the activity of the centre, such as economists Jacques Sapir or Bernard Chavance, or sociologist Alexis Berelowitch. Other research units have some activity sectors focused on that part of the world, such as CADIS (Centre d'Analyse et d'Intervention Sociologiques), specialized in studies of social movements, headed by Michel Wieviorka. Other researchers, members of different centres of the EHESS, have been working on various East European regions, as, for example, Daniel Bertaux (life stories and social mobility), Victor Karady (sociological theory, anti-Semitism), Patrick Michel (sociology of religion), and also Krzysztof Pomian, Marie-Elisabeth Ducreux (of Centre d'Etudes Historiques), or Ewa Bérard and many others.

Certain very active scholars have been working at research centres linked to provincial universities (François Bafoil in Grenoble, Gilles Lepasant in Bordeaux, Frédéric Sawicki or Michel Maslowski in Lille, Joanna Nowicki and Paul Gradhol, Dominique Redor at Marne-la Vallée, and so on).

State administration

Three research centres have distinguished themselves by their results and/or knowledge they have acquired of Eastern Europe. The most important beyond any doubt is CEDUCEE (Le Centre d'études et de documentation sur l'ex-URSS, la Chine et l'Europe de l'Est at Documentation Française) that was founded in 1962 by Françoise Barry, at the French government's special request, in accordance with General De Gaulle's policy and placed close to the Prime Minister (Edith Lhomel, Marie-Agnès Crosnier, Michèle Kahn, Alain Giroux, Jaroslava Blaha, Daniela Heimerl, Céline Bayou are the centre's outstanding members). Marked by the political climate of the time of its creation (war threats from the 'opposing bloc' in the sixties and seventies), the centre developed economic analyses based on secondary sources. Its financial means, however superior to those of universities, were nonetheless inferior to those American scientists had at their disposal, whose works, published by the Joint Economic Committee, were taken as a model. Apart from this centre, intended for documentary purposes, there is CEP II (Centre d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales), an organism embodied in Commissariat Français du Plan, grouping some very good economists, specialists of the Russian and Chinese economies (G. Sokolof, Gérard Wild, Françoise Lemoine, among others). In both cases, the resources at the scholars' disposal were their good knowledge of centrally administrated economies, as well as of the accounting tools necessary for correcting 'official' data through cross-national comparisons, and the construction of Industrial Exchanges Tables.

Later on (after 1989), another group was established inside the Administration. Expert activity of the Regional Development (Aménagement du territoire - DATAR) needed the cooperation of specialists suited for initiating work in Eastern Europe under transition, in the domain of industrial conversion, a domain in which France possesses rich experience. The centre had a team that worked from 1990 to 1996 under the leadership of geo-politician

Michel Foucher and the region's specialist Jean-Yves Potel. This centre has now been taking part in various consortiums funded by the European Union, but its expert activity has been given priority over its research tasks.

It is worth noting, as a sign of a late recognition of the expertise of the specialists in this geo-cultural area, and also of their more extended scientific basis, that Michel Foucher has been appointed head of Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision (CAP) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1999, while this function is usually carried out by a diplomat, and that Prof Marie-Claude Maurel, a renown specialist in agrarian issues in Russia and Eastern Europe, has been appointed director of the Département des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société (in 1997) at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.⁸

Between private and public spheres, there is the Institut Français des Relations Internationales (with geo-politicians like Dominique Moisi or Thierry de Montbrial and an economist specialist of the ex-USSR, Anita Tiraspolsky), as well as some smaller units such as that of Pascal Boniface (IRIS).

Paper media

Two main reviews have been in charge of publishing multidisciplinary works in that field.

First of all, *Le Courrier des Pays de l'Est* (editor in chief, Marie-Agnès Crosnier), a monthly review – a periodicity that makes it rather an information and trend review – published under the care of CEDUCEE, a unit of Documentation Française, with public funding, though it has a quite satisfactory subscriber basis (about 800). Documentation Française has been issuing now and then, in the series *Problèmes Politiques et Sociaux*, special issues on Eastern Europe, made up of selected papers on a given subject. Up to the year 2000, every year since the seventies, Documentation Française published a yearbook on Central and Eastern Europe.

Revue d'Etudes Comparatives Est-Ouest (directors A. Blum and G. Mink, and editor in chief K. Rousselet) is the reference journal for academic circles. With a less large circulation, the review is multidisciplinary and all social science disciplines are represented in its editorial board. The anonymity principle as well as a double referee system serve as guarantees of the scientific quality of the published articles. The review is financed by CNRS. It has been able to gather some representative members of young generation scientists (Anne Gazier, Catherine Perron, Catherine Goussef, and Jean-François Raviot).

Institut d'Etudes Slaves publishes *Revue d'Etudes Slaves*. Institut also issues *Bibliographie européenne des travaux sur l'ex-URSS et l'Europe de l'Est*, and it carries out policy of publishing works such as foreign language handbooks or proceedings of scientific meetings. It is also in charge of an editorial series *Cultures et Sociétés de l'Est*. The Russian centre, mentioned above, at EHEES, publishes *Cahiers du Monde Russe*. Two independent reviews that had their

⁸ It is more or less common that specialists of this geo-cultural area apply for positions connected with scientific diplomacy, as, for example, A. Berelowitch who was appointed to be cultural attaché in Moscow, or historian Antoine Mares appointed director of the Centre Français des recherches en Sciences Sociales in Prague.

moments of glory during the eighties, *Nouvelle Alternative* and *Autre Europe*, are now struggling to survive.

However, certain general publishers are showing some more interest in East European subjects these days. The main issues seem to be the years 1989 and 1991, the wars in former Yugoslavia, the extension of the European Union, the consequences of the archive openings, the emergent economies, and the conditions in Russia.

The Expansion of Research after 1989

The process of the break up of the Soviet-type system and the almost general opening of research and observation fields, that previously had not been easily accessible if not completely forbidden, on the one hand, and demand for more or less basic expertise and knowledge concerning certain socio-economic reality undergoing revolutionary transformation, on the other hand, put pressure on the authorities to grant substantial funding, as they never had in the past, for studies of Central and Eastern Europe. A programme valid for a number of years, given the title 'Intelligence of Europe', a part of which was entitled 'Transition processes in Central and Eastern Europe', was launched on July 20, 1989 by two major institutions, the Scientific Research Ministry and CNRS. The program, which was in operation until 1994, was endowed with important financial resources. In 1991 and 1992, 202 projects were presented, 66 of which were approved with grants amounting to 11 million francs. In 1992, as a response to a second call for proposals, 115 projects were submitted and 40 were accepted, but with diminished funding (3.5 million francs, to which 1.2 million was added for research on enterprises, technology and work problems). According to the evaluation report requested by the Scientific Research Ministry,⁹ these programmes permitted us to identify 27 CNRS research units, 20 units from universities and 8 units coming from other bodies, all of which had proved their capability to quickly come up to the expectations of the authorities.

It is certain that this exceptional institutional support gave a momentum to French social science research. Sociology, economy and history have most benefited from it, juridical science, political science, demography and geography coming next. Thanks to these grants, several works were published and dozens of reports were submitted for assessment to the Scientific Research Ministry. As a part of the programmes, dozens of scholars from Central and Eastern Europe could afford to spend between a month and a year working in French research units. The work carried out was related to the following fields:

- analysis of attitudes of people faced with social, economic and political constraints during the period of regime transition (30% of research work carried out). Studies were focused on very different subjects: adaptive strategies of individuals and social classes

⁹ Report on the science teaching and research, Central and Eastern Europe, to Mission scientifique et technique (DSPT 6), March 1995.

(farmers), or social groups (elites, ethnic minorities), emergence of partisan movements (political parties, counter-power, etc.)

- privatisation, competitiveness of economy (30% of research work)
- job management and employment, emergence of new managers, salary and wage policy and problems directly connected to enterprises were subjects of a dozen other studies
- re-interpretation of history and its use was also a subject of a dozen studies.¹⁰

Some Problems

The collateral effects of the disappearance of the Soviet bloc have destabilized the profession of researchers specialized in Central and Eastern Europe (Russia included). Several causes can be considered:

Endogenous facets of the professional legitimacy crisis

- The upsetting of the frontiers in the real world has unsettled the boundaries between scientific disciplines. The collapse of the ideological fronts and crumbling of the single true frontier that was the border separating the Soviet system as a whole¹¹ from the rest of Europe, then a growing number of new geo-political frontiers, as well as new sub-groups in search of their particularity (Russia, CIS, Central Europe, Balkan Europe, and selection of candidate countries for entry into the European Union), all these facts have raised new and relevant questions about the dividing lines between professions. Should in future Russian studies be separated from those of Central Europe as from those of South-eastern Europe? What kind of unity in the real world justifies the maintenance of the ancient professional unity?
- Constraints of professional legacies did not stop operating. Before 1989, the professional body was actually disunited, cliquish and overrideologized. The perverse effects of this legacy appear in continuing partisan views and are shown in some people's need to justify their past views by projecting their concepts onto the present. Let us just be reminded of the multiplicity of self-definition 'concepts': post-socialism, post-Communism, post-Sovietism, 'authentic' socialism. The debate that opposed 'shock therapy' to 'gradualism' was ideologically distorted, which also revealed how the past was pressing down on the present. Some focused their attention exclusively on the social effects in order to condemn the market; others neglected social problems in order to give the market absolute priority.

10 Information letter PECO, 'Intelligence of Europe', no. 3, March 1993, p. 14.

11 Didn't people use to say, by way of a joke, that Poland had five borders with the USSR: those with East Germany, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and also those with the sky and the sea...

- It was the field's unity that was seriously thrown into confusion, revealing to what extent the profession was ill at ease. What could justify the perpetuation of a multidisciplinary body of regional specialists? Is it geography, Slavic ethnic origin, a dominant linguistic family, similar trajectories of emergent economies, the beginning of political pluralism, or, last but not least, a common starting point, that is, the end of the Soviet system?

Exogenous questioning of the profession's legitimacy

- The profession was to undergo the sudden arrival of comparative transitology, which asked for 'its share of the cake' of the knowledge concerning that geo-cultural area, but its claim was based on the knowledge gained through studying other societies that had managed to get rid of their authoritarian regimes (Latin America, Southern Europe, etc.). This special branch of political science was seen by many specialists of Central and Eastern Europe as a threat of competition, even a danger of calling into question the very usefulness of post-communist transition studies.
- The advent in the field of approach diversity that put forward particular disciplines (economy, sociology, demography, etc.) and behind, in second place, the area specificity, did not produce good results only. For a moment, highly specialized economists disputed the capability of Soviet or post-Soviet economy experts to account for the current state of affairs, which in their opinion pertained to the methods of classical economy.¹² Initially disconcerted by this claim, economists specialized in the area were later able to show to what extent the dialectics between 'break-up' and 'continuity' were important in the cases of post-Communist economies. The 'path-dependence' theory gained new followers among the ex-sovietologists. In any case, the time was on the side of ex-sovietologists and legitimated their work: the after-effects of the Soviet system that these first specialists alone had been able to decipher accompanied the differentiation processes.

Conclusions

A new generation of scholars are fretting at the doorstep of different scientific institutions and waiting to achieve full academic status. Things were easier for them than for previous generations. First of all, the access to these countries is quite easy nowadays; so, for example, doctoral degree course students at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris can make their field trip to Eastern Europe in order to accomplish empirical surveys before writing their theses. This is made all the easier by scholarships granted for particular subjects.

¹² See the report by the evaluation panel regarding the CEPPII works on Eastern Europe (members: J.P. Dessertine, J.M. Guehenno, P. Lenan, G. Mink, M. Nuti, D. Rosati, J. Sapir), internal document, Paris, November 12, 1992, p. 9.

In general, long-term scholarships have increased in numbers and they have been diversified. Today there are doctoral grants for the best students but there are also European scholarships. A set of new academic institutions is ready to accept French doctoral students (Central European University, Natolin branch of Bruges College, Collegium Budapest, etc.)

France has created new establishments like kinds of out-posts for scientific observation that have been taking care of doctoral students, such as Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, the Centre Français des Recherches en Sciences Sociales in Prague, and there will soon be a similar centre in Moscow. This active policy of direct contact with the field is a *sine qua non* condition for the advent of a new generation in the research domain of Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, partisan cleavages are losing ground, giving way to promotion on the criteria of meritocracy alone, which is a fact of paramount importance for the future of this generation of scientists.

Getting East European scholars out of their locked up condition was a real performance test for French social scientists. The challenge consisted in being able to offer these scholars a value-added that was impossible for them to gain in Eastern Europe. For example, France could offer to sociologists coming from the post-communist world a different tradition in social theory, more focused on qualitative sociology issues (life histories applied to social mobility, conversion theory and symbolic, social and cultural capital theories, sociology of social movements). The most spectacular of all was undoubtedly French historians' contribution to the 'archives revolution', even if now and then there was some lack of epistemological distance toward their contents.

We can say that the results of the past decade are rather good: the changes that took place in the East forced the research and university units to react quickly and properly; they were able to defend their specificity against attacks coming from outside their domain. The weak point, a kind of 'French deficiency', by contrast with many other countries is the lack of a unique professional corporation functioning in accord with democratic principles, imposing its authority as a national and representative association.