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Tomasz Blusiewicz, Research Statement

My dissertation, *Return of the Hanseatic League: how the Baltic Sea Trade Washed Away the Iron Curtain, 1956-1991*, develops a comparative perspective on the Baltic region, from Hamburg in the West to Leningrad in the East. The project's transnational approach highlights the role played by medieval Hanseatic port cities such as Rostock (GDR), Szczecin and Gdańsk (Poland), Kaliningrad, Klaipeda, Riga, and Tallinn (USSR), as 'windows to the world' that helped the communist-controlled Europe to maintain contact with the West. The main innovation rests on linking particular developments in East Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union to global processes such as the post-Bretton Woods capital and trade flow liberalization or the financial repercussions of the 1973 oil shock. The project's comparative analysis highlights how the three states diverged in their responses to the changing global environment, introducing further diversity behind the Soviet Bloc's monolithic façade. This approach also emphasizes the significance and uniqueness of Baltic port cities, where global trends arrived faster and were more pronounced. This characteristic helped them to serve as inlets channeling what historians have identified as "the shock of the global 1970s" into the region. On the western side, I pay special attention to Hamburg as a foreign trade hub that projected its commercial dynamism eastwards and as a Cold War intelligence headquarters. My research has generated new insights on the ways in which "really existing socialism" diverged from the Marxist-Leninist blueprint and how it eventually metamorphosed into a laissez-faire market experiment of the 1990s. The originality of my approach has been made possible thanks to access to recently declassified materials produced by the communist secret police and intelligence agencies, including thousands of unseen pages of KGB records in the Lithuanian Special Archives in Vilnius, Stasi files from the German BStU, or reports written by the heads of the Soviet *Pribaltika* customs administration at the RGAE in Moscow. My work offers a radically new interpretation of the origins of the Solidarity movement in Poland and transcends the still nationally entrenched narratives of 1989. Ultimately, it sheds new light on the dynamics behind the eventual collapse of the Comecon trade system, the Soviet Bloc, and the Soviet Union itself.

In 1980, Lech Wałęsa signed the August Accords in Gdańsk's Lenin Shipyard, an act that has come to symbolize the beginning of the end of the Soviet Empire. *Solidarność* has been given an abundance of attention, but the specific setting of the revolutionary moment of 1980 has received no sustained study. The

Baltic port cities of Gdańsk and Szczecin played a pioneering role as the cradle of *Solidarność*, granted, but why venture beyond the Polish coastline and implicate the long-dead Hanseatic League, the way I suggest in my cover letter? As I argue in a forthcoming article in *Critical Historical Studies*, the genesis of the ten million strong movement is incomplete without considering its international context. This context begins with Willy Brandt's *Kniefall* in front of the Heroes of the Ghetto Monument in Warsaw several days before the eruption of the December 1970 Protests, which foreshadowed the arrival of *Solidarność* a decade later. Similarly, the postwar trajectories of Gdańsk, Riga, or even Kaliningrad, remain incomprehensible without considering the strength of their ties with, for example, Lübeck or Hamburg, the respective hometowns of chancellors Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. The Hanseatic heritage of those cities lay in ruins in 1945, began to come to life after the end of Stalinism and returned with full force only after international trade and tourism, underpinned by the grand strategies of détente and *Ostpolitik*, penetrated the façade of communist autarchy, widening the cracks in the Iron Curtain. But the deeper impact of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* on ending the Cold War is little known beyond the diplomatic surface. The significance of the billions of Deutsche Marks and thousands of merchant ships that sailed east after 1970 has not been appreciated. Already in 1970, 5.985 Western vessels were serviced by the Polish ports. 2.549 of them hailed from the FRG, with 22.400 German sailors onboard. In 1980, more than 50.000 seamen from West Germany set foot on Polish wharfs. BMWs and machine tools travelled under the decks while Deutsche Marks, audio recorders, cameras, and operative intelligence instructions - hidden in the sailors' pockets. Those journeys need to be studied in order to trace how Poland and the Baltic states moved from being Soviet satellites in 1970 to key cogs in the German export engine today. Speaking metaphorically, it is a story of Hanseatic cities reclaiming their ancient bonds in the Baltic, torn asunder by two world wars and the Great Depression. It also reveals a lesser known mechanism responsible for making Central Europe what it is today - an amended, peaceful, collaborative version of *Mitteleuropa* from a century ago.

One of the most informative works on communist economic history is still Ivan Berend's *Central and Eastern Europe, 1944-1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery*, published twenty years ago. After the likes of Janos Kornai, Alec Nove or Gregory Grossman are no longer active or alive, scholarly interest in the history of centrally planned economies (especially those outside of the Soviet Union proper) has essentially ceased. Barry Eichengreen's *European Economy after 1945* has provided a synthesis of our knowledge that satisfies most economic historians: centrally planned economies perished because they failed to switch from expansive to intensive growth during the transition from Stalinist autarchy to world market competition. This thesis holds great explanatory power. The theoretical concepts such as shortage economy or producers' market reflect reality accurately, but more in-depth research is required to nuance the story with (some of) the archives finally open. What needs to be further studied is the so-called parallel economy and especially the so-called

'dollarization' of numerous aspects of social relations, a process in which port cities played a central role. My comparative research on the entire stretch of the Baltic Coast from Hamburg (Kiel Canal) to Leningrad demonstrates that a monolithic (and often normative) view of the Soviet Bloc economies sometimes hides more than it explains. Due to geopolitical shifts after WWII, many of those forgotten, provincial Hanseatic ports assumed a new and special role. Rostock became the only *Überseehafen* of the "tenth-industrial world power" - the GDR, not unlike Shanghai or Hong Kong, scale adjusted. On the other side of the spectrum: Königsberg, a time-honored academic and commercial hub, turned into one of the most militarized, insulated places on the globe. But the undercurrents of underground economy based on maritime trade, legal and illegal, had eventually found their way into Kaliningrad as well, not in the least because they were reflective of the distorted incentive structure ubiquitously prevalent in the entire communist world. Incidentally, it is far from accidental that the postwar maritime history of Kaliningrad must be taken into account to explain the special role that the Oblast plays in helping Russia to bypass the post-Crimea sanctions today.

The politically transformative and morally uplifting message of *Solidarność* and the reverberations it generated throughout the Cold War world cannot be appreciated without studying the new economic structure of Central and Eastern Europe as it emerged after 1945. With the former German industrial powerhouses of Upper and Lower Silesia now in Polish hands and with an overwhelming majority of exports, including from the landlocked Czechoslovakia and Hungary, entering the global market through Gdańsk and Szczecin, the strike in the Lenin Shipyard (August 1980) struck at the heart of the Comecon system and threatened to paralyze it. Silesia and the five hundred kilometers of the Baltic coast that Poland now held transformed this hitherto largely agricultural country into an industrial one with maritime ambitions. While strikes in Gdańsk and Szczecin could put entire industries of Eastern Europe into a standstill and effectively block the inflow of convertible currencies so desperately craved by the regimes, few things were so disruptive to the stasis of command economies as trade and in particular: underground, non-state controlled trade right on the fault line between East and West. As the shock waves of the global 1970s reached the Soviet Bloc, which by then had become increasingly dependent on dissent-mollifying imports, port cities of the Baltic turned into *entrepôts* for all kinds of contraband operations denominated in the so-called 'hard' currencies, leading to a quick and gaping social stratification in a hitherto universally pauperized society. While workers in the Gdansk shipyard toiled for a meager state salary in the unconvertible Polish zlotys, the dollar or deutschemark revenue of those who sailed the ships the workers had built to any Western port - if they gave same forethought to arranging the illicit operations - made more profit than the workers in years. The new fortunes of those benefitting from the underground maritime sector were not to remain covert. The conspicuous consumption of the black-market kings was meant to be seen. The relationship between wealth and cooperation with the secret police was not

meant to be seen, but had eventually become even more self-evident than the sometimes-indeterminate origins of wealth. This stratification dynamic in port cities has to be examined to understand why *Solidarność* was born in the Baltic shipyards, but also why its egalitarian message reverberated so strongly in a country where the egalitarian promise was the only remaining appeal of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. In accordance with Stephen Kotkin's perspective, I argue that it is necessary to study both civil *and* uncivil societies (the nomenklatura) to understand both communism's collapse *and* the afterlife of its security apparatus. My research in the secret police archives of East Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union allows for a new insight on how it came to be that the Stasi had vanished from public life altogether while the KGB's Leningrad branch has installed its own president.

Stalin's decision to deport millions of people who had already experienced Soviet social engineering first-hand after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was put into effect in September 1939 to such vital nodes of the emerging Comecon system as Silesia or the Baltic ports demonstrates that the *Generalissimus* was not always the Machiavellian realpolitik genius that many in the West (not to mention contemporary Russia) hold him to be. This paradox can perhaps be explained by the fact that Stalin was used to the desolate expanses of the Siberian taiga or the Central Asian steppe swallowing up entire peoples deported on his orders. The uprooted inhabitants of Vilnius and Lvov, now residing in or nearby Gdańsk and Szczecin, were indeed effectively terrorized and forcibly collectivized into state farms and factories. But their sons and daughters, who grew up imbued with the stories of expulsion and injustice, were not to be intimidated. They constituted the core group behind *Solidarność* and held it together after the Martial Law of 1981, right until the first semi-democratic elections of 1989, when *Solidarność* took all but one of the contested seats in the parliament.

This reflection brings me to the second manuscript I would like to publish after the *Return of the Hanseatic League*... is ready. Its title will be: *Stalin's Gamble that Failed: How Moving Poland West Led to the End of the Soviet Empire*. As the title betrays, the main argument will be that Stalin's insistence on expanding Moscow's sphere of influence as far west as possible was a classic case of imperial overextension, a miscalculation that began to backfire particularly badly in the Polish Recovered Lands after 1970. This book idea has been inspired by, among others, *Der Lange Weg nach Westen* by Heinrich Ulrich Winkler. I see a need for an analogous publication to address a few alarming trends such as the ever-louder voices questioning the sense of European integration, now allegedly kidnapped by German hegemonic inclinations, or the Polish nostalgic longings for the paradise lost in the east, rekindled by Russian 'cultural diplomacy' after the Euromaidan. In other words, I am convinced that Poland should once and for all come to terms with the

territorial outcomes of World War II. Those outcomes - I intend to demonstrate - have ultimately turned out for the better, in the grand geopolitical scheme of things.

The brave new future of the Polish Recovered Lands was supposed to be entirely different. Ethnically cleansing and taking over the core areas of Prussian militarism, 'Junker relicts of feudalism' and Nazi electoral bastions was perhaps the only idea unifying the entire Polish nation in 1945. Many of the bureaucrats and planners who got involved in the historic-patriotic project of making the Recovered Lands a part of Poland 'again' believed that this area provided the perfect experimental arena for socialism to showcase its transformative potential. They wanted to present the world with what scientific planning and centralized execution could achieve when no obstructive relics of feudal and bourgeois past were in place to hinder the progress. It was possible because those areas had undergone a complete eradication of their pre-revolutionary, pre-existing conditions within several months. Yet the destruction that the westward moving front brought in 1944 and 1945 was merely a prelude to what happened next: deportation, expropriation, nationalization, dekulakization, collectivization and other mass operations that were all part and parcel of the Stalinist social engineering package.

Those dramatic events have naturally attracted historians' attention. However, there are merely a few English-language publications exploring the fate of the Recovered Lands beyond 1956, the year when the worst excesses of Stalinism came to an end. The several volumes that have appeared focus mostly on capturing the ethnic cleansings, population transfers and other major dislocations of 'Europe on the Move' *in situ*. However, as a Polish economist remarked in a conversation with John Kenneth Galbraith in 1956, Stalinism was still "the terrible past which may well lie before us". Stalinism was over in 1956, but those who survived it remained. They made their voices heard in 1956, 1970 and then, even more forcefully, in 1980. Without a detailed study of the Recovered Lands after 1956, our understanding of how the Soviet Empire collapsed and how the Polish-German rapprochement became possible will remain incomplete. For political reasons, Polish historiography still largely follows the (communist) party line which held that the Recovered Lands had been fully integrated with the rest of the country by 1948 and that studying them as a 'distinct' region is illegitimate, which is false and has to be corrected. German historiography focuses predominantly on the *Vertreibung* experience, politics of memory as well as on the German guilt and responsibility. It tends to shun critical analysis of Polish postwar history altogether, similarly due to delicate political reasons, branding any study paying positive attention to German postwar influence in Eastern Europe as 'crypto-revanchist' or otherwise suspect. As a native of Poland, I can avoid this self-imposed censorship unscathed.

My third book will take on a different direction. Relying on hitherto unseen personal testimonies, letters, and interviews, successively gathered by several generations of my family over decades, I would like to write the flip-side of the history that has been covered by Christopher Browning in his *Ordinary Men* from the occupier's vantage point. The spotlight will be cast on the reactions of the local communities to the establishment of ghettos and deportations of 1939-1942. Most of the materials pertain to the city known as Brześć nad Bugiem before the war. The city was located at the very heart of what Timothy Snyder defined as 'the double zone of occupation'. It witnessed the one and only joint Nazi-Soviet victory parade in September 1939. Brześć also happened to be the hometown of numerous future leaders of Israel, including Menachem Begin. Relying on this uncurated source base might seem adventurous, but I am convinced it is a risk worth taking. I have already surveyed all the materials while working as a research assistant for Bernard Wasserstein's book *On the Eve*: *the Jews of Europe before the Second World War*.

In sum: all three projects: *Return of the Hanseatic League*, *Stalin's Gamble that Failed* and this one, require little extra archival research while promising original contributions. I would like to use the time and resources offered by the Harvard Academy Scholars Program to continue working on the three manuscripts. My aim is to have all of them ready for publication within three years. More generally, I would like to combine my rare set of skills with the institutional support of the North American academe to form a scholarly basis from which I could establish my authority as a public historian. I would like to deploy that position to contribute to three interrelated agendas 1) Poland's "long way West", from which it has recently deflected; 2) the incomplete and fragile European integration in the Baltic; 3) the ongoing Polish-Jewish conversation. This plan will also work in the reverse direction. It will allow me to serve, for North American audiences, as a mediator conveying the complex history and vulnerability of the region that has witnessed a recent revival of attention, but not necessarily knowledge. This applies particularly to the Kaliningrad exclave, where I have already accumulated expertise and institutional connections at the Immanuel Kant Baltic University. While this place is already becoming a barometer measuring the condition of East-West relations, it could easily turn into a replay of 1939 and suffer the fate of the Free City of Danzig, if current political trends are to continue. I hope my future endeavors will contribute to deescalating the mounting tensions in the region. In North America, I would like to contribute to strengthening the political will to foster the transatlantic partnership in the Baltic. Furthermore, I believe that the wealthiest democracy in Europe, Germany, should do more to support, within the framework of transatlantic partnership, its historic eastern periphery and neighbors, now threatened by a revival of xenophobic, aggressive authoritarianism unseen in the region since the worst moments of the twentieth century. As my article on Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and his Warsaw *Kniefall* demonstrates, I am convinced that it was that gesture of simultaneous reconciliation with both Germany's

eastern neighbor and the Jewish nation that constituted a key turning point in postwar European history, without which 1989 and the EU in its current form would not have been conceivable. I believe historians should do more to keep the spirit of that policy of rapprochement alive, particularly in the age of reemerging nationalism.

One might accuse me of scheming to use history instrumentally in order to influence contemporary political agenda. I would be honored to hear such a charge. I do not believe there is a necessary connection between "using" history and manipulating the past. My dedication to a combination of scholarship and public mission is already evidenced, for example, by the encyclopedia article on the Eastern European Studies and the literature survey published in *Przegląd Historyczny*, a leading Polish academic history journal. I am currently actively engaged in supporting the growing opposition to the Law and Justice government, which, in my eyes, represents everything that is still wrong with Poland today. I believe that simultaneous dedication to scholarship and public engagement on both sides of the Atlantic are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I believe they are mutually reinforcing. My seriousness about fostering the transatlantic dialogue is also exemplified by my cooperation with Prof. Robert Kuśnierz of the Słupsk Pomeranian Academy. Together, we have won a Polish Ministry of Education grant (in 2014) to translate his award-wining book entitled *W Świecie Stalinowskich Zbrodni*, which tells the story of the Ukrainian Holodomor (whether I will embark on this project is something I do not have to think about until after I defend my dissertation).

If I had to identify myself with a few words, it would be: a transnational and comparative historian of the region defined by the Hanseatic legacy, with emphasis on the history of capitalism in the Baltic. This label encapsulates the core motivations and intellectual foundations of my work. They include a belief in the fundamental importance of free trade and market economics, in international cooperation, exchange of goods and ideas as well as in strong institutions founded on transparent business ethics. I also believe that it is essential, both in North America and in Europe, to formulate an effective foreign policy strategy that incorporates those maxims. It should be deployed more effectively (than it is now) to contain, approach and liberalize authoritarian regimes. My goal as a scholar is to use all the skills and knowledge at hand to demonstrate yet again that cooperation, exchange and free flow of goods and ideas is always better than confrontation, insulation and sanctions. If we do not use our unique kind of expertise to advise the public to make choices we consider wiser, I do not see much sense in being a historian.