Acknowledgments

This book is the result of different scholarly inputs that I have elaborated over the years. I started working on the topic of nationalism and borders in Europe on the eve of the Wars of Yugoslav Succession. While killing continued in the Balkans, I first discussed the topic at the Kotor Summer School in Montenegro and later, for almost two decades, during the intensive talks I had at the CEI International Summer School of Cervia (Italy). These events offered me frequent opportunities to explore research hypotheses, examine in-depth the content of stimulating essays of other colleagues, and exchange views and prospective scenarios with a wide number of international scholars. Among those, I am glad to remember here J.J. du Toit, Henry Huttenbach, Dušan Janjić, Anna Krasteva, Sir Michael Leigh, Joseph Marko, Julie Mostov, Francesco Privitera, Rudi Rizman, George Schöpflin, Susan Woodward and Mitja Žagar.

These people’s insightful remarks and suggestions became of greater importance for my further studies when I approached, with a comparative and interdisciplinary methodology, the notion of state partition together with Sanjay Chaturvedy, Rada Iveković and Ranabir Samaddar. Our intensive teamwork, supported by the Columbia University Institute for Scholars at Reid Hall and La Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris, resulted in a book specifically focused on the partition phenomenon, seen through the different lenses of philosophy, political history, geopolitics, peace and gender studies. This joint research was an unforgettable and extraordinary experience, both human and academic, which encouraged me to expand my research to the nature of the nation-state, its diachronical evolution, the nexus with democratic developments, and the role of diversity in modern and post-modern societies.

My research, conducted in Paris, New York, Warsaw, Belgrade, St Petersburg, Kazan and Kaunas enriched my knowledge with a multi-layered understanding that I gained from the thoughts and the visions of a number of colleagues I had the opportunity to meet regularly and debate with. In particular, I am grateful for the inspiration I received from Egidijus Aleksandravicius, Sara Barbieri, Albert Bininashvili, Jean Blondel, Ineta Dabašinskienė, Luigi Vittorio Ferraris, Marcello Garzaniti, James Gow, Zdravko Grebo, Igor Gretskiy, Damir Grubiša, Tvrtko Jakovina, Dejan
Jović, David Kanin, Konstantin Khudoley, Remzi Lani, Jan Malicki, Mikhail Minakov, Asim Mujkić, Lászlo Nyusztay, Daniele Petrosino, Sabrina Ramet, Mykola Riabchuk, Vasil Sakaev, Stephanie Schwandners-Sievers, David Solomons, Stanislav Tkachenko, Maria Todorova and Oleg Zaznaev.

A special tribute is due to the memory of two great friends, Livia Plaks (1947–2013) and Leonidas Donskis (1962–2016). With Livia I had an intensive period of cooperation when she was actively leading, with Allen Kassof and later alone, the “Project of Ethnic Relations”, an NGO based in Princeton but incredibly dynamic in the Balkans. Their ability to promote dialogue in very difficult contexts was unique, playing an insightful role at the turn of the millennium in the region. Our joint work on a number of occasions, and particularly regarding a highly demanding Kosovar–Serbian dialogue that we succeeded in promoting in Belgrade with Fehmi Agani and a young Ivica Dačić, offered to my theoretical studies an incomparably important and substantial dimension. On the other hand, on many occasions in Brussels when he was a member of the European Parliament or in Bologna and Kaunas where he used to teach, Leonidas Donskis generously gave me his wise reflections on history and politics, and valuable guidance in interpreting the changes in political cultures in the Baltic and Russian area, widening my horizons from sociology to classic literature, before he unexpectedly passed away, still too young and full of projects.

Furthermore, this book owes a lot to the passionate dialogue I have had (and still have) with my motivated and demanding students from both the international MA programs I have taught since 2001, the two-year joint diploma MIREES (MA in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe) based in Bologna, Kaunas, St Petersburg and Budapest, as well as the MA double degree program ERMA of Sarajevo and Bologna, centered on Human Rights and Democracy in South-East Europe. With their relentless curiosity and thirst for knowledge, they helped me immensely to frame my research on nationalism, diversity and state partitions in a prospective book.

On the other hand, as I had the opportunity to see when I was working in Paris at Reid Hall, the topic of state partition meets, in particular, the sensitivity of Indian scholars. Therefore, years later, once again Indian scholars, this time from the United Kingdom, invited me to participate in a stimulating research network on “Partitions: what are they good for?”. Thanks, therefore, to Radhika Mohanram and Anindya Raychaudhuri, who are leading the network, for enabling me to continue my research, highlighting the most recent, post-modern developments of these phenomena and their nexus with democracy.
As the partition perspective soon became a hot issue of the current political debate in Europe, not only because of the events in the Caucasus and Ukraine, but also within the EU because of the Scottish referendum, the contested demand for independence in Catalonia, and Brexit (which was at that time still a potential event), the topic also gained a new academic importance.

Still, the research activity that has generated this book, the subsequent collection of important sources and their analytical scrutiny, together with the methodological support of contextual interpretations and empirical fieldwork throughout Europe, would never have been possible without the generous support of ISES, the Institute for Social and European Studies, directed by Ferenc Miszlivetz. It was thanks to the senior scholarships that ISES offered in 2014–15 that I had the opportunity to carry out my project and discuss the intermediate steps and, then, my conclusions with a stimulating team of prominent scholars, among them Stuart Holland, Jody Jensen, Róbert Manchin, Tibor Palánkai, James Skelly, Christopher Walsch, and, of course, Ferenc Miszlivetz. This happened frequently in Köszeg, a beautiful and well restructured university campus of the Pannonia University, where a new higher research institution, called iASK (Institute of Advanced Studies Köszeg) is flourishing.

It was thanks to all these contributions and their enlightenment that I could expand my understanding of the plurality of angles and perceptions which determine both the diachronic and synchronic evolution over the years of the notions (and their substantial implementation) of nation-state building, self-determination, identity processes, democracy and diversity.

Finally, a special debt of gratitude is owed to a great friend and a stimulating scholar, Francine Friedman, who followed all of my research developments in the panels in which we participated together in New York City at the ASN conventions, in Sarajevo or at the ASEEES conventions in the US. She tirelessly and patiently edited my English and I am sincerely obliged to her for the titanic job she did. Robert Craig Nation, another great friend and prominent scholar with whom I shared many research projects, carried out a second valuable reading of the text, adding beneficial suggestions for which I am particularly grateful.

It is necessary to say, however, that the responsibility for the content of the book is mine alone.