REVIEWS

UDC 327:341.222]:111
DOI: 10.5937/spm98-66334
Book review

Српска политичка мисао
(Serbian Political Thought)
No 4/2026.
Vol. 98
pp. 193-197

Srđan Milašinović*
Matica srpska, Novi Sad

BORDER AND THE POWER OF PRESERVING IDENTITY IN AN AGE OF CHANGE

Simeunović, Dragan. 2025. *Granica i identitet: fenomen granica: identiteti i granice.* Novi Sad: Prometej: Centar za kulturne integracije. pp. 67.

The distinguished political scientist and academician Dragan Simeunović has, these days, presented us with a new work: *Border and Identity*, showing how, for outstanding creators and humanists, years pose no obstacle whatsoever. A full professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences and the Faculty of Law of the University of Belgrade, emeritus, member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of the Republic of Srpska, and the American Academy of Political and Social Science, secretary of the Committee for Philosophy and Social Theory of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as the holder of numerous other academic and social functions, he has dedicated his 28th book to a topic that has never been more "heated" and actual. In an age of unpredictable global geopolitical changes and turbulent international relations,

* E-mail: srdjan.milasinovic@kpu.edu.rs; ORCID 0000-0002-8251-339X

he has offered an academically mature, theoretically strong, and methodologically simple interpretation of essential political phenomena: borders and identity.

Already from the striking foreword by Professor Darko Tanasković, we see that this is a fundamental work that, alongside a foundational analysis of society, reveals a wealth of scientifically grounded reflections on the concept and meaning of borders in a world of Huntingtonian rifts among states and conflicts that herald wars of religion and culture. Borders and demarcations, identity and alterity, violent emergence and unlawful drawing are only part of the social migrations and divisions that daily reshape the planet's geopolitical mosaic, along with the new redrawing of borders and their permanent revisions. Emphasising the intellectual dispersion and synthetic method of Professor Simeunović, he points in the foreword to the opened epistemological gates that further explain the border mentality and the changes occurring in parallel with the planet's geopolitical turbulences.

A contemporary essay on borders and identities gradually shifts our perceptions of these concepts. By combining a readable, simple, and universally understandable style, the author unfolds a series of dilemmas aimed at determining the significance of space, always in relation to freedom, which may also be symbolic. Drawing on Arthur Schopenhauer's interpretation of "the limits of our vision as the limits we consider the limits of the world," Simeunović delves into more conceptually demanding and complex interpretations of the line that conceals and reveals the space of the state. This "is not and can never be just a thin imagined line," the academician concludes excellently, conducting a dialogical discussion with Tibor Varady, who, a decade ago, wrote that "law too has its boundaries." The border is formally a permanent but in practice highly movable line, Simeunović notes, recognising in this fact numerous conflicts shaking the planet. The fact that actors in conflicts do not acknowledge the shifting of lines does not mean that political reality will not take them into account.

A border is generally established to separate differences, but as Martin Heidegger says, it is not merely the place "where something ceases." At the same time, it is the space where that Something begins, so the border represents an end for some, but also a beginning for

others. Philosophically lyrical, aesthetically refined, semantically rich, Professor Simeunović synthesises interspatial events in the fields of politics, culture, and conflictology, striving to weave – by an invisible hand – the interdependence of centre and periphery, especially as reflected in the environment around borders. He does all this by depicting the potential drama among individuals and collectives who, existing in this environment, seek economic ways to shape their own lives in an insecure community. "Uncertainty is that factor which, even when unacknowledged, discourages any culture of saving. The life of border guards created bećari (or bekjari) – military volunteers who spend their pay for power because they do not know whether they will still be alive tomorrow or soon... The turbulent life of the border guard is compensation for his material insecurity and the possibility of a short life. The emanation of their violence is an advance payment for the violence that will sooner or later be experienced" (Simeunović 2025, 21).

The world is in turmoil; constant tensions and fears are increasing daily, so, logically, the individual becomes a product of their spiritual environment, as Slobodan Jovanović observed long before us. Every destabilisation of a border is a potential crisis for society, Simeunović concludes excellently, because phenomenologically it represents a space "unsupported by the element of permanent security." In lay perception, borders are always understood "as something dangerous, unpleasant, and insecure, so everyone strives to cross them as soon as possible" (Simeunović 2025, 26). Therefore, here blood is the only currency to which all bow, bringing back onto the stage an anti-Freudian readiness for bloodshed, where it should be "those across the border." The author conceptually immerses himself in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's rapture of sacrifice, which, in practice among these people, creates a cult of death, accompanied by an epic fascination with the act of sacrifice. Hence, also the problem of identity, its fragmentation or loss, due to which the One must be distinguished from the Other.

Love for one's people and state is particularly visible at borders, because emotions resonate more strongly there than in other spaces. Academician Simeunović possesses a measure by which he reduces heavy and mostly well-known definitions to light, understandable observations

that point to potential political dimensions. At first glance, this seems easy, but it is clear that behind it lies a rich encyclopedic education that gives every reader the impression of personal address and conversation. Similar to Eric Hobsbawm, he lucidly connects the phenomena and processes he points to with history and culture, understanding that without them – and religion – there is no national identity. "The memory of shared suffering and joy is the cement of an ethnos," Simeunović aptly concludes, noting how warriors remain in collective memory for a long time, but not in the same way as the devotees of the Spirit. "Research, for example, shows that today's Serbs take more pride in Nikola Tesla and Novak Đoković than in Miloš Obilić. This indicates that times of peace produce one kind of ethnic identification and role models, while times of war produce quite another" (Simeunović 2025, 35).

The problem of conflict lies in the fact that there is not enough love for everyone, which means that every love for "ours" also implies a lack of love for others. The merging of diverse ethnic groups through long coexistence led to the formation of nation-states, especially through shared experiences in wars and crises. Professor Simeunović is an excellent connoisseur of political theory, but also a guardian of secrets that could reveal much "excess of History" from more recent confrontations. When he speaks about the specific identity of the border, we must trust him, as the French sociologist Maurice Duverger argues: "The border deepens our tastes and makes them more refined" through constant comparisons with Others. Although such identity is complex and multivalent, we strive to integrate it into the complex whole of social relations, discovering and accepting everything good in the Other. Therefore, the border does not reduce horizons but opens them, reducing the innate fear of incidents that are always realistically possible. Love for all who inhabit the same territory is one of the solutions toward which politics should strive, because closing oneself within the Self and One's Own may increase security, but diminishes love toward Others.

Although modest in volume, this monograph will mean a great deal to the domestic academic community, especially to researchers of geopolitical processes, security and conflict studies, anthropologists, philosophers, gender studies researchers, and ordinary

citizens eager for simple, useful knowledge. The publishing house "Prometej" and the City of Novi Sad have ensured that the study is printed in English, making its benefits available to a global audience.

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* This manuscript was submitted on April 7, 2026, and accepted by the Editorial Board for online publication and published *online first* on June 5, 2026. It was accepted by the Editorial Board for publishing on August 10, 2026.