

Докторант Даниел ЦИТИРИГА

(Университет “Овидиус” – Констанца, Румъния)

ЦЕНТРАЛНА ЕВРОПА И БАЛКАНИТЕ ПРЕЗ ХХ В.:

СИМВОЛИЧНО И ПОЛИТИКО-ГЕОГРАФСКО ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ

Daniel CITIRIGA, PhD Candidate

(“Ovidius” University of Constantza, Romania)

**CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS IN 20TH CENTURY:
SYMBOLICAL, POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION**

Since the book of Friederich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* was published in Berlin in 1915, historians and political analysts began a very strong debate for a more accurate defining of the concept. Timothy Garton Ash, in his article, *Puzzle of Central Europe* (1999) is quoting a study appeared in 1954, under Karl Sinnhuber signature. This author compared no less than sixteen definitions of Central Europe, from which it may be concluded than the Iberian Peninsula was the only one not included in this definitions and Austria, Czech and Moravia was the only one's which are included in all definitions.

In our work- paper we stressed upon the forms used by the most important theorists who analyzed the defining Central Europe versus Balkans item. If for Polish historians as Oskar Halecki and Piotr S. Wandycz the used form is East Central Europe, in the case of French historians the Middle Europe is the concept which are frequently used. The other, as Milan Kundera or Czeslaw Milosz talk about Central Europe. Also, Maria Todorova used *balkanization* just as concerning a focus-conflicted area. All these definitions and notions which spread in time only show the special attention of which this concept is surround.

Keywords: Central Europe, Balkans, identities, ethnical nations, neighbors.

Central Europe: How defining Central Europe?

What is Central Europe? And what the Balkans? Does these territories exist? If it does, is it a precise geographical delimitation or is it only an invented concept by historians and political analysts? Isn't it just “a area with variable geometry?”

Timothy Garton Ash, in his paper entitled *The puzzle of Central Europe*¹, quotes a study which appeared in 1954, written by Karl Sinhuber, who compares no more less that 16 definitions of Central Europe, with the purpose of finding a concordance between the virtual space and the geographical-political space of the territory we are discussing about. After analyzing the documents mentioned above, we ascertain that the Iberian Peninsula is the only part not included in any of the definitions, whereas Austria, the Czech Republic and Moravia are the only ones which appear in all the definitions². This is the item we want to forms from the very beginning of present work-paper: the variety of definitions and concepts this space, entitled the Central Europe, has.

The concept of “Central Europe” was born in German area and in its Pan-German ideological *hinterland*. The first one who used it was Friederich Naumann, member of the Reichstag, in 1915, in his famous book *Mitteleuropa*³, in which he induced the organisation of the mentioned region determined by him, in a federative option. As Jacques Le Rider underlined, in one of his paper, which emphasized the ideas of the above mentioned German author, *Mitteleuropa* symbolized “the narcissist representation of a national territory which would be the middle of the continent”⁴. This is a solution found in order to defend the national identity, in front of the danger which came from the two extremes and to correct the European identity excesses. This approach caused vivid controversies, the ideas of the German politician being immediately attacked, first of all by the Slav nationalists, who saw in Naumann a new form of the Pan-Germanism synthesized in the *Drag nach Osten* formula⁵.

In another line, writing about fault lines and “ancient hatreds”, in one of his titled book, *The Fracture Zone: A Return to the Balkans*, Simon Winchester asks: “But once again there arose the question that seemed so eternally asked and so perpetually appropriate here. Just why? Just why is there this dire inevitability about the Balkans being so factions and unsettled a *corner of the world* (underlined by Daniel Citirigă), and inevitability that always seemed to exist? Just what was it that had marked out this *particular peninsula* (underlined by D.C.), this particular gyre of mountains and plains, caves and streams, and made it a byword, quite literally, for hostility and hate?”⁶.

According to Oskar Halecki, for several reasons the term Central – Eastern Europe seems to be closer to reality than the one of Central Europe. For these reasons he makes an original geographical division of the continent, in four basic regions: Western Europe, Central – West, Central – Eastern and Eastern. Again for geographical reasons, he considers that there is no natural frontier between Central – Eastern Europe and Central – Western, the only phenomenon entitled to do this delimitation is the historical one. From the territorial components of the region, Halecki excludes Germany, but he includes, beside Bohemia, Moravia, Poland and Hungary, the North-West of the Balkan Peninsula – regions inhabited by Bulgarians, Serbians, Croatians and Slovenians. Another border found by the Polish author is the maritime one: just in few exceptions, Central – Eastern Europe’s haven’t been considered maritime powers even though they are bordered by three seas: Baltic Sea, Black Sea and the Adriatic one. This is a reason for which they haven’t gained true geostrategical and geopolitical advantages beside the rest of Europe. Another one is that they are formed in minor regions which are difficult to unite in a political body⁷. From Piotr S. Wandycz’s perspective, the *Central Europe* (*Central - Eastern*) represents an arbitrary definition, appeared from the need to describe a part which is not entirely neither Western, nor Eastern, but which represents a “*middle area*”. According to the same author Central – Eastern Europe was used in order to name the area between the Baltic Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea (which means Poland, former Czechoslovakia and Hungary), not existing, between those who dealt with the history of this term and with the region itself, a full consensus upon the territorial – state components of the term⁸.

An intermittent focus on the peninsula has meant that perceptions that originated in the decades of turbulence during the gradual withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from most of the area in the XIX-th and early XX-th century could persist both in the periods of Balkan peace and the times when Balkans were swept by conflicts of European provenance such as the Second World War. Robert Kaplan proposes exotic explanation of Balkan, in *Balkan Ghosts*: “this was a *time- capsule world*: a dim stage upon which people raged, apilled blood, experienced visions and ecstasies. Yet their expressions remained fixed and distant, like statuary”⁹.

An interesting attempt of delimitating the Central – European theoretical project, in historical cultural terms, is found at Jenő Szűcs, in the essay *The three historical regions of Europe*¹⁰. Roughly speaking, according to the Hungarian political-thinker, the first expansion of “the barbarians”, which embodied the Western legacy of Roma, gave life to the notion of “*Westernization*” (500–800), and after the pacification of other “Barbarians”, the first expansion of this West (1000–1300) widened the frame of *Occidens Europe*, towards East and North, also including Northern Europe and maimed Central – Eastern Europe, respectively South – Eastern Europe. As part of the quoted work, the political analyst István Bibó promoted the idea according to which “*the Eastern and Central Europe, or more precisely the whole territory from east of Rhine, between France and Russia, is characterized in what concerns the political culture by a certain native return*”¹¹. Another Hungarian scholar, the geographer Prinz Gyulla, then again, in a map from 1943 included in the Central Europe also South – Western and North – Western Europe, the Rhine’s valley, in other words. The excellent Hungarian political analyst, Molnár Gustav, in a study with reference to the federalisation of Central Europe, underlined that “*this extraordinary variability which manifests spectacularly, also horizontally – geographical, as well as vertically – historically, proves that Central Europe does not have an own special essence. Central Europe is the middle part of the border area of Western Europe. So it is not an autonomous entity, but the border – area placed at the borders of a space of civilisation which approaches the final stage of its development, or, in a more rough utterance: purlieu. And not even purlieu, but only a part of it, because the border area naturally includes also the South-Eastern (Mediterranean) and North (Scandinavian) edge territories. It is of a defining importance that this frontier area in the same time external and internal: it is placed inside the European civilisation, but outside Western Europe, as a historical organism, and since the birth of the European Union, as a political organism.*”¹²

In *The Cupboard of the Yesterdays*, a short story written during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, H.H. Munro- who was correspondent of the British “Morning Post”, from Macedonia in the early years of the twentieth Century remarked: “The Balkans have long been the last surviving shred of happy hunting-ground for the adventurous, a playground for passions that are fast becoming atrophied for want of exercise”¹³.

Writers such as Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, György Konrad have used and promoted the term of “*Central Europe*”, instead of “*Central Eastern Europe*” certainly the defining region not just as a territorial unity, but as a historical – cultural unity. For Kundera, for example, Central Europe is that part of Europe marked by the tragic destiny

of the Hungarians, the Czechs and the Polish belonging to the West, “*placed from a geographical point of view in centre, from a cultural point of view in West and from a political point of view in East*”¹⁴. It is not a state, but “*a culture or a destiny*”¹⁵, which cannot be defined and determined by political borders “*but by the biggest common situations which gathers nations, always assembling them in different ways, along the always changing borders, which indicate a realm populated by the same memories, the same items and conflicts, the same common tradition*”¹⁶.

Between West and East – a reevaluation of Central Europe and the Balkans

Approached in a comparative way, the image of Central Europe has had, most of the past, a negative fame compared to the one of Western Europe, but a more favourable one compared to the Balkans, for example. Related to the idea of the periphery's inferiority given the centre, new particularities are revealed in the terms of some defaults or of some imperfect similarities, such as: urbanisation, the spread of some philosophies from different periods: the Renaissance, the Reform or the “Enlightenment”, styles as Baroque or Secession. If it is to look the explanations of the negative reflection of what we call Western Europe, we notice that the West – European area has benefited, for decades, by prosperity and standardizations in what concerns the social cultural and decisional aspects. With exception of few periods, the socio – economical difference between centre and periphery has driven to the creation of the occidental superiority feeling. In the Balkans, besides the similarities born of common natural and social conditions and besides the shared “heroic forms of life” or the “common natural heritage”, the observer will probably also point to the underlying reason for these similarities.

According Maria Todorova, the entire region shares a common macro-social frame which originated in the Byzantine and Ottoman legacies and resulted in a “lack of Christian aristocracy, a relatively free peasantry, small estates, a specific position of the church”¹⁷. “Unlike Orientalism - also quoted in same Todorova's paper- which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse of imputed ambiguity”¹⁸. Cultures of Balkan nations states have for decades, if not centuries, attempted to escape the image of the “dark Balkans”. The process of nation-building and self-determination has been carried out by the different national elites following the traditional models of Western nation-building. However, being small and peripheral, these nations were trapped in the contradictory play between the normative and the factual: between the modern imperative and their irrelevance in the struggle among the Great Powers.

From a historical perspective, the search of a specific *national character* resulted in the fervent differentiation of all Balkans nations from one another. The nationalistic imperative produced alternative versions of nationalist movements. During the period between first half of the 19th century and 1912, the nation – states in the region developed- slowly but relentlessly- relatively isolated national economies underpinned by hostile cultural rules. Balkan nations chose to transform into institutions their various political struggles and ideological hostilities from their neighbours¹⁹. We are faced with a lot of emotional nuances of Balkan identification, besides the memory of pre-modern identities, there are many factors that play essential roles in structuring field of compet-

ing forces. In the line for the examples, Bojidar Dimitrov efforts, using Elisabeth Kostova suppositions, to accord that *Dracula* was a Bulgarian historical figure or that Slavonic language was officially in Wallachia and Moldavia as soon as the 19th century²⁰.

Balkan/Balkanism were, also, a more fickle political/geopolitical project during last century. Romanian elites case are clearly: in 1906, Aurel C. Popovici insisted for *United States of Great Austria*, a reformatting ideological and administrative efforts to preserve the Double Monarchy as Central Europe and Catholic Empire, with Transylvania, Bukovina but also Old Kingdom of Romania inside²¹. But, just after 1918, building a ethnocratic state, the new Bucharest's central authorities focused a foreign policy toward also Central Europe (Little Entente, in 1920–1921 and, in the 20'–30's, its efforts to preserve recognition of Peace treaties) and the Balkans (Balkan Entente, born in 1934, together with Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey). "Between regions" make it, for instance, a good geopolitical formula not only for Romania but also for Yugoslavia (for Slovenia and Croatia) or even Albania. (Ismail Kadare wrote about *the limit* between East and West in the case of his country)²². Also for Slovenia, in the 19th century, Franc Prešeren or Ivan Cankar thought a Central European mission for their new born nation: in Trieste, in 1913, in his well-known speech about *Slovenians and Yugoslavs*, Cankar induced also a Balkanic future for them. "Let me some minutes in Ljubljana and just see Trieste", concluded Aleš Debeljak, in a summarizing paper about Slovenia, its "shifting borders"²³.

Within the framework of this complex, against the neighbouring powers, Jacques Le Rider writing about the disadvantage of the man born in "between regions" who would live a geopolitical pessimism. Not accidentally the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz repeated: "as people, we are not less valuable than French or English: as Polish people we are the sons of weakness, illness and debility". Another emblematic Polish writer, Czeslaw Milosz, Nobel Prize Laureate in 1980, in the chapter "The West", of his "The Captive Thinking", make a world's description, seen with the eyes of the Central – European. The Central – European would recognise without reserves the superiority of the West, according to the author within the framework of the technique and the production, but at the same time he cannot help noticing, even criticising, the spiritual helplessness and the feeling of a satisfaction caused by the material production²⁴. Related to the Western type writers, Gombrowicz found in Milosz a similar attitude to his perspective: "I feel in him the same thing as in me: antipathy and condescension toward them, mixed with a lack of power full of grief"²⁵. Another Nobel Prize Laureate, the quoted author, Albanian Ismail Kadare maintain that "national conscience in the Modern Balkans is determined by all physical and moral/emotional tensions which were supported, from centuries by all region peoples, in the field of preserving identity and regaining freedom"²⁶. Meanwhile attention may be called to the significant fact that the significant fact that the name of Macedonia, the heart of the Balkan peninsula, has been long used by the French gastronomes to denote a dish, the principal characteristic of which is that its component parts are mixed up into quite inextricable confusion²⁷.

In searching a national identity representing a common focused experience, all Balkan nations and states using eternally historical contrasts. Relevant Boyan Manchev accorded a *new production of Bulgarian nation* in a *national- universal project* versus

Megale Idea of Greece. Models of identities came from Communist regime, when Ludmila Jivkova induced a myth of Thracians or *pre-Slav* origins of Bulgarian, also in contrast, by this way with Communist Russia, most important Slav nation²⁸.

In the end of our analysis, we can affirm that Central Europe and the Balkans are concepts which have determined some of the most passionate and vivid scientific disputes of the 20th century. For some of us it is a utopia, for the others it is a cultural unity, and for another group it is a geographical reality, marked by a common historical destiny, supplied by a powerful symbolism. These disputes were approve with the raising/collapse of “the Iron Curtain”, as well as with the development of an intellectual class in the Occident, in exile, for which the Central Europe and South Eastern Europe’s territories was one of the life’s rules surrealism, of mockery as the only defence of human common sense.

NOTES

- ¹ **Garton Ash**, 1999.
- ² **Sinhubber**, 1954.
- ³ **Naumann**, 1915.
- ⁴ **Le Rider**, 1997: 72.
- ⁵ **Mastny**, 1998.
- ⁶ **Winchester**, 1999: 26.
- ⁷ **Halecki**, 1952: 7.
- ⁸ **Wandycz**, 1998: 1.
- ⁹ **Kaplan**, 1993: 2.
- ¹⁰ **Bibó, Szücs**, 2000: 117.
- ¹¹ **Bibó, Szücs**, 2000: 45.
- ¹² **Molnar Gustav**. *Europa Centrală între federalism și catastrofă*, “Provincia”, Cluj-Napoca, I, № 5, 2000, p.1–2.
- ¹³ **H. H. Munro**, 1982: 528–529.
- ¹⁴ **Kundera**, 1997: 222.
- ¹⁵ **Kundera**, 1997: 222.
- ¹⁶ **Kundera**, 1997: 222.
- ¹⁷ **Todorova**, 1997: 183.
- ¹⁸ **Todorova**, 1997: 17.
- ¹⁹ **Jelavich**, 2000.
- ²⁰ **Димитров, Б.** Дракула е българин. – Стандарт, № 4823, 12.06.2006, p. 25.
- ²¹ **Aurel C. Popovici**, 1997.
- ²² **Kadare**, 1990: 6.
- ²³ **Debeljak**, 2003: 67.
- ²⁴ **Milosz**, 1999: 37–63.
- ²⁵ **Fiut**, 2000: 171–179.
- ²⁶ **Kadare**, 1990: 6 .
- ²⁷ **Forbes, Toynbee, Mitrany, Hogarth**, 1915: 10.
- ²⁸ **Manchev**, 2006: 202–203.

SOURCES

- Димитров, 2006:** Димитров, Б. Дракула е българин. – Стандарт, №4823, 12.06.2006.
- Ash Garton, 1999:** Ash Garton, T. The puzzle of Central Europe – “New York Review of Books”, 16, N. 5, 18th March, 1999.
- Bibo, 2000:** Bibó I, Szűcs J. Între Occident și Răsărit. București-Cluj, 2000.
- Chirot, 2004:** Chirot D. Originile înapoierii în Europa de Est. Economie și politică din Evul Mediu până la începutul secolului al XX-lea. București, 2004.
- Димитров, 2006:** Димитров, Б. Дракула е българин. – Стандарт, №4823, 12.06.2006.
- Debeljak, 2000:** Debeljak, A. În căutarea nefericirii. Iași, 2000.
- Delsol, 2003:** Delsol C., Maslowski M., Nowicki J. Mituri și simboluri politice în Europa Centrală. Chișinău.
- Fiut, 2000:** Fiut Alexandre. Fluxurile și refluxurile haosului. – In: A Treia Europă N. 3-4, Iași, 2000.
- Forbes, 1915:** Forbes N., Toynbee A., Mitrany, D., Hogarth, D.G. The Balkans. A History of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Rumania, Turkey. London, 1915.
- Halecki, 1952:** Halecki, O. Borderlands of Western Civilization. A history of East Central Europe. New York, 1952.
- Jelavich, 2000:** Jelavich, B. Istoria Balcanilor. Secolele al XVIII-lea și al XIX-lea. Iași, 2000.
- Kadare, 1990:** Kadare, I. Aprilie spulberat. București, 1990.
- Kaplan, 1993:** Kaplan, R. D. Balkan Ghosts. New York, 1993.
- Kundera, 1997:** Kundera, M. Tragedia Europei Centrale- In: Europa Centrală: nevroze, dileme și utopii. Iași, 1997.
- Kolarz, 2003:** Kolarz, W. Mituri și realități în Europa de Est. Iași, 2003.
- Le Rider, 1997:** Le Rider, J. Încercare de istorie semantică.- In: Europa Centrală. Nevroze, dileme, utopii. Iași, 1997.
- Manchev, 2006:** Manchev, B. La Nouvelle Odysée: le continent et l’aventure- In: Cahiers de l’Echinox. Les imaginaires européens. Cluj-Napoca, 2006.
- Mastny, 1998:** Mastny, V. The Historical Relevance of Federalism in East Central Europe.- In “InterMarium”, 2, 1998, № 3.
- Milosz, 1999:** Milosz, C. Gândirea captivă. București, 1999.
- Molnar, 2000:** Molnar, G. Europa Centrală între federalism și catastrofă. – “Provincia”, 1, N.5, September 2000.
- Munro, 1982:** Munro, H. H. The Cupboard of the Yesterdays. London, 1982.
- Naumann, 1915:** Naumann, F. Mitteleuropa. Berlin, 1915.
- Popovici, 1997:** Popovici, A. C. Stat și națiune. Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari. București, 1997.
- Todorova, 1997:** Todorova, M. Imagining the Balkans. London, 1997.
- Sinhubber, 1954:** Sinhubber, K. Central Europe–Mitteleuropa–Europe Centrale: An Analysis of a Geographical Term – In: Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society. London, 1954.
- Wandycz, 1998:** Wandycz, P. S. Prețul Libertății. O istorie a Europei Central – Răsăritene din Evul Mediu până în prezent. București, 1998.
- Winchester, 1999:** Winchester, S. The Fracture Zone: A Return to the Balkans. London, 1999.