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CENTRAL, EASTERN AND EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE: ON THE HISTORY AND THE CURRENT STATE OF CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DEMARCATION OF CONCEPTS

ABSTRACT The article is devoted to a historical overview and discussion of the current understanding and demarcation of the concepts “Central Europe”, “Eastern Europe” and “Central Eastern Europe”. The analysis is performed from a descriptive and comparative point of view, including a step-by-step generalization and separation of the above concepts and the verification of how natural, artificial or instrumental their character is, as well as by analysing their contrastive properties. In conclusion, the author has argued that the integration / disintegration and democratization / autocratization processes in the countries that used to be or now constitute different sub-regions of Europe during the 20th and 21st centuries have led to significant and highly ambiguous changes in the spectrum of political, socio-economic, religious, cultural (national and supranational) processes, etc. As a result, various attributes of political, socio-economic and cultural development, in particular their diversity from the perspective of certain European sub-regions (which are often, though mistakenly, treated as a collective category of countries of “commensurable type”), have previously predetermined and today especially predetermine the need for analysis of the history and the current state of conceptualization and demarcation of the outlined concepts.

Key words: Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, East Central Europe, sub-region

The changes that have occurred in the 20th and early 21st centuries were marked by a number of perturbations in the political, socio-economic, cultural and religious life of the countries that are often said to be situated in Central, Eastern or East Central Europe. The most crucial of them are: the First and the Second World Wars; the formation and, eventually, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and, consequently, the end of an “era” of the model of socialist development, which after the *October Revolution* of 1917 and the First World War (or in some countries – either before or during or after the Second World War) and by the end of the 1980s – early 1990s influenced to varying degrees the socio-political and socio-economic processes; permanent and recurrent transformation during the 20th and 21st centuries of the political and socioeconomic structures of countries that are often related to Central, Eastern or East Central Europe; integration or disintegration processes, as a result of which different countries of the mentioned sub-regions expand and deepen, or quite the opposite, lose, their significance and self-sufficiency. Moreover, in recent years and decades, this has mainly occurred in parallel with the transition from communist to capitalist society, from autocratic to democratic regimes. Thus, the integration, disintegration and democratization processes have led to changes in a wide range of internal political attributes: the formation of postmaterial socio-political divisions and the restoration of the variability of material ones; the establishment of more effective and institutionalized party and electoral systems; the construction of harmonious mechanisms for the implementation of the rules of constitutional engineering; the proper development of political identity and legal culture; the implementation of the ideas and principles of effective governance through the integrated development of such major political institutions as the head of state, the government, the court system, the parliament and parliamentarism, etc. Nevertheless, democratization processes are quite often and even permanently replaced by autocratic ones, resulting in a loss of integrity in understanding the trends in the development of political events and practices, institutions and processes that are characteristic of some countries, which are often related to Central, Eastern or East Central Europe. Consequently, the processes of integration and disintegration, as well as democratization and autocratization in the countries that make up various sub-regions of Europe, have led in the 20th and 21st centuries to significant and ambiguous changes in the spectrum of political, socio-economic, religious, cultural (national and supranational) processes, etc. As a result, new attributes of political, socio-economic and cultural development, and in particular their diversity from the perspective of certain European sub-regions (which are often, though mistakenly, interpreted as a collective category of countries of “commensurable type”), have previously predetermined and today especially predetermine the need for analysis of the history and the current state of conceptualization and demarcation of the concepts of “Central”, “Eastern”, “East Central Europe”. This is important in view of the fact that the system characteristics of the countries making up the outlined sub-regions previously belonged or still belong to a group of transitional political and socio-economic practices, for which scientific conclusions explaining the specifics of the essence of the sub-regions themselves should be taken into consideration.

The outlined need for the conceptualization and demarcation of the concepts of Central, Eastern and East Central Europe was largely addressed in the intellectual output of such researchers as N. Aleksion and D. Beauvois,¹ S. Berglund, J. Ekman and F. Aarebrot,² M. Waldenberg,³ L. Wolff,⁴ S. Glinkina,⁵ K. Zernack,⁶ Y. Kish,⁷ J. Kłoczowski,⁸ I. Kosciuszko,⁹ J. Krzhen,¹⁰ M. Kundera,¹¹ T. Masaryk,¹² N. Mezhevych,¹³ A. Miller,¹⁴ V. Noskov,¹⁵ S. Romanenko,¹⁶ A. Romaniuk and V. Lytvyn,¹⁷ M. Simon,¹⁸

¹ Н. Алексюн, Д. Бовуа, *История Центрально-Восточной Европы*, Евразия 2009; D. Beauvois, *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, J. Kłoczowski (ed.), transl. by J. Kłoczowski, U. Paprocka, Lublin 2000.

² S. Berglund, J. Ekman, F. Aarebrot, *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, Cheltenham-Northampton 2004.

³ M. Waldenberg, *Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Warszawa 2000.

⁴ L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994; Л. Вульф, *Изобретая Восточную Европу: Карта цивилизации в сознании эпохи Просвещения*, transl. by И. Федюкин, Москва 2003.

⁵ С. Глинкина, "Центрально-Восточная Европа на пути в Евросоюз", *Новая и новейшая история*, vol. 3 (2007).

⁶ K. Zernack, *Polska i Rosja: dwie drogi w dziejach Europy*, Warszawa 2000.

⁷ Є. Кіш, "Центральна Європа: теоретико-методологічні засади концепту", *Науковий вісник Ужгородського університету*, vol. 28 (2012).

⁸ J. Kłoczowski, *Actualité des grandes traditions de la cohabitation et du dialogue des cultures en Europe du Centre-Est*, in J. Kłoczowski, F. Bédarida (eds.), *L'héritage historique de la Res Publica de Plusieurs Nations*, Lublin 2004.

⁹ И. Костюшко, *Восточная Европа после "Версаля"*, Москва 2007.

¹⁰ Я. Кржен, "Центральная Европа в европейском историко-географическом контексте", *Неприкосновенный запас*, vol. 6, no. 56 (2007).

¹¹ М. Кундера, "Трагедія Центральної Європи", *Ї: Незалежний культурологічний часопис*, vol. 6 (1995).

¹² T. Masaryk, *Nova Europa. Stanovisko slovanske*, Praha 1920.

¹³ Н. Межевич, "Восточная европа. К столетнему юбилею политического проекта", *Балтийский регион*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016); Н. Межевич, "Идентичность и граница: некоторые теоретические вопросы и практики в восточной части Балтийского моря", *Балтийский регион*, vol. 3 (2014).

¹⁴ А. Миллер, "Тема Центральной Европы: история, современные дискурсы и место в них России", *Новое литературное обозрение*, vol. 6, no. 52 (2001).

¹⁵ В. Носков, "Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу. К выходу в свет коллективного труда польских и французских историков «История Центрально-Восточной Европы»", *Диалог со временем*, vol. 32 (2010).

¹⁶ С. Романенко, "Межэтнические противоречия, региональное самосознание и политические союзы в южной части Средней Европы в конце XIX — начале XX в.", *Вестник Российского государственного гуманитарного университета*, vol. 7, no. 87 (2012); С. Романенко, "Процесс национального самоопределения народов Средней и Восточной Европы: итоги к концу 20 века", *Migracijske teme. Casopis za istrazivanje migracija i narodnosti*, vol. 10 (1994).

¹⁷ А. Романюк, В. Литвин, *Порівняльний аналіз політичних інститутів країн Вишеградської групи та інших країн Центрально-Східної Європи*, Львів 2016.

¹⁸ М. Симон, "Интеграционные процессы в странах Вишеградской группы: роль концепции Центральной Европы", *Мировая экономика и международные отношения*, vol. 7 (2014).

M. Foucher¹⁹ and many other. However, they still have not pinpointed the essential distinction of the categories of Central, Eastern and East Central Europe, at least as of the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, in this study, emphasis is laid on clarifying the history and the current state of conceptualization and demarcation of the above concepts. Moreover, the analysis is performed from a descriptive and comparative point of view, in particular including a step-by-step generalization and separation of the concepts “Europe”, “Central Europe”, “Eastern Europe” and “East Central Europe”.

WITH REGARD TO THE DEMARCATION OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN BORDER

Based on a whole range of views that directly or indirectly relate to the definition and determination of the concept of Europe, as well as its (this concept's) historical, geographical, geopolitical, cultural, religious, etc., borders it has been established that the distinction between the individual sub-regions of Europe including Central, Eastern or East Central, is rather relative and depends on multiple factors. More specifically, it depends historically and geopolitically on what one considers the eastern border of Europe.²⁰ In this regard, the opinions of the researchers are substantially divergent, since the majority of intellectuals state that the easternmost country of Europe is Russia (or earlier the USSR), while others emphasize that Russia and the USSR cannot be defined as the “Eastern Bastion” of Europe, whether geographically, geopolitically, culturally or religiously. Indeed, M. Kundera, in the essay “An Abduction of Europe”, considers it a substantial mistake to include Russia / the USSR in Europe. Other intellectuals, including T. Masaryk, adhere to a controversial opinion according to which Russia (and formerly the USSR) is what Europe was before, and therefore they constitute the “eastern flank” of the modern interpretation of Europe. On the other hand, representatives of the so-called “Eurasian” school generally believe that Russia is an independent and unique continent that at the same time is and is not the eastern border of Europe. All this indicates that on average the scholarly position on the matter still boils down to the perception of Russia, and formerly the USSR (at least to the Ural Mountains) as the easternmost country of Europe, as well as to the realization that all the territories between Greenwich and Russia should be called “Europe”, understood both as a part of the world and a peculiar continent characterized by a specific civilization and values along with the characteristic and undeniable socio-economic, political and cultural differences, etc. At the same time, as M. Foucher notes, if one compares the opinions of various intellectuals it becomes obvious that Europe is a concept that is open to multiple political interpretations. This means that Europe is not a geographical

¹⁹ М. Фуше, *Европейская республика. Исторические и географические контуры*, Международные отношения 1999.

²⁰ Я. Кржен, “Центральная Европа...”; М. Рябчук, “За огорожем Меттернихового саду”, *І: Незалежний культурологічний часопис*, vol. 13 (1998).

but a political category, a peculiar “historical process that is reflected in the space with a changing geography.”²¹

Therefore, this calls for the regionalization of Europe as an entity, which a priori cannot constitute either a geographical or geopolitical, or cultural and religious monolith. In this context, such a need for regionalization is to a large extent natural and historically justified, since scholars established and determined from the geopolitical point of view how reasonable it is to oppose everything that is more or less commonly considered as the West of Europe to everything that does not variably belong to West²² of Europe, but instead can be defined as its Centre or East. Simultaneously, from that time until the present day, the positioning of the centre and east of Europe or, in other words, Central and Eastern Europe has, for various reasons, undergone multiple changes, which did not overcome, but rather aggravated the problems of regionalization in Europe and placed on the agenda the need for the conceptualization of certain sub-regions in Europe – first of all in Central and Eastern Europe.

CENTRAL EUROPE AS A NATURAL CONCEPT: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The phenomenon and the concept of Central Europe are largely natural and contingent on geographic, political, geopolitical, as well as cultural and religious factors. This sub-region of Europe entered the public discourse shortly after the introduction of the dichotomy of Europe between the West and the non-West. In particular, since 1815, when the term “Central” or “intermediate” (from the French *intermédiaire*) Europe began to be used at the Vienna Congress to mark the territories of present-day Germany and the Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg).²³ At the beginning of the nineteenth century F. List, G. Daniel, K. Franz and F. Ratzel adhered to a similar, but somewhat broader, opinion and admitted that the states in the territory of modern Germany should have moved geopolitically to the centre of Europe and searched for colonies or spheres of influence on easily accessible territories from the Danube to the Black Sea.²⁴ This conceptualization of Central Europe underwent a particular development during the First World War,²⁵ particularly in 1915 when F. Naumann, hoping for the victory of the German Empire and the Triple Alliance (also including Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy), supported the development of a clear plan and concept of this sub-region, as an economic, customs and military alliance in

²¹ М. Фуше, *Европейская республика...*, pp. 34, 112, 134, 137.

²² Л. Вульф, *Изобретая Восточную Европу...*

²³ Я. Кржен, “Центральная Европа...”; A. Podraza, *Europa Środkowa jako region historyczny*, 17th Congress of Polish Historians, Jagiellonian University 2004; А. Романюк, В. Литвин, *Порівняльний аналіз політичних...*, p. 9.

²⁴ P. Modos, *Közép-európai olvasokonyu*, Budapest 2005, p. 30.

²⁵ Є. Кіш, “Центральна Європа...”.

Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire along with the Polish and Baltic territories as well as lands located south east of them. It was part of the then German political thought that the medium and small states of the sub-region outlined above (as well as of Germany itself) were considered as “Middle” (Mitteleuropa) or “Central” (Zentraleuropa) Europe.²⁶

However, as a result of the defeat of Germany and its allies in the First World War, the concept of Central Europe did not acquire a pan-German meaning. Nevertheless, it contributed to a redefinition of Central Europe from a theoretical, methodological and sometimes even ideological viewpoint. On the one hand, the idea of and assumptions behind the Danube Confederation of the Peoples of Europe as well as O. Jaszi's proposal to form a European federation of nations²⁷ became rather popular. On the other hand, T. Masaryk's “new European” idea to form a federation of small nations and states appeared to be quite acceptable, and given that it referred to a belt of land between Germany and Russia, it was geographically and geopolitically a central part of Europe.²⁸ However, neither the first nor the second idea of Central Europe in the interwar period gained geopolitical significance or reached the stage of implementation, especially in view of the objective international situation of the smaller European states and the position of large countries as to the arrangement of this sub-region.²⁹ The same concerns the concept and the initiative of the first head of the Second Polish Republic, Marshal of Poland, J. Piłsudski about the creation of Intermarium, i.e. a confederation of states between the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea. The union would have consisted of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and, perhaps, Finland. However, the problems which Poland faced when it came to state formation, as well as international disputes and the negative attitude of the majority of powerful international actors contributed to the abandoning of this project.³⁰

More popular instead became O. Halecki's 1950 proposal, based on scholarly and historical criteria, in which he justified and broadened the concept of Central Europe to be understood as a “transitional zone” (in the form of a large number of states) between the West and the non-West, or East, of Europe (which, as mentioned above, at that time corresponded with the USSR, and today mainly corresponds with Russia), and even proposed its internal division into Western and Eastern Central Europe.³¹ It is also noteworthy that at that time in Western political science and geopolitics there developed two fundamental approaches to the understanding of Central Europe.³²

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ O. Jaszi, *A Monarbia jovoje. A dualizmus bukasa es a dunai egyesult allamok*, Budapest 1918, p. 42.

²⁸ T. Masaryk, *Nova Evropa...*, p. 58.

²⁹ Є. Кіш, *Центральна Європа...*

³⁰ А. Романюк, В. Литвин, *Порівняльний аналіз політичних...*, p. 9.

³¹ Я. Кржен, “Центральная Европа...”; O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, London 1950.

³² Є. Кіш, *Центральна Європа...*

The first approach, as V. Levandovskyi³³ emphasized, was presented by the English and French intellectuals and derived from the necessity of transforming the sub-region of Central Europe into a “cordon sanitaire” separating the “living worlds” of two anti-nomic civilizations, the East and the West. According to this approach, the Central European belt would act as a buffer to protect the West from the pressure exerted by the East and to neutralize the latter’s expansionism. It is therefore quite obvious that such mutual isolation of the two worlds would quickly exhaust the Central European countries, given their unequal position in relation to the East. Instead, the second approach or a whole array of related approaches were presented by the German intellectual tradition and characterized as East- and West-oriented. The point is that in the German socio-political paradigm of that time (i.e. before the end of the Second World War) a cultural-historical, civilizational and, to a lesser extent, geographical dualism was inherent, the constant of which was the dialogue between the two parts – eastern and western.³⁴

As detailed below, the concept of Central Europe experienced a certain decline during the Cold War and the confrontation between the western and Soviet or eastern blocs, when the term “East Central Europe” was often used as an auxiliary, controversial and asymmetric one, denoting the countries of natural (common) Central Europe, which were dependent on the Soviet or eastern bloc and largely the USSR, and therefore were mistakenly interpreted as Eastern European countries. This, for example, was typical of the ideas of H. Seton-Watson, I. Berend, G. Ranki and other scholars who combined such countries of natural Central Europe as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well as the Balkan countries in the artificial construct of Eastern Europe.³⁵ By contrast, a large number of intellectuals, in particular E. Polonski, adhered to the “historical” concept of T. Masaryk, who insisted that the countries between Germany and Russia, including Austria, the Baltic states, Finland and Turkey, should be interpreted as Central Europe. Finally, the intermediate idea was followed, for example, by P. Vandych,³⁶ who argued that even in the period of acute confrontation between the western and eastern or Soviet blocs, only Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, today forming the Visegrad Group, fell under the category of natural Central Europe, but the countries that earlier were a part of the Habsburg Empire and Germany were excluded. This logic was partially modified by T. G. Ash,³⁷ who noted that also included under the concept of natural Central Europe, even in the course of the Cold War, were the territories of the former Habsburg monarchy. His explanation was quite simple and focused mainly on the reflections about the specific cultural and religious atmosphere

³³ В. Левандовський, “Україна в геополітичних концепціях першої третини XX сторіччя”, *Політична думка*, vol. 3 (1994), pp. 66-67.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Я. Кржен, “Центральная Европа...”.

³⁶ П. Вандич, *Ціна свободи: Історія Центрально-Східної Європи від Середньовіччя до сьогодення*, Київ 2004.

³⁷ T. G. Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*, New York 1989.

of natural Central Europe and its penchant for the West of Europe, in particular as distinct from the self-oriented, inward-focused Orthodox and Islamic communities of the non-West, or East, of Europe. As P. Hanack points out, despite the fact that the cultural unity of natural Central Europe was rather amorphous (as well as in the case of other European sub-regions), since this sub-region was determined by an almost total lack of perception of itself as a single and monolithic whole with a common identity, it was characterized instead as having a tendency for strife, atomicity and separation, in particular against the background of relations in the context of the conflictive coexistence of small nations.³⁸

However, even despite this, the naturalness of the Central European sub-region was relevant even at the time of the Cold War, because although it was incapable of forming a federation and certain states frequently lost sovereignty it always stood out by adopting western patterns of political, socio-economic and cultural development, in particular because political institutions outstripped the social reality, and due to the constant conflict between ethnic and state identification, particularly, in the form of a “siege mentality”. From a historical point of view, this was supplemented by the prevalence in the territory of different Central European states and proto-states (as, for example, in Eastern Europe) not of despotisms and autocracies but of state formations with universalist claims (in particular, referring to the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg monarchy or Austro-Hungary) and multiethnic societies and peoples. On the one hand, this was an indication of the delayed (since the 19th century) development of national states³⁹ and civil society (relatively weak as compared to Western Europe, but relatively strong as compared to Eastern Europe). On the other hand, it became a safety barrier for full-fledged Soviet-type integration in the post-war period and a predictor of the stubborn refusal of the countries of the sub-region to be considered part of the European East. Although more genuinely eastern elements existed in the political, socio-economic and cultural life of Central European countries (in some of them for over forty, and in others for almost seventy years), which during and after the collapse of the USSR were among the adequate and partially natural reasons for their positioning as countries of East Central Europe (this notion is considered in detail below).

In view of this, it is quite obvious that the natural origins of the idea and concept of Central Europe began to be revisited, as E. Kish notes, in the period before and after the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, when very radical transformation and reformation took place in the Central European sub-region.⁴⁰ The point is that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as in the 1920s, the peoples and countries of the sub-region got a chance to get rid of the „imperial” and anti-civilization orientation (represented by the USSR) and to determine their place and role in the world. At the same time, the natural shift of the concept of Central Europe towards its slightly upgraded understanding within the framework of the updated coordinate system occurred. However,

³⁸ Я. Кржен, *Центральная Европа...*

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Є. Кіш, *Центральна Європа...*

even despite this and attempts at modernized generalizations of the concept of Central Europe, the unanimous position of intellectuals and politicians and the spatial configuration of the understanding of this sub-region still have not been elaborated. This can be traced for the first time in J. Kłoczowski's remarks⁴¹ according to which there are several interpretations of Central Europe. In particular, it may be understood: 1) as a dichotomy between two parts – an idea that, as noted above, goes back to 1950 – namely, a central-western part (a kind of western centre, derived from the imperial tradition of the Reich and the construction of Austria-Hungary) and a central-eastern part (a kind of eastern centre, inhabited by various nations and peoples from Finland to Greece and located between Scandinavia, Germany, Italy and the USSR / Russia); 2) as a historical area and a geographical space which for a long period of time have been associated with Western civilization, including the German-speaking countries (the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy), the Kingdom of Hungary, Bohemia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but at the same time were opposed to Russia and the nations of Southern and Eastern Europe, namely those constituting a part of the Byzantine and Turkish heritage; 3) as the sphere of cultural heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whereby it includes, in whole or in part, such countries of Europe as Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus to a lesser extent, Moldova and Ukraine, etc.

On the one hand, it has determined that there are no clear boundaries between the western, central and eastern European sub-regions, as a result of which Central Europe, being the geographical area between the differently divided regions of Eastern and Western Europe, is characterized by the fact that Northern and Southern Europe overlap and variably influence it. On the other hand, it crystallises the position according to which Central Europe is not geographical, but rather geopolitical construct and a sub-region that includes the central part of the European „geopolitical continent” and is located between the Western Europe and Northern Eurasia (from west to east), and between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea (from north to south). This logic allows the academic community and the politicum to attribute territories (from west to east) of Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein (which is the western part of Central Europe), Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria (which is the eastern part of Central Europe) to Central Europe.

Thus, it is generally believed that Central Europe has become a separate sub-region not so much geographically as geopolitically (however, with a historical reorientation of states), culturally and “spiritually”,⁴² and therefore it differs significantly from Eastern Europe, especially in the context of its special relations with the EU and other national and supranational structures in the world. Moreover, the naturalness of such conceptual and renewed institutionalization of Central Europe (in particular, from the late 1980s onwards) may be traced in at least three aspects: firstly, in the processes of disintegration (in relation to the USSR) and integration (with respect to the EU)

⁴¹ J. Kłoczowski, *Actualité des grandes traditions...*, pp. 29-30.

⁴² Є. Кіш, *Центральна Європа...*

of the countries of this sub-region (first of all, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and subsequently the Czech Republic and Slovakia), understood as a kind of return to a holistic Europe; secondly, in the extending of the disintegration and integration processes in the sub-region (particularly under the influence of Germany, Austria and Poland) beyond the scope of the expansion of the EU interests towards east; and thirdly, in the countries' search for internal and external compromises, in particular in the context of gradual (in 2004, 2007 and 2013) and deepening expansion of the EU, with a view to strengthen the sub-region's geopolitical role and position in the world. And, as M. Kundera points out, the naturalness of such renewed institutionalization of Central Europe was complemented by the fact that the sub-region of Central Europe was "longed to be a condensed version of Europe itself in all its cultural variety, a small arch-European Europe, a reduced model of Europe made up of nations conceived according to one rule", i.e. "the greatest variety within the smallest space".⁴³ This was due to the fact that in geographical Europe a dual-purpose bilateral process of segmentation of Central Europe and Eastern Europe and transformation of the geographical, geopolitical and historical image of Central Europe as the "closest neighbour" of Eastern Europe, was at first initiated and subsequently developed.

EASTERN EUROPE: FROM THE NATURAL CONCEPT TO THE ARTIFICIAL PARADIGM OF THE COLD WAR AND PARTIAL RESTORATION IN THE MODERN PERIOD

In contrast to the maximally natural concept of Central Europe, the phenomenon of Eastern Europe, initially, particularly from early modern period until the end of the Second World War, both geographically and culturally natural, later turned into an artificial paradigm and a political superstructure. This became particularly evident at a time when the division between the western and the Soviet bloc became the dominant force in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. What is important is that the USSR included in the self-ruled Soviet bloc those countries that traditionally and naturally had belonged to Eastern and Central Europe between the early modern period and the Second World War. Similar, but less extensive processes took place within the Western bloc, as it included both the countries of Western Europe and the countries that traditionally and naturally constituted the essence of Central Europe and still do.

It is noteworthy (by analogy with the concept of Central Europe) that the historical and geopolitical naturalness of the construct of Eastern Europe was initially predetermined, as J. Krzhen⁴⁴ points out, by the significant influence exerted on the sub-region by the Eastern civilizations, from Byzantium to the Mongol hegemony in Kievan Rus' and Ottoman hegemony in the Balkans. Thus, in Eastern Europe (in contrast to

⁴³ М. Кундера, "Трагедія Центральної Європи".

⁴⁴ Я. Кржен, *Центральная Европа...*

Western and Central Europe), a historically significant political role was played, and still is played in various modified forms, by despotism, autocracy or absolute supremacy, which are all characterized by the absence of pluralist democracy, and the existence of totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes. This is complemented by the fact that historically speaking civil society is not inherent in Eastern European countries or civil society was formed or is still being formed (in the form of substitution of concepts) not naturally – „from the bottom” – but artificially instead – through reforms „at the top”. Furthermore, the Eastern European sub-region was historically characterized by continuous institutionalization of serfdom and the existence of the institution of rural community as a fiscal unit, as well as by the lack of self-governance of cities and legal non-autonomy.⁴⁵ This was due to the fact that in the countries of historical Eastern Europe (unlike Central European countries, not to mention Western Europe), no contractual principles (i.e. the principles of social contract theory) or legal codification were approbated, and mechanisms of dependence of legal and social status on the state and the head of state were applied instead. As a result, the historical naturalness of Eastern Europe was dictated by the maximization and centralization of the role of state institutions, which essentially was characteristic of the countries of Central Europe as well, with the difference that in the latter, along with the development of the state, the institution of civil society was reinforced.

The paradox of the situation is that the historical naturalness of the concept of Eastern Europe has become a springboard for creating an artificial paradigm and the construction of this sub-region (particularly at the expense of other sub-regions) in the future, when it was already quite obvious what is natural Eastern Europe and natural Central Europe. It concerns the period, if not from the beginning of the twentieth century, at least from the end of the Second World War and at least until the end of the Cold War, when, according to N. Mezhevich,⁴⁶ Eastern Europe was considered primarily as a political or geopolitical project and space, comprising elements of both conceptual naturalness and ideological artificiality. In this context, it is noteworthy that the naturalness of Eastern Europe was conceptually established in the early modern period (since this term was used as early as during the 17th–18th centuries⁴⁷), although it was determined by a number of events that had preceded it. In particular, historically Eastern Europe was defined as a cultural or economic unity, which was endowed with characteristics attributable to the Byzantine, Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Ottoman influence. Thus, the key role in the natural invention of Eastern Europe was played by the Enlightenment, which initially needed “another Europe” as a means to confirm the clear advantages of individual nations of traditional Europe.⁴⁸ This means that Western Europe itself invented Eastern Europe as “its complementary other half”⁴⁹ and “it was

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Н. Межевич, *Восточная европа...*

⁴⁷ Л. Вульф, *Изобретая Восточную Европу...*

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁹ L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe...*, p. 4.

the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent”⁵⁰ and to the separation of Western and Eastern Europe. Subsequently, in the first half of the twentieth century in particular, the concept of Eastern Europe underwent significant changes. Thus, according to the Catholic Encyclopaedia of 1913, the Balkan states and some parts of countries such as Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire were part of Eastern Europe, primarily in ethnological terms. In its turn, during the period before the Second World War, Eastern Europe was defined as a result of separation from Central Europe, in particular between the Slavs and the Germans along the Elba River. Consequently, the naturalness of Eastern Europe at that time was determined in terms of a political sub-region within the Versailles-Washington system established after the First World War, but was characterized by the great dynamism of transformations and the variability of the political process. For the territorial and political structure of the sub-region in the first half of the 20th century was continuously and very artificially changing until 1939 and continued to evolve during the Second World War (in particular, upon the results of the First and Second Vienna Arbitrations).⁵¹ At first, particularly during the years 1918–1919, on the borders and the junction of the three former empires-projects – the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian – the sub-region and the geopolitical project of Eastern Europe evolved and was positioned as a political and historical fixture of the eastern part of Central Europe and geographical Eastern Europe as such, which were characterized by their own internal sources of potential for conflict. This, for example, was reflected in J. Giedroyc’s and J. Mieroszewski’s concept of „Eastern policy” of Poland, which actually considered the relationship between Poland and historical Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as sublimation of relations with Russia / the USSR. Almost immediately afterwards, in particular from 1919 to 1922, the sub-region of Eastern Europe started to turn into an artificial and exclusively geopolitical rather than geographical concept, since it began to diminish the significance of the construction of Central Europe.

Finally, in the aftermath the events of 1939-1956, the concept of Eastern Europe acquired a maximally artificial meaning and began to be used as a substitute or another name of the Soviet or Eastern bloc. This was accepted in most scientific studies in the Soviet and even post-Soviet period (especially in Russia), which when discussing issues pertaining to natural Eastern Europe and natural Central Europe, considered the countries of these sub-regions to be part of the artificial construct of the European East: at first (before the collapse of the USSR) as “traditional Eastern Europe”, and then (after the collapse of the Soviet Union) as “the new Eastern Europe”.⁵² Therefore, according to a clearly artificial and instrumental point of view, the countries of Eastern Europe in the Soviet (in the USSR) and post-Soviet (in Russia and in some other countries) periods were or are: a) the countries of the Eastern European flank of the USSR or the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹ Н. Межевич, *Восточная Европа...*

⁵² А. Мальгин, “Новая Восточная Европа” и стратегические интересы России, at <<http://georgia.monitor.org/news/253/1048/>>, 13 November 2018.

CIS (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia); b) border countries / western neighbours of the USSR or the CIS (Poland, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia and its successor states); c) the Baltic States.

As a result, it showed that as of the late 1980s and early 1990s divergent and rather unclear definitions and interpretations of Eastern Europe, in particular given their only partial naturalness and excessive artificiality influenced by the ideological aspect of the Cold War period, were characterized by inaccuracies and were considered too general, since they mostly concerned the sub-region located between Western Europe and the Ural Mountains, that is, the countries of the former “Eastern bloc”. As a consequence, they tried to “squeeze” the geographical, geopolitical, cultural, socio-economic and other interpretations of this concept into the ideologized and artificial concept of Eastern Europe. In particular, S. Berglund, J. Ekman and F. Aarebrot,⁵³ in view of the political/geopolitical and socio-economic aspects of European development during the Cold War, defined Eastern Europe at that time as an „Eastern bloc”, that is, the former communist countries of Europe within and outside the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, the Department of Statistics of the United Nations believed Eastern Europe to include such states as Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine and the Czech Republic, which was due to their historical membership in the sphere of Soviet influence and the so-called „Warsaw Pact”. By analogy, but expanding the scope of the term significantly, the „Multilingual Thesaurus of the European Union”⁵⁴ defined Eastern and Central Europe as comprised of the following countries: Azerbaijan, Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Ukraine, Croatia, Czech Republic and Montenegro. An opposite tendency may be observed in the “CIA World Factbook”,⁵⁵ whereby Eastern Europe includes only some post-Soviet countries located geographically in this sub-region, namely Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, it is clear that the definitions of Eastern Europe at that time were often somewhat subjective, relative and context-dependent. Therefore, according to M. A. Drake,⁵⁶ the majority of definitions of Eastern Europe as an independent sub-region should be considered as imprecise and too general. On the contrary, without definite and unambiguous wording, they had a clear political colouring.

In view of this, individual countries that earlier were artificially and instrumentally included in the Eastern European sub-region, sought to “withdraw” from it, and other countries sought to enter it instead.⁵⁷ The outlined geopolitical and conceptual pro-

⁵³ S. Berglund, J. Ekman, F. Aarebrot, *The Handbook of Political Change...*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Multilingual Thesaurus of the European Union*, at <<http://eurovoc.europa.eu/>>, 19 June 2019.

⁵⁵ *CIA – The World Factbook*, at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>>, 19 June 2019.

⁵⁶ M.A. Drake, *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, New York–Basel 2005.

⁵⁷ J. Lukacs, *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age*, New York 1993, pp. 122, 134.

cesses began to unfold shortly before, during and after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist system in 1986–1991. As a result, the concept of Eastern Europe began to be reestablished and regained its natural definition, since in political, academic and public discourse it came to be separated from the concept of Central Europe. This became particularly evident after the launch and completion of European integration processes in Central Europe, since those countries of the artificial construct of Eastern Europe of the Cold War period which did not enter the EU were naturally left in the EU's conceptual and geopolitical orbit.⁵⁸ Moreover, after the collapse of the USSR, the countries of natural Eastern Europe, at least according to its geographical outline (in particular, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Russia, and to a lesser extent Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), either have not exchanged at all or have barely exchanged (or have not completed the exchange of) their geopolitical and cultural identity for “Europeanness”, and hence the identity of Eastern Europe.⁵⁹ The UN adhere to a similar point of view and refer to Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine as countries of the sub-region under discussion, and link all other countries of artificial Eastern Europe to the natural concept of Central Europe or to the constructs of the East Central and South Eastern Europe. In parallel, some scholars believe that the territory located on the East European Plain should be called Eastern Europe, including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, some of the Baltic countries and Kazakhstan. Moreover, since 1991, the countries of Eastern Europe as a separate sub-region have not changed their peripheral political status and the specific character of their socio-economic and cultural development. A striking proof of this was the publication of “Eastern Europe after Versailles”⁶⁰ in 2007 by I. Kosciuszko (the editor in chief) and other scientists, in which the main feature of the Eastern European sub-region, i.e. its peripheral location,⁶¹ was pointed out. This idea was reflected in the fact that the political elites of Eastern Europe voluntarily weakened the quality and number of sovereign administrative functions of their states in the early 1990s:⁶² whether in the form of delegating sovereignty as a conscious, but very difficult victim, whether in the form of “ballasting”, that is unusual, unnecessary or impossible functions. Moreover, this was done in the context of the discussion about the sovereignty of the countries of Eastern Europe, which was highly politicized, and associated with the practice of short-term independence⁶³ and peculiarities of socio-economic development.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ В. Цымбурский, “Как живут и умирают международные конфликтные системы (Судьба балтийско-черноморской системы в XVI–XX вв.)”, *Полис*, vol. 4 (1998); М. Ильин, “Балто-Черноморская система как фактор формирования государств в Восточной Европе”, *Политическая наука*, vol. 1 (2008).

⁵⁹ Н. Межевич, *Восточная европа...*

⁶⁰ И. Костюшко, *Восточная Европа после “Версаля”*, Москва 2007.

⁶¹ *Мир силой оружия. Восточная Европа после “Версаля”*, at <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/405502.html>>, 19 June 2019.

⁶² Н. Межевич, *Восточная европа...*

⁶³ М. Симон, “Интеграционные процессы в странах Вышеградской группы...”, p. 23.

⁶⁴ Н. Межевич, “Идентичность и граница: некоторые...”.

In sum, this shows that during the Cold War the category of Eastern Europe in its natural sense included mostly only the USSR, but in the artificial sense it comprised not only the USSR, but also the countries naturally falling within Central Europe and other countries of the Soviet or Eastern bloc. This means that during 1945–1991, the term Eastern Europe had primarily a military-political and socio-ideological meaning,⁶⁵ and in a broad sense it denoted a special territorial and political system that was created around the USSR.⁶⁶ The situation began to change only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the ideologized construct of Eastern Europe was rejected and replaced with the early 20th-century natural concept defined in opposition to the natural sub-region of Central Europe. Therefore, at this time, the geopolitical situation determined the quantitative, but not territorial, expansion of Eastern Europe, in particular at the expense of the collapse of the USSR and the inclusion within the limits of the sub-region of such post-Soviet countries as Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, as well as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. In spite of their internal differences, they were and are still characterized as a community of a sort from the point of view of their economic, historical and geographical character, as well as (albeit somewhat earlier) geopolitical positioning.⁶⁷ The point is that since the collapse of the USSR the countries of the Eastern European sub-region have been hopeless trying to catch up in terms of political and socio-economic modernization and democratization, adhering instead to authoritarian or hybrid political regimes (so-called „grey zones”) and retaining their extremely weak economies and civil societies. This was complemented by the above-mentioned peripheral location of the countries of the sub-region, which has not only a spatial but also a temporal dimension,⁶⁸ as well as the prevalence of mono-ethnic state-nationality instead of a model of a multiethnic state-nation.⁶⁹

As a consequence, Eastern Europe (at least in most countries and throughout the larger part of their post-Soviet history) has largely remained unchanged as far as the character of geopolitical design that was inherent in this sub-region when it was part of the USSR.⁷⁰ It has therefore been established that, in the present context, by Eastern Europe one should traditionally and more or less naturally understand the post-Soviet countries that are located in geographic Europe, but are not part of the European Union. These countries constitute a socio-economic and, to a lesser extent, political sub-region, given their mutual proximity combined with a common heritage going back to the Soviet times, with their similarities in terms of political institutions, informal political practices and cultural orientations. As a matter of fact, because the countries of the sub-region were once part of the USSR their starting conditions for the develop-

⁶⁵ С. Романенко, „Межэтнические противоречия...”, p. 39.

⁶⁶ K. Zernack, *Polska i Rosja: dwie drogi w dziejach Europy*, Warszawa 2000, p. 783.

⁶⁷ Н. Межевич, *Восточная европа...*

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ С. Романенко, „Процесс национального самоопределения...”.

⁷⁰ Г. Маленков, *32-я годовщина Великой Октябрьской социалистической революции*, Москва 1949, pp. 5-6.

ment of political and socio-economic systems were similar, although this fact did not exclude the possibility of different conditions and interpretations for functioning of the latter at the national level since 1991. At that, the differences within the countries of Eastern Europe are due to certain variations of the institutional design of political power in the period prior to the co-optation of the countries of the sub-region by the Soviet Union, different socio-economic conditions and traditions of political organization, and divergent socio-political and cultural distance from the European Union after the collapse of the USSR. As a result, this means that under present conditions, Eastern Europe is a separate instrumental unit within the post-socialist region of Europe of the post-Soviet segment – it denotes countries that are fully or partially geographically located in Europe, but the political and socio-economic development vectors of which are still permanently or situationally uncertain. According to this logic, the countries of Eastern Europe (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia, Russia, as well as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) are former republics of the Soviet Union, which had divergent traditions of statehood until the formation of the USSR and prior to their inclusion in this state formation; they are not members or official candidates for membership in the EU, and therefore they follow to a lesser extent the political, socio-economic and cultural trends and processes that are characteristic of the countries of Western and Central Europe; in the institutional and functional context, they broadly reproduce the diversity of political and socio-economic practices that cannot be outlined on the example of other European sub-regions.

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: NATURALLY INSTRUMENTAL CONCEPT OF MODERN TIMES

Finally, as far as the concept of East Central Europe is concerned, it is largely evident from the analysis above and clear that it is synthetic and naturally instrumental. The naturalness of this concept is motivated by the fact that, as J. Kłoczowski,⁷¹ observes, East Central Europe (along with West Central Europe) is one of the geographical parts of Central Europe and includes the space inhabited by various nations and peoples from Finland to Greece and is located between Scandinavia, Germany, Italy and Russia (with the exclusion of those countries, which constitute the external borders of the sub-region). In turn, the instrumental character of this concept lies in the fact that it was used as an auxiliary, controversial and asymmetric one with regard to the artificial concept of Eastern Europe during the Cold War period and denoted the countries of natural Central Europe that were dependent on the Soviet, or Eastern, bloc and particularly the USSR, and thus, differed significantly (and still differ) from the countries of natural Eastern Europe in the political, socio-economic and cultural context.⁷² Even despite the fact that the term “East Central Europe” appeared long

⁷¹ J. Kłoczowski, *Actualité des grandes traditions...*, pp. 29–30.

⁷² Є. Кіш, *Центральна Європа...*

before the beginning of the Cold War, in particular in 1935 in “Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis”.⁷³

Therefore, the concept of East Central Europe was historically and politically developed as partly dependent of artificial ideologemes. This is outlined by N. Aleksjun, D. Beauvois and other researchers, who in their collective monograph „A History of East Central Europe”⁷⁴, united their efforts to give the most complete picture of the history of the countries and peoples of the sub-region, including, first of all, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia within their historically changing borders, as well as, to a lesser extent, modern Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, etc.⁷⁵ The fact that the enumerated countries belong to the sub-region under analysis (with the exception of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, which, for historiographic and comparative reasons, constitute natural Eastern Europe, as noted above⁷⁶) is first of all due to the position of Polish, partly communist, but mostly post-communist historiography, which, along with Hungarian, Czech and Slovak historiography, especially since 1989, was aimed at finding a general name for these states and a number of others.⁷⁷ The point is that, having escaped from the socialist camp, which was artificially defined as Eastern Europe,⁷⁸ these countries, which naturally constituted Central Europe, faced the problem of developing a new identity, which at the turn of political eras had to determine their peculiar status with regard to the natural Western Europe and natural Eastern Europe (above all, Russia). Therefore, the concept of East Central Europe, approbated at that time, mainly naturally, but at the same time instrumentally, denoted a variant of sub-regional identity, which occupied an intermediate niche between pan-European, Western European and Eastern European identities, as well as national identities of separate countries.⁷⁹ This means that the outlined conceptualization of East Central Europe is a modified version or part of the concept of Central Europe, regardless of the natural, artificial or instrumental character of the latter.⁸⁰ The point is that, according to M. Foucher, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and

⁷³ D. Beauvois, *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁴ Н. Алексюн, Д. Бовуа, *История Центрально-Восточной Европы*, Евразия 2009; D. Beauvois, *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*...

⁷⁵ В. Носков, “Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу...”, р. 323; Н. Межевич, *Восточная европа...*; А. Портнов, “Изобретая Речь Посполитую? ”, *Ab imperio*, vol. 1 (2007), р. 49; М. Walddenberg, *Narody zależne...*, Warszawa 2000; Т. Винарчук, “Українська компаративістика у пошуках європейського контексту вітчизняної історії”, *Наукові праці історичного факультету ЗДУ*, vol. 15 (2002).

⁷⁶ В. Носков, “Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу...”; Ф. Болкестайн, “Соединенные Штаты Европы – это иллюзия”, *Известия*, 28 августа 2004.

⁷⁷ В. Носков, “Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу...”, р. 323.

⁷⁸ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1997, pp. 158-161; З. Бжезинский, *Великая шахматная доска. Господство Америки и его геостратегические императивы*, Международные отношения 1998, pp. 101-105.

⁷⁹ С. Глинкина, “Центрально-Восточная Европа...”, р. 60.

⁸⁰ А. Миллер, “Тема Центральной Европы...”, р. 76.

some other states of the sub-region under analysis are “countries representing the exact sense of the word ‘Central Europe’”⁸¹, but the concept of Central Europe accepted in them, particularly in the form of its naming as East Central Europe, differs fundamentally from “traditional” Central Europe in that these countries “intend to maintain some openness of their eastern borders”⁸² towards the “western borders of Russia.”⁸³

A controversial opinion is shared by other researchers, who believe that the concept of East Central Europe is excessively ideologized, artificial and controversial, in particular due to the heritage of the historiography of the Cold War period, and therefore has no serious recognition outside the narrow circle of its supporters.⁸⁴ Moreover, the opposition to the concept of Central and Eastern Europe takes place in two directions, i.e. towards the “competition” with mainly artificial construct of Eastern Europe and towards the “competition” with different variants of the concept of Central Europe. Thus, during the second half of the 20th century, that is, the period of the Cold War, a specific aspect of the so-called Central European identity was the „Iron Curtain”, the consequences of which are still observed, in particular “in the course of transformation processes of the former socialist countries and the preserved differences between identities to the east and to the west of the former border.”⁸⁵ Thus, one of the reasons for criticizing the concept of East Central Europe is the excessive “volatility” and “mobility” of this sub-region, since in some historical periods it included some countries (that is, one mapping and regionalization), while in other historical periods, it included some other countries etc. (that is, another mapping and regionalization),⁸⁶ which resulted in the lack of internal political, cultural and socio-economic unity in the sub-region. One more reason for criticizing the concept is, as V. Noskov notes,⁸⁷ an attempt to revive myths about the greatness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or attempts to link the sub-region to a particular historical state (for example, Austria-Hungary). As a result, some researchers have tried to demonstrate the post-Jagiellonian motifs of the concept of East Central Europe in contrast to post-Habsburg reminiscences of the concept of Central Europe, as well as other researchers tried to position them as anti-Russian (with Russia as a “constitutional alien”⁸⁸) and divergent from the concept of Eastern Europe⁸⁹.

⁸¹ М. Фуше, *Европейская республика...*, p. 104.

⁸² Ibid., p. 114.

⁸³ А. Миллер, “Тема Центральной Европы...”, p. 92.

⁸⁴ В. Носков, “Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу...”.

⁸⁵ H. Lemberg, “Boundaries and Identities of Central Europe: Changing Concepts”, in *Proceedings. Actes. Rapports, Abstracts, and Round Tables Introductions. 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences*, Oslo 2000, p. 349.

⁸⁶ С. Романенко, “Межэтнические противоречия...”.

⁸⁷ В. Носков, “Изобретая Центрально-Восточную Европу...”, p. 323.

⁸⁸ А. Миллер, “Тема Центральной Европы...”, p. 83.

⁸⁹ С. Тихвинский, “Итоги XIX Международного конгресса исторических наук в Осло”, *Новая и новейшая история*, vol. 1 (2001), p. 14; М. Бибилов, В. Тишков, В. Волаков, “XX Международный конгресс исторических наук”, *Новая и новейшая история*, vol. 1 (2006), p. 10.

The synthetic outcome of combining the natural and instrumental outline of East Central Europe is its understanding as a naturally instrumental concept of the sub-region, the states of which see a warranty in the NATO and EU structures, principles of democratic governance, and are fundamentally open to the west, and to the east, but are not determined by the common Central and Eastern European identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The article offers a historical overview and survey of the current understanding and demarcation of the concepts “Central Europe”, “Eastern Europe” and “East Central Europe”. This is performed in view of a synthetic position, according to which “Europe” is a concept which is “open to multiple political interpretations”, since this part of the world is not a geographical but a political category and a certain historical process reflected in the space with a changing geography. Accordingly, this dictated the need for the regionalization of Europe as an entity, which a priori cannot constitute a geographical, geopolitical, cultural or religious monolith. Especially due to the fact that the positioning of the centre and east of Europe (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe) has historically and currently been extremely distinctive, and therefore highlights the problems of regionalization in Europe and places the need for the conceptualization of certain European sub-regions on the agenda. It has been recorded that the categorization of Central Europe mostly and historically is and was natural while Eastern Europe is mostly artificial, although natural today, and East Central Europe is naturally-instrumental. This is determined by the fact that the regionalization of Europe was caused by the variability of integration and disintegration as well as democratization and autocratization processes in the countries of the individual sub-regions, which during the 20th and 21st centuries have led to significant and highly ambiguous changes in the spectrum of political, socio-economic, religious, and cultural processes.

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