

Unified Military Industries of the Soviet Bloc: Hungary and the Division of Labor in Military Production. By Pál Germuska. Lanham: Lexington, 2015. 328 pp.

With his *Unified Military Industries of the Soviet Bloc*, Hungarian historian Pál Germuska has made an important contribution to the historiography of Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Subtitled *Hungary and the Division of Labor in Military Production*, the monograph examines the workings of economic and military cooperation within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the Warsaw Pact (WP) from the perspective of a smaller Eastern European country. Germuska rightly stresses that the “majority of works dealing with the military industry of the Soviet Union do not even mention other Warsaw Pact-COMECON member states” (p.xiii). Treating Hungary’s integration into both organizations from the angle of the military industry, Germuska has identified an intriguing and long overdue inroad into both organizations. He thus successfully addresses a significant hiatus in the “post-second World War history of Hungary’s national economy,” which “cannot be analyzed or understood without considering the international power dynamics and foreign economic relations that prevailed” (p.xii).

Germuska’s perspective allows him to address a number of issues, which are crucial to an understanding of Cold War Eastern Europe, such as military and economic integration, specialization, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the other WP/COMECON countries, and the increasing scope for maneuver of smaller WP/COMECON members. These are all important themes, which deserved further attention in scholarship. Hungary is an excellent starting-point for a new assessment of the dynamics of the COMECON and the WP, because it was very (pro-)active in both organizations. Tracing the Hungarian role in the division of labor in military production from the foundation of the COMECON in 1949 to the collapse of both the COMECON and the WP in 1991, Germuska paints a compelling picture not only of the manifold initiatives of the country but also of its growing assertiveness.

In six chronological chapters, Germuska charts the development of Eastern European economic and military cooperation from a Hungarian perspective. The important topics addressed include the restructuring of the COMECON in the early 1950s, the foundation of COMECON’s Military Industrial Standing Commission and its incipient specialization from 1955 to 1963, the organizational

reforms and burgeoning dissent in the WP in the 1960s, and the surfacing conflicts of interest in the 1970s. Although the main developments in the 1980s are treated in less detail due to a scarcity of available archival sources, Germuska still succeeds in explaining how “[t]he international political tension and economic difficulties of the early 1980s served to heighten the interdependence of COMECON countries” and enhance “conflicts of interests between the energy-exporting Soviet Union and energy-importing member states” (p.237).

Germuska is very sensitive to the conflicts and different interests of the countries participating in both organizations, which, according to him, grew in intensity in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite its relative brevity, the chapter dealing with the 1980s proves particularly fascinating. It shows simultaneously how Gorbachev had “begun to declare privately that the program of socialist integration was dead,” while the Soviet Union publicly “advocated the notion, obviously inspired by the economic integration in Western Europe, of establishing a common COMECON market” (245–47). In the meantime, Hungary was the strongest critic of this idea, “espousing the introduction of an open market-economy” instead (p.247). Meanwhile, the process of integration into Western European institutions ultimately seemed the more alluring objective to the former Soviet satellites after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This Westward turn of the Eastern European members sealed the fate of both the COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in June and July 1991.

The book prioritizes an analysis of foreign economic relations over the international power dynamics. With meticulous research drawing on materials found in a wide range of mostly Hungarian archives (from which he quotes extensively), Germuska unveils an enormous amount of information about other Warsaw Pact countries, too. Moreover, the wide time-span from 1949 to 1991 enables him to trace the evolution of both organizations, while offering the reader an overview of the development of Eastern European cooperation in the Cold War from a novel perspective. The broad time sweep combined with the meticulous research guarantees a detailed treatment of the topics at stake, but it also requires a lot of background knowledge from the reader.

Germuska convincingly analyzes the interplay between the COMECON and the Warsaw Pact. This is a very thought-provoking issue on which little research has been done. It reveals parallel developments in the two organizations and also instances of miscommunication between them. With the Warsaw Pact as the military engine, most topics related to the military industry were, in fact, discussed within the COMECON, which therefore takes center-stage in this

book. Germuska even claims that “cooperation in the area of military industry [...] perhaps constitute[d] the most effective facet of the organization’s activity” (p.269). This is, in itself, a very interesting observation, since the COMECON has hardly ever been treated from a military perspective before.

This book offers more than a portrait of Hungary’s role in the Soviet bloc’s military industrial complex. By charting Hungary’s position within the Soviet bloc’s military industries, Germuska defies the conventional image of the COMECON and the WP as Soviet monoliths, which solely existed to further Soviet interests. On the contrary, from the 1960s onwards, both organizations became steadily more multilateral, and Hungary took an increasingly pro-active role in them within this broader context. The book thus shows not only that there was an extent of Eastern European integration, something which has often been questioned or simply ignored, but also that the history of Eastern European integration was much more complex and multi-layered than has usually been claimed. Germuska accordingly does not fall into the trap of adopting a teleological approach, which would falsely assume that both organizations were doomed to fail.

Germuska’s book therefore tallies with a recent trend in New Cold War History, which revises the role of Eastern European countries in international organizations, while deemphasizing the role of the Soviet Union. He may still conclude that despite “signs of hegemonic cooperation based on mutual interests [...] the imperial outlook remained predominant all the way until 1989–90” (p.287), but his monograph nevertheless successfully shows that neither the COMECON nor the Warsaw Pact were mere monoliths, and their histories were much more complex and intriguing.

Germuska does an admirable job showing that cooperation within the military industry was an important driving force in the development of the Soviet bloc’s economic integration. His sophisticated treatment of the new archival sources allows for a nuanced approach to and a subtle analysis of Eastern European cooperation. Simultaneously shedding new light on Hungary’s national economy and on Eastern European cooperation during the Cold War, it is a must-read for those who wish to understand the post-World War II history of Eastern Europe in its full complexity.

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