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CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE IN THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

ABSTRACT The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were singled out from the European context because of their cultural and historical background. These states, historically parts of empires, after the World Wars were located between the great powers and served as the watershed between the West and Eastern Europe, with which Soviet Russia was associated. After the collapse of the socialist system, and then the Soviet Union, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were oriented toward European integration structures. Despite the queue for entry into the European Union, the dividing lines in Europe have not disappeared, which indicates the political nature of the processes on the continent, even though the need for cooperation to solve urgent European problems is high.

Keywords: Central-Eastern Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Middle Europe, integration

INTRODUCTION

There are several definitions of Central and Eastern Europe based on sociocultural, geographic, political, and other characteristics. Thus, according to the Czech historian Jan Křen,¹ the term 'Central Europe' was first used in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna to refer to the territories of present-day Germany and Benelux. One hundred years later, the term 'Middle Europe' became widespread thanks to Friedrich Naumann's book *Mitteleuropa*,² published in 1915. The German geopolitician justified the need to unite the peoples of Central Europe in order to resist the encroachments of the United States, Russia and England; Germany was to be the axis of such an integrated political and economic space. F. Naumann considered the wide spread of German culture and language in the region to be a favorable prerequisite for such unification.

Subsequently, the countries located in the geographical center of the European territory were included in Central Europe: Austria, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Ukraine (western regions), Kaliningrad Region, Serbia (partially, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and Belgrade with surroundings), and Belarus (western regions).³ Geographically, Eastern Europe includes the territory of Russia up to the Ural Mountains, the south-western part of the Russian Plain within Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the Crimean steppe, i.e. the flat part of the Crimean Peninsula.⁴

However, the geographical approach does not coincide with the political and socio-cultural approaches. Before World War I, the northern part of the border between Eastern and Central Europe usually lay along the River Elbe, between the Slavs and the Germans. At that time, the Balkan states and parts of such countries as Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire (not including the Caucasus) were counted as part of Eastern Europe. It was pointed out that the eastern border of Europe should be determined ethnologically. The Hungarian historian Jeno Szucs gave an ironic definition of the countries belonging to Central Europe: "that part of Eastern Europe that always dreamed of belonging to Western Europe but in one form or another has always remained a part of Eastern Europe."⁵

After World War II, all the socialist countries of Europe were considered as part of Eastern Europe. This happened after W. Churchill's '*Sinews of Peace*' speech, where the English politician drew a line "from Stettin on the Baltic Sea to Trieste in the Adriatic" dividing the spheres of influence of Western countries and the Soviet Union; as a result, "the capitals of the states of Central and Eastern Europe – states whose history

¹ J. Křen, "Central Europe in the European Historical and Geographical Context", *Untouchable Stock*, vol. 6, no. 56 (2007), at <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2007/6/kr4-pr.html>>, 4 October 2018.

² F. Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, Berlin 1915.

³ I.F. Kefeli, *Geopolitics of Eurasia*, St. Petersburg 2010, p. 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

⁵ L.N. Shishelina, *The Expansion of the European Union to the East, and the Interests of Russia*, Moscow 2006, p. 60.

goes back many centuries – found themselves on the other side of the curtain.”⁶ After the end of the Cold War, a number of countries previously considered part of Eastern Europe were assigned to other regions. However, the line dividing Europe did not disappear but only moved east to the borders of the Russian Federation.

The term ‘Central-Eastern Europe’ has also been used in *historiography*: at first in relation to the territories between Germany and Russia, and later to the countries dependent on the USSR. The capitalist countries of Europe opposing the socialist countries were counted as part of Western Europe until the early 1990s as well.

The inclusion of the socialist countries among the countries of Eastern Europe was quite stable and recognized internationally. Thus, when the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was signed in 1996, Azerbaijan, Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Russian Federation, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Yugoslavia were all classified as Eastern European countries.⁷ Therefore, until the end of the 20th century, the territorial scope of Eastern Europe was subject to constant political conditioning, which confirms the current historical confusion and political subjectivity of this concept.

If the countries located east of Germany and south of the Baltic Sea to the borders with Greece, including Russia, belong geographically to Central and Eastern Europe, then for political reasons and given their Soviet past, the states that emerged as a result of the collapse of the USSR are called post-Soviet, with the exception of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, for which the term ‘Baltic States’ became entrenched.

Already in the 21st century, the former socialist states were frequently divided into the countries of Central Europe, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and those of South Eastern Europe,⁸ among which the Balkan states, as well as Romania and Bulgaria, were classified. Thus, the post-Soviet countries – Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, as well as the Transcaucasian republics – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia began to be attributed to Eastern Europe.

1. ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

The uncertainty as to where the countries and peoples of the geographical center of Europe belong is due to economic, cultural, religious, political and other factors. The countries of Eastern Europe throughout their history occupied an intermediate

⁶ W. Churchill, Speech at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, USA, 5 III 1946, in *The Sinews of Peace*, Moscow 2006, pp. 462-493.

⁷ Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Adopted by the UN General Assembly, 10 IX 1996, pp. 52-53, at <https://www.ctbto.org/fileadmin/user_upload/legal/treaty_text_Russian.pdf>, 4 October 2018.

⁸ Central and Southeast Europe. The end of the XX – the beginning of the XXI centuries. Aspects of social and political development. Historical and political reference book. M.; St. Petersburg 2015., p. 7.

position between empires and powers of the geopolitical East-West axis. However, although their borders were repeatedly redrawn and the countries fell within the sphere of influence of one power after another, they have always been part of the Slavic-Orthodox civilization.

In characterizing this region emphasis is frequently put on its differences from both the West and the East. The industries of the countries of this region differed from the western industrial agglomerations in terms of a smaller proportion of large enterprises and a greater proportion of non-urban workers. In agriculture, the specific feature of Central and Eastern Europe was the combination of large-scale land tenure with a considerably developed stratum of upper middle class closely associated with the food industry (Hungarian mills or Czech and Austrian breweries). A peculiarity of the peasantry was its organization and the presence of political forces defending the interests of small owners (political parties in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary).

What was characteristic of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was that they did not perceive themselves as a single whole, sharing a common identity, but that they came under the influence of the West. The superficial borrowing of Western models, in the opinion of many authors, is the cause of a phenomenon characteristic of Central Europe: here, political institutions often outpace social reality. As an example, the Polish gentry democracy, which emerged in the second half of the 15th century, is usually cited. Among the values and principles of this democracy, the Polish professor Michał Śliwa highlights the sovereignty of the people and political representation, the principles of freedom and equality of citizens, the concept of the rule of law, as well as the principle of tolerance and the separation of church and state.⁹ These democratic values could not be implemented in the archaic agrarian society and ultimately led to a crisis and a decline of the Polish state.

In the 19th century, a parliamentary-type institution functioned in Hungary, the National Assembly, which instead of democratic transformations promoted the strengthening of national self-awareness and the formation of political forces adhering to both moderate-liberal and revolutionary views.

The attempt to 'implant' Western parliamentary democracy into the countries of the region after World War I had moderate success: while in Czechoslovakia, the institutionalization of democracy took place, in other countries democratic processes alternated with authoritarian ones, which can be attributed to the formation of national states.

Therefore, under the influence of Western values, the local political culture acquired a number of specific features, including provincialism, lack of mechanisms for achieving compromise, excessive alienation of the political elite from the masses. Civil society in this part of Europe was weaker and appeared later than in Western countries but earlier than in countries to the east.

Frequently broken and interrupted traditions of statehood became the rule for the region rather than an exception: as a result of the Turkish invasion, Hungary was

⁹ M. Śliwa, *Polish Democracy. Idea – People – Events*, transl. by V. Stockman, Moscow 2014, p. 9.

divided into several parts in the 16th century; Poland was divided between three neighboring empires at the end of the 18th century; from the 17th century onwards, the Czech state entered a long period of gradual adaptation to the Habsburg Empire. The difficult beginnings of nations in this region correlate with this intermittent tradition of statehood, which is often characterized by regression, loss of statehood and degradation of the role of people, which is primarily identified at the level of language, ethnos or religion. Frequent existence under foreign domination contributed to the spread of siege mentality.

While empires associated with a certain nation (British, French, Spanish, Russian, Ottoman) historically emerged in the West and in the East, Central and Eastern Europe was dominated by multinational state formations with universalistic claims (the Holy Roman Empire or the Habsburg monarchy); these were ruled by dynasties that did not associate themselves with a particular people. The late development of national states is also characteristic of this region: while in the West this process began in the 15th-16th centuries, in Central and Eastern Europe it dates from the 19th century.

In Central and Eastern Europe, where supranational empires prevailed, integration processes were weaker than in the West; it was not possible to create large political nations of the Western type. The process of nation formation in this part of the continent continues today, as evidenced by the events taking place in the Balkans and in the European post-Soviet space.

It was in the 19th century that the preconditions for the transition of Central Europe to real integration were met. However, unlike Western countries guided by pan-European universalism, the plans of Eastern Europeans focused on the development of regional cohesion and the retention of the advantages of their intermediate civilizational and geopolitical status. If the main driving force behind Western European integration plans were economic interests, in the east of Europe cultural and political motives prevailed. While in the West of Europe the creation of political unity was only to follow economic 'consolidation' through the elimination of customs barriers, the East of Europe sought to preserve the already existing far-reaching unification of peoples with its trade and economic advantages on new political foundations. Nevertheless, even if in different ways, both parts of Europe strived for a federal state: the West by increasing the degree of integration, the East through its decrease.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the problem of choice between the two geopolitical poles (the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance) became more acute, and the external pressure on the region increased. As before, there were fundamental differences between Western and Eastern European integration ideas: while Western Europe sought to unite mainly under the banner of liberal ideas, Eastern Europe continued its search for a new form of its own internal reorganization, relying on the enthusiasm of nationalist leaders. While the West of Europe sought to expand the territories and to increase the level of integration of the already established state entities, the East of Europe, on the contrary, aimed to divide Europe's second largest territorial entity, Austria-Hungary, which would result in a reduction of the level of political integration while retaining all the advantages of an economic unity.

The complexity of the real relations between the peoples of the region was reflected in their political plans: in alliance with Austria, the Czechs saw a panacea for Hungarian attacks on leadership; the Hungarians avoided any alliances with Romania; Western European messianism was inherent in the Hungarian and Polish elites, which was one of the reasons for the idea of the Eastern European confederation to fail.

Two great powers – Germany and Russia – decisively influenced the development of this region. Connections with the German-speaking world were stronger, because for many centuries it constituted the core of the state entities that existed in the region, and considerable German-speaking populations lived for centuries as ethnic minorities in the Czech lands, Poland and Hungary. The German influence on the history of local peoples was more noticeable than the Russian influence that dominated the region for forty years in the second half of the 20th century in the form of Soviet socialism. Although full integration of the Soviet type in the post-war period did not happen, the ‘eastern’ elements really became more pronounced – the years of communist rule are considered the era of the most powerful influence of the East in the entire history of the region. Therefore, the term ‘East-Central Europe’ in the second half of the 20th century was quite appropriate to the prevailing circumstances.

At the end of the 20th century, the region of Central and Eastern Europe again found itself in the already familiar mode of transformation, as a result of which the influence of the West became increasingly apparent.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

In the 20th century in Eastern Europe, the ideas of Marxism were actively spreading, leaving their mark on the future fate of this region. The October Revolution in Russia and the signing of the Brest Peace finally shattered the hopes of the Czechs and all the other Slavic peoples of Austria-Hungary for liberation at the hands of Russia and a revival of the Pan-Slavic idea. The further plans of the organization of Central Europe were designed exclusively by the Western powers. In 1920, the ‘Big Four’ (USA, Great Britain, France and Italy) as representatives of the victor countries in World War I, decided the fate of the region in accordance with their own ideas of justice and security. According to US President W. Wilson, the Allies could feel safe as long as Germany was disarmed and incompetent, and Austria-Hungary divided into small states. Therefore, in the aftermath of World War I the empire disappeared from the map of Europe. Later, it became apparent that the Habsburg monarchy had served as the axis of the balance of power on the continent, and its disappearance led to true disasters for Europe.

After World War I, the Western powers created a puppet union of states, the *Little Entente* (1920/1921-1938). This military-political bloc included Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia; the aim of the union was to contain Hungarian irredentism and to prevent the re-establishment of the Habsburg monarchy in Austria or Hungary. However, the initial goals of the alliance over time became less relevant, and priority

shifted to other political interests. Western politicians began to consider the Little Entente as one of the variants of the political bloc of small Eastern European countries near the borders of the Soviet state. At the same time, the great powers pursued their goals, which suggests that the Little Entente was far removed from the integration ideas of the middle region, and any disagreement among the great powers that initiated its creation simultaneously aggravated the situation in the center of Europe.

In creating this structure, England and France were guided by their own geopolitical interests: on the basis of the Little Entente they sought to create simultaneously both anti-Soviet and anti-German *cordon sanitaire* between the Baltic and the Black Sea. The goal of the United States (which sought to control the situation in Europe) was to create an extensive network of small states that needed support and, as a result, were controllable, and with their help the USA could directly influence European politics.

New state borders in the region were laid to create a conflict situation between neighboring states which was irresolvable without the help of big states. About three million Austrian Germans were isolated from Austria, and the same number of Magyars were separated from Hungary and lived in neighboring states. These national divisions caused confrontation in the 1930s.

Meanwhile, the fate of the peoples in the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire evolved differently. According to the results of Versailles (1919), Saint-Germain (1919) and Trianon (1920) peace treaties, Czechoslovakia became an independent democratic state with a republican form of government. The adopted constitution repeated the main provisions typical of the constitutions of the United States and France. The concept of the Czechoslovak state was based on the idea of a single 'Czechoslovak' people. Nevertheless, there were serious differences between the Czechs and the Slovaks: Slovak nationalists, after the arrest of their ideological leader Vojtech Tuka in 1929, proclaimed a policy of independence for Slovakia. About a third of the population of Czechoslovakia were Germans, Hungarians and Ukrainians, which sealed the unenviable fate that the state would face in the future: in 1938 it was practically divided between Germany, Poland and Hungary, all of which made territorial claims to Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1939, Nazi Germany occupied the territory of the Czech Republic and Moravia, and Slovakia declared independence, becoming Germany's satellite country.

In November 1918, the independent Hungarian Republic was proclaimed, headed in 1920 by Miklós Horthy, who established a tough authoritarian regime of a conservative type, which generally contributed to the establishment of political stability. The foreign policy of Hungary, which, because of the Trianon Peace Treaty, lost two thirds of the territory, one third of the population and access to the sea, aimed at returning the lost territories and restoring the country to its former borders. This policy led Hungary to an alliance with Nazi Germany, which predetermined its participation in World II against the USSR.

Romania, which remained a kingdom after the war, almost doubled its territory and population and gained full control over the mouth of the Danube. However, national minorities constituted one third of the country's population, which gave rise to

separatist and national movements and revanchist sentiments among the neighbors who were exploited to secure territorial gains. In 1938, after an authoritarian coup the constitution was abolished, and fascist reforms were carried out, imitating the Mussolini system. After the partial loss of territory under the military-political pressure of the USSR and Germany between June and September 1940, General Ion Antonescu, who entered into an alliance with Nazi Germany, became the actual dictator of Romania.

After World War I, Polish lands, which had been divided between Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary in the 18th century, were incorporated into Poland, a large European state with a republican system. Despite the long-term loss of sovereignty, the Polish nation not only did not cease to exist but also consolidated itself in the face of the threat of assimilation. The deep historical traditions of the Polish political community contributed to the preservation of specific social and cultural institutions embodied in the new Polish statehood declared in October 1918. The democratic institutions were unstable, and in 1926 a military coup was carried out under the leadership of Józef Piłsudski. The institutionalization of the new order was interrupted by World War II; extremely unfriendly relations were established between Poland and the neighboring Soviet republics. In addition, the Poles annexed the Vilnius region of Lithuania, which created additional differences between the new states that had once been a single entity, *Rzeczpospolita*, a commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania established as a result of the Union of Lublin in 1569.

The Yugoslav peoples united around Serbia and in December 1918 created the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which included Serbia (along with Macedonia, annexed in 1913), Montenegro, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. In the new state, the Serbs claimed the role of the dominant nation and did not want to reckon with the interests of other nations, which were very different from each other despite their common origin (Catholic Croats and Slovenes; Orthodox Macedonians, Montenegrins and Serbs; non-Slavic Albanians practicing Islam, and some Slavs who accepted Islam). This almost immediately made the national question the main source of political instability and led to new ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. In January 1929, King Alexander, trying to restore order through dictatorship, dissolved the parliament and banned political parties. The country was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In 1934, the king was killed by the Ustasha, Croatian nationalists; in 1939, the Croats were granted autonomy within the Kingdom.

Bulgaria, which during World War I fought on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, lost part of the territory after the defeat; great reparations and military restrictions were imposed on it, which hampered the political development of this monarchy. In 1934, a fascist coup was carried out, after which the most favourable regime for German entrepreneurs was introduced, which made Bulgaria dependent on Germany, and not only economically.

When it comes to statehood formation in the territory of Albania, the republican form of government alternated with the monarchist, which in 1928 led to the establishment of royal power and the adoption of a monarchist constitution. By the end of the

1930s, the state-political structure of Albania began to copy the system of fascist Italy; nevertheless, communist sentiments were strong in the country.

In 1934, an alliance formed between Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Romania, known as the Balkan Entente. The military-political alliance aimed at preserving the status quo in the Balkans. The treaty provided for mutual assistance in an attack on a union member of a Balkan state (Bulgaria or Albania) and for mutual obligations not to attack others and to support others in case of an attack by another European power. This project was developed by French diplomacy and found support from the British.

Economic problems in the post-imperial space did not contribute to stability in relations in the Central European region. The dismemberment of Austria-Hungary destroyed an intra-regional division of labor that had taken shape over the decades, as well as an integral economic mechanism, which was characterized by the absence of customs and other barriers. New states had to re-form their production facilities, the market, the transport infrastructure and the system of foreign economic relations. Czechoslovakia, the industrial center of Austria-Hungary, was in the most advantageous position: it became one of the most developed industrial countries in Europe. Romania and Yugoslavia, engaged in the integration of new countries, tried to create a balance between more and less developed areas and looked for the most profitable foreign markets for purchasing heavy industry products. Therefore, instead of horizontal links, economic verticals closed in the West were formed here. All this finally weakened the region on the eve of World War II and made it easy prey for Germany.

3. THE SOCIALIST PERIOD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

The reorganization of European countries after the end of World War II was affected by a number of events of international significance. The establishment of Soviet control in territories that were in the Soviet sphere of influence was perceived in the United States and Great Britain as a threat to the world. The US Deputy Ambassador to the Soviet Union, George F. Kennan, in his 'long telegram' of February 1946 justified the impossibility of cooperation with the USSR. The author undertook the development of the ideas of the telegram in the July 1947 issue of Foreign Affairs in an article entitled 'The Sources of *Soviet Conduct*'. Kennan's views became a key factor that determined the US approach to building relations with the Soviet Union and contributed, in conjunction with W. Churchill's Fulton speech where the British politician put forward the idea of a military alliance of Anglo-Saxon countries to fight world communism, to the emergence of a system of relations called the Cold War.

Besides the lowering of the Iron Curtain, a significant role in complicating relations between the former allies belonged to the Marshall Plan (put forward in June 1947), the American program for the restoration and development of the European economy through economic assistance from the United States. The main goal of the Plan was to

improve the difficult economic situation of post-war Europe, to prevent left-wing forces from coming to power and to prevent the transition of European countries to the socialist camp. At the same time, the Plan provided for the military-political dependence of countries that received American assistance, for the reformation of the domestic political process in Western countries characterized by the arrangement of democracies similar to the American one, and for the implementation of the Truman Doctrine of the global confrontation with communism in Europe.

Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, Finland and the USSR refused such assistance. Only Czechoslovakia at the first stage managed to get some financial injections into its economy, which did not significantly affect the restoration of its competitiveness in European markets. Sixteen Western European countries and Turkey, which became beneficiaries of the Marshall Plan, later became active partners in the bloc politics of Western states. Alliances were built on the west side of the 'Iron Curtain'. From this point on, true European integration diverged into West European and Eastern European for several decades. Bloc systems started to form: the Western, led by the United States, and the Soviet socialist, led by the USSR.

An important aspect in this confrontation was the change in the Western powers' position on the German issue. In November-December 1947, they headed for the creation of a separate German state in the western zones of occupation. This violated both the agreements with the USSR and Stalin's geostrategic plans for creating a neutral buffer zone between the USSR and the West in Germany.

If in the first years after the war, the USSR supported attempts to build national variants of Soviet-type power in the countries of Eastern Europe, Russian historians recognized the period of 1948–1953 as the years of the introduction of the Soviet model of society organization, that is, the 'Stalinization' of Eastern Europe.¹⁰ In the Soviet sphere of influence, a collective security system was quickly created, based on similar bilateral treaties on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with the USSR, as well as between small countries of Eastern Europe.

This peculiar unification in foreign policy demanded additional efforts in the internal policy of these states. In January 1949, the USSR attempted to respond to the Marshall Plan by creating the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) which initially comprised the USSR, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Later, the CMEA expanded to include both European socialist states (GDR, Albania) and Asian and Latin American states (Mongolia, Vietnam, Cuba).

In contrast to Western European states which shared similar political and economic systems, the Soviet Union was to transfer the underdeveloped capitalist economies of Eastern European countries to the socialist rails. The creation of a new internal political structure also implied a change in the cultural and historical course of development of these states from central European to Soviet. To do this, it was necessary to eradicate religious beliefs and traditions, introduce communist ideology, and change the people's mentality.

¹⁰ L.N. Shishelina, *The Expansion of the European Union...*, p. 33.

By 1949, the Soviet model had been extended to all the European states bordering on the USSR. An inverted *cordon sanitaire* was thus created, which, unlike the one that arose after World War I, now stood guard over the Soviet Union against the capitalist West.

The creation of new social and political systems became possible not only because of the violent pressure of the Soviet Union on the satellite countries. Of significance was popularity of the communist movements in post-war Europe, as well as the personal ambitions of a number of Eastern European communist leaders, who, with the help of Moscow, sought to strengthen their power.

The introduction of a new political and economic order progressed with great difficulty. In more developed countries, there was still no consensus between the government and society not only on the nature of the ruling system but also on the modernization program. The introduction of new methods of control and modernization in less developed, agricultural states proceeded more calmly. Greater pressure was observed in the field of ideology, where party societies were formed, the internationalization of social life was going on, the role of the church and folk traditions was minimized, and the ideological cultural life was being shaped. As the Hungarian historian Emil Niederhauser writes, by the mid-1950s, Stalin-type regimes in Eastern Europe had developed in a "lightweight form".¹¹

In order to ensure security in response to Germany entering the NATO bloc, the Warsaw Pact Organization was created in 1955 for a military alliance of European socialist states with the leading role of the Soviet Union. The treaty was signed by Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, Poland, Romania, the USSR and Czechoslovakia at the Warsaw meeting of European states on ensuring peace and security in Europe.

In the history of the Eastern European transformations, there were four non-Soviet reformation attempts, the first in the GDR in 1953, the second, more ambitious, in Hungary in 1956. Both initiatives failed, and the Hungarian uprising ended in bloodshed. In 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the so-called 'Prague Spring' occurred – an attempt to build "socialism with a human face" and find a third way of political and economic development. Warsaw Pact troops were brought into Czechoslovakia, and the uprising was crushed. The fourth attempt to reform against the will of the Soviet Union was in Poland in 1980, when the 'Solidarity' trade union under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa opposed the communist regime. This attempt was suppressed by the forces of the Polish army and the Polish political leadership, and a regime of communist and military rule was formed which prevented interference from outside.

Despite the failure of the attempts to deeply transform the society, in some socialist countries partial reforms were carried out that resulted in the introduction of small private property (Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia) and the free movement of citizens outside the Eastern bloc (Hungary, Yugoslavia). However, in most states of the socialist bloc, a strictly ideologized policy was implemented, not diverging from the ideas of the Soviet political leadership. It was only in 1985, after Mikhail Gorbachev was elected

¹¹ Ibid., p. 39.

General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, that a restructuring policy was introduced in the USSR, which was to involve social and political transformation, the policy of publicity (openness and transparency) and the acceleration of the socio-economic development.

In 1986, negotiations between the European Economic Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance resulted in a joint declaration in which the organizations recognized each other, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe established relations with the European Economic Community. According to Svetlana Glinkina, "The Declaration gave the 'green light' to the long-standing aspirations of EEC leaders to embark on the path of direct bilateral relations with the CEE countries."¹²

The refusal of the Soviet Union to assist the leaders of the satellite countries in restoring order in the states of the socialist bloc led to the collapse of the communist regimes which proved to be untenable without outside support. The 'Iron Curtain' began to lift in June 1989, when the foreign ministers of Hungary and Austria removed barbed wire on the border between these countries. In the November of the same year, the Berlin Wall, a symbol of the Cold War, was torn down, and in December 1989 in Malta, Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush officially announced the end of the Cold War.

Describing the results of the Cold War, the Harvard University professor Joseph Nye noted that after the defeat of Fascism, the USSR and the communist ideas had serious potential, but most of it was lost after the events in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and this process continued as the Soviet Union used its military power.¹³ Thus, the Soviet Union was unable to use the potential of soft power, which Western countries, primarily the United States, were able to do.

Overall, during the period of socialist transformations in the countries of Eastern Europe, the industrialization of the economy was successfully carried out, social problems were largely resolved, and ethnic conflicts were frozen. However, a cardinal resolution of the existing problems was not achieved. With the weakening of the political center on which the created power vertical was held, the East European countries began to look for new support. In this situation, the only option for Eastern European countries seeking self-preservation was to connect with Western structures that were gaining momentum, and the active process of rapprochement began since the late 1980s.

The G-7 summit in July 1989 decided to adopt a program to assist the countries most advanced in their pursuit of Western standards. The tool for implementing this policy was the PHARE program (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies), which was subsequently extended to other post-socialist countries of Europe. An important step towards the rapprochement of the EEC and the former countries of the socialist integration group was the establishment of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD, 1991). Its main task was to "build a new

¹² S.P. Glinkina, N.V. Kulikova (eds.), *The Countries of Central and Eastern Europe – New Members of the European Union: Problems of Adaptation*, Moscow 2010, p. 16.

¹³ J. Nye, "Rhymes of History", *Kommersant*, vol. 38 (2006), p. 8.

era in Central and Eastern Europe”, to assist in strengthening the market economy and democracy, as well as in developing the private sector in the post-socialist countries of Europe.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Further evolution of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe became irreversibly Western-centric in nature. To streamline the rapprochement of post-socialist states with Western European countries, the European Council session in June 1993 in Copenhagen formulated the criteria for joining the EU which became a reference point for the candidate countries.

Early in the 21st century, the process of mass accession to the European Union began, and is still not completed. With the liberalization of the economy and democratization of the political sphere, the new independent states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia became (and still become) candidates for membership in the European Union. In general, positive results in terms of the socio-economic development of new EU member countries¹⁵ contributed to the popularity of this choice, which suggests “the dominant trend in the development of modern international relations.”¹⁶

However, it is not possible to quickly become Western Europeans. The mentality of the peoples inhabiting the region of ‘Middle Europe’, which developed over the centuries, do not allow to radically change the values and political perception in a short while. The shift in mentality is very slow, which allowed the American political scientist Marc Howard to state: “As long as the specific personal and social experience of post-communist citizens will influence the attitude to society and current politics, institutional and political changes will have little effect on social standards”¹⁷.

Despite the entry queue into the EU, the dividing lines in Europe have not disappeared, and this is a political rather than a geographical factor. The term ‘Europe’ is often synonymous with the totality of the countries of the European Union and those European countries that either plan to join it in the near future or share its values. The correlation of Russia with such Europe differs from the geographical definition, since it is additionally filled with political sense. An example of matching the geography and politics was the proposal of Charles de Gaulle to consider Europe from Lisbon to the Urals, despite the socialist nature of the regimes in Eastern European countries. In the

¹⁴ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The official website of the EBRD, at <<https://www.ebrd.com/ru/about-us.html>>, 4 October 2018.

¹⁵ A.R. Ataulina, E.G. Lisovskaya, “European Countries – Members of the CMEA and the Integration Processes in the Post-Soviet Space”, *Issues of Economics and Law*, no. 11 (2013), p. 98.

¹⁶ K.A. Kokarev, “Features and Prospects of Integration Processes in Europe”, in O.E. Lushnikov (ed.), *Expansion of the European Union at the Expense of the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe: Implementation Errors or Bankruptcy of the Concept: Coll. report*, Moscow 2014, p. 7.

¹⁷ M.M. Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, Moscow 2009, p. 174.

1990s, a project of Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok appeared, which in the latest concept of the Russian Federation's foreign policy is associated with the strategic task in relations with the EU to form a "common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean based on harmonization and combination of European and Eurasian integration, which will make it possible to prevent the emergence of dividing lines on the European continent."¹⁸ French President Emmanuel Macron in his speech at the 22nd St. Petersburg Economic Forum on May 25, 2018 again called Russia "an integral part of Europe."¹⁹

Therefore, the issue of creating a united Europe without dividing lines is on the agenda. The place and role of Russia in it will depend on "how useful its policy can be in the field of arms reduction, creating conditions for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and combating international terrorism."²⁰ The manner of resolving the emerging contradictions in Europe indicates the course of further development of Russian-European relations, which, taking into account recent events on the world stage, require cooperation in order to solve pressing world problems.

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¹⁸ The concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, 30 XI 2016, at <http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_207990/>, 4 October 2018.

¹⁹ Plenary meeting of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, 25 V 2018, at <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57556>>, 4 November 2018.

²⁰ Primakov E.M., *Challenges and Alternatives to a Multipolar World: The Role of Russia*, Moscow 2014, pp. 192-193.

- Kokarev K.A., "Features and Prospects of Integration Processes in Europe", in O.E. Lushnikov (ed.), *Expansion of the European Union at the Expense of the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe: Implementation Errors or Bankruptcy of the Concept: Coll. report*, Moscow 2014.
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