Borders connecting and dividing - East meets West and the borders of the European Union

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Abstract

Central Europe is usually defined as a 'cleavage' between the East and the West, or as a conflict zone that was affected by two tendencies in its historical past; the idea of unity that implies a homogeneous region and resistance to these efforts, and the struggle for autonomy of the people living in Central Europe. Thus, this dual perception appears in its in-between position that allows adopting Western values while keeping Eastern traditions at the same time. The purpose of the paper is to examine whether the postmodern perception of borders, the problem of a "borderless Europe", and the perception of Orientalism as a critical framework originally aimed at understanding Western (imperialist) mechanisms, can be adapted to grasp identity-building issues in our region. This paper aims to examine how the perception of "East", and "Central" appears in the post-totalitarian world, the legacy of post-colonialism, and the growing geopolitical importance of orientation.

Keywords: borders, post-colonialism, orientation, regionalisation, security

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Europe and pandemic politics immediately raised a variety of unsolved questions, problems. It unleashed a chain of crises the European Union had to face, and the resilience policy implemented by the different governments put them to test. These challenges covered health policy, interactions between the members of society, the regimes, and the division of power, digital surveillance, technologies for democracy, and authoritarianism. It also influenced existing and forthcoming economic inequalities, existing centre-periphery relations, and last, but not least, the pandemic also affected international relations and security. This security requires not only a reassessment of networks and supply chains, economic ties, but the changing relations in the world order, the problem of societies,

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the identities, inequalities, threats, and challenges (Laurelle and Rivera, 2020). Nowadays one of the main hotspots of the security challenge is identified with the threat that the current crisis in Ukraine can escalate to a new cataclysm, and it carries echoes of the Cold War and resurrects an idea emerging from the 1945 Yalta Conference: that the West should respect a Russian sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe (Daniszewski, 2022).[1] History has thus become part of everyday discussion and in addition to the above-mentioned layers of crisis, the unsolved or forgotten problems of 1945 and the 1990s have resurfaced in the post-totalitarian world.

State frontiers set in 1945-1947 remained fundamentally untouched until 2014 (Miszewski *et al.*, 2018). However, with the breakout of the war in the Crimean Peninsula, previously invisible borders have suddenly become impenetrable barriers, while the fate of borders, considered stable for decades, has been called into question. At the same time, the issue of borders has been complemented by the problem of identity, and the East-West dimension, especially during the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, has no longer been expressed only in debates in cafés or university lecture halls but has escalated into an international conflict, bringing back Cold War attitudes and fears. As the heir to the former Soviet Union, which collapsed in 1991, Russia is making efforts to rebuild its former empire, questioning the legitimacy of its former member states, recognised as independent countries since 1991, and is laying historical claim to their territory.[2] The in-between countries, based on their own historical experience, are seeking to redefine their position to avoid the threat of being a conflicting state. The question of identity and belonging has taken on a new dimension.

In this paper, we shift our focus to the problem of how this security issue can meet the challenges of setting up new relationships, new ties that can be identified with the problem of belonging, how location can determine interactions and what Central Europe, the in-betweenness, including the East-West dimension can expect and learn from this crisis. We assume that the postmodern perception of borders, the problem of "borderless Europe" can be adapted to grasp identity-building issues in our region. As borders may influence the mental perceptions of "East", and "Central", we intend to examine whether the problem of post-colonialism, and in particular "white colonialism" appears in geopolitical discourse in the recent centuries and decades. The new European context, in which colonialism becomes the historical heritage of the European Union, also enables the political elites of

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[1] This corresponds to the US Secretary of State's, Anthony Blinken's statement according to "those principles established in the wake of two world wars and a cold war, reject the right of one country to change the borders of another by force; to dictate to another the policies it pursues or the choices it makes, including with whom to associate, or to exert a sphere of influence that would subjugate sovereign neighbors to its will" (Schmidt, 2022).

[2] As announced in an essay by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation written in 2021.

states to master colonial discourses without a colonial past (Petrovic, 2015). Our investigation focuses on two directions; the Eastern Partnership (and Russia), or the "Jagiellonian Myth" (Czyzewski, 2017), and the Western Balkans emphasizing cultural unity (Todorova, 1997), but hostile to the West (Scott, 2013). Poland and Hungary are a case in point, both having the experience of being subordinated and being in the ruling position in the historical past. Postcolonial studies offer an insight into how states are differentially positioned within a globalized world system and how power and economic and political inequalities—most often discussed in terms of North/South, East/West—create the terms through which each region and its peoples are defined. The paper seeks to focus on these above-mentioned two selected countries, the so-called "Antemurale Christianitatis", at the crossroads of Oriental and Western impulses which often appear in politicians' speeches, newspaper articles, and political programmes, although in the case of the two countries the defensive wall protects against a different threat. Last but not least, our purpose is to examine how the problem of belonging can be measured among the local population. In this paper, we will present Central Europe as a discursive model, and in later chapters, we will analyse the external and internal relations of the region. In a separate chapter, we will also look at the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans and try to indicate how the people of the region see their place in the region. The latter is explained against the background of a 2019 international survey.

1. Central Europe as a discursive model

The framework of our investigation is the concept of Central Europe which can be interpreted in multiple layers. It is usually defined as a zone or 'cleavage' between the East and the West, but it can also be understood as a conflict zone that was affected by two tendencies in its historical past (Denni, 2009); the idea of unity that implies a homogeneous region and is hostile to the efforts and the struggle for autonomy of the peoples living in Central Europe. Thus, this dual perception is manifest in an in-between position that allows adopting Western values while keeping Eastern traditions at the same time. The terminology itself can refer to a 'middle' position and the region can be identified from the historical or cultural perception as a "child of the West who later married the East" (Berend, 2013). The region was also characterized as the territory of German influence, or the frontier between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East (Schmidt, 2020), the area where the East and the West meet.

The influence of the Communist Soviet Union almost entirely covered the unstable group of independent and weak successor states from the interwar period (Snyder, 2019), however, it can also be regarded as a *geopolitical unity* with common past and interests. Located at the borders of the great powers' sphere of interest, or defined as a group of states forced to coexist in a semi-peripheral position, commonly experiencing the structures of global inequality, or states that are facing

similar economic, social, political challenges and solutions. Furthermore, Central Europe can be considered an area of dreams, rebellion, and a *story-sensitive narrative* (Losoncz, 2014).[3]

The frames of Central Europe can be understood as a *state of unreality* within a vacuum, a state of active pessimism (Czyzewski, 2017). As Czyzewski argues, in the debate on Central Europe culture combines with politics, geography with myth, and memory with a vision of the future; how to practice Central Europe in this post-totalitarian, post-Holocaust, and post-modern territory. This practice concerns the borderland ethos, which is strongly connected to the Central European tradition of dialogue. Nationalism, multicultural society, and its crisis: these questions invite us to revisit the problem of borderland ethos, transnational interest, the meaning of citizenship, the difficulties of living with the Other.

The region can also be referred to as an experiment that belongs to an *imagined reality*. As T. G. Ash argues, Central Europe, unlike North America, is not a geographical unit but rather a spiritual or mental entity. Central Europe exists as an imagined construction, a mental approach to distinguish people from this region from the Orthodox, less developed Eastern neighbour, a political-cultural distinction against the Soviet East (Kaplan, 2012). Furthermore, it can be a *cultural community* or a pure desire for economic cooperation that can lead to economic, or in the future, political integration (Schmidt, 2020).

The mapping of the region is rather problematic, as Central Europe can include and exclude the Czech lands, Austria, and Germany; it can incorporate the Carpathian Mountains and can be a bridge to the Balkans (Schmidt, 2020). Maps usually represent borders; however, borders are good examples of otherness constructed by separate trajectories and incompatible developments.[4] Borders formulated the mental maps of Central Europe as they were functioning as the borders of the Empire of Charlemagne, which separated Christian Europe from the Slavs in the East and the borders drawn by the reformation and counter-reformation of the sixteenth century. Even for the generations after 1945, the mental map of Europe can be identified with the continuation of the perceptions about the more developed and backward parts of Europe (Antohi, 1996). During the Cold War era Europe became synonymous with the West (Jacobs, 2012; Schmidt, 2013; Kaplan, 2013). The borders that divided Europe also divided the world. They created a geopolitical division between the East and the West. The Iron Curtain divided

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[3] In 2014 the Hungarian journal, 2000 opened a discussion about the legacy of Central Europe since the majority of the regions that are supposed to be the parts of this region became the members of the European Union, the Western orientation was verified.

[4] The division of Europe was examined through various concepts. The core and periphery theory by Wallerstein is based on the same ideology that Hungarian historian Szűcs Jenő described in his work in the early 1980s. The essay was published in the early 1980s and claimed that there was no homogeneous Eastern Europe.

Europe and – because this division was exported to other parts of the world – also worked as a global border (Schmidt, 2016).

The term borderland does not pertain to an area divided by a border, an external border does not cut through it; furthermore, it is not multicultural – understood as a constellation of separate cultural groups – in nature. Borderland considers borders part of its territory. It encompasses diverse communities living together - people speaking different languages and following various religious and national traditions and customs. They live according to an ethos that turns 'other' into 'ours'. They were able to combine caring for what is separate, at risk of exclusion or extinction with creating and regenerating a 'sensitive connective tissue' that binds people together. That had to be uncovered and then activated, through conversations between people, generations, nations, between the past and the present, between tradition and modernity (Matynia, 2011). The more widespread the crisis becomes, the more the 'connective tissue' disappears.

Labelling Eastern Europe as an "Orient" means shutting it out of Europe. Eastern Europe as we know it is a region balanced between exclusion and inclusion, reluctantly accepted as European yet fixed in an imagined and constructed otherness (Gajda, 2019). The contrast of otherness highly contributes to creating a sense of belonging to a given group, and this process involves labelling other groups. The us-them agenda is often a practical way to articulate projects and experiences, to frame a story for the given group. The construction of identity takes place through narrativity: boundaries, images, community, social roles are articulated around a plot, i.e. a linguistic object. "The telling itself … has the power to endow a site with vibrant meaning. For the Western imagination, East-Central and/or South-East Europe was a target for the projection of otherness, somewhat like the Middle East" (Gajda, 2019).

Identity is constructed through interaction: individuals belonging to a given group find out who they are in the public forum. They receive a name to which they must respond. Performative identity is the product of endless repetition, of quoting a particular model, …. the determination of I takes place on the principle of "I according to the others". By performance, we thus mean the interactive aspect of identity building: the self-reacts to the way it is addressed. In the case of new-born states, identity has an extraordinarily important meaning. Who is one of us and who is one of them? Both the Polish and Hungarian psyche is affected by the tragic conflict between what is ours and not ours. Furthermore, it also affects the reinterpretation of history, in particular the sins we committed, or which were committed against us (Zurzenko, 2009). Wronged by history, or exploiting this experience, the inhabitants of Central Europe celebrate their sense of grievance and monopolise it (Parfianowicz, 2020). It is also articulated in the problem of how we can appease the tension and most notably if the outsider is a native and who the others are. This highlights our difficulties with newcomers, immigrants, or other 'guests' when the question "who arrived first" arises. It is not hard to imagine how

tempting it is for political populists, religious demagogues, and cultural conformists to take advantage of that (Czyzewski, 2019; Bretter, 2020).[5]

The migrant crisis from 2015 onwards has revived the notion of the bastion of Christianity. *Antemurale Christianitatis* was initially used to refer to the countries located at the frontline of the Turkish expansion. In the aftermath of the Turkish conquest of the Balkans, the status of *antemurale* started to be assigned to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, directly under threat of a Turkish or Tatar invasion. Since the second half of the fifteenth century, such vision of their respective countries was expressed by the rulers of Danubian Principalities. The 1683 Battle in Vienna, the battle where the Polish- Lithuanian-led army stopped the Muslim invasion is ingrained in the Polish narrative (Márton and Gozdziak, 2018). The Hungarian narrative also focuses on the Ottoman empire, emphasizing that for almost 150 years we were the defence wall against the Muslim hordes.[6] The myth of being *antemurale Christianitatis* – literally, in front of the 'walls' of the castle of Christianity, the last outpost of Europe and 'defender of its gates' and its 'true' civilization – has been one of the most persistent and significant ones in European and East European national historiographies and has arguably remained central to

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[5] The Polish intellectual tradition refers to the space of the Central European cultural mosaic as the "borderland", this term intentionally replaces the term "Kresy" (ends, bounds) popularly used by Poles to refer to the Eastern peripheries of the former Commonwealth, now located in the modern states of Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine. This term is emotionally charged due to its connection with the glory of the multicultural Jagiellonian realm – the romantic myth, traumatic war memories, and sentiment for the cultural motherland. Kresy however, has gradually changed in the narrative of the Polish perception of the historical landscape. As Czyzewski argues, Kresy, (Eastern Borderlands, the territories to the east of Poland's current border that are part of modern-day Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine) to which Sienkiewicz makes constant reference, in which 'ours', meaning Polish, replete with tales praising the glory of the Polish army and the assimilative power of Polish Culture, irresistible to its neighbours. In Tokarczuk's interpretation, "Kresy" is turned into a rich landscape of cultural polyphony, in which otherness is ours yet deeply hurt. In the Hungarian discourse, the meaning of Commonwealth for Poles is likened to the emotional interpretation of "Greater Hungary", the glory of the multicultural Habsburg Empire being shrouded in a veneer of nostalgia and lamentation. According to the widely used Hungarian definition "Hungarians are the ones hurt by Trianon" (Bihari, 2017).

[6] The mainstream conservative media presented a populist reinterpretation of Hungary's medieval history, and compared today's refugee crisis to the Ottoman era, when Hungary was a "bastion," defending Christianity from the "Muslim hordes". On TV, self-appointed "security policy analysts" presented the migrants as potential terrorists infiltrating the country. (retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311557615_Why_an_anti-Islam_campaign _has_taken_root_in_Hungary_a_country_with_few_Muslims).

national identity production on the borders of the continent.[7] The Balkan peninsula remained a buffer zone up until the early 20th century - the collapse of empires. This *protection zone* topos appeared in the Hungarian narrative of refugees from the Middle East. Reflecting on the migrant crisis in 2015, the Hungarian prime minister recalled the bastion topos. He has been particularly fond of the Christian theme and remains steadfast in his commitment to 'keep Europe Christian', because, reportedly, 'European identity [has been] rooted in Christianity and remains steadfast in his commitment to 'keep Europe Christian'.[8] His Slovakian and Polish colleagues agreed and stated that their countries would only accept Christian refugees, thereby making Muslims explicitly unwelcome and marking them as a security as well as civilizational threat.[9]

2. The asymmetric relations in Central Europe

Eastern European scholars have used postcolonial studies to explore representations of the region as Western Europe's "other." They have also used postcolonial studies to understand the political, social, military, and economic interference and domination by Russia, Western countries, or entities such as the European Union. Whether the entire region of Eastern Europe during the socialist period was truly colonized by Soviet Russia is open to debate, and the tremendous diversity in the socialist experience among different countries cautions us against broad generalizations (Owczarzak, 2009).

The USSR (and the Tsarist Russian Empire) however, is not the only candidate for the status of the former colonial empire (Spivak *et al*., 2006) in Central and Eastern Europe (Terian, 2012). Poland was in a controversial position as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth itself could be treated as a „white colony" from the perspective of the subordinated social groups, while during the age of partitions, between 1795 and 1918, between 1939 and 1945, and, effectively during the bipolar system, Poland was also serving as a special colony (see also: Glinksi, 2015; Mayblin *et al*., 2014). Hungary itself could be treated as a subordinated entity within the Habsburg Monarchy while being a multi-ethnic construction, the ethnic groups and

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[7] see Antic, A., *At the Gates of Europe: The Eastern European Refugee Crisis* (http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/blog/at-the-gates-of-europe-the-eastern-european-refugee-crisis-2/).

[8] "Christian Europe is like the air we breathe, it surrounds us naturally, and that is why we feel at home in Hungary, regardless of our religious beliefs. This is why, in his opinion, the question of Christian Europe has become a political issue (retrieved from https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180330_Orban_A_kereszteny_Europa_kerdese_politikai_kerdesse_valt).

[9] "Islamisation starts with a kebab and it's already under way in Bratislava, let's realise what we will face in five to 10 years," "We must do everything we can so that no mosque is built in the future," these comments were told by the chairman of the Slovak Nationalist Party in 2016 (Samuels, 2016).

the Hungarian ruling nation were in an asymmetrical position regarding various political rights, the existence of interest groups, and inequality of collective rights. The Austro-Hungarian "Dual Monarchy" was thus an asymmetrical and unbalanced federation[10] (Pelinka, 2015).

In the post-World War II international order, the subordination of the Central European region to Soviet interests resulted in an asymmetrical relationship. The post-Yalta division of the continent and the isolation of its eastern part fostered the strangest of fantasies about the "kidnapped part of Europe", and the political regimes that ruled the countries of this region, with their appetite for total control, façade and spectacular rituals, proclivity for corruption and bureaucracy. With limited personal impressions of Central Europe in the Cold War era, Western popular culture fed on an image of Central Europe as a backward, bizarre region, characterised by archaic customs, outdated social relations, and illogical behaviour of its inhabitants. The stereotypical image of Central Eastern Europe is that of a backward region, whose female inhabitants can offer only sexual services (given that they have little to offer intellectually). We would like to blame these labels on the colonial perspective, which is inherently inscribed in the "tales of miserable countries" (Czyzewski, 2017).

The collapse of both the Berlin Wall and the Soviet bloc called for the creation of new geographical stories and new spatial representation that could capture and codify the cartographic chaos of the former Eastern European space (Bialasiewicz, 2003). It is still a question of debate whether we can call the Central European region after the collapse of the bipolar system a special type of (post)colonial structure since the empires that occupied East-Central Europe never assigned colonial status to the territories they ruled in this region (Terian, 2012). As Terian argues, the fact that East-Central European post-colonialism – if such a thing exists – was not institutionalised as such, but was always an implicit, concealed phenomenon, disguised in the forms of political and cultural dependency, has stirred numerous controversies not only concerning the colonised but also the colonisers. Krastev and Appelbaum however, identify the status of Central and Eastern Europeans as subordinated, whose desire was to "shake off the colonial dependency implicit in the very project of Westernization" (Appelbaum, 2018; Krastev, 2018).[11]

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[10] "The new constitution gave a different significance to different nationalities, not as a result of their quantitative size but due to their traditional position in the Habsburg Monarchy."...A balanced federal union could have strengthened the empire internally, as Pelinka argues.

[11] For two decades after 1989, the political philosophy of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe could be summarized in a single imperative: Imitate the West! The process was called by different names—democratization, liberalization, enlargement, convergence, integration, Europeanization—but the goal pursued by postcommunist reformers was simple. They wished their countries to become „normal", which meant like the West. Imitation was widely understood to be the shortest pathway to freedom and prosperity (Krastev et Holmes, 2018).

3. The Eastern Flank, Russia

The tension between Poland and Russia has its roots in the historical past. In the Polish narrative, Poland treats itself as a centre, a defence wall of Christianity, the land of entire freedom that protects the whole West from insecurity coming from the East, Asia and barbarism, while Russia is described as a special bridge between Asian and European civilisation. From the point of view of Russia, as Kundera argues, it emphasizes its mission to protect all Slavs, Pravoslavia, against the rotting Capitalism coming from the West. This twofold standpoint can be recognised in the perception of both countries. While for Russia the incorporation of huge parts of Poland was meant as a special gift for Poles, from the perspective of Warsaw it was rather a stagnation, or vegetation, the total neglect of Polish values.

Poland and Russia have their own historical patriotism that determines their relationship. Establishing a common position is rather difficult, since "they were never on our side", as Russian discourse characterises Polish-Russian relations. Even the Napoleonic army was full of Polish volunteers fighting for their freedom.[12] (Re)interpreting history in a completely different way, the painful consequence for Poles was that the partition of Poland was a natural consequence of the internal instability of the Kingdom of Poland while blaming Russia for the destruction of the Duchy of Warsaw was blasphemy. Relativization of the loss by comparing the victims and the sins identified with the Stalinist Bolsheviks and treating Poles as "ungrateful for not acknowledging the achievements of Russia as a Liberator against Hitler's fascists and protector against the danger coming from Asia, from the Mongol hordes in the 13th century to the threats coming from China and the Islam. We gave them the Eastern Part of Germany and could give them Western Ukraine if only they were grateful for our efforts."[13]

In the Polish narrative, Russians are accused of imperial ambitions, the desire for revenge, return to the old communist frames, while according to the Russians standpoint, Poles are suffering from an inferiority complex, and are afraid of losing their sovereignty, because Russia is rich in mineral resources, and views it as an unreliable Western neighbour, while Poland emphasizes that Russia is located somewhere in Asia (Zurzenko, 2009). The other reason for the conflict between Poland

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[12] For our freedom and yours (Za wolność naszą i waszą). It is commonly associated with the times when Polish soldiers from partitioned Poland were fighting in various independence movements all over the world in the 19th century with the hope that their claims for unification would be also recognised.

[13] This is the core of the Russian narrative about the CEE countries (Juurvee *et al.*, 2020).

and Soviet Russia lay in the practice of the specific Russian foreign policy; if you acquire a part of the territory, you have the right to claim the whole[14] (Miłosz 1993).[15]

Accommodating Russia in Europe has always been a dilemma as its inclusion would drastically shift the balance of powers within Europe as a region, although excluding Russia creates a powerful adversary. Under the trans-Atlantic region, the tensions with Russia in a divided Europe could seemingly be managed by maximizing asymmetries (Diesen, 2021).

Poland's Euro-Atlantic integration has stabilised its position and eased the dilemma that had divided Polish intellectuals for decades: either Poland is on the periphery of the Western world, or it becomes a Central European power, and economically a German vassal or a regional power. This is consistent with the notion that, in terms of Western attitudes towards the Soviet Union and its satellite states, the Soviet Union could be understood as the centre in its relations with satellite countries, based on its political, military, economic, and ideological parameters. East Central European countries are understood as the periphery of the Soviet centre and consequently, are in a postcolonial situation (Terian, 2012).

The Polish foreign policy began a new era after the victory of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in 2015 by re-establishing the Jagiellonian myth and its ambitions to act as a regional power in Europe. The governing party has campaigned on Polish national pride, strongly emphasising the aspect of discontinuity in foreign policy under the slogan "getting up off our knees;" (Szlapka, 2019)[16]; it has also portrayed predominantly Roman Catholic Poland, which traditionally sees itself as a victim of history, as the "Christ of nations."[17] This strategy was complemented by the National Security Strategy of Poland issued in 2020 which stresses bilateral, regional, and global cooperation to strengthen Poland's position in the international security system. Apart from the Visegrad Group, the Bucharest Nine, and the Weimar Triangle[18], Poland is also interested in the support of strengthening the

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[14] As both Kaplan and Brzezinski argue, without these territories the Russian Empire as the successor state remained a Eurasian, or „predominantly Asian" country (Kaplan, 2013; Brzezinski, 2017).

[15] Czesław Miłosz argues that losing Belarus and Ukraine would have made Russia a rather Asian great power on one hand, but by this division, Poland gained predominantly ethnically mixed territories that increased the internal instability by various ethnic conflicts. Being united with Ukraine was fundamental to Russia's sentiment of being European (https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2021/12/18/why-russia-has-never-accepted-ukrainian-independence). On the renewal of Russian claims, see Glied (2020).

[16] As the author remarks, there was a turning point in the Polish foreign policy after 2015 when Poland tried to strengthen the cooperation with the USA neglecting the ties with the EU.

[17] This metaphor was widely used both for Poland and for Hungary (retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/world/europe/poland-european-union.html).

[18] The Polish aim to become a regional leader is manifest in its position in the Weimar Triangle. The last meeting of the Foreign Ministers in the Weimar Triangle format took place in Paris on 15 October 2020. Ministers discussed developments in the European Union's Eastern and

independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, including support of their efforts to fulfill the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and engage in stabilisation activities in Poland's eastern neighbourhood.

While Poland is treated as a buffer zone between Russia and the European Union, acting as a bridge between Ukraine and the European Union, and as a potential intermediator between Russia and the European Union, Hungary rather performs as Russia's and China's Trojan horse.[19] Hungarian foreign policy focuses on the Eastern dimension, too, and since 2018 holds an observer status in the Turkic Council, the Cooperation Council of Turkish-speaking states; moreover, the Hungarian Government opened the council's European Office in Budapest in 2019.[20] In November 2021, Hungary proposed a joint summit with the Turkish Council and the V4 at the highest level in Budapest to be held in the first half of 2022.[21]

4. The sub-regional concepts in the European Union's Eastern Periphery

The Polish responsibility towards its neighbourhood and field of interest beyond the borders of the European Union is manifest in its attitude towards the Caucasus, i.e. the concept of *Eastern Partnership*[22], a joint initiative based on the agreement between the Swedish and Polish ministers of foreign affairs that opened a new chapter in the Polish (and European) neighbourhood policy. Apart from

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Southern neighbourhoods, a coordinated approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. (retrieved from https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/zusammenarbeit-staaten/-/228752). For a discussion of its role as a bridge between East and West, see Alt, R. (2021), A Plea to Restart the Weimar Triangle (retrieved from https://ip-quarterly.com/en/plea-restart-weimar-triangle).

[19] This was apparent in gestures such as the nonconformist Hungarian vaccine diplomacy countering the European Union's practice, the Paks II nuclear power plant investment supported by Rosatom, the location of the international Investment Bank in Budapest, and employees receiving diplomatic status. The Hungarian government has currently invested in building a new Orthodox church in Héviz, a tourist resort popular among Russian citizens, while the gesture towards China is manifest in the construction of the Budapest – Belgrade railroad financed by Chinese loan and the planned campus of the Shanghai-based Fudan University in Budapest, opposed by the majority of Hungarian citizens. (retrieved from https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/09/hungary-could-turn-into-chinas-trojan-horse-in-europe/).

[20] About the programme see: http://www.turkkon.hu/EN/contact-us.

[21] Retrieved from http://www.turkkon.hu/EN/2021/11/15/hungary-proposes-the-joint-summit-of-the-turkic-council-and-the-v4/ For a detailed account of this initiative), (see Glied, 2020).

[22] It immediately came up against interference by Russia, which was met with a policy of resilience promoted by the EU (retrieved from https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0589-the-eastern-partnership-between-resilience-and-interference).

Ukraine, five post-Soviet member states form a part of the Eastern Partnership; however, one of the latter, Belarus has suspended its participation.[23]

The Russian challenge remains a factor in the region. The tension between Russia and the USA rooted in Russia's interest in Ukraine demanded an intensified communication among member states and put a greater pressure on countries located on the Eastern borders of NATO.[24] The Bucharest Nine initiative (B9), launched by the Romanian and Polish presidents, includes NATO's eastern flank members: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The first summit was held in Bucharest in November 2015.

4.1. The Lublin triangle

The independent ULB states (Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus) and their intense cooperation with Poland appeared on the agenda of Polish politicians already in the 1910s; however, being integrated parts of the Soviet Union, there was limited opportunity to maintain cooperation with both Ukraine and Belarus during the interwar period. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these traditional ties could be reopened. The Polish and Lithuanian plans integrated the old/new visions expressed by Ukraine regarding their legacy to be treated as Ukraine's position within Central Europe.[25] Traditionally, Poland was interested in deepening the cooperation within the region as it was included in the programme of the Polish government in 1990.[26] Poland was the first to call for international action in support of local protesters following the disputed Belarusian elections[27] and it was also Poland that was the first to appeal for action to address the problem of refugees organised and congested at the Belarusian border. Plans to deepen cooperation

[23] In June, 2022 the European Council granted status to Ukraine and Moldova. (retrieved from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/).

[24] In early 2022 it is still questionable how far this Russian threat can progress, however, NATO has decided to send reinforcements and the US is planning to deploy American troops to the Eastern flanks of NATO. (retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nato-sends-ships-jets-eastern-europe-ukraine-crisis-2022-01-24/).

[25] Dmytro Pavlychko, former ambassador of Ukraine exclaimed at meeting in Warsaw that it was not appropriate to use the phrase East-Central Europe since Ukraine belongs to Central Europe. „Don't say Central and Eastern Europe, say Central Europe. Ukraine is a part of Central Europe."

[26] "We are interested in maintaining good relations with our neighbours; Germany, and the Soviet Union ... and as a third priority we are also interested in maintaining good relations in the region, focusing on the triangle between Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Apart from our closest allies, we are also attracted by the further Eastern regions, like Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, and naturally, our close friends in the Baltic region." [Skubiszewski, 1990].

[27] About the tension between Poland and Belarus see: (retrieved from https://www.portfolio.hu/global/20211109/hibrid-hadviseles-zajlik-lengyelorszag-ellen-lukasenka-bosszujat-kemeny-megtorlas-kovetheti-509796).

between Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine have been put forward for historical and geopolitical reasons. "We treat Ukraine not as a problem. Indeed, we have a problem with Russian aggression, but it is our common interest to strengthen the stability of Ukraine for the security of Europe and Poland."[28] These were the words of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the importance of this regional co-operation. The Lithuanian partner also emphasized the necessity to forge closer ties between Ukraine and the European Union. "Ukraine will possibly ensure the future and sustainable development of its people, as well as the embodiment of the dream of every Ukrainian - participation in European processes, taking into account the interests of the nation." The legacy of ULB, the core of Polish romanticism in foreign policy (Polegkiy, 2020) is represented by the joint Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian armies. A joint military unit, LITPOLUKRBRIG was established in 2014 in Warsaw. The Brigade comprises international staff, three battalions, and specialised units.[29]

From the Ukrainian perspective, the Lublin Triangle was viewed as an addition to the Eastern Partnership programme of the European Union.[30] This regional cooperation also focused on promoting the integration of these three countries in the field of security policy, economic cooperation, healthcare, cultural and touristic domains. Poland was to act as a mediator between Ukraine and NATO, however, this ally was also open towards Belarus. The quintessence of this cooperation was the perception that "this is more than a friendly support or a partner-based cooperation, as it is a familiar support", as stated by Dmytro Kuleba, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to his standpoint, security would be one of the main priorities of the Lublin Triangle, with the format's participants agreeing to coordinate actions to protect international law in the context of Russia's ongoing annexation of Crimea. The Lublin Triangle is the first Central Europe – specific alliance that Ukraine joined, as the country is currently not a part of the Visegrad Four or the Bucharest Nine.[31]

The *Lublin Triangle* alliance based on the declaration signed in 2020 July was also open towards Belarus. This regional cooperation also focused on the integration of these three countries in the field of security policy, economic cooperation, healthcare, cultural and touristic domains. The framework of the Lublin Triangle is

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[28] About the inauguration process see further (retrieved from https://www.defence24.pl/ powstaje-trojkat-lubelski-nawiazanie-do-unii-lubelskiej-z-1569-r, or https://www.gov.pl/web/ dyplomacja/minister-spraw-zagranicznych-wzial-udzial-w-spotkaniu-trojkata-lubelskiego).

[29] The details of the cooperation is available here (retrieved from https://kam.lt/en/ international_cooperation_1089/litpolukrbrig.html).

[30] The details of the Lublin Triangle are here: https://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl/trojkat-lubelski-polska-litwa-i-ukraina-wzmacniaja-wspolprace/.

[31] This new format aims to bring the three countries closer together while also echoing their historical ties — namely the 17th century Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth which included most of today's Ukraine in its borders (Dordevic, 2020).

identical to that of the Visegrad cooperation. It is intended to function as an informal consultation platform, but its members will be drawn from NATO and the EU, as well as from non-NATO and non-EU members.[32] The Lublin Triangle focuses on political dialogue that is based on the Heads of States and Governments meetings, and cooperation among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the ministers of the L3 group responsible for different sectoral policies. This initiative can be understood as an asymmetric solution or a gesture for a non-member partner to link it to the already existing group.[33] The task to promote joint initiatives within the L3 and Eastern Partnership can also give Ukraine a distinguished position.

The L3 cooperation also focuses on cooperation with both the European Union and the so-called "Association Trio", the platform that was established in July 2021 with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, to express their intention to join the European Union.[34] This initiative was warmly welcomed by both the Lithuanian and the Polish ministries of foreign affairs, while Western politicians were a bit more cautious and tried to keep the balance between the West Balkan EU candidate states and the Eastern Partnership member states. The Lithuanian head of diplomacy emphasized however that the Trio as the smaller group has a better chance to express its interests, as was the case of the Baltic states struggling to obtain European Union membership Makszimov (2021).[35] Cooperation at all levels in the format of the Crimea Platform is also on the agenda of the L3 initiative, such as maintaining dialogue with the US Administration with special attention to energy, security, and economic cooperation.[36] The COVID-19 pandemic rewrote the programme of borderless Europe, so the L3 also deals with the recognition of immunization documents to ease travel restrictions between L3 citizens, while promoting cooperation in trade and investment and common actions in migration policy, humanitarian assistance, and cooperation against misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda, and contributing to media freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists.

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[32] Lublin is a symbolic place, the venue of the Polish-Lithuanian union in 1569 and the members cover those regions which belonged to the signatories complemented with the territory of the present-day Belarus and the majority of Ukraine including Kyiv and the Western regions. The signatories of the Lublin Triangle also expressed their common responsibility towards Belarus and the intention to tighten their relations particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[33] Bucharest Nine, and the Three Seas Initiative.

[34] The "Association Trio" joint memorandum was signed on 17 May 2021 in Kyiv with the participation of foreign ministers of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

[35] Since 2022 June, Ukraine and Moldova are EU candidate states.

[36] The Crimea Platform was established as a new international consultation and coordination format to develop the initiative put forward by the President of Ukraine and aimed at improving the effectiveness of the international response to the ongoing occupation of Crimea, responding to growing security threats, increasing international pressure on the Kremlin, preventing further rights violations and protecting victims of the occupation regime, as well as achieving the main goal, which is to ensure that Russia ceases the occupation of Crimea and the Ukrainian government regains control of the peninsula (retrieved from https://crimea-platform.org/en).

Unlike Poland, Hungary's standpoint on Ukraine and Russia is controversial. The Hungarian government has repeatedly opposed the Ukrainian NATO candidacy referring to various conflicts.[37] The reason for the Hungarian opposition has two underlying factors. On the one hand, the Hungarian government extended Hungarian citizenship to all Hungarians living outside but within the territory of historical Hungary, since the Ukrainian Constitution does not recognize dual citizenship and does not allow persons with multiple nationalities to be employed in the civil service.[38] The Ukrainian Language Law that announced Ukrainian as the only official language in Ukraine in 2015 and 2019 was also met with criticism. However, at the beginning of December 2021 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Hungary, the two foreign ministers agreed on the resolution of previously existing conflicts and Hungary offered to supply natural gas to Ukraine.[39]

4.2. The Western Balkans – the New Challenge

The image of the Balkans as a "half other" plays a special role in the context that while some European countries are members of the EU, others are seeking an opportunity to obtain this status. The Western Balkans are seen as a part of Europe in geographical, historical, and civilisational terms (as European and local politicians tend to emphasize), but they still have a long way to go to become European. Or, on the other hand, it is an ambiguous place "where some countries have a European identity, while others have to work for it". The discourse on the accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU seems to be an ideal setting for the new European orientalism. In the political discourse, the countries of the Western Balkans do not perceive the process of EU accession as a profound transformation: they need permanent help and guidance to carry out this transformation. This "guardianship" expresses that this region is "at a lower level of the evolutionary scale", that "it

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[37] The core of the Ukrainian and Hungarian tension is focusing on the problem of the Hungarian minorities living in the Transcarpathian region (retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-nato-hungary-idUSKBN1Y823N).

[38] "Under the proposed regulations, 53 categories of positions (including notaries public, heads of state educational institutions, and members of local government councils at all levels and their advisers) cannot be held by persons who hold foreign citizenship in addition to Ukrainian" (retrieved from https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2022-01-13/ukrainian-hungarian-dispute-over-dual-citizenship and https://www.dualcitizenshipreport.org/dual-citizenship/ukraine/).

[39] Ukraine will be able to import a daily amount of 8 million cubic meters of gas from the European market via Hungary from January, Ukraine's state operator of gas transmission said on Wednesday after signing an agreement with the Hungarian operator FGSZ (retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/ukraine-agrees-deal-with-hungary-gas-imports-2021-12-22/).

cannot get ahead on its own, it needs outside leadership to not slip back into the mistakes of the past (Petrovic, 2015). The reason for this ambiguous position can also be explained by its historical position, as Austrians, Croatians, Hungarians, and Poles of the 19th century claimed that their ancestors saved Europe from Islam, while Bulgars, Greeks, Montenegrins, Romanians, and Serbs, still under Ottoman overlordship in the romantic period, framed their respective bids for independence as fighting for the Christian world.[40] In the Hungarian (and the European Union's) view, the Western Balkans is seen as a Christian bulwark against Muslim threats, but, as one analysis of the issue notes, quoting the Hungarian prime minister, "but how we manage the security of a state in which two million Muslims live is a key issue for their security too."[41]

"The Balkans are likely to present the "next big opportunity" for the European Union, and the region could become the bloc's next economic motor" – these were the words of Viktor Orbán's in September 2021, addressing the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the Visegrad Group and South-Eastern Europe. He also added that the V4 and Balkan countries may end up building together the most significant economic area of the entire European continent."[42] From the Hungarian viewpoint, the Western Balkans should also join the European Union soon, otherwise they will remain a conflict zone and a buffer zone.

Although Poland feels responsible for its Eastern neighbours and Hungary rather focuses on the West Balkan region, it does not mean that Poland has nothing in common with this region. Although memories of the 1990s in the West Balkans are radically different, as Poland joined NATO in 1999 while the successor states of Yugoslavia got engaged in a painful long-lasting war, by the 2020s three West Balkan countries had become NATO members.[43] The dynamics of Polish- Balkan relations had to change with the collapse of Yugoslavia; Polish diplomacy has subsequently attempted to adapt to this new reality over many years (Balcer and Halili, 2020). Warsaw engaged with the Western Balkans through participation in various international missions, while Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the formal Prime Minister acted as Special Rapporteur of a UN Commission on Human Rights. Currently, Poland is one of the most important advocates of EU enlargements towards the Western Balkans. In September 2019, during the Czech presidency of the V4 Group, the Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries met in Prague with partners from the Western Balkans. They issued a joint declaration on the support of

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[40] As the author remarks see: http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/blog/at-the-gates-of-europe-the-eastern-european-refugee-crisis-2/.

[41] About this see in details: Mujanovic, Jasmin: Hungary's Orban investing in the destruction of Bosnia (retrieved from https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/05/hungarys-orban-investing-in-the-destruction-of-bosnia/).

[42] About the controversial acceptance of the Hungarian nomination see: https://hungarytoday.hu/pm-orban-balkans-next-opportunity-eu-economy-kover-varhelyi/.

[43] In 2009 Albania, in 2017 Montenegro, while in 2020 North Macedonia joined the NATO.

the European integration of the WB countries based on security, energy security, and infrastructural issues. They also emphasized the necessity of the harmonisation of their initiative with the EU's Balkan Strategy accepted in 2018.[44] If the Ukrainian crisis represents instability in the Eastern borderland, a similar problem arises with the so-called "Non-paper on Bosnia and Herzegovina", and the attempt to divide the territorial integration of Bosnia-Herzegovina guaranteed by the Dayton Agreement from 1995. With the initiative to separate the Croatian and Serbian populated regions, there is a threat that a new territorial arrangement would allow Greater Albania, Greater Croatia, and Greater Serbia to right-size and "right-people" their respective states all at the same time, as noted by Emil Suljagic, the director of the Srebrenica Memorial Centre.[45] According to Austrian and Slovenian resources, the initiator was probably Hungary (Latal, 2021; Mujanovic, 2022).[46]

In 2019, Olivér Várhelyi from Hungary was appointed Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement[47]. While his controversial record, particularly his concessionary stance on the absence of the rule of law in Serbia and Hungary's contentious relationship with controversial former political leaders in the Western Balkans is acknowledged by sceptics and critics, his position places particular emphasis on the relationship between the V4 and its neighbors. This Hungarian action was widely criticised not only by Bosnian politicians, who suggested the cancellation of the Hungarian Prime Minister's planned visit to Sarajevo[48], but the US has introduced sanctions against the Bosnian Serb Prime Minister, Milorad

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[44] Reiterated their unequivocal support for the EU accession of the Western Balkans and their firm belief that reunification of Europe cannot be complete without them joining the European Union. Underlined that the EU enlargement policy provides an invaluable tool for achieving security, stability, and prosperity in the Western Balkans; consequently, a credible enlargement policy represents a strategic investment in the security, stability and prosperity of the EU as well (retrieved from https://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/v4-statement-on-the-190912).

[45] The international context seems to echo the 90s, once again. The end of the Cold War facilitated the dissolution of what is today the former Yugoslavia. The looming conflict between the powers with global reach and the ability to project power – cold or by proxy – may rekindle the violence in much the same way once again (Suljagic, E., Analysis – notorious non-paper's implications on Bosnia (retrieved from https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-notorious-non-paper-s-implications-on-bosnia/2232536).

[46] The "unofficial document" identified Bosnia and Herzegovina as the biggest problem in the region, stated that the EU perspective was "completely out of the question" and proposed solutions, including its peaceful dissolution. Perhaps the most shocking development so far is Hungary's transparent support for Milorad Dodik's separatist regime and its attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[47] Várhelyi represented the Hungarian interest in the West Balkan region, his appointment was in favour of the Hungarian aims, however, he repeatedly denied the existence of this document.

[48] About the failure of Orbán's visit see: https://sarajevotimes.com/is-orban-planning-to-cancel-his-visit-to-sarajevo-due-to-security-reasons/.

Dodik, who is accused of undermining the stability of the Western Balkans region through corruption and threats to long-standing peace agreements. Dodik has undermined BiH institutions by calling for the seizure of state competencies and setting in motion the creation of parallel institutions in BiH's Republika Srpska (RS) entity. Furthermore, Dodik has used his official BiH position to accumulate personal wealth through graft, bribery, and other forms of corruption.[49] According to various views, it was not only the Serbian–Bosnian Prime Minister whose interest lay in the secession, but the Russian background can also be mentioned. The scandal reaching the level of German and French diplomacy argued that Hungarian commissioner Olivér Várhelyi was also involved in these negotiations.[50] Qui prodest? This is the commonly asked question in political science. Since these events are currently unfolding against the backdrop of political, economic, and health crises, the answer is yet to emerge.

5. Measuring Central Europeanness

In 2019, the Globsec research centre conducted a comprehensive survey of the population of several countries, focusing on East-West orientation.[51] The table below shows the opinions of the population in the V4 countries and Austria. It is interesting to note that a larger percentage of the Austrian population identified themselves as Eastern, while a larger percentage of the Hungarian population identified themselves as Western. The attitude towards certain values does not necessarily coincide with the geographical location, but the events of the previous decades and the orientation of the Hungarian population towards the East today have the opposite effect.[52] Based on the outcomes of this survey, it is still questionable how to measure Central Europeanness, or the impulses coming from the east and the west.
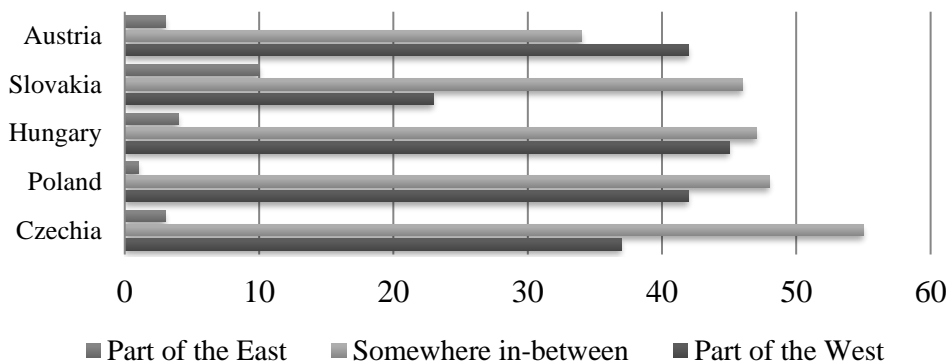
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[49] The official decision is accessible: https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0549.

[50] An open discussion was held in Sarajevo followed by a secret negotiation where, according to unnamed sources, Várhelyi did not oppose the Serbian plans for a referendum on the secession. Seres László: Miért érdeke Magyarországnak Bosznia kettészakadása? https://azonnali.hu/cikk/20220106_miert-erdeke-magyarorszagnak-bosznia-ketteszakadasa

[51] More is available in Globsec Trends 2018, Central Europe: One Region Different Perspectives (retrieved from https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2018.pdf).

[52] The Hungarian government announced the new Eastern opening policy in 2010, however, the expectations were far from reality (retrieved from https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2021/05/07/keleti-nyitas-szijjarto-orban-kina-gazdasag-vilaggazdasag-befektetes-kifektetes-agyrem).

Figure 1. Would you like to be your country a part of the West, a part of the East, or somewhere in-between?

■ Part of the East ■ Somewhere in-between ■ Part of the West

Source: Globsec Trends (2019)

Table 1. The different types of values

Western values	High standard of living, where the West is the benchmark for better job opportunities and higher salaries	More civilised in terms of values, better governance, a stronger guarantee of democracy, and less corruption	Identity and cultural background
Eastern values	Russia, the threat is coming from the East, based on historical experience	Economic development, belated convergence, being the Eastern periphery of the EU's core member states	Culture and history, the heritage of the Cold War
In-between position	Bridge – mediating between the two imaginary competing blocks to prevent conflicts	Opportunism, to benefit from the two worlds	Neutrality or independence to survive, location between the great powers

Source: Globsec Trends (2019)

Regarding the current position of Central Europe, as Jokubaitis observes, "Kundera is right when he states that the nations of Central Europe preserved memories of Western Europe "in which culture had not yet entirely bowed out" (Jokubaitis, 2018). Why governmental discourse disregards the idea of a European Union without nation-states is often an issue of criticism. Being a Central European also means that history deeply permeates every decision we make. States in the region came into being as part of a struggle for cultural survival. Nations in the region fought for their freedom from the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires by fighting

for their culture. The political formula of the nation-state in Central Europe always meant something more than it did in Western Europe. The struggle for cultural independence in Central Europe was the beginning of the struggle for political independence. Before the establishment of political independence, the nations of the region had to establish their cultural identity. It is impossible to understand the democracies of Central Europe without paying any attention to the phenomenon of nationalism. Parfianowicz on the other hand argues that a negative connotation of Central Europeanness can also be identified with the uncontrolled growth of xenophobic and national sentiments. This corresponds with Bibó's argumentation in his essay on the "Miseries of Eastern European Small States" where he mentions their small-mindedness, the aggression of their nationalisms, their lack of democratic spirit, their bent to political unrealism, chauvinism, and xenophobia.

Conclusions

Although the idea of Central Europe was welcome right before transformation, the autumn of nations in 1989 paradoxically ended in a failure of the idea of Central Europe and of the intellectual grouping that championed it (Czyzewski, 2017). In the early 2020s, the idea of Central Europe as a bridge, a model, an area of harmonious coexistence of multicultural, multireligious, and multinational community has been called into question. Uncertainty appears in historical narratives where the past and the present are idealised, sometimes in the form of overtly kitschy tales. The point of departure is a recognition of Central Europe as the arena of numerous failures: civilizational, cultural, political, and the experience of being weak, being the victim, or simply the "poor cousin of the West" (Parfianowicz, 2020). At the same time, the Hungarian government's communication gives Central Europe a very different role. As the Hungarian Prime Minister stated in his speech: "We are the sand in the machinery, the spanner in the works…we are David who Goliath is best off steering clear of."[53]

At dawn on 24 February 2022, everything changed. The optimistic views on smooth transformation, the end of the bipolar system disappeared and became replaced by a story that had been told in previous centuries, became reality with the arrival of the Russian army in Ukraine. In the three months or so since then, decades-old taboos have been shattered, including Finnish and Swedish neutrality, the ban on German armed assistance, and the fact that war would not return to Europe, having learned from the devastation of two bloody world wars. Central Europe is once again

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[53] The Prime Minister's speech is accessible (retrieved from https://hungarytoday.hu/viktor-orban-hungary-october-23-speech/).

finding its place, and it seems that on the battlefield, whether real or virtual, we are witnessing a revival of historic friendships and alliances.[54]

Geopolitics has returned to Europe, putting a modern spin on the old spheres of influence formula, and casting an ever-growing shadow over the normative idealism of the past two decades. In the neighbourhood, the new Eastern Europe, which includes Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, is moving like a pendulum; sliding back into the Russian sphere of influence, while the belt of countries from the Baltics through Poland to Romania and the Balkans are at risk of becoming a contested space yet again— "lands in-between."

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[54] A Francis Fukuyama, whose work "The End of History" was a highly cited reference of the transformation, in 2022 March composed his arguments in 12 points. As he argues "A Russian defeat will make possible a 'new birth of freedom, and will bring us out of our mess over the decaying state of world democracy. The spirit of 1989 will live on, thanks to a handful of brave Ukrainians." (retrieved from https://www.infobae.com/en/2022/03/15/12-predictions-by-francis-fukuyama-on-how-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-will-end/).

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