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# Geopolitics of Central Europe – A Historical View

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*Introduction*

The Central European region is a strategic area. According to historical considerations it meets the criteria of a geostrategic territory but without this being adequately reflected in international relations theories. For centuries the territory of Central Europe has been a conflict zone between great empires bordering its area,<sup>1</sup> and these large powers have tended to involve this territory not only within their sphere of interest, but often as an integral part of their executive powers.<sup>2</sup> For this region the fight for “survival” has been immanent in the sense of defending independence and realistic international legal sovereignty, and it has been for centuries. What is therefore its geopolitical context?

If we consider Central Europe as a distinct entity, let us try to answer two research questions:

1) *What is the defining attribute of the geopolitical dimension of the Central European region?*

2) *Is Central Europe a real entity in geopolitical terms?*

During the processing of the issue I will work on the hypothesis that *the countries of Central Europe are a mere object of geopolitical interests, not their real subject.*

The methodology used will be qualitative research focusing on the contextual relationships in the region in a historical perspective.

1. *Geopolitics*

Geopolitics can be described as an approach exploring the relationship of the country, or its space, and the state.<sup>3</sup> Geopolitics examines the movement of power and strength in a geographic space, whether for military operations or strategic control in peacetime.<sup>4</sup> Space, or territory, in international relations is understood as an independent variable, but it is interesting to look at it as a

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\* Geopolitics is used here as an umbrella term for the next levels of analysis - geostrategy and geo-economics.

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<sup>1</sup> I define the narrower region of Central Europe as the four states of the Visegrad group, Slovenia, Austria and Germany; it means seven countries in all.

<sup>2</sup> Irah Kučerová, *Region of Central Europe or Middle Europe?* (Bratislava: Ekonóm, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Kjellen, *Der Staat als Lebensform* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1917).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1942), 4.

dependent variable,<sup>5</sup> which seems to be quite relevant to the research of Central Europe and its geopolitical and geostrategic potential. Consider Russia's unwillingness to accept Central European countries' sovereignty, especially in the military field; the reluctance to accept the belonging of the former Soviet satellites to NATO (still intensely in the Baltic republics); the still imperial thinking of Russia and the idea that Central Europe - not only Ukraine, but also the Czech Republic and Poland - logically and rightly comes under the Russian sphere of influence, which corresponds to the majority opinion among Russians, whose perception is still influenced by Russia's "great power" position as the dominant player in the former Soviet Union. This is also reflected in the persistent conception of geopolitics in international relations, when the Cold War greatly distorted its applicability in the academic sphere,<sup>6</sup> although all the consideration of the rival players was determined by the geopolitical and mainly geostrategic background. In other words, while classical geopolitics is seen as "an objective record of the facts related to power in the world," from the perspective of critical theory it is understood as "interpretative cultural practice."<sup>7</sup> Geopolitics cannot be an objective assessment of reality; it always will be subjective from the perspective of the major players, which for Central Europe means Germany and Russia. Geopolitical thinking fulfils a more political science vision of the overall analysis than the attitude of academic disciplines. Therefore there is a problem with a geopolitical analysis of Central Europe in scientific thinking.

### 1.1. *The geopolitical context of Central Europe*

Geopolitics means working with geographic arguments in favour of political objectives, therefore having a direct relation to decisions about economic or political power objectives in the region.

Central Europe is a logical buffer zone<sup>8</sup> between Western and Eastern

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Kofroň, *Ofenzivní neorealismus: Přislib pro neoklasickou geopolitickou analýzu?* [Offensive Neorealismus: Promise for the Neoclassical Geopolitical Analysis?] (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Michal Romancov, "Nová studená válka mezi Ruskem a Západem" [The New Cold War between Russia and the West], *AP1* (2009): 86; Kofroň, *Ofenzivní neorealismus*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Geopolitical Structures and Cultures: Towards Conceptual Clarity in the Critical Study of Geopolitics," in *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns*, ed. L. Tchantouridze (Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, 2004), 75.

<sup>8</sup> During the interwar period of the twentieth century, the region was thought of as a *cordon sanitaire*, a belt of countries forming a barrier between expansionistic Russia, or the USSR, and similarly-minded Germany. This was originally a French idea; however, it has historical roots in the previous period. A better metaphor might be of Central Europe as a bridge figuratively connecting two distant shores; East Europe is still seen as somewhat foreign (a better option), or as a backward region (a more common approach) in the political jargon of the country, a society on the development trajectory. EU terminology is eloquent – a country in the process of catching-up.

Europe, not only in geographical terms, but of course also on the grounds of security, as well as various institutional, cultural and economic aspects. As such, its geopolitical and geostrategic importance is increasing. The economic potential of the Central European region, its favourable natural conditions, its resources, the skill level of the labour force, the centuries-long functioning population migration, and also the once unifying element of German as the official and educational language: all these things have increased the geo-economic dimension of the reference region. For centuries, Central Europe has been a central subject of interest, and often also of the conflict between strong Germanic and Russian historical states.

While for over a thousand years Central Europe was subject to mainly Germanic influence, after World War II it fell into the Soviet sphere of power. The Berlin-Moscow axis was murderous for Central European countries, continuously from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century; but if that axis had rotated 90 degrees it would have linked the Baltic and the Balkans, and the countries of the Visegrad group could today have played an important role in the mediation of cooperation.<sup>9</sup> It is not the end of the Russian axis. Even twenty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Russia is surprised that Central European countries really want to break away from the Russian sphere of influence.

“The Baltic countries - Ukraine, Poland and even the Czech Republic - are preventing the formation of a Russian-European alliance. Although these countries are EU members but not ‘European’ in the geopolitical and strategic sense, they lack a European mindset, are completely deprived of it, destroying incipient Europe.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, these central European countries are not “European” within the Russian meaning, because they do not want to accept – because they cannot accept – the neo-imperial intentions of Russia which began to emerge after the year 2000; on the contrary they want to distance themselves from Russia. Alexander Dugin considers Central Europe to be the Axis countries, i.e. Germany and Italy. He does not consider Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary as Central European countries at all, but as the East, and already, from as far back as the 1930s (!),<sup>11</sup> an area falling under the direct influence of the USSR as a geopolitical player. In the thirties, these Central European states were still

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<sup>9</sup> František Škvrnda, *Ruská hrozba v střední Evropě. Nová bezpečnostní architektura Evropy* [The Russian Threat in Central Europe: The New Security Architecture of Europe] (Parliament of Czech Republic, November 27, 2012, a public lecturer at the conference organised by Parliament).

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Tomaschitz, “Rozhovor s Alexandrem Duginem o Evropské unii” [Interview with Alexander Dugin of the European Union], *Dělský Potápěč*, 7 September 2009, accessed 20 March 2015, <http://deliandiver.org/2009/09>.

<sup>11</sup> Александр Дугин, *Постгеополитика против геополитики многополярного мира*, accessed 15 March 2015, <http://www.newsland.ru/news/detail/id/633895/cat/94/>.

fully sovereign players in international relations and were trying to engage in international cooperation according to their wishes, but still sixty years later Alexander Dugin assigns them to the East, perceiving them as part of the East.

Michel Foucher defines so-called Middle Europe as an intermediate geopolitical space between the West and Russia, a space of historical transition between them, influenced by both spheres: temporarily historically tied politically and territorially with Russia (or the USSR), but nowadays (1993) engaged with streamlining the processes imposed by the West as preconditions for EU integration.<sup>12</sup>

Geopolitics is part of the political, security, international and social discourse, therefore it is applied by the holders of various ultimate values according to the object of interest and the period in which the object is subjected to the analysis of international relations; it is an active part of the daily practice of international relations.<sup>13</sup> For the geopolitical analysis of Central Europe, it is important to emphasize that between geopolitics, political geography and geographic determinism there are indeed differences; however, there is always a highlighting of the interconnectivity of geographic characteristics with their political significance and the strategy of the territory or region. The idea that “geography is not an innocent discipline, but the method that gives rulers the right to organize, occupy and manage space”<sup>14</sup> incorporates the fight for ownership, control and the possibility of managing space: an integral part of world politics.

The special status of the Central European area as the geographically western edge of Eastern Europe, but the historically and structurally eastern edge of Western Europe is reflected best and for the longest time in the position of Germany and its attitude. See, for example, von Naumann’s concept of a Central European territory dominated by Germany, the so-called *Mitteleuropa*. Incidentally, von Naumann was not alone in understanding this region as serving the function of a link, a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe; the analogy of a bridge was in fact quite commonplace.<sup>15</sup> Other metaphors of

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<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucher, *Fragments d'Europe: Atlas de l'Europe médiane et orientale* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 60.

<sup>13</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society,” in *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 107-124.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Kupka, “Moderní geopolitické teorie USA” [The Modern Geopolitical Theory of the US], in *MV*, no. 2 (2001): 83-97.

<sup>15</sup> Bořivoj Hnízdo, “Střední Evropa v geopolitických proměnách kontinentu” [Central Europe in Geopolitical Changes of the Continent], in *Konsolidace vládnutí a podnikání v České republice a v Evropské unii I. Umění vládnout, ekonomika, politika* [The Consolidation of Governance and Business in the Czech Republic and in the European Union: The Art of Governing, the Economy, Politics], eds. Jiří Kabele, Lubomír Mlčoch and Stanislav Pscheidt (Prague: Matfyzpress, 2002), 331, 338.

Central Europe describe it as a buffer zone or as an axis around which the entire European continent revolves. But then, Central Europe has played a fateful role in the whole of European history. It is for this reason the German term *Mitteleuropa* entered the historical dictionary of Europeans. However, if the linguistic borders between the Germanic and Romanesque worlds are stable, then the borders between Germanic and Slavic areas are much more variable.<sup>16</sup>

The strategic reach, both in terms of the usability of soft security (internal security, or threats) and hard security (external threats, the securing of a military nature), helped increase the attractiveness of this region. “Geopolitics does not deal with power politics: it is power politics!”<sup>17</sup> Central Europe has always been, for its economic, political or military power potential, subject to the power disputes of major players: the Germans, represented by the Prussians as well as the Habsburgs, and the Russians. From the Germanic side, this occurred from the early Middle Ages, from the Russian only in the late modern period, however with the same or at certain times with an even stronger emphasis. “Originally a geographical concept, Central Europe has become the political power concept.”<sup>18</sup>

Central Europe logically suited the concept of social Darwinism in the geographical context of the state and the nation being a living organism and, as such, developing, as considered by Kjellén and Ratzel, but also by Mackinder and Haushofer. If it reaches the limits set by its own geographic boundaries, the state is obliged to provide resources for its nation from areas in close proximity or in other regions (the concept of seeking *Lebensraum*). Territorial expansionism is morally justifiable in order to serve one’s own population. Central Europe was the first logical choice.

To this also contributed the fact that “the vague aspects of Central Europe also include its territorial definition, which is intuited, but not quite clear.”<sup>19</sup> As observed by Krejčí, “the geographical characteristics of Central Europe lack natural borders ... the Danube and the Carpathians do not

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<sup>16</sup> Robin Okey, “Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions,” *PPr*, no. 137 *The Cultural and Political Construction of Europe* (Nov. 1992): 102.

<sup>17</sup> Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics,” 108.

<sup>18</sup> Václav Chyský, “Po stopách konceptů střední Evropy 19. a začátku 20. století se zaměřením na ‘Mitteleuropu’ Friedricha Naumanna” [Following the Footsteps of the Concepts of Central Europe, 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century, with a Focus on Friedrich Naumann’s “Mitteleuropa”], *Střední Evropa*, 28 January 2012, 122-123.

<sup>19</sup> Michal Romancov, “Geopolitické perspektivy České republiky v Evropě” [The Geopolitical Perspective of the Czech Republic in Europe], in *Konsolidace vládnutí a podnikání v České republice a v Evropské unii I. Umění vládnout, ekonomika, politika* [The Consolidation of Governance and Business in the Czech Republic and in the European Union: The Art of Governing, the Economy, Politics], eds. Jiří Kabele, Lubomír Mlčoch and Stanislav Pscheidt (Prague: Matfyzpress, 2002), 341.

demarcate the region, but they pass through it,<sup>20</sup> a situation which can be applied to the natural Polish-German border of Oder. The distinct geographic ambiguity of the Central European region plays into the hands of the more dominant and assertive states in the region – historically the Prussians and the Austrians, and later the Russians. The geopolitics of Central Europe faces the relativity of the meaning of Central European issues in the European context.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.2. *Development of Central Europe's geopolitical importance*

Economic characteristics such as a favourable climate, plenty of rich forests (sources of heating fuel, building materials, food), high quality land for agricultural use and, in the beginning, free territories for colonization, contributed initially to the geopolitical significance of the Central European region. As a result, there was *Ostsiedlung* or settlement of the east from the Germanic side. This was fully applied in the Middle Ages, when the economic potential of Central Europe was confirmed and the region's powerful neighbours became more interested in the area.

However, it was necessary to take political changes into account: early medieval statehood formation within Central Europe was associated with the acquisition of the hereditary title of king. In Czech lands the title was obtained by Ottokar I of Bohemia (1155-1230) in 1204 from Pope Innocent II, confirmed by the Golden Bull of Sicily in the year 1212 by Frederick II. Much earlier, in the year 1000, Stephen I (969-1038) became the hereditary king, unifying the Kingdom of Hungary. Stephen, who was consistently promoting Christianization in what was still at that time pagan territory, was crowned the King of Hungary by Pope Sylvester II. The Christianization of Hungary, along with Stephen's dynastic marriage in 995 to Gisela of Bavaria, established the Hungarian Kingdom as part of the circle of Western Christianity, which in geopolitical terms meant submission to the Holy Roman Empire, under whose protection Hungary flourished. Similarly, in Poland Boleslaw the Brave (992-1025) was also crowned in the year 1000 by the German Emperor Otto III, and this was finally confirmed in 1025 as a hereditary royal title, although his followers lost the crown for a short period of time. "Geopolitically everything was basically decided; the Przemyslid state was in the gravitational field of the Holy Roman Empire,"<sup>22</sup> but so also were the Piast in Poland and the Arpads in Hungary.

Proximity - not only geographically but mainly institutionally, through Christianity - and submission to the Roman Emperor and therefore the Pope, was the determining instrument of the geopolitical orientation of Central

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<sup>20</sup> Oskar Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru* [Geopolitics of Mitteleuropean Area] (Prague: Professional Publishing, 2010), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Hnizdo, "Střední Evropa," 327.

<sup>22</sup> Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru*, 58.

European nations from the early Middle Ages. The right of ecclesiastical investiture - the right to appoint the ecclesiastical authorities and their autonomy - became an important document of emancipation. Poland won it relatively early with the canonization of St Adalbert two years after his death in 999, or in 1000, when Emperor Otto III granted Boleslaw and his successors the right of investiture for the archbishopric at a dynastic meeting in Gniezno. Thus Poland gained ecclesiastical independence, followed by Hungary, where real ecclesiastical independence was gained during the reign of Ladislav I (1046-1095). The Czech Kingdom, however, had to wait for independence until the fourteenth century, despite the founding of the Prague bishopric under Boleslav II in 973. The right of investiture indicates the geopolitical importance of the state and its position in Europe's most powerful political body at that time: the Holy Roman Empire. As you can see, the Czechs had to wait.

When the Great Moravian Empire ceased to exist in the early tenth century, new state units formed in the territory of Central Europe, consistently directed, through their inclination for Christianity, towards the sphere of influence of the Holy Roman Empire. These units disengaged not only from paganism, but also from the Byzantine and Eastern branches of Christianity and clung instead to the Western rites.<sup>23</sup> This meant that for a thousand years, Central Europe was institutionally a part of the West.<sup>24</sup> Belonging to the western branch of Christianity was not just a sign of so-called modernity belonging to the political elites, but also a tool for the domination of weaker ethnic groups. Therefore it was a political power instrument, expressive of the close relation of church and state. And this situation prevailed for nearly a thousand years, differentially across certain states.<sup>25</sup> Christianity in Central Europe was thus a legislative, philosophical and ideological, but also a practical concept, similarly to Western Europe. Belonging to the western version Christianity - the acceptance of its standards and the requirements for its full implementation - became a geopolitical tool for the dissemination of power and the promoting of the church's own interests in Central Europe.

Central Europe experienced a golden age during the reign of the Czech King and the Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316-1378), most obviously because he was chosen to be the emperor in 1355, but in real terms for several other reasons. Central Europe became, for the first and evidently also the last time, "the navel of world," the Central European monarch heading the largest areas of Europe at that time, and the church also recognizing him as "a sovereign anointed by God," which was significant in terms of his real authority and law

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<sup>23</sup> That is, the set of customs, liturgical law and the legal regulation of the Christian reality.

<sup>24</sup> Irah Kučerová, "Region of Central Europe or Middle Europe?", accessed 7 October 2013, [http://fmv.euba.sk/files/Conference\\_proceedings\\_Smolence\\_2012.pdf](http://fmv.euba.sk/files/Conference_proceedings_Smolence_2012.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> For example, with the Tolerance patent of Joseph II in 1781, the Austrian Empire started the process of separating church and state, which was much earlier than in other countries.



enforcement. His political influence was reflected in the promotion of the Prague diocese to an archdiocese in 1344,<sup>26</sup> and he was also well supported economically and culturally by the strength of the Prague penny (known as the *groschen*) since the Wenceslas II era (1300), the flowering of crafts and trade, the establishment of the first university to the north of the Alps (1348) and the building of many constructions of utilitarian and sacred significance that have survived the ages and still testify to the excellence of his governance today. His diplomacy stabilized European relations at that time. In the institutional field, Charles IV contributed to the legislative anchoring of the societies living in Central Europe. He was the author of the Golden Bull or imperial constitutional law that was valid from 1356 until the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. Under Charles IV, Central Europe, thanks to its capital town Prague which had approximately 40,000 inhabitants, became the geopolitical centre of the medieval European world.

The reign of Wenceslas IV and his successor Sigismund I meant the beginning of the destabilization of the state, continuing throughout most of the fifteenth century. Although, thanks to his father's diplomacy, Wenceslas was crowned the Roman king (1376), he did not become emperor, unlike Sigismund; he was even deposed from the Roman throne for inaction (1400). The geopolitical dimension of Central Europe, which had barely begun construction by Charles IV, began to fade. Although Sigismund received a historic title – he was elected Roman King against Wenceslas (1410) and later even promoted to Roman Emperor (1433)<sup>27</sup> – the religious disagreements of contemporary Europe, the Papal Schism (1378-1417), the growing influence of religious reformists, and the Hussite requirements resulting in a war in the Czech Kingdom did not aid regional development. Religious divisions between Catholics and Hussites culminated in an open war, considerably over the Central European region, which resulted in a period of several years in which a number of crusades were declared against the heretical Czechs involving the Catholic aristocracy of German military orders, the Poles, the Hungarians and the Habsburgs. Central Europe was convulsed in turmoil, especially religious and dynastic disputes, its influence in Europe declining.

Some geopolitical hope for the renaissance of the Central European region was undoubtedly provided by the government of George of Podebrady (1420-1471); ruling from 1458, he was the only Czech non-dynastic monarch and the only non-Catholic king, but was a man of great diplomatic talents. Certainly the most prominent attempt to stabilize Europe, which could have

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<sup>26</sup> This meant not only an increase in the state/society's value to the church, but also a step towards religious autonomy – statutes that Poles and Hungarians had from the eleventh century.

<sup>27</sup> He was also the ruler of Silesia, Lusatian, Hungary and Lombardy – at least formally ruling virtually all of Central Europe of that time.

brought Central Europe a degree of geopolitical and geostrategic importance comparable to the era of Charles IV, was George's draft of the Agreement on Peace for all Christianity<sup>28</sup> in the year 1462. The intent was the political and religious stabilization of European nations and the development of peaceful cooperation. The problem, however, was its too-modernist conception of religion which did not accept the crucial role of the Pope and thus failed to gain support in religious circles; indeed, on the contrary, it activated religious resistance, with curial diplomats arguing against the project. Another pitfall was hidden in the notion that in the meantime the versatile multinational management of the great empire would be replaced by independent government-related international treaties in the cooperating communities.<sup>29</sup> This concept clearly surpassed the boundaries of the former conception of church and state, to some extent being a prototype of the Westphalian system which was agreed approximately 200 years later. It was apparently the first attempt at a multilateral agreement on international relations.<sup>30</sup> Although it failed in its original purpose, it did have the outcome of establishing a bilateral friendship between the Czech and French kingdoms in 1464. George's initiative was remarkable and groundbreaking, but unfortunately it did not signal a fixture of or increase in the geopolitical importance of Central Europe.

Vladislav of the Jagiellonian Dynasty (1471-1526) sat on the Czech and later the Hungarian throne after the death of George of Podebrady, which led to the partial interconnection of Central Europe, because this was done with strong support from Emperor Frederick III of the Habsburgs. In 1526, Rudolf II<sup>31</sup> took over the Czech throne, choosing Prague as the residential city of the Habsburg Monarchy, thanks to which the city's cultural and scientific prosperity continued. Is it then possible to designate Central Europe in this period as a geopolitical centre? It is either difficult or impossible to do so. The Central European region was a zone of conflict for not only internal political rivalry, but also religious disputes used as the basis of political struggle. Central Europe had already been a subject of geopolitical interests; now it was being

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<sup>28</sup> *Tractatus pacis toti Christianitati fiendae*.

<sup>29</sup> Václav Vaněček, *The Universal Peace Organization of King George of Bohemia: A Fifteenth Century Plan for World Peace, 1462-1464* (Prague: Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1964), 81-90.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Nejedlý, *Le premier projet d'union des Etats europeens, concu en Boheme dans les annees 1463-1464 a l'initiative de Georges de Poděbrady, le "roi hussite" et de son conseiller francais Antonio Marini de Grenoble* [The first project of the union of States Europeans developed in Bohemia in the years 1463-1464 at the initiative of George of Poděbrady, the "King Hussite" and his French adviser Antonio Marini of Grenoble], in *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, eds. Aleš Skřivan and Arnold Suppan (Prague: Charles University Prague, University of Vienna, 2008), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Rudolf became King of the Czechs, Hungarians and Croats, as well as the Roman Emperor – truly a sovereign of the Central European dimension.

seen not as a geopolitical player, nor as a participant, but as an object.

After the death of Rudolf (1612) the Habsburg's residential city was quite logically transferred to Vienna, while Prague lost its influence and evidently its position as a global or global/European centre for good.

Due to the childlessness of Rudolf II and his successor Matthias, the Central European Empire found itself in a crisis accentuated by the religious conflicts of the Thirty Years War. Thanks to this war, all of Europe paid attention to Central Europe for a brief time, since the Defenestration of Prague began there in May 1618. However, Central Europe was lost as a separate region for almost three hundred years as a result of the conflict.

After the expiration of the Polish-Lithuanian Union (1389-1600) Poland was in a state of violent upheaval, controlled by several noble families. The Russian Empress Catherine II, with the support of Friedrich II, pushed her man to the Polish throne in 1763; he ruled under the name of Stanislav II August. Although he tried to reform the organization of the state and the economy, reform attempts were stopped under pressure from Russia and Prussia. If we add to that some uprisings in the territory administered by the Polish crown which had to be suppressed by Russian troops, the Polish state did not show agility or sustainability.<sup>32</sup> The result was the threefold division of Poland and the loss of its sovereignty for a long 146 years as its territory was annexed to three neighbouring empires: Prussia, Russia and Austria. Central Europe was subsequently defined primarily by the extent of Prussia, Austria and, partly, the Russian Empire. The geopolitical context was clear: the three participants agreed on the division of power and the administration of the region, which in particular held geo-economic potential for them. This geopolitical situation was preserved in Central Europe for centuries.

The existence of Central Europe as an independent geopolitical entity was revived by Napoleon Bonaparte and, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which raised a new geopolitical order in Europe, the result being that the Russian Empire began to be perceived as Eastern Europe. It also led to a degree of speculation and controversy over the political and geographic anchor of the Central European area<sup>33</sup> which remains today. The Central European region was under the administration of the Holy Alliance, therefore geopolitically it occupied a subordinate position once again.

World War I fundamentally changed the political map of Europe, especially for the Central European region. Centuries-old empires fell apart: Austro-Hungary, the German Empire,<sup>34</sup> Tsarist Russia and then the Ottoman

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<sup>32</sup> Jan Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy* [Two Centuries of Central Europe] (Prague: Argo, 2005), 72.

<sup>33</sup> Hnizdo, "Střední Evropa," 330.

<sup>34</sup> Of course, the German Empire was, historically, a relatively short formation from 1871 to 1918, but as a significant part of Prussia it influenced the development of Central Europe for centuries.

Empire, whose influence for space in Central Europe had long been neutral. In Central Europe there arose states based on nationalism which, however, ignored the Germanic element that had been present there for centuries, a situation which soon backfired. Centuries of power regionalism by the Germans in Central Europe resulted in sour grapes, which took the form of efforts to exclude the Germans from the future plans of the Slavic countries, despite the fact that the Germanic population had been an integral part of these societies for thousands of years. However, it was not just the myopia of the Slavs. For example, Mackinder recommended that the winners of World War I separate Central Europe from the Russians on one side and the Germans on the other. The Slavic states in Central Europe<sup>35</sup> were to form a buffer zone, which would solve the centuries-long disputes of Germans and Slavs as well as prevent the region from being absorbed by the Germans and Russians. And given the revolution in Russia, which threw the Russians into chaos, poverty and totalitarianism, there was a threat, according to Mackinder, that the population of Eastern Europe might then lean more towards the German concept of order. In that case, more democratic societies such as Czechoslovakia could serve as an example against the autocracy of the Germans and Russians, which is their common feature:

“Take the example of the Czechs. Did they not ascend resolutely against Bolshevism and did they not establish their national greatness in admirable conditions in Russia? Did they not show outstanding political ability in re-establishing and managing their state, though it was almost entirely surrounded by Germans and Hungarians? Did they not give the nature of learning and modern industry to their state? They will never lack the will for justice and independence.”<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, he could not have been more wrong. Czechoslovak society renounced its historically short, newly-gained independence in favour of a political, economic and institutional Soviet protectorate voluntarily in the 1946 parliamentary elections. In any case, the *cordon sanitaire* of Central European countries was mainly to prevent a possible alliance between Germany and Russia. But Mackinder himself meant Eastern Europe, i.e. everything beyond the eastern border of Germany, was an unstable region, and he attributed to the *cordon sanitaire* of countries in Central Europe a clear geopolitical, or rather geostrategic importance.

In Czechoslovakia, although representatives of a future independent state were talking of two equal languages - Czech and German - at the 1919-1920 Paris Conference, it was the idea of Czechoslovakism that finally ousted other nationalities from the political mainstream. Due to the fact that six to ten

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<sup>35</sup> Mackinder talked about Eastern Europe when he was in fact referring to what we describe in this article as the Central European nations.

<sup>36</sup> Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (London: Constable Publishers, 1919), 206.

languages were commonly used in Czechoslovakia,<sup>37</sup> it was not a uniform or unified ethnic and linguistic space, but rather one which logically recorded its instability, leading to geopolitical games. If we add to this the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, followed by an influx of immigrants from Russia who won asylum quite easily in Czechoslovakia, as did the German exiles in the late 1930s, then interwar Czechoslovakia was an appealing destination for refugees, but for its own civil population conditions were not comparable.

However, newfound freedom after World War I did not lead to stability throughout the wider area of Central Europe, i.e. from Germany and Austria to the Slavic countries and Hungary. Geopolitically, the whole region was a compartment of dispute and a disputed area.<sup>38</sup> The harsh Versailles Treaty economically, socially and even politically affected Germany, while Austria, in a milder form, also experienced internal political instability including a failed coup attempt. Slovenia sought refuge in a federation of other southern European countries and Hungary was the subject of reparations as a member of the dualist monarchy. The so-called War for Slovakia, the military conflict in 1918-1919 between Hungary on one hand and Czechoslovakia and Romania on the other, which was fought on the territory of Upper Hungary and Ruthenia and accounted for the newly established Czechoslovakia and Transylvania, claimed by Romania, was essentially a continuation of World War I. Subsequently, due to the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary lost large areas - in the region of 67% of its territory compared to the year 1910 - and about 58.3% of its population,<sup>39</sup> which did not help political stability. As an immediate result of the Trianon treaty, 3,425,000 ethnic Hungarians remained outside the new, greatly diminished borders.<sup>40</sup> Indeed this occurrence carries political repercussions to this day.

Poland had to fight with Russia in 1919-1921 for the eastern territory; although the dispute was resolved in favour of Poland, later the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1939 essentially confirmed the inclusion of Poland under the tutelage of the USSR for long decades. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was a clear gesture of two superpowers deciding how to geopolitically control the disputed region of Central Europe. Timothy Snyder called the countries of

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<sup>37</sup> Namely Czech, German, Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, Romani, Romanian – obviously a central European melting pot in practice, because one language functioned as an umbrella in every region.

<sup>38</sup> Karel Kosík, *Třetí Mnichov?* [The Third Munich?], *Listy* 22, no. 6 (1993): 35.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 155.

<sup>40</sup> Richard C. Frucht, ed., *Eastern Europe: An Introduction to the People, Lands, and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), vol. 1, 359-360; Miklós Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, trans. Anna Magyar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 262.

Central Europe “bloody countries” in which Hitler’s and Stalin’s global domination plans overlapped.<sup>41</sup>

From a geopolitical perspective, the Central Europe region was notably peculiar, since it was in both a narrower and broader sense something of a powder keg of ethnic and linguistic rights, as reflected in the political demands which, in practice, were usually not heard out. The set policy in individual states after World War I had its roots deep in the nineteenth century, in the era of the rise of nationalism, and it did not correspond to the requirements of the modern cosmopolitan society which had, paradoxically, arisen in the interwar period when nationalities and religions had mixed freely in Central Europe. However, the idea of nation states based on ethnicity in Central Europe in the interwar period led only to instability and inner tensions within society, which culminated in World War II. Efforts to achieve ethnic and linguistic purity reached their peak after World War II, because the very fact of the war and its context backed up the supporters of the idea of an ethnically uncomplicated state, along with other ideas such as the geopolitical resolution of traditional national power disputes which could be used by the major regional players to justify their territorial expansionism. Then there was result, among other things, of the increased post-war migration of Europeans. 1945 was notable for the most exceptional population shift in European history.<sup>42</sup> With the expulsion of ethnic Germans under the Potsdam Agreement, nearly 10 million people moved to Germany, in addition to forced labourers returning from concentration camps. The post-war migration flows of Europeans mainly burdened the areas of Central Europe.

### 1.3. *Geopolitical perspectives of Central Europe after World War II*

The vision of Central Europe as a buffer zone promised to calm tensions: a *cordon sanitaire* between Russia and Germany meant a clear definition of Central Europe to the west and to the east, coupled with the fact that this area was important to strategically arrange due to the security situation and the balance of forces in Europe.<sup>43</sup> This idea was very prominent after World War I and World War II, when it was surprisingly promoted by the West and by Stalin himself, who understood the *cordon sanitaire* of the “people-democratic” regimes subordinate to him as a power bulwark or safety barrier against the

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<sup>41</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Krvavé země* [Bloody Countries] (Litomyšl: Paseka, 2013), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Železná opona: podrobení východní Evropy 1944-1956* [The Iron Curtain: The Subjugation of Eastern Europe 1944-1956] (Prague, Plzeň: Beta - Dobrovský - Ševčík, 2014), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Daniel and Petra Durkošová, *Geopolitické vize střední Evropy - proměny chápání pojmu “střední Evropa” a jejich důsledky* [The Geopolitical Vision of Central Europe - The Changing Understanding of the Concept of “Central Europe” and Its Consequences], accessed 22 January 2015, <http://www.globalpolitics.cz/clanky/geopoliticke-vize-stredni-evropy-promeny-chapani-po-jmu-%E2%80%9C-stredni-evropa%E2%80%9C-a-jejich-dusledky>.

possible future aspirations of Germany, or the West and capitalism in general.<sup>44</sup> However, the then *de facto* domination by Moscow over Central Europe and its Sovietization meant a real shift of the Soviet border to the west, which changed the geopolitical situation in all Eastern Europe.<sup>45</sup> Not only in this political climate of the Cold War but also in earlier eras, all approaches involving metaphorical bridges or *cordons sanitaire* ultimately failed because although Central Europe was indeed in the geographical centre of Europe, it was, from a geopolitical point of view, on its periphery.<sup>46</sup>

The process of Sovietization, or the communization of Central and Eastern Europe, led to the formation of the Soviet bloc, but under different conditions, depending mostly on past historical experience. Most of the entities involved were states with undemocratic developments, with the exception of Czechoslovakia,<sup>47</sup> which was considered truly democratic and a relatively tolerant state.<sup>48</sup> The communized central European countries, however, did not have much in common - they were countries and societies with different historical experiences, political regimes, institutional characteristics and economic bases. However, thanks to the communization of society, i.e. the Sovietization of these countries, they had much in common during the period of 1945-1989,<sup>49</sup> mainly in terms of analogous institutional development. Stalin was aware of the value of Central Europe with regard to its geostrategic and geo-economic importance, though he did not fully believe in its control at the beginning of negotiations over its post-war organization, just as he originally did not consider taking over the Soviet occupation zone in Germany, later the GDR.<sup>50</sup> Due to the strong support for the Communists by the residents of Central European countries, which correlated with the Munich syndrome in Czechoslovakia, Stalin's path to taking control of Central Europe was significantly facilitated. The problem was perhaps only with the Poles, arising from their long and unfortunate historical experience with the Russians, or the Soviets. As a result, following a recommendation by Stalin's Soviet agents, a pro-Soviet secret service started to operate in Poland during the war, from 1939. This organisation was subsequently responsible for the Katyň massacre

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<sup>44</sup> Zdeněk Veselý, *Dějiny mezinárodních vztahů* [History of International Relations] (Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2010), 353.

<sup>45</sup> Běla Plechanová and Jiří Fidler, *Kapitoly z dějin mezinárodních vztahů 1941-1995* [Chapters from the History of International Relations 1941-1995] (Prague: ISE, 1997), 59, 151.

<sup>46</sup> Romancov, "Geopolitické perspektivy," 345.

<sup>47</sup> Veselý, *Dějiny mezinárodních vztahů*, 353.

<sup>48</sup> Tony Judt, *Intelektuál ve dvacátém století* [Thinking the Twentieth Century], trans. Martin Pokorný (Prague: Prostor 2013), 20.

<sup>49</sup> Applebaum, *Železná opona*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Plechanová and Fidler, *Kapitoly z dějin*, 48; Mary Fulbrook, *Dějiny moderního Německa: od roku 1918 po současnost* [The History of Modern Germany: From 1918 to the Present], trans. Eva Prášková (Prague: Grada, 2010), 126.

(1940), and supported the Soviet-backed Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKW) Manifesto in July 1944. The achievements of pro-Soviet manipulation of information and political leaders in Poland became a prototype for Soviet meddling in the politics of other Eastern European countries, including Central Europe. Geopolitically, Central Europe became an integral part of the Soviet bloc, considered to be a mere object of bipolarity for international relations and the Cold War, rather than a participant. The bipolarity consisted mainly of the ideological conflict of the West and the East in terms of civil and political rights.<sup>51</sup> This means that Central Europe lost its geopolitical influence but, as you can see, not its importance.

The fall of the Iron Curtain allowed Central European countries to rebuild after more than forty years of deliberately disrupted traditional economic relations, subject to political liberalization. But not much has changed geopolitically for the nations of Central Europe. They still remain more the object of geopolitics than its subject, with the possible exception of Poland, but certainly not other smaller states. Along with a collapsing socialist system, i.e. the Soviet system, talk of the geopolitical role of Central Europe was, to be fair, slightly revived, although the major geo-economic axis affects Central Europe only marginally, among other residues of the Cold War. Certainly the major geo-economic corridors (main railway lines, energy pipelines) bypass the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but intersect in Poland or Austria in the south.

On the other hand, we may say that Central Europe has been a geo-economically interesting destination since the very early 1990s, in connection with the legal association of these countries to the EU, among other factors. The FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) inflows, outsourcing and the creation of subsidiary companies of renowned Western corporations are associated with the search for the new commodity markets which the unsaturated markets of early post-socialist countries offered. To this we can add the effects of a relatively skilled workforce, an adjusted tax environment for business, the geographic location and a developing transport infrastructure. All these factors have increased the overall geo-economic potential of Central Europe. Besides broadening the traditional road networks and railways, co-financed by European Structural Funds among other sources, consideration was also given to waterways. Potentially strategic, although controversial from an environmental perspective, is the Danube-Oder-Elbe (DOE) channel project.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru*, 89.

<sup>52</sup> The history of this idea is quite long: in 1901, the Austrian Parliament passed the so-called waterway law regulating building of Reich shipping networks, which aimed to create a synergy of several factors satisfying Vienna's imperial ambitions in terms of the economic linking of Austria-Hungary (J. Janáč, "Inženýrský sen o průplavu" [Engineering the Dream of a Canal], *Lidové noviny*, November 14, 2013, 12). The Czechoslovak government discussed the project in 1919. For Hitler's expanding Germany, the DOE channel project became essential for the integration of



Its implementation is currently not on the agenda, not even at the level of preparing international consultations. In spite of this, it does illustrate the role of infrastructures in geopolitics.

After the fall of the socialist regime and their detachment from Moscow, the post/socialist states declared their desire to “return to Europe,” that is, to integrate into the European Union and participate in European and transatlantic institutions.<sup>53</sup> The European Union at first greeted the idea with substantial enthusiasm, which gradually faded away as the transformational problems of the individual states became apparent. Although at first the expansion of the EU to include the transitive economies of Central Europe was estimated to happen around the year 2000, the reality was more difficult. There were several reasons for this. First of all, the transitive economies were coming through a difficult process of political, institutional, economic and social transformation, which led in most cases to the accumulation of macro-economic problems. Furthermore, having experienced problems following the acceptance of poor and damaged economies such as those of Greece, Portugal and Spain, the EU was not willing to open its gates without further reforms in the candidate countries. There was another inhibitor: fundamental changes inside the Union itself, which introduced measures relating to its internal market and competition with other countries, became a very explosive political topic in the home politics scene. If we add to this the pressure of stronger competition from non-European subjects as a result of globalization, it is clear why the original desire to expand rapidly through the inclusion of the post-socialist states was disappearing in the EU, especially when we consider that mutual trade had already been liberalized, thus the main advantages (from the EU’s perspective) had already been gained.

In the 1990s the attitude of the member countries was changing in favour of expansion because of the fear that the very chaotic situation in the Russian Federation and the former Yugoslavia countries might spread to other former Soviet satellites. Geopolitically, it was better to have a proper convergence in the candidate countries under the supervision of the European Commission and then connect these countries to the EU core. For the first time in the history of European integration the basic conditions for acceptance were formulated *ex ante*.<sup>54</sup> The so-called Copenhagen criteria focused on political

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the Empire. Within the Protectorate, the construction started almost immediately after winning the Blitzkrieg against Poland. The fact that the work continued continuously until 1943, when it was halted for financial and capacity reasons, reflects the geostrategic importance of waterways in Central Europe. Similarly, the Socialist government took over the project, but due to financial difficulty postponed a decision in 1972 until after 1990. According to the current schedule of the Ministry of Transport, the DOE could be completed in the year 2039.

<sup>53</sup> Krejčí, *Geopolitika středoevropského prostoru*, 373.

<sup>54</sup> Irah Kučerová, *Hospodářské politiky v kontextu vývoje Evropské unie* [Economic Policies in

structures, human rights and economic requirements. In the second half of the 1990s there was a screening of progression in the converging of the candidate countries joining. Fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria meant a certain institutional standardization and stabilization of societies in these countries. For the European Union this was in accordance with the declared long-term aim to spread a zone of peace, stability and prosperity. Geopolitical and geostrategic interests were evidently prevailing over geo-economic interests.

Essentially, the whole of Central Europe except for one country - neutral Austria - is a part of NATO today. A certain geopolitical landmark was the acceptance in 1955 of the FRG (West Germany) into the structures of the North Atlantic Alliance, which basically violated the results of the Postdam Treaty on Germany demilitarization. One year later the GDR became a member state of the Warsaw Pact. The real unification process of Germany in 1990 had to consider the position of the GDR in security structures. The fact that Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to the GDR leaving the Warsaw Pact and integrating its territory into NATO in July 1990 enhanced the main geopolitical turning point of the Cold War. As such, I consider the date of 16 August 1990 - when Gorbachev expressed his consent - to be the beginning of the end of the Cold War! It is true that the unification of Germany was connected to the promise that NATO would no longer encroach upon the Soviet Union, and it meant that both the Russian border and this promise were broken relatively soon.

In March 1999, three of the Visegrad countries were accepted into NATO. In the first expansion round involving post-socialist countries in 1999, the “acceptance of Hungary and the simultaneous non-acceptance of Slovakia into NATO was a geopolitical paradox because Hungary became geographically cut off and shared its borders only with the non-members of NATO.”<sup>55</sup> Slovakia became a partner country of NATO in 2004,<sup>56</sup> along with the Baltic republics, the countries of the Eastern Balkans and Slovenia. The fact that NATO was expanded by the inclusion of the Central European countries before their EU entry says something about the geopolitical dimension of Central Europe - it was still primarily seen as an object. Entry into NATO was understood as another step towards the stabilization of Central Europe in international relations; for the citizens of these countries it was a confirmation of their pro-Western orientation and a cutting off from their long-term protector, Moscow,

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the Context of the Development of the European Union] (Prague: Karolinum 2010), 42.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Klinkova and Veronika Dokulilova, “Geopolitika rozšiřování NATO” [Geopolitics of NATO Enlargement], accessed 25 August 2013, <http://www.globalpolitics.cz/clanky/geopolitika-rozsirovani-nato>.

<sup>56</sup> Evidently the most sensitive part of NATO expansion because not only are they countries with a direct border with Russia but more importantly Russia considers the Baltic's to be its traditional sphere of influence and Russia also properly shows it. That is why it is a geopolitically sensitive topic for the citizens of the Baltic States.

which evaluated the moving of NATO boundaries towards its borders as a security threat.

Although there was still the opinion prevailing that Central Europe had the potential to bring about the geopolitical unification of Europe,<sup>57</sup> economically under the banner of Germany or the newly made Berlin-Moscow geopolitical axis, Russia nevertheless expected to be dominant ideologically, spiritually and politically. It must be said that, for example, the Nord Stream gas pipeline project, especially the original proposal which considered only the direct connection of Russia and Germany, precisely represented that idea. The agreement between the Russian Federation and Germany in 2005 on building a gas pipeline on the bottom of the Baltic Sea in fact completely bypassed neighbouring countries, which was evidently the intention, and European representatives all across the EU considered it to be a security threat.<sup>58</sup>

Radoslaw Sikorski, at the time Defence Minister of Poland, even likened it to the modern day Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact;<sup>59</sup> Swedish Defence Minister Mikael Odenberg emphasized that the project might disrupt Swedish security interests,<sup>60</sup> as well as those of Finland, Denmark and the like. Based on recent historical experiences of Russia's use of energy policy against its former satellites such as the Baltic countries, Ukraine and Belarus, there is a danger that Russia will use energy as a means of pressure and, in the case of gas deliveries, as a political tool.<sup>61</sup> While in the beginning the ecological aspects of building and, later, operating Nord Stream were primarily discussed, assurance by Vladimir Putin that the ecological safety of the gas pipeline would be achieved with the help of the Baltic fleet of the Russian Navy only created other political and security concerns as well as rejection. There were even concerns voiced that optical cables providing the running of the transmission stations could be used as a means of espionage.<sup>62</sup> Even the German Bundeswehr had similar concerns because the existence of the pipeline could endanger the naval security of Germany. There was also a question of to what degree Nord Stream

<sup>57</sup> Александр Дугин, *Основы геополитики* (Москва: Арктогея, 1999), 220.

<sup>58</sup> Ariel Cohen, "The North European Gas Pipeline Threatens Europe's Energy Security," accessed 25 February 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/10/the-north-european-gas-pipeline-threatens-europes-energy-security>; Roger Boyes, "Gazprom Is Not a Market Player, It's a Political Weapon," *The Times*, 7 January 2009, accessed 20 February 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article2598609.ece>.

<sup>59</sup> "Polish Defense Minister's Pipeline Remark Angers Germany," Voice of America Online, May 3, 2006, accessed 4 October 2014, [https://www.google.cz/?gws\\_rd=ssl#nfpr=1&q=Polish+Defense+Minister+Pipeline+Remark+Angers+Germany,+Voice+of+America+Online,+3rd+May+2006](https://www.google.cz/?gws_rd=ssl#nfpr=1&q=Polish+Defense+Minister+Pipeline+Remark+Angers+Germany,+Voice+of+America+Online,+3rd+May+2006).

<sup>60</sup> Alex Bakst, "Baltic Sea Pipeline: Sweden Afraid of Russian Spooks," accessed 15 February 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/baltic-sea-pipeline-sweden-afraid-of-russian-spooks-a-448652.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Boyes, "Gazprom."

<sup>62</sup> Hans-Martin Tillack, "Schroeders Pipeline. Spionagekanal in der Ostsee?" *Stern*, May 18, 2008, accessed 12 March 2015, <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/schroeders-pipeline-spionagekanal-in-der-ostsee--3091598.html>.

project was a private business between Putin and Schröder, who immediately after finishing his term of office became the head of the whole project. How could an international treaty of such a nature be prepared without previous consultation with defence experts?

Since its beginning, Nord Stream was considered a geopolitical tool of power sharing between Russia and Germany in the area of Central Europe. Because the fact that Russia diverted approximately 40-50% of gas from the traditional Ukraine distribution network in favour of Nord Stream,<sup>63</sup> classical Central European countries are more in danger of gas delivery drop-outs. Nord Stream was tested in its geopolitical, security, environmental, economic and ethical aspects. The ethical dimension is connected especially to the efforts of Germany and Russia to avoid all the participating countries in the Baltic Sea area, which was understood as a power solution in the region and geopolitically unacceptable. Without a doubt, the clientelism was and is a significant ethically controversial dimension of the project. First of all, there was Schröder, who signed the agreement on the construction with Putin ten days before the German parliamentary election and subsequently became Chairman of the Board for the Nord Stream Company, of which 51% is owned by Gazprom.<sup>64</sup> It is, however, important that at the time of the project's preparation Schröder replaced a former officer of the Eastern Germany Intelligence Service (Stasi), Matthias Warnig, who obviously knew Putin, himself former agent of the KGB in the GDR, very well.<sup>65</sup>

Even though the construction costs and operation of Nord Stream were estimated on an economically unprofitable level, the security and geopolitical attitude that sees Central Europe only as a strategic or a trade object prevailed.

A real geostrategic dimension of Central Europe was given by the idea of the USA placing anti-nuclear defences in the Czech Republic and Poland. In the Czech Republic this was supposed to take the form of radar, a so-called anti-nuclear umbrella; in Poland it was about placing Patriot missiles - a mobile missile system with long range missiles that would protect Poland from an eastern attack. The intent to do so had already been introduced in Europe in 2006, with negotiations starting in 2007. In the Czech Republic the public, with the huge support of Russia, was against the radar. So in September 2009 the

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<sup>63</sup> Jessica Bachman, "Russia to Divert 20 BCM of Gas from Ukraine to Nord Stream," accessed 12 March 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/russia-nord-stream-idUSLDE74O1XA20110525>.

<sup>64</sup> There was a clear division of financial and management powers – the controlling shares are controlled by Russia, management was given to Germany.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Parfitt, "Putin's Enemies Call for Investigation into Links with Stasi Agent," *The Daily Telegraph*, February 27, 2005, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1484535/Putins-enemies-call-for-investigation-into-links-with-Stasi-agent.html>; John Vinocur, "For Schroder and Putin, Linkup No Coincidence," *New York Times*, January 3, 2006, accessed 10 March 2014, <http://select.nytimes.com/iht/2006/01/03/international/IHT-03politicus.html>.

USA declared this project cancelled<sup>66</sup> while with Poland, a much more constructive partner, the agreement was signed in 2008. The problem also lay in the fact that this missile defence shield was supposed to be for the private defence of the USA, rather than included under NATO. In any case, with respect to security, Central Europe filled the headlines of newspapers for a period of time. If the radar was built in the Czech Republic as part of a global strategic system the Czech Republic would come into a geopolitical focus,<sup>67</sup> as Poland did. Considering that the radar was supposed to basically protect all Europe, including parts of Russia (!) and the northern part of the western hemisphere, the geostrategic significance of the Czech Republic would have been more essential than the Patriot missiles in Poland. However, it is worth considering the question of whether it is proper to allocate such military equipment in a small and densely populated area in the middle of Europe.

Geopolitically, Central Europe is a region hard to grasp. Given that even its geographical specification is not unambiguous, it is also complex in its profusion of political and economic characteristics. On the institutional level, Central European societies have tended to move closer to the West rather than the East, while representatives of both those geopolitical entities unanimously associate it with the East. The geopolitical scene of Central Europe is connected more to geostrategic and security discourse.

“Central Europe seems to be a conglomerate of national states representing something special, something that has aspects of both the West and the East and that enables it to lean toward both of them depending on what suits us better or where a stronger partner pulls it in.”<sup>68</sup>

The future of Central Europe is and will be determined by the relationships of the European Union, Central Europe and Russia. “Considering the historical burden on one side and the culturally-civilization approximation on the other side, it is evident where the Central European states would like to lean toward.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> In March 2014, relating to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the idea of American radar in Central Europe was re-animated by Senator McCain. The plan, however, served to confirm the arguments of Russia that it was supposed to be an anti-Russian radar. The proposal did not succeed.

<sup>67</sup> Krejčí, *Geopolitika střeoevropského prostoru*, 375.

<sup>68</sup> Marián Mrva, “Stredná Europa ako historický región” [Central Europe as a Historical Region], *SPR2* (2003), accessed 10 February 2014, <http://spr.fsv.ucm.sk/archiv/2003/2/mrva.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Romancov, *Geopolitické perspektivy České republiky v Evropské unii* [The geopolitical perspective of the Czech Republic in the European union], in *Konsolidace vládnutí a podnikání v České republice a v Evropské unii I. Umění vládnout, ekonomika, politika* [The Consolidation of Governance and Business in the Czech Republic and in the European Union: The Art of Governing, the Economy, Politics], eds. Jiří Kabele, Lubomír Mlčoch and Stanislav Pscheidt (Prague: Matfyzpress, 2002), 349.

*Conclusions*

Geopolitics connects the geographic analysis of a region with the political and economic interests of countries in the given region. This does not have to mean only countries belonging to the specific region, because from a geostrategic point of view even very distant places can become a centre of interest. In the case of Central Europe, its geopolitical characteristics are based on its strategic location, in more than one aspect. Firstly, it is the geographical centre of Europe, which is relevant especially in terms of traffic, international trade and military strategy, as Napoleon could see during his campaign to Russia. The strategic importance of Central Europe has been visible for centuries due to the fact that it separates two big empires - Prussia, or Germany, and Russia - from each other. It still performs this function, and throughout the entire twentieth century the idea of Central Europe as a *cordon sanitaire* was praised. Another dimension of the Central European region's strategic value has always been economic or resource amenities. However, in the last century there have been a number of small nations - either independent Central European states or those subsumed within bigger empires - which are in a subordinate position that has determined or limited their importance significantly. And even though Central European nations have been experiencing solid freedom, democracy and stability<sup>70</sup> for the last 25 years, their position in the system of international relations has not been completely unambiguous. And this is despite their being anchored within international societies such as the European Union and NATO.

Arguably, there is one geopolitical particularity worth special attention: the Second World War was a long-term milestone in history for Central Europe (and as well Eastern Europe), and lasted significantly longer than it did in Western Europe. The course of the war and the historical victory of the Red Army (USSR) in the more eastern parts of Europe established conditions for the communization of that part of Europe in several countries, even by non-violent means,<sup>71</sup> at least in the beginning. That also led to a different approach to the winners of the war: while Nazism was defeated and the area that was controlled by Nazi Germany for a while was liberated, the area liberated by the Soviet Union was fully incorporated under the Soviet influence for more than next 40 years. As Applebaum points out, "Stalin never gave back the territories he occupied in [the] first stage of the war. East Poland, east Finland, the Baltic

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<sup>70</sup> As an example there is the so-called Velvet Divorce of Czechoslovakia in 1993 as opposed to the almost ten-year-long war in Yugoslavia motivated by the secessionist tendencies of some federal republics. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 659.

<sup>71</sup> This was certainly the case in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, because many citizens of these states had genuine Communist beliefs (at least at the beginning) and willingly enforced Soviet behavioural patterns.

nations ... were incorporated into the Soviet Union. The eastern Polish territories remain part of Ukraine and Belarus today.<sup>72</sup> However, he dominated politically over great swaths of Central Europe - the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary - and also influenced development in Austria and Slovenia. This was the period in which the Central European region came fully under the geopolitical influence of the Soviet Union.

The answer to the first research question - *What is the defining attribute of the geopolitical dimension of the Central European region?* - is relatively easy to settle. If we try to define Central Europe in a narrower sense as a geopolitical player, we have to make do with its role as the mere object of geopolitical forces, as an object of interest whose role is often enforced by force. In the fourteenth century, ending with the era of Charles IV, policy ceased to be implemented on the supranational level in Central Europe. In those times Central Europe could be described as a European player, a real subject of international relationships. In the following centuries this territory was of interest to world powers only for its economic or strategic potential, i.e., only as a geopolitically usable object. This can be seen in the way that the majority of Central European countries came under the domination of foreign powers. In a broader sense, in Central Europe - including Germany and Austria - the geopolitical situation was varied massively between countries.

Answering the first research question logically provides an explanation for the second: *Is Central Europe a real entity in geopolitical terms?* In the prism of geopolitics, yes it is, especially as a sphere of interest to both the West and the East. But not as a player able to influence its position in international relations - only Germany has been able to do that for any substantial length of time. Euphemistic ideas regarding smaller Central European states in this territory representing a bridge between the West and the East failed because of their inability to enforce such ideas in international relations in a way that the superpowers would accept. Since the end of the First World War, geopolitical thoughts on the Central European region have been based on the idea of a *cordon sanitaire* separating the superpower ambitions of Germany and Russia; today it is seen, among other things, as a dam for Russian neo-imperial behaviour.

My hypothesis that the *countries of Central Europe are a mere object for geopolitical interests and not their real subject* was confirmed by the historical analysis of circumstances in the early Middle Ages. Only for sporadic periods in the High Middle Ages was Central Europe in the position of a real geopolitical player.

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<sup>72</sup> Applebaum, *Železná opona*, 25.

## LISTA ABREVIERILOR

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analele Banatului</i> . Muzeul Banatului, Timișoara.
<i>AG</i>	<i>Arhiva Genealogică</i> . Academia Română, Iași.
<i>AHY</i>	<i>Austrian History Yearbook</i> . Center for Austrian Studies. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
<i>AIIAI</i>	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Iași</i> . Academia Română. Institutul de Istorie și Arheologie, Iași.
<i>AIIICN</i>	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj-Napoca</i> . Academia Română, Cluj-Napoca.
<i>AIIXI</i>	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași</i> . Academia Română. Institutul de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași.
<i>AMM</i>	<i>Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis</i> . Anuarul Muzeului Județean Vaslui.
<i>AP</i>	<i>Acta Politologica. Prague</i> . Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University Prague.
<i>Apulum</i>	<i>Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis</i> . Muzeul Național al Unirii, Alba Iulia.
<i>Balcanica</i>	<i>Balcanica</i> . Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade.
<i>CMR</i>	<i>Cahiers du monde russe</i> . L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris.
<i>Corvina</i>	<i>Corvina</i> . Societă unghereze-italiana Mattia Corvino, Budapest.
<i>EM</i>	<i>Erdélyi Múzeum</i> . Erdély Múzeum Egysület, Kolozsvár.
<i>Hierasus</i>	<i>Hierasus</i> . Muzeul Județean Botoșani.
<i>JCH</i>	<i>Journal of Contemporary History</i> . SAGE Publications, London.
<i>Клио</i>	<i>Клио</i> , Издательство Нестор, Санкт-Петербург.
<i>Korunk</i>	<i>Korunk</i> . Korunk Baráti Társaság, Kolozsvár.
<i>Kritika</i>	<i>Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History</i> . Georgetown University.
<i>Leonardo</i>	<i>Leonardo</i> . Istituto Romano Editoriale, Fondazione Leonardo, Roma.
<i>LO</i>	<i>L'Europa Orientale</i> . Istituto per l'Europa Orientale, Roma.
<i>MV</i>	<i>Mezinarodni vztahy</i> . Institute for International Relations, Prague.
<i>PP</i>	<i>Passato e presente</i> . Giunti, Firenze.
<i>PPr</i>	<i>Past &amp; Present</i> . Oxford University Press.
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revista Arhivelor</i> . Arhivele Naționale ale României, București.
<i>RHSEE</i>	<i>Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen</i> . Academia Română, Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga”, București.
<i>RI</i>	<i>Revista istorică</i> . Academia Română. Institutul de Istorie „Nicolae Iorga”, București.
<i>RInt</i>	<i>Relations internationales</i> . Société d'Études Historiques des Relations Internationales Contemporaines, Paris.
<i>RRG/RJG</i>	<i>Revue Roumaine de Géographie / Romanian Journal of</i>



	<i>Geography</i> . Institute of Geography. Romanian Academy, Bucharest.
<i>RRH</i>	<i>Revue Roumaine d'Histoire</i> . Académie Roumaine, Bucarest.
<i>SEER</i>	<i>The Slavonic and East European Review</i> . University College London.
<i>SPR</i>	<i>Slovenská politologická revue</i> . University of st. Cyril and Method in Trnava.
<i>SR</i>	<i>Slavic Revue</i> . Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, University of Pittsburgh.
<i>SS</i>	<i>Studi storici</i> . Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Roma.
<i>Transilvania</i>	<i>Transilvania</i> . Astra. Braşov (Sibiu din 1881).
<i>Trans R</i>	<i>Transylvanian Review</i> . Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca.