

What is Central Europe and what is Eastern Europe? The name of the region in the academic discourse in Poland and France

21st of March 2022

Summary of the conference

Wojciech Roszkowski, Professor (Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences) – *Central Europe or East Central Europe?*

Biography:

Wojciech Roszkowski, a Polish historian. From 2004 to 2009 he was Member of the European Parliament. His *Modern History of Poland* was published in Polish, first in the underground under the pen-name Andrzej Albert and then officially in many editions after 1990. His publications in English include: *Landowners in Poland 1918-1939* (1991), *Land Reforms in East Central Europe after World War One* (1995), *Changing Rules* (co-author, 1997), *The Shadow of Yalta* (2005), *Biographical Dictionary of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (co-author, 2008), *East Central Europe. A Concise History* (2015) and *Cultural Heritage of East Central Europe. A Historical Outline* (2015) as well as *The Shattered Mirror. The Fall of Western Civilization* (2017) and many others in Polish.

Abstract:

Central Europe or East Central Europe?

Geographical terminology plays a very specific role in the case of studies concerning countries situated between Germany and Russia and characterized by economic backwardness of foreign domination in the 19th century. In the literature concerning these countries various terms can be found. Most frequently they are rated as Central Europe or East Central Europe or, less

frequently, Central and Eastern Europe, while the criteria of this differentiation are often unclear. Sometimes there may be a hidden political agenda. Central Europe was often used in a narrow sense to mark the former Habsburg domain or the area of German expansion (Mitteleuropa). Eastern Europe was often understood as the Russian domain. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, the situation of the widely understood area dramatically changed but the terminology remained unclear. A large part of the region constitutes countries belonging to the NATO and the European Union, while the rest remains in the “grey zone” which is claimed by the Russian Federation but whose societies look more and more clearly to the West. This is why it seems rational to distinguish the members of the NATO and the European Union as Central Europe from East Central Europe understood in the wider sense. The former area would include the Baltic states, Poland, the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia, while the latter would also include Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkan states.

Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, Professor (Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences) – *From Eastern Europe through Central-Eastern Europe to Central Europe. What is Central Europe today?*

Biography:

Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Central and Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet Research at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She is the head of a research project on the Three Seas Initiative.

Abstract:

From Eastern Europe through Central-Eastern Europe to Central Europe. What is Central Europe today?

During the Cold War, the iron curtain clearly marked the division between the Eastern Europe and the Western Europe. After the collapse of the bipolar order in 1989, the concept of Central-Eastern Europe gained popularity. The process of redefining the region gained new dynamics due to the enlargement of the EU and NATO, which shifted the borders of the West to the East. That constituted an important step on the way to the emergence of Central Europe on the foundations of Central-Eastern Europe. Today, in the academic discourse in Poland, *Central Europe* is often understood as the eastern part of the EU, namely as the area of Three Seas Initiative which includes twelve EU members.

The concept of Central Europe is still subject to various interpretations, and political science does not bring answers to many questions. There is no consensus as to its geographical and political scope, there are even doubts whether Central Europe exists. Could this lack of precision be considered an asset for the states of this part of Europe, particularly concerning

their chances to develop and promote their own narratives and definitions of the region? The profound changes of the security architecture provoke further discussion on the concept of Central Europe.

Marek Więckowski, Professor (Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences), co-authors: **Emmanuelle Boulineau**, Professor (The École normale supérieure de Lyon) and **Lydia Coudroy de Lille**, Professor (University Lyon 2) – *Central and Eastern Europe, Europe médiane: identity and borders of an in-between Europe in French and Polish geographies*

Biography:

Marek Więckowski, Deputy Director for Science and Head of the Department of Urban and Population Studies at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization (IGiPZ) of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN), Professor Marek Więckowski is a geographer specialised in political borders and cross-border cooperation, geography of tourism, geography of transport, spatial mobility and regional development. He is collaborating with the *École normale supérieure Lettres et Sciences humaines* (ENS LSH) in Lyon, France. He conducted research with Professor Lydia Coudroy de Lille on the regionalisation in *Europe médiane* through cultural circulations and on Franco-Polish cooperation in geography.

Abstract:

Central and Eastern Europe, Europe médiane: identity and borders of an in-between Europe in French and Polish geographies

This topic questions how Central or Central and Eastern Europe have been mapped, named and delimited in two European geographies, namely French and Polish. Two labels have been developed in French geography since the 19th century: Central Europe and “*Europe médiane*”. While the former focuses on a central core consisting of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the latter adopts a blurred and extensible approach according to geographers, but can be simply described as an Europe in-between. In Polish geography, the discussion about the location and boundaries of Central Europe in the European space is still open and discussed, not only because of the criteria adopted by different authors, but also because of the definitions given, which are linked with the process of the region's formation. This presentation reviews the terms developed by French and Polish geographers to describe Central Europe and the challenges that continue to be faced in qualifying the region.

Jakub Olchowski, Ph.D., **Szczepan Czarnecki**, Ph.D. student (Institute of Central Europe, Lublin) – *Central Europe: theory and praxis – perspective of Institute of Central Europe in Lublin*

Biography:

Jakub Olchowski, Ph.D., is an academic teacher and international relations analyst. Assistant Professor in International Security Department at Maria-Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin; head of the Eastern Europe Department in Institute of Central Europe in Lublin.

Szczepan Czarnecki, Ph.D. student in the field of political science at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland and an analyst in the Visegrad Department of Institute of Central Europe in Lublin.

Abstract:

Central Europe: theory and praxis – perspective of Institute of Central Europe in Lublin

The notion of ‘Central Europe’ has been conceptualized multiple times and from many diversified research perspectives. The approaches vary depending on a discipline and from the point of view of political science, international relations and sociology a perspective that focuses on self-identification and factual ties seems to be crucial for defining Central Europe. Also, some important components of Central European identity must be stressed: a tradition of imperial pressures, an experience of systemic transformations as well as a specific historical pattern of being ‘in-between’. Institute of Central Europe concentrates on a functional aspect and political praxis of the region. Basically, this approach refers to ‘Lublin historical school’, locating Central Europe in the area ‘between Germany and Russia’, as well as to Oskar Halecki’s concept. Secondly, analysing international relations, we use IR methodological apparatus. Therefore, we consider factors such as ties (cultural, political, economic) and interdependencies, common historical experiences and a cohesion level. Given the dynamic nature of international relations, we define Central Europe broadly, focusing on a processual approach both to the region and its surroundings. It also must be emphasized that the notion of Central Europe, regarding its historical connotations, geopolitical determinants and cultural identity/similarity is useful when it comes to understanding contemporary political processes and their consequences.

Paweł Kowal, Professor (Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences) – *The “Jagiellonian idea” as the source of the Polish tradition of thinking about Central Europe*

Biography:

Professor Paweł Kowal teaches at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He is a political scientist, historian, columnist, expert on Eastern policy, co-founder of the Museum of the Warsaw Rising, lecturer at the University of Warsaw and Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Research Station of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kyiv. Member of the Polish Parliament – Sejm, he also serves as Deputy Chairman in Foreign Affairs Committee. He was Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2006 and 2007, and was also a member of the National Security Council. From 2009 to 2014, he was a member of the European Parliament and its Foreign Affairs Committee, and Chairman of the EU delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Commission.

Abstract:

The “Jagiellonian idea” as the source of the Polish tradition of thinking about Central Europe

In the fifteenth century and at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Lithuanian Jagiellonian dynasty ruled the thrones of Central Europe – Poland, Czech and Hungary. And although this political system did not turn out to be historically stable, in the future it laid the foundations for unification ideas, which are concerned with the security and prosperity of the Central European region. The most expressive manifestation of the Jagiellonian idea was the Union of Lublin concluded in 1569 between Poland and Lithuania. This act created the Polish-Lithuanian federal state, which for the next 150 years was a regional power, protecting the peoples inhabiting it. The harmonious coexistence and cooperation of Poles and Lithuanians in one state was a testimony to the accuracy of the historic choice made by two nations. Both countries were united by a political agreement and gave the possibility of practically unlimited contacts at all levels of social activity: political, cultural, spiritual and economic. The Jagiellonian idea became an inspiration for successive generations of Polish state and political activists promoting and implementing various forms of integration of Central European countries.

Étienne Boissarie, Professor (Europes-Eurasia Research Centre, National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Inalco) – *Central or Eastern Europe? How to define the area in history teaching?*

Biography:

Étienne Boissarie, Co-director of the Europes-Eurasia Research Centre (CREE) at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations (Inalco) in Paris, Professor Étienne Boissarie is a historian of Central Europe, specialised in Habsburg Europe of the late 19th century and in Slovak history in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2019, he was awarded by the Slovak Historical Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences for outstanding contribution to research on Slovak history abroad. Two of his articles will be published soon: “From war to peace? Central Europe

facing its 1919–1920 reshaping” for the Italian journal *Ricerche storiche* and “Ruling Central Europe after WWI: aims, tools and challenges” for the Slovak journal *Forum Historiae*.

Abstract:

Central or Eastern Europe? How to define the area in history teaching?

After a review of the structure of the teaching of Central European history at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations (Inalco) that has shaped the minds of several generations of researchers until the beginning of the 21st century, its evolution in recent years will be examined. While the teaching of the region's history used to focus on Central Europe and the Balkans, it appeared relevant to adopt a more flexible approach by including new countries such as the Baltic States and Finland, as well as Sweden depending on the issues addressed; and to rely on the long term history, considering the impact of the external influences, in particular Ottoman, German and Russian, and the unification processes of Italy and Germany on the fate of the Central European countries.

Paul Gradwohl, Professor (Research Centre for Contemporary Central European History, University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne) – *Security as a key to cope with Central/Middle Europe in modern times*

Biography:

Paul Gradwohl, Head of the Research Centre on the History of Contemporary Central Europe (CRHECC) at the Panthéon-Sorbonne University in Paris, Professor Paul Gradwohl is a historian of contemporary Central Europe, specialised in the historiography of Central Europe, security policies and feelings of security in the region in the 20th century. He conducts research in international relations, globalisation and regionalisation in Sorbonne, Identity, International Relations and Civilisations of Europe (SIRICE) department. He is also deputy director of the CNRS research group n°3607 “Knowledge of *Europe médiane*”. In 2018, together with the historian Antoine Marès, he edited the issue “L'Europe médiane, carrefours et connexions” of the journal *Monde(s): History, Spaces, Relations*.

Abstract:

Security as a key to cope with Central/Middle Europe in modern times

Considering that discourses on macro-regions make sense in a cross-cultural dialogue or struggle, this presentation will not aim at answering the question what is Central Europe or Central and Eastern Europe, but rather what are the issues at stake in adopting this or that denomination. Three points will be discussed: attempts at state-building in the region as a repetition of Greek history; the extension of the ethnic framework of Central European

countries; and security as a relevant approach to understand Central Europe as a whole in the last two centuries.

Paweł Ukielski, Ph.D. (Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences) – *East-Central Europe in the thought of Oskar Halecki and Jenő Szűcs as a reference point for contemporary academic discourse*

Biography:

Paweł Ukielski, Ph.D., political scientist, historian, Institute of Political Studies Polish Academy of Sciences assistant professor. Lecturer in Collegium Civitas university (2002–2014) and Graduate School for Social Research (since 2020). Co-creator and Deputy Director (2004–2014 and since 2016) of the Warsaw Rising Museum. 2014–2016 vice-president of the Institute of National Remembrance, 2011–2017 and since 2021 Member of the Executive Board of the Platform of European Remembrance and Conscience (PEMC), 2019–2021 Chairman of the Supervisory Board of PEMC.

Abstract:

East-Central Europe in the thought of Oskar Halecki and Jenő Szűcs as a reference point for contemporary academic discourse

Polish historian Oskar Halecki in 1950 and Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs in 1983 presented their concepts of East-Central Europe. Their ideas and definitions were well documented and deeply rooted, reaching the Middle Ages. This paper aims at analysing both concepts, their basis and borders of the region proposed by Halecki and Szűcs. In the second part it aims at reflection if, and to what extent their concepts are still useful in contemporary research and attempts to define the region.

Prepared by secretaries of the conference:

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