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DOES THE NAME MATTER?

CENTRAL EUROPE AND CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE IN DIFFERENT VARIATIONS AND CONFIGURATIONS. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLISH AND CZECH DISCOURSES

ABSTRACT

This article points at differences and similarities in ways of defining Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe found in Polish and Czech academic discourse. The aim of the article is, firstly, to identify these differences and similarities, and secondly, to indicate the probable reasons for their existence. In order to accomplish both goals, the authors analyze selected narratives of Czech and Polish historiography and the terms present in both kinds of discourse under analysis. The analysis is based on a selection of texts considered relevant and influential. The time span covered in the article is the period from the First World War to the present times, with particular emphasis on the period from the 1970s onwards. In spatial terms, the article focuses on influential Polish and Czech authors working either in their home countries or abroad, as émigrés. The object of study is discourse understood as a communication activity in which meanings are continuously constructed. The article takes into consideration the following issues: (1) the popularity of the notions of “Central Europe” and “Central-Eastern Europe” in both discourses; (2) the evaluation of these concepts – namely the attribution of some positive and negative features to them; (3) the presentation of the *topoi* of Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe in Polish and Czech discourses (the views concerning their spatial ex-

tent and borders); (4) political operationalization of these concepts in the form of integration (geopolitical) projects.

Key words: Central Europe, Central-Eastern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Poland, Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION

One might think that the subject of our analyses are two concepts whose scopes both in Polish and Czech languages are quite obvious and raise no doubts. Central Europe would simply constitute part of Central-Eastern Europe. In other words, Central-Eastern Europe would be made of Central Europe and Eastern Europe. However, it turns out that the problem is far more complicated. Both concepts are consequences of modern era discourses, although admittedly the discussion of the borders and characteristics of Central Europe has been held for two centuries, starting with the stabilization of the new political order in Europe following the Congress of Vienna (1815), whereas the concept of Central-Eastern Europe is much younger, originating in historiography and political science only after 1945.

We analyze here the concepts or models of two macro-regions which have been created generally in different historical conditions by scholars representing various fields, as well as politicians and economists pursuing their different interests. Both concepts appeared and developed in academic discourse, which, however, has always been strongly tied to political discourse. This mostly concerns the concept of Central-Eastern Europe, a specific reaction to the reality of the bipolar order established after the Second World War. The concept of Central Europe is much more complicated. In both cases, nevertheless, the origin of the concepts analyzed here is strongly related to the historical aspect, as history and historians have played a vital role in formulating them. Naturally, apart from historians, political scientists, sociologists, geopoliticians, geographers, economists and culture experts have also contributed substantially to the development of both concepts.¹ This pluralism of the subjects presenting their opinions on the territorial scope and properties of Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe contributes to the confusion over the two concepts. We can also observe a specific type of determinism here, namely the shape of a particular definition very often depends on the theoretical orientation or the world view adopted by the one who formulates it and on their political, cultural or economic interests. The definition depends on their likes and dislikes, their place of birth and residence, their nationality and many other subjective and objective factors. It is also worth noticing that people discussing Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe are often more attached to the name itself than

¹ An example of an attempt at dealing with both discourses on the grounds of culture studies is: W. Parafianowicz-Vertun, *Europa Środkowa w tekstach i działaniach. Polskie i czeskie dyskusje*, Warszawa 2016.

to facts and phenomena whose existence and properties they would like to prove. As a result, according to J. Trávníček, the author of a lengthy anthology of texts on Central Europe which illustrates the growing numbers of scholarly and press articles since the 1980s, we can find more and more review papers summarizing the research so far, which gives an impression that when it comes to Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe we are moving from a discourse stage to a meta-discourse stage. Individual narratives concerning Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe intertwine with meta-narratives and thus these ideas are becoming the object of scientific research.²

The authors of this article assume, on the basis of numerous papers published by Polish and Czech authors on Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, that although both (Polish and Czech) discourses are internally diversified, there are also many divergences between the Polish and the Czech perception of what Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe stand for. This article concerns most of all observable differences and similarities between the two discourses in the ways of defining the above concepts. The aim of the article is, firstly, to identify these differences and similarities and secondly, to indicate the probable reasons behind them. In order to accomplish both goals, the authors analyze selected narratives found in both discourses under discussion. Our analysis is based on a selection of texts commonly considered relevant and influential (discursive).

It is hoped that this text will stimulate discussion over the Polish and the Czech perception of the concepts mentioned in the title, rather than close or summarize such discussion. The time span covered in the article is the period from the First World War to the present times, with particular emphasis on the period from the 1970s onwards. In spatial terms, the article focuses on influential Polish and Czech authors, both working in their home countries and abroad, on emigration. The object of study was indicated in the title of the article and it constitutes (mostly academic) discourse understood as "(...) communication activity in which meanings are continuously constructed."³ It is examined from the point of view of sociology rather than linguistics, whose task is to show its structure and development in the above-mentioned period.

In this article we consider the following issues: (1) the popularity of the concepts of "Central Europe" and "Central-Eastern Europe" in both discourses; (2) the valuation of these concepts by ascribing positive and negative features to them; (3) the *topos* of Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe in the Polish and Czech presentation

² J. Trávníček, "Zrození střední Evropy z ducha...", in J. Trávníček (ed.), *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém*, Brno 2009, p. 293. The book consists of several selected texts divided into two sections: (a) Geopolitics, History; (b) Culture, Literature, Novel. It also contains two excerpts from panel discussions (of Central-European and Russian writers in Lisbon in 1988 and dissident politicians and writers in the Budapest round table in 1989). Moreover, it contains a list of 100 most important works on Central Europe. Ibid. p. 305-317. A similar list, comprising over 300 items (mostly by Polish scientists) is included in the collective work: R. Zenderowski (ed.), *Europa Środkowa: wspólnota czy zbiorowość?*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 2004.

³ A. Grzymała-Kazłowska, "Socjologicznie zorientowana analiza dyskursu na tle współczesnych badań nad dyskursem", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* no. 1 (2004), p. 21 (transl. ours).

(perceptions of their spatial extent and borders); (4) political operationalization of both concepts in the form of integration (geopolitical) projects.

1. THE “POLISH” CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE VERSUS THE “CZECH” CENTRAL EUROPE?

At the beginning we would like to point out that although Central Europe functions as a cultural and (geo)political concept in both discourses, Central-Eastern Europe is perceived mainly as a geographic and, above all, (geo)political notion. As for the differences, in Polish discourse both terms seem to be equally or similarly popular (with CEE slightly leading the race), whereas in the Czech language the concept of Central Europe clearly dominates and the term Central-Eastern Europe appeared in Czech discourse as late as at the end of the 1990s, mostly in political and geopolitical analyses (with a few instances in historiography and other fields of science) and usually in comparison to Eastern Europe or Central Europe. Its significance is marginal, it is extremely rarely used in everyday life, for example in the media, where the term “Central and Eastern Europe” is preferred.⁴ Over the past two decades the concept of Central-Eastern Europe in Czech academic discourse has predominantly been used in political science or geopolitics and international relations, sociology and history of art,⁵ to mark a vaster region, whereas the term “Central Europe” is spatially more limited. This concerns particular works especially by young or middle-aged scholars who are in touch with their colleagues in the English-speaking world (J. Miller, O. Císař) or in Poland (M. Kubát), or often participate in international research projects.⁶

The concept of Central Europe is close to the hearts of the Czechs and Hungarians, whereas Polish authors have long preferred the term “Central-Eastern Europe” for various reasons: due to their rich historical experience with the East and in order to differentiate themselves from the Germans who emphasize their Central European origins without the “eastern” component.⁷ In general the concept of Central Europe lacked popularity in Polish academic discourse practically until the 1980s. The term “Central Europe” is preferred by Polish political scientists, as noticed by A. Czarnocki, whereas

⁴ E.g. Z. Beránek, “Neklidné hranice americké politiky”, *Lidové noviny* (appendix “Orientace”), 14 April 2018, p. 22/IV. The author is deputy chief of mission at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in the USA. It should be noted that these terms are often used quite randomly. See M. Ehl, “Jak se střední Evropa vrací do času socialismu”, *Hospodářské noviny*, 31 July 2013.

⁵ One important work in the Polish discourse on history of art is: T. Gryglewicz, “Dzieje pojęcia Europa Środkowa”, in T. Gryglewicz, *Malarstwo Europy Środkowej 1900-1914. Tendencje modernistyczne i wczesnoawangardowe*, Kraków 1992.

⁶ See M. Fryč, *Prezentace knihy „Rukověť dějin umění ve středovýchodní Evropě 400–1000”*, at <<http://martinfryc.eu/vystavy/prezentace-knihy-rukovet-dejin-umeni-ve-stredovýchodni-evrope-400-1000/>>.

⁷ A. Czarnocki, “Europa Środkowa. Europa Środkowoschodnia: geopolityczne a historyczno-kulturowe rozumienie pojęć”, *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio K: Politologia*, no. 1 (1994), p. 26.

Polish historians tend to use the term “Central-Eastern Europe”, which can only partially be explained by the geographical scope of their research.⁸ This is interesting as in Czech discourse the term “Central Europe” prevails in both academic disciplines, while the term “Central-Eastern Europe”, which exists parallel to “Central and Eastern Europe”, enjoys a rather limited recognition, particularly in political science, international relations and geopolitics.⁹

By the mid-1990s, Czech discourse had used almost exclusively the term “Central Europe”, whose definition and territorial scope gave rise to controversies. Since the end of the 1990s, as already stated, the delimitation of the term “Central-Eastern Europe” was primarily the domain of political scientists specializing in the theory of international relations and geopolitics. As early as at the end of the 1990s, a concise review of the main conceptions of Central Europe appeared in specialist literature, thanks to B. Dančák, who analyzed integration processes in the region. The author emphasized the political and cultural aspect of the concept of Central Europe, dominant after 1945, as well as the actual division of the region into the part inhabited by Czechs and Hungarians and the one inhabited by Poles (quoted after J. Rupnik, a French political scientist and historian born in Prague).¹⁰ P. Wandycz, who contributed to the introduction of the concept of Central-Eastern Europe to Czech scholarly discourse, pointed at the tendency demonstrated by Czech authors, who perceived Central Europe as a “central belt” separating Eastern Europe from Western Europe.¹¹ He also recalled the perspective of Russian political scientists, who combined Central and Eastern Europe in order to emphasize the possibility of further internal divisions and claimed that in the east the region borders on the “post-soviet territory”, which, according to Dančák, means that the Baltic states, as well as Belarus and Ukraine, i.e. states which in Polish political science are clearly classified as Central-Eastern European, are not included in this category by the Russians. Within this confined region, I. Kobrinská, to whom Dančák refers, distinguishes three smaller areas: central (Visegrad), “southern” (Bulgaria, Romania, former Yugoslavia countries, Albania) and “Baltic” (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia).¹²

In order to determine the specific character of Central Europe it seems useful to use A. Ágh’s comparative study of quoted by Dančák in which differences between our region and the Balkans as well as the border between them are taken into consideration.

⁸ Ibid. p. 23-24.

⁹ B. Dančák, V. Hloušek, “Central and Eastern Europe in the Process of Globalization and Europeanization: Comparing the Czech Republic and Poland, in K. Fábíán (ed.), *Globalization: Perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe*, Oxford-Amsterdam-San Diego 2007, p. 227-250. This problem definitely requires an in-depth analysis of the subject literature (political studies), for example on the basis of the scientific journal *Mezinárodní politika*.

¹⁰ B. Dančák, “Geneze spolupráce ve střední Evropě”, in B. Dančák (ed.), *Integrační pokusy ve středoevropském prostoru II*, Brno 1999, p. 8-9. Podle: J. Rupnik, *Jiná Evropa*, Praha 1992, p. 14-15.

¹¹ B. Dančák notes that the term „Central-Eastern Europe“ in the Czech scientific community appears extremely rarely and in serious books in the subject literature first appears in the Czech edition of P. Wandycz. B. Dančák, “Geneze spolupráce...”, p. 24-26.

¹² I. Kobrinskaja, *Długi koniec zimnej wojny. Rosja i Europa Środkowa 1991-1996*, Warszawa 1998, p. 19-20, 23, quoted after: B. Dančák, “Geneze spolupráce...”, p. 12.

Ágh believes that since the 16th century Central Europe has been a sort of periphery of Western Europe, whose Westernization or Europeanization proceeded much more intensively compared to the Balkans and, particularly in the 19th century, it brought quicker economic, social and political progress. The key factor in the political development after 1989 was the fact that Central Europe reintroduced democracy, whereas the Balkan states experienced the first wave of democratization. At the end, Dančák emphasizes the necessity to take into account the growing differences between “new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe”, related to “different use of the concepts of *Central Europe and Eastern Europe*,” and, taking the European integration perspective, namely the need for paying attention to newly-created political and economic integration associations in the region.¹³

An original conception of Central Europe, taking into account the perspectives of geography, nationality and culture and reflecting the “delay” in the process of forming modern nations and modernization compared to Western Europe, is proposed by V. Hloušek. In his opinion, contemporary Central Europe is composed of: the four Visegrad states (V4) as its specific “core”, Slovenia and Croatia, both of which, in A. Ágh's terms, are united by the common experience of the reintroduction of democracy after 1989 (compared to other post-Yugoslav states which experience the first wave of democratization), as well as Austria, for historical reasons. A typical trait of the internal political development of those states is the fact that “the stage of establishing and developing modern mass politics was preceded or accompanied by the stage of building the state and building the nation”. The typical sequence for Western Europe (the building of the state, followed by the building of the nation and the development of mass politics) could not be observed in Central Europe due to the parallel existence of the “Habsburg empire” and the growing “peripheral protests of the nations subordinated to it.”¹⁴

This conception of Central Europe and its “separation” from Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe (the Balkans) corresponds with further studies and books which V. Hloušek contributed to in 2004–2007,¹⁵ including a collective work devoted to political systems of Central-Eastern Europe.¹⁶ Similarly, the concept of *Central Europe* was

¹³ B. Dančák, “Geneze spolupráce...”, p. 12.

¹⁴ M. Havelka, “Konotace pojmu «střední Evropa» v českém prostředí“ (Přednáška pro české a německé studenty na kompaktním semináři “Střední Evropa“ Friedricha Naumanna a “Nová Evropa“ T. G. Masaryka: dva koncepty pro Evropu na konci první světové války“, Praha 1998), in M. Havelka, L. Cabada (eds.), *Západní, východní a střední Evropa jako kulturní a politické pojmy*, Plzeň 2000, pp. 32-34. See also: *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38. Jedná o “mírně upravenou pasáž” ze studie V. Hloušek, “«Habsburská tradice», demokratizace střední Evropy a její kritické body“, in P. Fiala, M. Strmiska (eds.), *Víceúrovňové vládnutí: teorie, přístupy, metody*, Brno 2005, pp. 13-17.

¹⁵ Např. V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, *Konfliktní demokracie. Moderní masová politika ve střední Evropě*, Brno 2004; V. Hloušek, L. Kopeček, “Polityka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej po 1989 a słowaccy ekskomuniści”, in I. Miklaszewicz, R. Kamuntavičius (eds.), *Razem w Europie*, Kaunas 2006, pp. 31-44, at <<https://www.muni.cz/vyzkum/publikace/724790>>, 14 July 2018; V. Hloušek, P. Kaniok, “Členství stran ze střední a jihovýchodní Evropy v eurostranách – příběh s otevřeným koncem?”, in V. Hloušek, P. Kaniok (eds.), *Evropské politické strany po východním rozšíření Evropské unie*, Brno 2007, pp. 161-165.

¹⁶ V. Hloušek, “Chorvatsko“, in M. Kubát (ed.), *Politické a ústavní systémy zemí středovýchodní Evropy*, Praha 2004, p. 137-158.

used in a research project of political scientists from Brno and Pilsno in 2010-2012,¹⁷ although in other cases a narrower delimitation of the region prevails, including only the Visegrad Group countries and Slovenia¹⁸.

An interesting contribution to the discourse on the conceptions of Central Europe in the first decade of the 21st century was made by M. Havelka, who, following a preliminary review of terms and concepts, compared the idea of Central Europe professed by its four nations, namely Hungarians, Slovenians, Poles and Czechs, through the prism of mind maps, which turn out to be different. One of the main reasons for these differences is, in his opinion, the fact that Poles, as a result of their historical development, consider themselves “much more or much more directly Europeans than Czechs or Hungarians (and Austrians) do.”¹⁹

This stage of Czech discourse on Central Europe was symbolically concluded in 2008 by the already mentioned anthology edited by the literary scholar J. Trávníček, titled *Caught by history. Central Europe as a concept and an issue*.²⁰ As the title of the book implies, the concepts of “Central-Eastern Europe” or “Central and Eastern Europe” are used only sporadically.²¹ The final part of the anthology features a “developmental”, or chronological, review of the conceptions of Central Europe. It is also partly devoted to the related concept of Central-Eastern Europe, understood in terms of an idea of Central Europe expressed by Polish and Hungarian historians. According to Trávníček, after 1945 the concept of Central-Eastern Europe was a reaction to the post-Yalta division and the appearance of the Soviet bloc, while O. Halecki’s views were largely shaped by “a very Polonocentric viewpoint, dividing the region into two parts and the fact that the lands of the Czech Kingdom were classified as belonging to the eastern part, must seem – not only to the Czechs – as a considerable intellectual manipulation.”²²

In Poland the term „Central Europe” gained popularity only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It must be remembered that “The idea of Central Europe was brought to

¹⁷ This is the research project of the Czech Republic Grant Agency (Grantová agentura České republiky) No P408/10/0295 *Stranické systémy zemí středovýchodní Evropy*. The aim of the project was to conduct a comparative analysis of party and political systems in ten post-communist countries of Central-Eastern Europe. The results of the analysis were presented in the publication: L. Cabada, V. Hloušek, P. Jurek, *Ztraceny v tranzici? Minulost a přítomnost politického stranictví ve střední a východní Evropě*, Brno 2013, at <<https://www.muni.cz/vyzkum/publikace/724790>>, 14 July 2018.

¹⁸ For example the grant project GA ČR No GA P408/11/0709 *Soudobé výzvy demokracii ve středovýchodní Evropě*. The subject of the analyses were: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, at <<https://www.muni.cz/vyzkum/publikace/724790>>, 14 July 2018.

¹⁹ M. Havelka, “Střední Evropa: konstrukce – iluze – realita aneb o středoevropských pojetích Střední Evropy”, *Svět literatury*, no. 37 2007, p. 197-213 (transl. ours). See also: M. Havelka, “Wo liegt die Mitte?”, in M.T. Vogt, J. Sokol, B. Mikolajczyk (eds.), *Peripherie in der Mitte Europas. Schriften des Collegium Pontes*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, p. 91-98; I. Kučerová, *Střední Evropa. Komparace vývoje středoevropských států*, Praha 2015, p. 59.

²⁰ J. Trávníček (ed.), *V kleštích dějin...*

²¹ I. Bibó, “Deformace politické kultury ve střední a východní Evropě”, in J. Trávníček (ed.), *V kleštích dějin. Střední Evropa jako pojem a problém*, Brno 2009, p. 17-30.

²² J. Trávníček, *Zrození střední Evropy...*, p. 269-271 (transl. ours).

life by intellectuals of the so-called eastern bloc. It was a declaration of their will to gain independence and most of all, their way of emphasizing their identity.”²³ We should add that especially among Czech and Hungarian intellectuals, as noticed by K. Dziewanowski: “[t]he concept of Central Europe has become trendy. And the discussion of this concept has become fashionable. Many people in at least a few countries and in several journals (also in a few sensational books) enthusiastically discuss Central Europe, that is something which (...) does not exist at all. Because there is no Central Europe. It does not exist in official, political diplomatic terminology or in the language of agreements and communications, newspapers and TV, books (official ones, accepted by censors), scientific works, publications of state academies of science, encyclopedias, UN documents and terminology. Once upon a time Central Europe existed, but then it disappeared. There is no Central Europe”²⁴. The same author then writes: “And then suddenly, out of the blue: out of the fog, smog, acid rains, dust of deteriorating historical towns, out of high radioactivity, out of the decreasing life expectancy in the area, out of shattered hopes of two or three generations – out of the blue, the discussion on Central Europe began. This happened simultaneously in a number of countries: Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany. And in Poland, too (...)”²⁵

Trying to find the reasons for such poor circulation of the term “Central Europe” in Polish discourse before the 1990s, B. Geremek, who later became Poland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, noticed that “(...) while in official and unofficial Czech and Hungarian debate Central Europe is discussed, the problem seems to be non-existent in Polish political reflection and thought. This is by no means accidental, though neither does it reflect a lazy attitude. This stems from the state of the social awareness in Poland, the fact that Poland strongly identifies itself with the West and does not feel it has a different civilization than the rest of Europe.”²⁶ This ideally corresponds with the already quoted observation by M. Havelka. The idea of Central Europe was introduced to the Polish academic, literary and political discourse by emigration journals, such as “Kultura”, “Zeszyty Literackie”, “Puls”, “Aneks”, unofficial “Res Publica”.²⁷ The tendency to use the category of Central Europe in Poland after the war might be connected with Poland’s westward shift and loss of what is commonly referred to as Eastern Borderlands and the desire to become independent (at least mentally) from the influence of the USSR as an eastern power *par excellence*. The Czechs, on the other hand, did not experience any territorial shift to the west, as they have always considered themselves to be “the bridge” between the West and the East, with which they only bordered indirectly, through the eastern frontiers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then through Slo-

²³ M. Buchowski, I. Kolbon, “Od «Mitteleuropy» do Europy Środkowej: zarys dziejów idei”, *Sprawy Narodowościowe. Seria nowa*, vol. 19 (2001), p. 22 (transl. ours).

²⁴ K. Dziewanowski, “Europa nadliczbowa”, in *Między Wschodem i Zachodem*, Konwersatorium „Polska w Europie”, Kościół pw. Świętej Trójcy, Warszawa 1988, p. 44 (transl. ours).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53 (transl. ours).

²⁶ B. Geremek, “Głos w dyskusji”, in *Między Wschodem...*, p. 31 (transl. ours).

²⁷ M. Buchowski, I. Kolbon, “Od «Mitteleuropy»...”, p. 22 (transl. ours).

vakian and Carpathian lands belonging to Czechoslovakia. The loss of Carpathian Ruthenia after the Second World War and the political independence of Slovakia in 1993 weakened or even eliminated the Czech contacts with the East.

It should also be noticed that some Polish authors demonstrate a tendency to equate both concepts and use them interchangeably. Let us quote as an example one of articles by T. Stryjek in "Kwartalnik Historyczny", titled: *Central Europe (Central-Eastern), or the praise of diversity and comparative studies*. In Stryjek's opinion "the name 'Central Europe' ('Central-Eastern Europe') can be used and in fact should be used with reference to the times when this part of the continent was conceived. This conception appeared, however, later than two o*ther notions which constitute the foundation of modernity and still define the framework in which the history of Europe is perceived. I mean here firstly Eastern Europe conceived as a civilization and secondly the modern concept of the nation. It was in the age of Enlightenment that both began to be understood in a way similar to how they are perceived now."²⁸ Another example could be found in a statement made by P. Eberherdt, a geographer and geopolitician, who said that "this area has two names – Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe. The latter is more adequate and more widespread. (...) It should be stated that it was understood differently in the past and contains numerous ambiguities."²⁹ One should note that such an equation of both concepts has never appeared in Czech academic discourse.

Referring to the concept of Central-Eastern Europe, it should be noted, following J. Kłoczowski, that "it [was used] for the first time quite recently, in the middle of the 20th century by historians of this area of the continent. It cropped up in the course of the debate which had started only after the First World War which fundamentally changed the political map of the areas we now call Central-European Europe."³⁰ The same author reminds us that "In 1935 Hungarian historians established a scholarly journal in Budapest, giving it the name which later on turned out to be particularly useful: *Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis*."³¹ That is how the name Central-Eastern Europe appeared."³²

Whereas the concept of Central-Eastern Europe is relatively common in Polish discourse, the same cannot be said about Czech discourse. According to the author of one of the syntheses of the modern history of Central Europe, J. Křen "Central-Eastern, or Central and Eastern Europe, for the nations here constitutes some sort of a 'broader homeland', although this concept is difficult to accept for the Czech community and "it

²⁸ T. Stryjek, "Europa Środkowa (Środkowo-Wschodnia), czyli o pochwalę różnorodności i komparatystryki", *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, no. 4 (2013), p. 779 (transl. ours).

²⁹ P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami. Przemiany narodowościowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Warszawa 1996, p. 14 (transl. ours).

³⁰ J. Kłoczowski, "Wprowadzenie", in J. Kłoczowski (ed.), *Historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. I, Lublin 2000, p. 10 (transl. ours).

³¹ The journal was published in 1935-1944. The archives of all its issues are available at <<http://epa.oszk.hu/html/vgi/kardexlap.phtml?id=2625>>.

³² J. Kłoczowski, "Wprowadzenie", p. 11-12 (transl. ours).

seems that the Czech language is resisting it.”³³ In this context it is worth referring to the comment made by the editors of the Czech edition of P. Wandycz’s *Cena wolności. Historia Europy Środkowowschodniej od Średniowiecza do Współczesności*.³⁴ They assumed that regardless of the term “Central-Eastern Europe” the author used in the title, the book is in fact a comparative study of Central Europe and “although we will frequently see a problematic and rarely used “Central-Eastern” concept, the discussion about these concepts should not conceal the fact that it really boils down to an effort to bring the Central European lands to where they once belonged and from where the Soviet system was trying to remove them”³⁵. The change in the title of the book (from the original “East Central Europe” to “Central Europe” in the Czech edition) was undoubtedly caused by the position of the author himself, P. Wandycz, who claimed that “the concept of Central-Eastern Europe was an outcome of a compromise worked out by representatives of various scholarly perspectives” and was semantically ambiguous: on the one hand it was used with reference to the space between the Baltic, the Adriatic, the Aegean and the Black Seas, and on the other hand, it denoted its core, that is, the territory of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.³⁶ It is worth mentioning that the concept of “Central-Eastern Europe” finds its way to the Czech discourse through the above-mentioned book by P. Wandycz. From the very beginning, however, the Czech language treated this concept as a foreign and artificially-created hybrid. Nevertheless, the concept of “Central-Eastern Europe” is still used in the Czech historiography, although it is often related to older times in various semantic shades and to various regions. For example, J. Miller, in his work on the development of communities in Central-Eastern European towns in the early modern era uses this concept to denote the Lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslaus, the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, including Royal Prussia and Red Ruthenia, that is, in the broad sense of the term,³⁷ while later works of Czech, Polish and Slovak historians of the Middle Ages concerning the transformation of the Arpad, the Piast and the Premyslid duchies into kingdoms in the early and mid Middle Ages roughly concern the territories of the countries of the Visegrad Group,³⁸ whereas essays by P. David and V. Soukup relate this concept to the history of the Poland-Lithuanian Union from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 18th century.³⁹

³³ J. Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy*, Praha 2005, p. 27-28 (transl. ours).

³⁴ P.S. Wandycz, *Cena wolności: historia Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej od średniowiecza do współczesności*, Kraków 1995. (Original, first edition: P.S. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom: A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Routledge 1992) (transl. ours).

³⁵ P. Wandycz, *Střední Evropa v dějinách. Od středověku do současnosti*, Praha 1998, p. 9 (transl. ours). The term “heartland” was borrowed from Tomothy Garton Ash.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁷ J. Miller, *Uzavřená společnost a její nepřátelé. Město středovýchodní Evropy (1500–1700)*, Praha 2006.

³⁸ M. Wihoda, L. Reitinger et al., *Proměna středovýchodní Evropy raněho a vrcholného středověku. Mocenské souvislosti a paralely*, Brno 2010. It is interesting to note that the book was published in the publishing series: *Kraje i kultura w Europie Środkowej (Země a kultura ve střední Evropě)*.

³⁹ P. David, V. Soukup, *Jagellonské dědictví. Kapitoly z dějin středovýchodní Evropy*, Brno 2012.

To summarize, the concept of “Central-Eastern Europe” entered the language of Czech historians via foreign authors and still functions as a “foreign word”, which cannot be said about the Polish language.⁴⁰ Considering the mutual influence of both Polish and Czech discourses on the issues under discussion, referring to the discussed terminology it should be noted that whereas the concept “Central Europe” (more popular in Czech discourse) was readily adopted by Polish historians, geographers, political scientists and other experts, Czech researchers find it difficult to absorb the term “Central-Eastern Europe”. While Polish authors base their understanding of the concept of Central Europe on various sources – on the one hand those written in German, and on the other, on Czech and Hungarian ones – Czech authors using the term “Central-Eastern Europe” most often refer to Polish authors, especially O. Halecki and P. Wandycz, and only sometimes to English-language authors.

2. “POSITIVE” CENTRAL EUROPE, “NEUTRAL” CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE AND “NEGATIVE” EASTERN EUROPE

The concept of Central Europe, comprising a strong culture and civilization component, is usually valued positively, especially in the countries which constitute a part of this region (including Poland and the Czech Republic) or aspire to join it. The concept of Central Europe in the Polish⁴¹ and Czech languages has a clear component pertaining to culture, identity and civilization. The term gained special significance in the communist period (in the dissident circles of the 1970s and the 1980s) and its task was to differentiate the countries and nations that had taken shape as part of the Latin (Western) civilization but fell under the Soviet influence from other countries belonging to the so-called Eastern Bloc. This was a sort of flight from the East, which was associated with Asian barbarity, lack of democratic and liberal traditions, etc.⁴² The identity of post-war Central Europe was built mostly by anti-communist protests in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. The term “Central Europe” itself was severely

⁴⁰ Např. S. Gerhardt, “Východostřední Evropa – Centrální Evropa – Střední Evropa. Přiblížení pojmů a pokus o objasnění jejich obsahu”, *Střední Evropa, revue pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku*, no. 131 (2008), pp. 37–48.

⁴¹ See A. Tyszka, “Przestrzeń kulturowa «środką Europy»”, in A. Tyszka (ed.), *Róża wiatrów Europy*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 31–46.

⁴² R. Zenderowski, “Europa Środkowa jako «ucieczka przed Wschodem» czy «pomost» między Wschodem i Zachodem?”, in R. Zenderowski (ed.), *Europa Środkowa...*, pp. 36–48; J. Kieniewicz, “Stojąc w drzwiach: odczytywanie dziedzictwa i wybór przynależności”, in J. Purchla (ed.), *Europa Środkowa – nowy wymiar dziedzictwa*, Kraków 2002, p. 81. Kieniewicz accusingly implies that the reference to the category of Central Europe made by Poles is in fact a kind of a desertion from the East, where Poland had belonged for centuries, a peculiar silent acknowledgement of Russia’s exclusive rights to the region. “Referring to Central Europe may arouse suspicions that we accept this historical defeat and, following the slogans from half a century ago, we return to the Piast route. I find this approach to heritage disastrous and even harmful to our national interests”. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

persecuted by the Soviet censorship.⁴³ The term “Central Europe” and its growing popularity was perceived by the Soviets in terms of a threat, it did not arouse any sympathy among the anti-communist Russian opposition in exile. Even “Trybuna Ludu”, at the beginning of 1986, indirectly acknowledged the topicality of this concept, publishing a series of articles attacking “the myth of Central Europe”.

Contrary to the earlier, internally heterogeneous concept of Central Europe, which was exposed to external pressures, attempts to redefine it, which started in the 1980s, strongly emphasized its cultural dimension. Scholars began to stress the cultural integrity and community of the nations in the region (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary).⁴⁴ Milan Kundera, an outstanding figure in promoting the positive image of Central Europe, in his well-known essay, *A Kidnapped West or the Tragedy of Central Europe*, wrote that “Central Europe 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: the greatest variety within the smallest space.”⁴⁵ Kundera clearly defines Central Europe through the prism of values that are of key importance for preserving the European values that have been forgotten in the West and brutally trampled on and destroyed in the East. It must be admitted that Kundera’s text is of fundamental significance to the Central European narration, regardless of which nationality the authors come from. Polish authors unanimously consider the text to be vital for the constitution and identity of Central Europe, whereas references (including polemic ones) to it appear in many if not in the majority of texts.⁴⁶ J. Reiter writes about the cultural dimension of Central Europe: “I sometimes wonder whether Central Europe is a substitute name for something which one does not wish to call directly. I also share the suspicion formulated once by Ralf Dahrendorf that it is in fact the desire of freedom, but only implied, probably for fear of the consequences of calling things by their names.”⁴⁷ K. Wojtyła, who later became Pope John Paul II, defines Central Europe stating that: “A trait of a vivid culture – including the Central European culture – is its ability to spread, to confront with values represented by other cultures.”⁴⁸ After 1989, Poland has seen many initiatives aimed at promoting the

⁴³ A. Podraza, “Europa Środkowa. Zakres przestrzenny i historia region”, *Prace Komisji Środkowoeuropejskiej*, vol. 1 (1993), p. 24.

⁴⁴ P. Bílek, “Střední Evropa je, ale kde?”, *Literární noviny* 3 December 2015, at <<http://literarky.cz/civilizace/89-civilizace/21117-stedni-evropa-je-ale-kde>>; J. Pehe, “Střední Evropa je mizějící sen”, *Právo* 27 September 2017 (příloha Salon), at <<https://www.novinky.cz/kultura/salon/450108-jiri-pehe-stredni-evropa-je-mizejici-sen.html>>.

⁴⁵ M. Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe”, *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, p. 33 (transl. ours).

⁴⁶ Kundera’s text soon became an object of severe criticism, which only grew in the 1990s and in our century. This seemed a bit like an attempt at mythologization of Central Europe (and Kundera had the right to do so if he was creating a literary work or even a political manifesto), and today some authors consider Kundera’s Central Europe as a case of wishful thinking.

⁴⁷ J. Reiter, “Głos w dyskusji”, in *Między Wschodem...*, p. 79.

⁴⁸ K. Wojtyła, “Gdzie znajduje się granica Europy”, *Ethos*, no. 28 (1994), p. 29; R. Zenderowski, “Pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem?”, *Przegląd Zachodni*, no. 3 (2004), p. 12. A similar tone was

Central European concept as a specific transnational identity category, in which the Polish identity could be inscribed. One could mention here the books of Andrzej Stasiuk, a popular writer, who praises his Central European homeland (also through his Czarne publishing house which specializes in Central European issues),⁴⁹ the monthly “Gazeta Środkowoeuropejska” (an addition to “Gazeta Wyborcza”) published in four countries of the V4, or “Kafka. Kwartalnik środkowoeuropejski” published by the Goethe Institut, also in Polish (in 2001-2005). In 1993-2015, under the auspices of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków, a yearbook titled: “Prace Komisji Środkowoeuropejskiej” [Central European Commission Works] was published. There have been more similar initiatives promoting the idea of Central Europe.

Central-Eastern Europe, as we have already noticed, has a geographic and political nature, rather descriptive than evaluative. Some authors point out its socio-economic backwardness as a feature differentiating it from the West and claim the border between these two regions lies on the Elbe river. Moreover, some Polish authors, in opposition to Czech authors, reveal a tendency to indicate some common cultural traits of the states and nations of this relatively vast area. This fact is observed by the Czech authors, which can be seen in the already quoted excerpt from J. Křen, who mentions a “wider homeland” which even the Czechs find difficult to identify with.⁵⁰ B. Cywiński, on the other hand, notices that “The modern age divided Europe into many regions greatly differing from one another and shaped by entirely different factors (...) This specific character [of Central-Eastern Europe – editor’s comment] is best defined by negation. East of the Elbe river, societies did not become bourgeois, there was no rapid urbanization and capitalism-driven acceleration of civilizational progress. Central-Eastern Europe did not have much contact with overseas countries and treated them as fairy lands for a long time (...)”⁵¹ Piotr Eberhardt writes: “Central-Eastern Europe is not only a geographical category. The territory defined in this way has a common political history, similar social and economic structures and a similar civilization level. Further binding material, cementing the identity of the region is the historical heritage of two multi-cultural states: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Habsburg Monarchy.”⁵² The same author then refers to a later period when the specific community (fate) of Central-Eastern European nations was created: “The fact that Central-Eastern European countries belonged to the so-called socialist bloc for a long time created a common fate and for many years determined not only the economic ties between the countries

expressed by C. Miłosz, for whom Central Europe is a zone with specific cultural properties (including architecture properties) ranking from Vilnius to Dubrovnik. See C. Miłosz, “O naszej Europie”, *Kultura*, no. 4 (1986), pp. 3-12.

⁴⁹ M. Cobel-Tokarska, M. Dębicki, *Słowo i terytorium. Eseje o Europie Środkowej*, Warszawa 2017, p. 149-175.

⁵⁰ J. Křen, *Dvě století ...*, pp. 27-28.

⁵¹ B. Cywiński, *Doświadczanie Europy*, Warszawa 1985, p. 8 [reprint from monthly *ZNAK*, no. 6 (1979)] (transl. ours).

⁵² P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami...*, pp. 14-15 (transl. ours).

but also the model of social life.”⁵³ T. Mazowiecki, a future Polish prime minister, when asked in 1988 about the reality of Central-Eastern Europe, said in one discussion: “For me this community exists (...) as a community of underdevelopment and oppression.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, the concept of Eastern Europe, belonging to the strongly stigmatizing oriental discourse, is negatively evaluated both in the Polish and Czech discourses. The concept owes its popularity to the activities of the Western elites. The cold war division of Europe which lasted a few decades was perceived by many politicians, intellectuals or even common people from both sides of the border symbolized by the Berlin Wall, as obvious and practically inviolable.⁵⁵ *Nota bene* the Iron Curtain fell nearly exactly (with a minor deviation in Thuringia) where over eleven centuries earlier the eastern borders of Charlemagne’s kingdom lay.⁵⁶ It is impossible not to notice that it was not only a consequence of the post-war confrontation between the USA and the USSR, but it belonged to the Western enlightenment tradition of orientализing discourse created mostly by French and German thinkers, whose aim was to create a myth of an uncivilized, barbarian and chaotic East in order to lend some credibility to the idea that Western civilization was more advanced. This was manifested in “the silent assumption concerning the mythological and civilizational inclined plane (West-Ost-Gefälle).”⁵⁷ According to this stigmatizing narration, fantastically diagnosed and described by E. Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978) and Larry Wollf in *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (1994), “[i]n order to consolidate its own optimistic image as the embodiment of the Enlightenment ideals of progress, the West ‘needed’ a poorly developed, uncivilized, backward and immature Other, who had to be appropriately presented and named, that is, equipped with the identity that was ascribed to him.”⁵⁸ This type of ideological narration was typical not only of political discourse. Unfortunately, it deeply penetrated the space of academic reflection, especially in the field of history, sociology, political science, anthropology and literary studies.⁵⁹ Finally, it has become, along with a whole set of negative stereotypes and prejudices, part of popular culture, with its even greater power of influence.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 15 (transl. ours).

⁵⁴ T. Mazowiecki, “Głos w dyskusji”, in *Między Wschodem...*, p. 22 (transl. ours); compare with T. Bartkowski, “Gdzie leży Europa Środkowa?”, *Przegląd Powszechny*, no. 7/8 (1992), p. 26.

⁵⁵ A. Czarnocki, “Europa Środkowa. Europa Środkowowschodnia: geopolityczne a historyczno-kulturowe rozumienie pojęć”, *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio K: Politologia*, no. 1 (1994), p. 23.

⁵⁶ R. Zenderowski, “Pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem?”, p. 5.

⁵⁷ H. Juros, “Europa, quo vadis?”, in R. Zenderowski (ed.), *Europa Środkowa...*, p. 64 (transl. ours).

⁵⁸ D. Skórczewski, “Polska skolonizowana, Polska zorientalizowana. Teoria postkolonialna wobec «innej Europy»”, *Porównania*, no. 6 (2009), p. 96 (transl. ours).

⁵⁹ In her books and articles, Will Kymlicka exposes stereotypes and superstitions widespread in social sciences and concerning Central-Eastern Europe. See for example, “Nation-building and Minority Rights: Comparing West and East”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, no. 2 (2000), pp. 183-212.

3. THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE *TOPOS* OF CENTRAL EUROPE AND CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE

It seems that due to its historical experiences, (past and present) geographic extent, population size and numerous ties with the East, Poland would be better inscribed in a wider space – one that spreads between the seas – called Central-European Europe. The Czech Republic (or the Czech lands in their historical borders), on the other hand, for geographic and historical reasons “fit” better the “inland” Central Europe. Moreover, the Czech Republic in its entirety has nearly always been considered as a part of Central Europe, irrespective of the assumed definition of the concept, whereas when it comes to Poland, it is often the case that only its southern territories (i.e. Silesia and the lands that were annexed by the Austrian Empire during the Partitions of Poland) are included within this region. Polish authors are clearly more eager to widen the geographic scope of Central Europe (an inclusive approach, vide O. Halecki), and sometimes even use both terms – Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe – interchangeably (we have already discussed this issue).⁶⁰ On the other hand, although Czech authors in the interwar period were inclined to understand Central Europe in terms of a vast geopolitical space, their successors nowadays demonstrate a tendency to narrow down the area of Central Europe to the Latin part of the former Austrian Monarchy and the south-eastern part of the German Reich in its borders before the Second World War or identify it with the countries of the Visegrad Group. Analyzing the borders established in Czech discourse we must state that until the First World War this concept was generally identified with the territorial scope of Austria-Hungary, optionally enlarged to incorporate Polish lands, the lands of southern Slavs (within the borders of what later became known as Yugoslavia) and northern Italy. According to Masaryk it was a vast geopolitical space between Germany and Russia, from the Baltic republics to the Balkans, but without Austria (this very roughly corresponds to the concept of Central-Eastern Europe used in the Polish discourse). Beneš proposed including Austria and Hungary in the region of Central Europe (without Czechoslovakia and Poland) along with Romania, leaving the Baltic states and the Balkans outside the region. On the other hand, in post-1980 Czech discourse Central Europe was reduced to the area of what we know as the Visegrad Group.

The position represented by O. Halecki is of fundamental importance to Polish (but by no means exclusively Polish) discourse. The author in question divided Central Europe in its broad sense into two parts – Central-Western Europe (Germany) and Central-Eastern Europe (countries east of Germany, with the exception of the USSR). Halecki writes: “If we want to understand the European history and divide Europe into three, not just two parts, then both Western and Eastern Europe must be reduced by

⁶⁰ For example: D. Dzierżek and W. Paruch understand Central Europe as “an area separated by (...) the seas – the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea”. D. Dzierżek, W. Paruch, “Sens pojęcia «Europa Środkowa» w warunkach demokratyzacji i europeizacji regionu – przewartościowania i kontynuacja”, in E. Nowak, R. Riedel (eds.), *Polska i Europa Środkowa. Demokratyzacja, konsolidacja, europeizacja*, Lublin 2010, p. 22.

such a territory which will produce Central Europe as a result.” He also remarks earlier that “the division of Central Europe into its western and eastern parts is clearly visible. The western part is truly German, both ethnically and historically: this part is simply Germany. The eastern part, which we may call Central-Eastern Europe (...) could be controlled by Germany – and in fact in various periods of its history it was controlled by Germany; nevertheless these lands (...) from the very beginning were populated by various non-German ethnic and language groups, which distinguished them from the homogeneous, German Central-Western Europe.”⁶¹ This name, writes Halicki, covers “all twelve countries, including Austria, which in the interwar period existed as independent states between Scandinavia, Germany, Italy in the west and the Soviet Union in the east.”⁶² A similar opinion is expressed by W. Rosiński, who claims that Central Europe is composed of “(...) the countries located between the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea: Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Greece.”⁶³ On the other hand, K. Smogorzewski in one of his books in 1943 states: “The term “Central Zone” is used for the area located between Germany and Russia, spreading from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Aegean Sea in the south, whose total area is 570 thousand square miles and which is inhabited by 110 people in nine countries.”⁶⁴

A critical reflection on the concept of Central Europe by O. Halecki, on the basis of the Polish translation of his book published in 2000 by the Institute of Central-Eastern Europe in Lublin, was published in 2003⁶⁵ by a political scientist from Brno, V. Hloušek. He questioned the division of Central Europe into two historical “macro-regions” and especially the concept of Central-Eastern Europe, comprising Poland as “the key country”, the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen, the Lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslaus, the Baltic states including Finland as well as Belarus and Ukraine, before its annexation by Russia. From the Czech point of view this “somehow super-standard” perception of Central Europe, according to Hloušek, stemmed from the Polish perception of its “geopolitical location” which did not find confirmation in historical facts.⁶⁶ This concept, however, was adopted by the English language historiography and political science, it was also accepted by some authors of the region (for example A. Ágh). Furthermore, some German scientists started to use the term “Ost-

⁶¹ O. Halecki, *Historia Europy – jej granice i podziały*, Lublin 2000, p. 123 (transl. ours).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 130 (transl. ours).

⁶³ W. Rosiński, *Zagadnienia Europy Środkowej i Bałkańskiej*, Ohio 1946, p. 6 (transl. ours).

⁶⁴ K. Smogorzewski, *Mysli o integracji Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1939-1944*, Warszawa 2001, p. 73 (transl. ours). The text was originally published in K. Smogorzewski, “Europe’s Middle Zone”, *Free Europe*, no. 82 (1943).

⁶⁵ V. Hloušek, “Evropa a její místo v dějinách – reflexe Oskara Haleckého”, *Středoevropské politické studie*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 1-11, at <<https://journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/4023/5306>>, 9 July 2018.

⁶⁶ Hloušek refers to Norman Davies (N. Davies, *Polsko. Dějiny národa ve středu Evropy*, p. 310), stating that for a long period of its history Poland clearly belonged to Eastern Europe rather than to Central Europe. However, the partition of Poland redefined the geopolitics of Polish lands. V. Hloušek, *Evropa...*, pp. 6-7.

mitteleuropa” when referring to the satellite states of the USSR.⁶⁷ The image of Central Europe outlined by O. Halecki as a transitory region between the West and the East, is, in Hloušek’s opinion, not “fully adequate”. It would be more realistic, in his opinion, to determine the core of Central Europe, with its specific development and structural properties and to differentiate mutual relations between particular parts of Central Europe, Russia and Germany.⁶⁸

In his extensive study on political and geopolitical development of Central European space, V. Hloušek evaluated various latest models of “Central and Eastern” or “Central-Eastern” Europe, which, in his opinion, are strongly influenced by Halecki’s concept and which include the whole territory of the Balkans (albeit admittedly with some reservations) into the region, except for Greece (for example I.T. Bérend and G. Ranki), define it as “an area of small nations” between Germany and Russia (I. Bibó) or a space between four seas (P. Wandycz). He also mentions that both I. Bibó (the concept of so-called historical nations) and P. Wandycz (*heartland*) use the term Central-Eastern Europe in a narrower sense, limited to the current states of the Visegrad Group, which is identical to the Czech perception of Central Europe after 1989.⁶⁹ Reading the above study we can feel a deficit of references to views expressed by J. Szűcs, who is only marginally mentioned when criticizing Halecki. Referring to I. Bibó, he formulates his own concept of the territory of Central-Eastern Europe, reaching the eastern regions of Germany, the Baltic states and the southern border of the former Habsburg Monarchy and covering all historically Polish lands in the east (until the fall of the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth).⁷⁰ Hloušek finally concludes that “the concept of Central-Eastern Europe is not indispensable, as it lacks clear outlines, it is geographically amorphous and contains too many heterogeneous elements.”⁷¹

An interesting attempt at defining the “Central European macro-region” in contemporary history studies is the already-quoted book by J. Křen.⁷² He summarizes the most significant conceptions of Central Europe so far, ranging from Halecki to Wandycz, who define the region “under various forms and names”. Then he indicates some attempts

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6. According to M. Havelka the concept of “Ostmitteleuropa” (“Central-Eastern Europe”) meant to F. Naumann “what Central Europeans define as Central Europe themselves”. M. Havelka, “Střední Evropa...”, p. 201.

⁶⁸ V. Hloušek, *Evropa...*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁹ Idem, *Pojem střední Evropa, jeho proměny a milníky politického vývoje*, Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity, Řada historická, C 54, 2007, pp. 29-31. The evaluation of the model of Central Europe created by O. Halecki was taken from: V. Hloušek, *Evropa...*, pp. 58-60.

⁷⁰ J. Szűcs in the introduction to his book concludes that it is “the region named according to still imperfect but the friendliest modern terminology consensus – «Central-Eastern Europe»”. J. Szűcs, *Tři historické regiony Evropy*, Bratislava 2001, p. 12. As observed by M. Havelka, his attempts at defining Central Europe as the western part of Eastern Europe in the geographic sense and the eastern part of Western Europe in culture and civilization sense is “too abstract” formula to the Czechs, since in the Czech Republic Central Europe has never been perceived as some sort of a counterpoint to the West, let alone the opposition to it. M. Havelka, “Konotace pojmu...”, p. 97.

⁷¹ V. Hloušek, *Pojem střední...*, p. 32 (transl. ours).

⁷² J. Křen, *Dvě století...*, p. 22-28.

at the final definition of the region from the perspective of economic history,⁷³ history of culture (with certain concepts treating the Austria-Hungary Monarchy as an organic whole), political history (mostly with reference to the formation of modern states and nations). The last viewpoint is decisive: the Central European region or “Central or Central-Eastern Europe” is “the zone of national fragmentation, a home of small nations and minorities and their belligerent coexistence”, its territory is not determined historically and variable (from the Habsburg Monarchy to “the waiting room and membership in the NATO and in the European Union”) and it is impossible to imagine without the Austrian lands and Slovenia, or without some kind of reference to them. The subject of the book is “six nations (Austrians, Czechs, Slovenians, Hungarians and Poles), direct or historical neighbours who have established the joint historical land, some sort of comparative base for the local history.”⁷⁴ The author proposes some interesting explanations for various names of the region, referring to the relationship with the so-called wing powers. Stronger ties of Austrian and Czech lands with Germany in the modern era accounted for Halecki’s concept of two Central Europes (Eastern and Western), whereas after four decades of the Soviet bloc, “we are left only with what once was called and what is still called *East Central Europe, Ostmitteleuropa, Central-Eastern Europe*”⁷⁵

In Polish discourse, as we have already partly mentioned at the beginning of the article, the problem consists in differentiating between the two concepts, Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, with reference to their borders.⁷⁶ They are sometimes used interchangeably, which is entirely incomprehensible from the Czech perspective. Problematic in this context is a problematic statement that P.S. Wandycz makes, according to which: “The expression “East Central Europe” has been applied to the entire area between the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean, and Black seas (flanked by ethnic German and Russian blocs), or some variations thereof, or to its “heartlands,” (...) that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. It is with these three countries that this book is concerned. (...) The frontiers of these states have fluctuated a good deal throughout history. They expanded and contracted, comprising at various times the present day Lithuania, Belorussia, and the Ukraine, as well as parts of Yugoslavia and Romania.”⁷⁷

In this sense the “heartland” could be understood as Central Europe. This approach harmonizes with the opinion expressed by A. Krasieński, who stated that: “Treating Central Europe not only as a narrow geographic concept but above all as a specified and distinguished cultural circle, we have to (...) pay special attention to the countries which have the strongest sense of joint European heritage and where the Central European identity is the most vivid and most explicitly articulated. These countries are, though not exclusively, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The place occupied by them and

⁷³ Ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 26 (transl. ours).

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 27-28 (transl. ours).

⁷⁶ See J. Stańczyk, “Europa Środkowa – kryteria wyodrębnienia i cechy regionu”, *Studia Polityczne*, no. 12 (2001), pp. 197-202.

⁷⁷ P.S. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom...*, p. 1.

the considerable degree of civilization development allows us to treat them, along with Poland, as an avant-garde able to influence other countries of the region and even appointed to do so.⁷⁸

Many Polish authors point at the vagueness and conventionality of the term “Central-Eastern Europe” and the borders of this region. Although the founder of the Institute of Central-Eastern Europe, J. Kłoczowski, claims that Central-Eastern Europe means “in principle the areas of Europe which for centuries belonged to the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth, or the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the former Czech Kingdom and Hungary,”⁷⁹ he immediately adds that “[t]he term ‘Central-Eastern Europe’ is problematic and its assumed meaning needs to be defined whenever it is used. Furthermore, one should use it carefully, remembering vast areas of the borderlands, mutual influences, diversity of cultural, social, national and religious relations which we find so frequently in the history of our part of Europe.”⁸⁰ His view is supported by M. Waldenberg, who writes: “I do not have a high opinion of disputes over what area Central-Eastern Europe covers, where its eastern and western borders lie as well as where it borders with the Balkans. These disputes are too frequently political and ideological in character and the answers to such questions are above all manifestations of preferences, sympathies and animosities of their authors. This particularly concerns the answer to the question of where Eastern Europe begins.”⁸¹

The concept which rather seems to harmonize with the concept of Central-Eastern Europe and which somehow “blurs” the concept of Central Europe in Polish discourse is “Intermarium”. This is in fact a geopolitical concept which includes a definition of the borders of the region, which may equally well be described as Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe. The ambiguity of this concept is best illustrated by P. Eberhardt, who writes: (...) there is some probability that Intermarium was usually understood in terms of more restricted borders. It was often narrowed down to the space between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. There were also variations including Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and even limiting the area to the territory of the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth and the areas of the historical duchy of Moldavia.⁸² T. Szczepański, on the other hand, notices that: “(...) an element constituting the identity of the area is the heritage of two multicultural states (Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth and Habsburg Monarchy), within whose borders certain common features of culture originated, which were later shared by all nations-successors.”⁸³ The above mentioned author also adds, echoing Halecki somewhat, that “Intermarium is an area in Central Europe, between the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. At the same time it is an area lying

⁷⁸ A. Krasieński, “Wprowadzenie”, in *Między Wschodem...*, pp. 11-12 (transl. ours).

⁷⁹ J. Kłoczowski, “Wprowadzenie...”, p. 7 (transl. ours).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18 (transl. ours).

⁸¹ M. Waldenberg, *Narody zależne i mniejszości narodowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej: dzieje konfliktów i idei*, Warszawa 2000, p. 14 (transl. ours).

⁸² P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami...*, p. 21.

⁸³ T. Szczepański, *Międzymorze. Polityka środkowoeuropejska KPN*, Warszawa 1993, p. 4 (transl. ours).

between Russia and Germany.”⁸⁴ There is no doubt that the concept of “Intermarium”, nearly totally absent in Czech discourse and yet important due to its relationship with the concepts of Central Europe / Central-Eastern Europe, deserves a separate study.⁸⁵

4. CENTRAL EUROPE AND CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE AS POLITICAL PROJECTS

As observed by the Czech sociologist and philosopher of history, M. Havelka, the space of Central Europe “has never functioned as a real and integrated whole, it has always been only ‘in the minds’”⁸⁶, which, in our opinion, also refers to Central-Eastern Europe. B. Geremek expressed a similar opinion, stating that “Central Europe is most of all the work of nostalgia and projection rather than an existing entity. (...) The idea of Central Europe is (...) such *wishfull thinking*.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as noticed by R. Bogdański, “Central Europe, even if it does not exist, has its magic.”⁸⁸

The concept of political integration of the space defined as Central Europe or Central-Eastern Europe had two forms in the 20th century. The first refers to the interwar period, when a number of new countries were added to the political map of Europe, some of which – including Poland and Czechoslovakia – were important from the geopolitical point of view. The second one refers to the period after the collapse of communism in 1989.

In the interwar period the term “Central Europe” had strong political overtones mostly in Czechoslovakia (thanks to T.G. Masaryk, E. Beneš, M. Hodža and their concept of Central Europe), whereas in Poland it was considerably less important at that time. “During the first world war Masaryk defined this concept as a vast belt between Germany and Russia, spreading from Scandinavia to Greece, while Poles were inclined to see Central Europe at that time mostly as a zone influenced by Western Christianity, without determining its borders precisely and without excluding Western influence on the countries which formally did not belong to the Latin culture.”⁸⁹ Poland preferred the concept of Intermarium, which reflected the space of Central-Eastern Europe (the “Jagiellonian” space) promoted by J. Piłsudski. This concept later resonated in the emigration circles during the Second World War in the democratic opposition in the communist period.

Both Polish and Czech concepts were perforce an answer to and a competing offer in relation to the well-established and intellectually developed German concept

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 3 (transl. ours).

⁸⁵ More on the idea of Intermarium identified with Central-Eastern Europe in the Polish discourse of the 1970s and the 1980s in K. Rogaczewska, “Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w myśli politycznej polskiej opozycji w latach siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych XX wieku”, in M. Dymarski, J. Juchnowski (eds.), *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w polskiej myśli politycznej*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 179-197.

⁸⁶ M. Havelka, “Střední Evropa...”, pp. 200-201.

⁸⁷ B. Geremek, “Głos w dyskusji”, in *Między Wschodem i Zachodem...*, p. 28 (transl. ours).

⁸⁸ R. Bogdański, “Prawdziwy koniec Europy Środkowej?”, *Obóz*, no. 21 (1991/92), p. 174 (transl. ours).

⁸⁹ A. Krasieński, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Między Wschodem i Zachodem*, Konwersatorium „Polska w Europie”, Kościół pw. Świętej Trójcy, Warszawa 1988, p. 4-5 (transl. ours).

of *Mitteleuropa*. The Polish concepts were additionally determined by the conviction of the permanent threat from Soviet Russia. The Czechs seemed to be less sensitive to the threat of Russian expansion, although after 1945, especially after the events of the Prague Spring, many Czech authors realized that this threat cannot be neglected.⁹⁰ Moreover, it should be noted that the perception of Central Europe in the Czech lands was closely related to the formation of modern Czech national identity. From the perspective of the “us” and “them” dichotomy, “Czech national identity, in the period of the formation of Czechoslovakia, was constructed as a counterpoint to Germans.(...) It was a long-term trend, from the origins of national rebirth until the contemporary times.”

⁹¹ In opposition to the German concept of Central Europe, that is in the 1870s, Czech politicians, fearing united Germany and Russia, were seeking some sort of “broader foundations for reconciliation with Austria.” They practically considered Central Europe to be confined to “the geopolitical space of Austria-Hungary (at most, extended to include Poland, future Yugoslavia and northern Italy), making it clear that Germany did not belong to it (with the possible exception of Bavaria)”. At the same time it should be noted that “from the Czech perspective, Central Europe has never been perceived as something which was, in its essence, to be directed against the West...”⁹²

Once again both concepts acquire political features as projects of political integration after the fall of communism in 1989 in Eastern Europe at that time. Both projects shared the ambition to distance themselves from the East as a zone of uncertainty, threats and civilizational backwardness. Especially the concept of Central Europe was strongly promoted and popularized by Polish, Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian elites, as well as by for example the American administration. Henry Kissinger, during his stay in Warsaw in the summer of 1990, corrected himself a few times, first using the term “Eastern Europe” to define the geopolitical location of the host country, only to use the term “Central Europe” a few minutes later. American diplomatic posts at the beginning of the 1990s received clear guidelines that the Visegrad Group countries are to be referred to as “Central Europe”.⁹³

It should be repeated that the foundation for future geopolitical concepts, such as the establishment of the Visegrad Group or the Central European Initiative and finally the Intermarium Initiative, were hot debates held by opposition intellectuals and activists in the 1970s and 1980s. In the Czech or Czechoslovakian case they were closely related to the concept of Central Europe understood exclusively and limited to the Czech lands, Slovakia (which was not treated as an independent entity, as clearly implied by the narration proposed by M. Kundera), Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Bavaria and the southern part of Poland. On the other hand, since the 1970s Czech dissident discourse considered the possibility of using the heritage of Austria-Hungary as a political basis

⁹⁰ D. Janák, “Problém národní identity v díle Edvarda Beneše”, *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, no. 2 (2014), p. 249.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249 (transl. ours).

⁹² M. Havelka, “Konotace pojmu...”, p. 99 (transl. ours).

⁹³ M. Buchowski, I. Kolbon, “Od «Mitteleuropy»...”.

for a new order in Central Europe, which was manifested in publications in “Střední Evropa”, which still refer to this idea. It must be admitted, however, that they are not very popular in the political and academic communities.⁹⁴

The case of the Polish discourse is much more complicated, since on the one hand we can observe intensification of the Polish-Czech-Hungarian solidarity narration which draws the borders of Central Europe anew and is built on the ethos of anti-communist protest, and on the other hand we should notice the existence of a strong intellectual and political trend promoting the restoration of the idea of “Intermarium”. “The concept of Intermarium became popular in Poland in the 1980s. Many political groups were formed around such journals as ‘Obóz’, ‘A.B.C. – Adriatyk, Bałtyk M. Czarne’, ‘Nowa Koalicja’ or ‘Międzymorze’. The ideas generated around this concept were clearly political. They aimed at breaking the countries of Central-Eastern Europe free from the Soviet empire.”⁹⁵ It was at that time that T. Szczepański wrote that “Geopolitics is the basic factor constituting the identity of the Intermarium countries. Regardless of all the differences between them, they have one thing in common: they were subjected to the dominance and infiltration of Germany and Russia (and in the past also Sweden and Turkey). Each of these powers wanted to subject the Central-European area to its rule, perceiving it as its vital interest.”⁹⁶ That second (Intermarium) trend seems to be deeply rooted in the Polish geopolitics. Shortly after the end of the Second World War W. Rosiński wrote: “The nations which could create such a federation of Central and Balkan Europe would have a population of over 120 million and would constitute a powerful economic factor, giving them enormous opportunities for development. Moreover, such a federation of Central and Balkan Europe would also be a factor that would once and for all put an end to the barbarian wars both from the west – from Germany and from the east – from Russia to the West. (...) All *Dränge* (marches) of the contemporary Huns and Mongols would be thwarted for ever.”⁹⁷ This type of thinking has clearly experienced a revival since 1989 in Poland, especially in the context of the unification of Germany and the uncertain situation in the territory of the USSR.

Both Polish and Czech (geopolitical) concepts of Central Europe in the post-1989 period seem to be losing their anti-German nature (although the concept of Intermarium, excluding Germany from the integration processes, may be seen as violating German interests).⁹⁸ On the contrary, democratic and united Germany is more increasingly perceived as a Central European partner. This is due, inter alia, to the dynamic development of political and economic cooperation between the Czech Republic and Germany and between Poland and Germany, but also due to some sort of symbolic return of Germany to Central Europe, manifested in moving the capital city of the country from Bonn to

⁹⁴ M. Havelka, “Konotace pojmu...”, pp. 101-102.

⁹⁵ P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami...*, p. 21 (transl. ours).

⁹⁶ T. Szczepański, *Międzymorze. Polityka środkowoeuropejska KPN*, Warszawa 1993, p. 4 (transl. ours).

⁹⁷ W. Rosiński, *Zagadnienia Europy Środkowej i Bałkańskiej*, Ohio 1946, p. 6 (transl. ours).

⁹⁸ It must be noticed that after 2015 there have been many voices in the Polish public debate openly criticizing Germany.

Berlin. Comparing the Polish and the Czech concepts of Central European integration projects and the narrations accompanying them, we can clearly see on the one hand the inclination shown by the Czechs to narrow down the integration to the Visegrad Group and on the other hand the unfading idea of integrating the countries and nations of Intermarium, which is clearly the Polish geopolitical concept that once again appeared in the (geo)political discourse after 2015. What these two perspectives share is the conviction that the Visegrad Group states remain the “core” of Central Europe, in the broad sense of the term, understood, *inter alia*, in terms of Intermarium (Three Seas).

SUMMARY

It is difficult to summarize such a multi-layered problem. However, it is worth paying attention to a few issues which seem relevant when we consider the differences and similarities in how the concepts indicated in the title are defined in both discourses. First of all, we need to realize the fundamental difference in using the term “Central-Eastern Europe”, which does not consist in demarcating different borders in each discourse, but in the practical absence of the term in Czech discourse and in large pluralism of opinions within the Polish discourse, as a result of which we can distinguish a few principal conceptions of Central Europe. Secondly, the concept of Central Europe is something natural for the Czechs, a sort of “identity card” allowing them to join the Western civilization club. Since the 19th century the Czechs have contributed to the discussion of the borders and properties of the region, initially as a subordinated nation, albeit one that was culturally and economically developed (well above the European average), and then as an independent nation in the interwar period. On the other hand, for the Poles, who were mentally closely tied to the East, the category of Central Europe, understood geographically, not in terms of civilization, was unknown for a long time, just as the concept of Central-Eastern Europe was for the Czechs. Unlike the Czechs, the Poles never needed any “adapter” such as the Central-European concept, to feel European. Since the Middle Ages Poland has always considered itself to be a fully-fledged European country. Thirdly, we can only note the ideas concerning the borders of Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, as there are so many mutually exclusive concepts both between the two discourses and within each of them. It is impossible to make any generalizations here. The way borders are demarcated in the region is an outcome of many objective and subjective factors. This, in turn, makes it impossible for us to talk of the process of development of some sort of supranational central-European community. Fourthly, undoubtedly Central Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, in addition to being socio-cultural or geographic concepts, have gained some features of geopolitical projects over the past two centuries. From the geopolitical perspective we should pay special attention to specific projects of regional integration, which have been implemented with various levels of success since the second decade of the 20th century. While before the Second World War the Poles and the Czechs made some attempts at integrating the two parts of the region (Poland, to north of the Carpathian mountains,

and Czechoslovakia, to the south), after the fall of communism in 1989 we observed the “crossing” of the Carpathian mountains and more or less successful cooperation within the Visegrad Group, which to some extent echoes the unsuccessful Polish-Czechoslovakian confederation from the period of the Second World War.

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