

**Revisiting South Eastern Europe:
Comparative Social History of the 19th and 20th Centuries**

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in cooperation with:
Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia
Univerza na Primorskem, Koper
Central European University, Budapest

On the role of the chairpersons and discussants

Dear colleagues,

some of you have asked me about their more specific task within the panels and discussions. First of all I apologize if I made the impression that the comment was meant as a *concluding* comment after the discussion. I have changed this in the programme now, not having reflected on it enough earlier. I had always thought of a comment *opening* up the discussion, a comment that should hint at those questions that come to a “Westerner’s” mind when listening to Southeastern European history.

In fact, as I said when inviting you, it is sort of an experiment, along Western-Balkans-interdisciplinary lines, if I may say so. Most of you will have to comment on (Balkan) topics they are not really familiar with. Yet this is in fact the experiment: Will it be possible to interpret those unknown stories on the grounds of Western (and beyond) comparative and social history expertise? What questions – both in terms of methodology and contents - do these stories arouse in your minds? Is it possible to “speak one historiographic language”, or does it rather turn out that we indeed are looking at very different worlds? Can we detect “European” historical tropes within the framework of relative synchronicity (Todorova)?

My ideal vision is the following:

All panel contributions will be made accessible on the Institute's website by Christmas (the Catholic/Protestant/Greek-Orthodox Christmas, as some of the panelists jokingly have asked me if I meant January 7th ...).

In the course of the conference, first *all* papers will be presented, interrupted by a coffee break. After the last paper, the discussant will open up the discussion. Limiting his speech to 15 minutes at the most, he should, on the one hand, try and point out those aspects surprisingly new to him (if there are any), and, on the other hand, "read" the contributions on the basis of his own expertise, pose questions, hint at similarities and differences, point out methodological commonalities and potentials etc.

Then the chair person will open up the floor, but before that he is very welcome to add some points of his own to the comment (no more than 10 minutes), and by this open up the floor. In fact, if you wish, chairpersons and discussants could even endeavor a sort of dialogue as an opening up of the discussion.

What I want to emphasize is: The chairpersons by no means are less significant within the discussion than are the commentators. Technically, the first see to the maintaining of the temporal framework within the panels, while the latter's task is the bundling of the panel contributions into a set of questions and reflections. Yet, both are equally asked to see themselves as *the* experts of comparative research and social history within their panel and, accordingly, to essentially contribute to explore the potentials of a European history that takes up the challenge to include Southeastern Europe.

Please let me know if you have any questions or doubts about these suggestions.

Thank you and best regards,

Sabine Rutar