

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NORDIC AND BALTIC STUDIES IN ROMANIA: EUROPEAN NETWORKS: THE BALKANS, SCANDINAVIA AND THE BALTIC WORLD IN A TIME OF CRISIS

The Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies
and Valahia University of Târgoviște, May 25-27, 2012

Silviu Miloiu

The Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies, E-Mail:
silviu.miloiu@arsbn.ro

The Romanian Association for Baltic and Nordic Studies continued to organize in 2012 a series of events, one of the most meaningful of which was the third international conference on Baltic and Nordic Studies entitled *European networks: the Balkans, Scandinavia and the Baltic world in a time of economic and ideological crisis* opened on 25 May at Valahia University of Târgoviște and sponsored by the Romanian National Research Council, Niro Investment Group and other partners (<http://www.arsbn.ro/conference-2012.htm>). The main goal of the conference was to foster debate and academic discussion with regard to the challenges the Balkan and Baltic regions face today, within a time of severe global economic instability. The participants discussed and advanced solutions to problems such as the accession of Balkan states to the EU and/or NATO, with particular reference to the experiences of the relatively new EU and/or NATO Member States from South-Eastern Europe and the Eastern Baltic region; the economic, security or cultural threats posed by Balkan and/or Eastern European states or non-state actors to the Western or Nordic Europe as perceived there; the development of extremist movements and the Balkan organized crime in the Scandinavian countries; the Balkan Roma peoples as a “threat” for Western and Nordic Europe; strategies for integrating minorities in the Baltic Sea rim countries and the Black Sea areas.

The conference advanced new perspectives in researching themes such as the EU accession of the Balkan states, the problem of minorities or the organized crime. It argued, for instance, that:

- Right-wing extremist entities from the Balkans and Scandinavia tend to form an informal network and they are increasingly networking using the internet and the online social platforms, thus confronting Europe with a new, unconventional threat. The institutions designed to prevent their ramification are not yet properly equipped to fulfill their task, and new researches are needed in this regard. In fact, diagnosing, understanding and countering extremist groups and behavior ranging from criminal activity to acts of terrorism today is being complicated by media depictions of groups and narrative interpretations of security events, political developments, the evolution of prevalent forms of violence, and a general reluctance or at least disinterest in finding new cognitive frameworks for discussing the evolving aspirations and capacities of extremist groups;
- Balkan organized crime has come outside its traditional areas of action in Serbia, Montenegro and Albania and that is now gaining prominence in an international scenario, making agreements with Italian and South American mafias to manage drug routes, weapon smuggling and human trafficking towards Scandinavia and Western Europe;
- A concept of “long-distance nationalism” can be introduced in order to research how migrants relate to their identity and origin, and how they discursively represent nationalism and transnational belongings;
- The so called ‘Roma problem’ is European and not national, and that the problem substantially relates to poverty; the Roma members are often depicted in countries such as Finland to violate the laws as well as the moral values and manners; being a European issue, it must be tackled at European, national and local level;
- The Balkan states can substantially benefit from the support and model of the EU integration of Romania or of the Baltic states, although the accession of the non-EU Balkan states to the EU will be significantly delayed by the present economic crisis.

The conference addressed also the theme of the historical relations and contacts between states belonging to the two so called peripheries of Europe, such as the Romanian-Finnish relations, the Romanian-Swedish relations, history of transfers between the two areas.