
THE RISE AND FALL OF NATIONALISM STUDIES

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What the demise of a small department in an embattled university says about the future of Europe and the world.

In early 2022, just days after Russia invaded Ukraine, around two dozen students in the nationalism studies program at Central European University gathered in a classroom on the top floor of its glassy, modernist main building in Vienna. I was one of them.

The news of Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine felt urgent and close by. As we quietly nibbled sandwiches and sat in a circle of chairs facing the center of the room, a small group of professors went around the room, asking one student after another, particularly those from Ukraine and Russia, how they were reacting to the invasion. Ukraine had spent three decades creating a nation out of what had previously been one province in a vast superpower. Now Russia, the remaining heart of the former Soviet Union, seemed to be trying to rebuild the empire at the core of its own nationalist narrative by clawing it back with military force.

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