

first publication

After the millennial celebrations (of what exactly?) the world of the early twenty-first century is once more confronted with agonizing questions of religious, ethnic, and social identity. After the euphoria that greeted the end of the cold war in Europe, countries, ethnic groups, religions, and regions are once more fighting out by violent as well as peaceful means their often self-destructive quest for identity. In particular, questions of identity have been especially vexing for the countries that emerged from the former »Soviet block«, which include both republics of the former Soviet Union and the nominally independent former »People's Republics«. The following article is a historical and cultural reflection on various possible mappings for the region, based on the elementary question, what ideological ballast each terminology carries in thinking about the region. In contrast to most approaches, which foreground politics and economics, I shall focus on the cultural and identity-shaping functions of literature, which has been, and continues to be, particularly prominent in this part of the world. Before turning to the terminological question raised in my title, I want to give a brief historical account of literature's role in shaping the current national and ethnic identities. A more detailed account of this will be given in the 4-volume *History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe* that Marcel Cornis-Pope and myself are preparing. An outline of the project has been published in 2002 as an *ACLS Occasional Paper*.

I National Awakening and the Institutionalization of Literature

The first modern historians of literature were the romantic writers August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who gave broad and comparative public lectures on the history of European (and in a limited way also of non-European) literature in the early 19th century. At the time, no university chairs existed for the modern languages and literatures, only for the classical languages and rhetoric. Indeed, the universities were not eager to accommodate writers and literary scholars. The University of Jena, surely the most progressive then in this respect, gave Schiller a chair in history and relied heavily on Goethe's administrative talents, but the Schlegel brothers were unable to find there a foothold, and their public lectures were finally given in Berlin, Paris, Vienna and elsewhere, outside the universities. August Wilhelm Schlegel did finally receive the first German chair for literature (*Literatur und die schöne Wissenschaften*) at the University of Bonn in 1818, but his brother and Coleridge were never appointed at universities.

University chairs for modern literatures were gradually established in many European countries during the first half of the 19th century, but this institutionalization had its price. The academic study of literature was legitimated on the grounds that it would provide histories and textbooks for teaching the modern languages and literatures in schools, and this, in turn, was subordinated to national interests: the institutionalization of literary studies became part of unwritten but powerful national agendas. Friedrich Schlegel's last series of public lectures, given in Vienna in 1812, clearly indicates a shift from an earlier liberal and cosmopolitan conception of literature to a national and conservative one that was to legitimate the institutionalization of national literature. Schlegel, by then in the service of Metternich, declared in Vienna that the foremost business of poetry was »to preserve and to glorify those great national memories that are in the dim past of a national history.«¹ It is in this sense, by becoming the keeper of the national soul, that literature and literary scholarship acquired a political justification, and social as well as academic prestige.

Conventional wisdom holds that literature was first institutionalized in the »developed« western part of Europe and only later in its »backward« eastern and southern parts. Yet the institutionalization of literature was a question of national identity rather than economics. It progressed relatively slowly in nations like England and France that had a robust self-image. The first great French literary history, that of Gustave Lanson, was published only in 1895, when, due to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71, France was still smarting from its defeat and had lost its self-assurance. Literature was first institutionalized in societies that had problematic identities: Germany, Italy, some Scandinavian, and most East European cultures. In these, constructing a national literature was a major contribution to the struggle for a

1 Schlegel, Friedrich: Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe [Critical Friedrich Schlegel Edition]. Ed. Ernst Behler. 35 vols. Paderborn: Schöningh 1958ff., vol. 6, p. 15.



2 Gellner, Ernest: *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfels 1964, p. 169.

3 Foucault, Michel: *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage 1973, p. 300.

4 Toldy, Ferenc: *A magyar nemzeti irodalom története. Példatárral*. Budapest: Emich 1851 [Rpt. Budapest: Szépirodalmi 1987].

national language, culture, and political independence. The construction of a national literature was often a *prelude* to state formation and even a *precondition* for it. Thus, the German literary histories of Gervinus and others envisaged a unified German state but preceded its actual creation. Germany had in this respect a paradoxical but crucial role, for the key ideas about a national literature originated with Herder and the German romantics, but these were used in the national awakenings of Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary and other East-Central European countries against the domination of German language and literature: Germany aggravated its identity problem by exporting it eastward.

The national awakenings were not directed to the great external powers alone. The Hungarian national awakening and its state-supported projects for a Hungarian national literature soon had to confront the national awakening of the country's minorities. To complicate matters even further, the »national community« could often be imagined in different configurations. Especially in the Slavic countries national projects emerged, because the national-political unit was conceived differently: on a pan-Slavic scale, in terms of federations like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, or yet smaller units. In his first literary history, Ferenc Toldy⁴ could still conceive of Hungarian literature as everything written in any language within the country's borders. By the end of the 19th century such liberal conceptions of the national all but disappeared.

Ernest Gellner claims that nationalism »invents nations where they do not exist«²; as far as the eastern part of Europe is concerned, we may add that poets and philologists were major contributors to this »invention« of nations. They did so in two major ways: 1) by constructing texts and 2) by building institutions. The first one of these, text construction, can be brought under five distinct activities: 1) writing dictionaries; 2) reviving the vernacular poetry; 3) (re-)constructing the national literary past by publishing oral poetry, medieval and baroque vernacular literature; 4) canonizing national poets; and, last but not least, 5) writing national literary histories.

National literary projects always started with a language revival. The Hungarians associate this with Ferenc Kazinczy, the Czechs with Joseph Dobrovsky, the Romanians with Ion Heliade Radulescu, and the Serbs with Vuk Karadžić. In many cases the language revival led to the construction of the first dictionaries. As in the case of Kazinczy's *Magyar Muzeum* (1788) and *Orpheus* (1790), the language revival was often furthered by new journals. The revival was usually divisive, for a cosmopolitan elite continued to regard itself as part of the hegemonic (more »advanced« and »refined«) foreign culture, while the innovators sought to revitalize the vernacular, the local, and the ethnic. Although the elite usually came from the aristocracy, and the opposition from the bourgeoisie and the lower middle class, the groups did not divide neatly along class lines, for some of the most powerful reformers were aristocrats.

The language revival was furthered everywhere by the appearance of poets like Kazinczy who wrote in the vernacular. But the main figures of the national literary program were philologists, who often limped behind the poets by relying on pre-symbolist and even pre-romantic notions of literature. Thus, for instance, the first historians of Hungarian and Bulgarian literature, Toldy and Teodorov-Balan, both defined literature in terms of its 18th-century meaning as *all* oral and written texts. For them, literature had not yet differentiated itself from other discourses, and not yet enclosed itself in what Michel Foucault calls »radical intransitivity«³. The philologists contributed to the national program in three main ways. First, they dug into the national past, recovering forgotten vernacular texts. Many of them were heroic songs and ballads about ancient struggles against invading foreign powers. The recovery of the Serb heroic epic in the early 19th century was a major European event, enthusiastically greeted by Goethe and leading to inspired searches for similar lost poetry in other cultures. These were actually no discoveries or even rediscoveries, because the »finding« was not by serendipity: the editing and publishing of the texts was shaped by a national demand for foundational texts to project a proper national self-image. The published text was a product of the 19th century, often even a forgery, rather than an *objet trouvé*. Most notorious was the case of the *Rukopis Královédvorský*, which Václav Hanka published in 1819, claiming that he found them in a cellar of the castle of Dvůr Králové nad Labem two years earlier. Later it came to light that the poems were written by Hanka and his friend J. Linda to prove that the Czechs heroic songs were a match for the Serbian ones. Whether some of the oral poetry discovered elsewhere was also a forgery is still hotly debated. It is in any case clear that the national epic songs and folklore published in the 19th century were manipulated by philologists, who though it was their task

5 Stagl, Justin: Nation. In: Ranke, Kurt et al. (Eds.): *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*. Berlin: de Gruyter 1975ff., vol. 9, pp. 1233-43, here p. 1235.

6 De Sanctis, Francesco: *Storia della letteratura italiana*. 2 vols. 1870/71. Bari: Laterza 1925, vol. 2, p. 433.

7 Ibid., p. 421.

8 Chmielowski, Piotr: *Historia Literatury Polskiej* [History of Polish Literature]. 6 vols. Warszawa: Biblioteka Dzieł Wyborowych 1899/1900, p. 23.

9 Ricoeur, Paul: *Time and Narrative*. Transl. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol. 1. Chicago: Chicago UP 1984, p. 197.

10 Perkins, David: *Is Literary History Possible?* Cambridge: Harvard UP 1992, p. 2.

11 Renan, Ernest: *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* [1882]. In: Renan, Ernest: *Œuvres Complètes*. Ed. Henriette Psichari. Vol. 1. Paris: Callmann-Lévy 1947-1961, pp. 887-906, p. 892.

12 Ibid., p. 891.

13 Perkins 1992, p. 20.

to inspire the nation with ancient patriotic texts. Ethnic differences, rarely thematized in folktales, became dramatized in the process of editing to help inventing a national tradition.⁵

The philological treatment of written literature involved the republishing of texts from the Middle Ages and the Baroque, which often represented glorious chapters in the national history. Above all, philologists had to canonize national poets. In the early phases of constructing a national literature this usually meant the revival of an older poet; in the later phases it led to the apotheosis of a 19th-century poet. All peoples of East-Central Europe consecrated in this way national icons: the Hungarians glorified Sándor Petőfi (originally called Petrovics), the Poles Adam Mickiewicz, the Serbs and the Montenegrins Petar Njegos, the Czechs Karel Mácha, the Bulgarians Hristo Botev, and the Slovenes France Prešeren. The sculptors of these national monuments were philologists.

The philological contribution to the national project culminated in the writing of national literary histories that integrated the founding texts, the revival of medieval texts, the story of the language revival, and the canonization of national poets into single grand narratives. Benedetto Croce's words in the introduction to Francesco De Sanctis's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870/71) holds true for most of the other literary histories as well: »a history, whose protagonist was precisely Italian literature, even Italy; the individual writers were presented only as phases in the general development.«⁶ Indeed, de Sanctis was dreaming of writing a history of Italian literature as a history of Italy well before the publication of his book.⁷ National literary histories thus became uplifting accounts of the nation's spiritual fortunes. Remarking »I cannot claim that I can reconstruct the soul of the whole nation«, the Polish literary historian Piotr Chmielowski added: »but I shall attempt to offer some hints about the changes it underwent, as reflected in the literature of the last nine centuries.«⁸ Others saw their task in similar terms.

National literary histories had archetypal structures, and a set of stock roles that were filled by different actors in different histories: in the Hungarian stories the Turks and the Austrians were the villains and the Hungarians the heroes, but the Hungarians assumed the role of the villains in the Romanian stories. In these grand narratives of literary history the nation assumed the role of a collective hero or »logical subject«⁹. Its birth, growth, maturing, and decline was recounted in an organic, developmental history, where each stage followed from the previous ones. Though the biological metaphor endowed these histories (explicitly or implicitly) with an element of inevitability, the narratives did not necessarily follow a smooth line, but, contrary to what David Perkins¹⁰ claims, could accommodate »jumps, reversals, returns, clean slates, or beginnings«. Indeed, the organicist story could be cast into different generic forms, and assume the shape of a divine comedy, a Bildungsroman, a drama of fate, or even a national Golgotha. Common to all these scenarios was merely the demand that elements threatening the integrity of the story be suppressed or excluded. Collective amnesia, Ernest Renan claims, is as important to a nation as shared remembrances.¹¹ Historical errors and forgetting what may disturb a nation's glorified (or, for that matter, masochistic) self-image are »essential factors in creating a nation.«¹² What Perkins attributes to all narrative historians is particularly applicable to the historians of national literatures: they were compelled to suppress whatever perceptions did not fit into their plot construction.¹³

These national literary projects did not consist of text constructions only. They involved in equal measure the founding and development of literary institutions. In the early phase this usually consisted of starting journals and newspapers, perhaps also patriotically oriented publishing houses (such as the *maticas* in the various Slav countries), theater groups, and societies for the cultivation of the native language and its poetry. Initiatives of this kind were often taken first in the provinces, but the later phases of the national projects were usually transacted in the capital. The primary aim then became the establishment of nationally representative institutions, which were to become both vehicles and symbols of the national culture: the National Academy, the National University, the National Library, and the National Theater. Each of these institutions assumed a specific literary function within the national project. The task of the academy was to nurture and guard the language, to generate dictionaries, to further the production of literary histories and textbooks, and to establish guidelines for the instruction of the national language and literature on the secondary and university levels. The universities assumed the task of training the teachers of literature in secondary and higher education and of generating literary histories, textbooks, and other handbooks. The most popular of the national institutions, the national theater, was to stimulate the writing of dramas



14 Jókai Mór: *Kárpáthy Zoltán*. 1854. Budapest: Szépirodalmi 1971, p. 142.

15 Bartók, Béla: *Letters*. Ed. János Demény. Budapest: Corvina 1971, p. 50.

about the national past, whose production would then become communal self-celebrations of the nation. The première of Bedřich Smetana's opera *Dalibor* on May 16, 1868 was coupled with the ground-laying ceremonies for the permanent Czech National Theater in Prague, ceremonies that included processions with banners and colorful folkloric costumes, as well as speeches by leading politicians. Smetana exclaimed when depositing the cornerstone, »Music – the Life of the Czechs!« implying that the cornerstone was also to become a foundation for the nation's future. His next opera, *Libuše*, provided a foundational myth for this anticipated event, and its première opened the new permanent Czech theater on June 11, 1881. The final act contains Libuše's vision of Bohemia's glorious future (based on the manuscript forged by Hanka) and concludes with an apotheosis of the Czech nation. As in the case of the first chapter in Mór Jókai's novel *Kárpáthy Zoltán* (1854), such opening nights of a national theater could then be celebrated in fiction.

»Every nation has a holy city of which it thinks with piety and pride«, writes Jókai in the same *Kárpáthy Zoltán*,¹⁴ this time introducing the 1838 great flood of Pest. The institutionalization of literature did indeed enhance the national character of the capital city, turning it into a symbol of the nation. Yet these cities of national pride were also a gathering place of foreign writers and intellectuals, magnets for the poor and downtrodden inside and outside the country, and sites of cosmopolitanism. Every East-Central European capital city had its German-language newspaper (the venerable *Pester Lloyd* was published from 1853 until World War II), its German theater, and often its Yiddish one as well. Capital cities also attracted the writers and intellectuals from the country's minorities and from the neighboring countries. In short, they were not only the fulcrum of the national literary culture but also forces of cultural dispersion and diversification. Reacting to this, most East-Central European countries witnessed populist rural movements that vilified the capital city's urban culture, attacking its industrial gloom, its decadence, and its immigrant Germans, Jews, and other foreigners, while glorifying the countryside and the healthy roots of the national oral culture. Even the young Béla Bartók, the later champion of intercultural understanding, wrote on August 15, 1905 to Irmay Jurkovic:

A real Hungarian music can originate only if there is a real *Hungarian* gentry. This is why the Budapest public is so absolutely hopeless. The place has attracted a haphazardly heterogeneous, rootless group of Germans and Jews; they make up the majority of Budapest's population. It's a waste of time trying to educate them in a national spirit. Much better to educate the [Hungarian] provinces.¹⁵

The national literary projects were generally rent by internal tensions and contradictions because they fed on two sustaining forces antagonistic to each other: the state that strove to establish a central power, and the centrifugal and subversive forces from below, the suppressed minority groups that constructed their own vernacular national literatures as expressions of their own »imagined communities«. The German national literature that Friedrich Schlegel championed in the service of Metternich was rejected by the Hungarian national awakening, though it was inspired by Herder and the German romantics. This Hungarian project of national literature had to confront, in turn, the Croatian, Romanian, Slovakian, and other ethnic projects of national literature, which developed their own (set of) national poets, texts and institutions. The Janus-faced national projects were supported by central powers as well as pockets of subversion.

II *Mittleuropa*

It is against this emergence of nationalism in the Eastern part of Europe, led to no small degree by writers and intellectuals, that we have to consider various 20th-century conceptions of the region.

Let us start with the concept of »*Mittleuropa*«, which moved into the center of discussion during World War I, when Friedrich Naumann anticipated a post-war *Mittleuropa* uniting Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but including in a broader sense all the nations »that belong neither to the Anglo-French western alliance nor to the Russian Empire.«¹⁶ He anticipated the emergence of two long trenches or Chinese walls after the war, one stretching from the Lower Rhine to the Alps, the other from Courland to either the right or left of Romania, but he predicted that a third trench dividing Germany and Austria-Hungary would not be needed.¹⁷ Within a year, the book sold more than 100 000 copies and became Germany's greatest bestseller after Bismarck's memoirs.

16 Naumann, Friedrich: *Central Europe*. Transl. by Christabel M. Meredith. New York: Knopf 1917 [EA: *Mittleuropa*. Berlin: Reimer 1915], p. 9.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 16.



18 Ibid., p. 4.

19 Ibid., p. 33.

20 Ibid., p. 20.

21 Ibid., p. 27ff.

22 Ibid., p. 27.

23 Ibid., p. 9f.

Naumann, originally a Lutheran minister of Christian-socialist persuasion, became a politician concerned about Germany's power in the world. His pre-war advocacy of Germany's colonial expansion made him a liberal imperialist; the war refocused his attention on Europe. Today, he is regarded as a forefather of German liberalism, and the German liberal party, the FDP, named its cultural foundation after him (*Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung*). Theodor Heuss, the first president of the Federal Republic, worked for Naumann in his youth and published a comprehensive biography of him in 1937. The ideology behind Naumann's vision is troubling, even if (or perhaps, precisely because) his leading principle sounds so familiar in our age of globalization: »The spirit of large-scale industry and super-national organization has seized politics.«¹⁸ For Naumann, bigger was better, more beautiful and more efficient, and better equipped in the struggle for survival – in economics as well as in politics. Small nations could not remain sovereign; more concretely, a Czech army, a Croatian Chief of Staff, an exclusively Hungarian Foreign Ministry, a Slovenian economic policy, or a Galician treasury would be impossible.¹⁹

A closer look at Naumann's ideology of globalization reveals that it differs from today's trend, for the institutions he names have, except for the Galician treasury, recently been established – in spite of the economic trend towards the dissolution of inefficient small units. In Naumann's vision, the economic principle ranks even higher than in ours, for today's principle of globalization is partly balanced by the political principle of self-determination, which was the force behind the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It continues to operate today in many other countries. Naumann cared little for self-determination. In his view, the German Empire was founded on the German national ideal; its numerous Prussian Poles could represent a difficult problem for statesmanship, but, he thought, »they are neither so numerous nor so powerful as to come into consideration as partners in the Government.«²⁰ He realized that the ethnic movements of the Monarchy represented a serious threat to his imagined *Mitteleuropa*, but he vastly underestimated the subversive forces fighting for independence. The Hungarians, he thought, understood that they could remain independent only if they relied on a major non-Slavic, i.e. German, power.²¹ He admitted that the Slavs and the Romanians had less to expect from the merger of the Monarchy with Germany, but he hoped that their dislike for the Russians would drive them into the arms of a *Mitteleuropa* in the hope of extracting advantages from it.²²

The ideas concerning *Mitteleuropa* were, of course, articulated well before Naumann's time. Jacques Le Rider's useful recent survey of it shows that it has represented in history time and again a German perspective on both the eastern part of Europe and on Germany itself. Whenever the Germans saw themselves as *Mitteleuropäer*, they took a middle ground between East and West and defined their identity as much in relation to the former as to the latter. *Mitteleuropa* acquired significance whenever German culture experienced a crisis or underwent a deep transformation of its geopolitical identity: after the Thirty-Year War, after Napoleon, and after the creation of a German Reich in 1871.²³ Just how German the concept is, and how much it differs from its apparently faithful French (»*Europe Centrale*«) and English (»*Central Europe*«) translations, becomes evident if we compare Jacques Le Rider's German title, *Mitteleuropa. Auf den Spuren eines Begriffs* (*Mitteleuropa. Following the Traces of a Concept*) with the ambiguous original French title: *L'Europe Centrale – L'idée Germanique de Mitteleuropa* (*Central Europe – The German Idea of Mitteleuropa*). The subtitle seems to indicate that *Mitteleuropa* cannot be translated with »*Europe Centrale*«, but whether this is precisely what is meant depends on the punctuation we insert between the main- and the subtitle.

Of course, *Mitteleuropa* looked different from an Austrian perspective. For Metternich, who had no interest in expanding the Habsburg Empire eastward, it meant a European balance of power in which the centrally located Danubian Habsburg territory would play a key role. Once Germany was united under Prussian leadership, Austria was forced to shift eastward and to conclude the compromise of 1867 – at the cost of creating a problematic multicultural state. Though, for understandable reasons, Naumann's idea could not master much support in the Monarchy, some Austrians contemplated different *Mitteleuropas*. Perhaps most important among them was the writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who spoke of an Austrian-centered spiritual *Mitteleuropa* well before the publication of Naumann's book. Then, in the speech of October 31, 1916, entitled *Österreich im Spiegel seiner Dichtung* (*Austria in the Mirror of its Literature*), Hofmannsthal presented his ideas of an Austrian alternative to Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*. He continued his attempts to define a new cultural identity for Austria and the surrounding areas with the founding of the Salzburg Festival and a steady stream of speeches and es-



24 Sebestyén, György: *Notizen eines Mitteleuropäers*. Foreword Alois Mock. Vienna: Atelier 1990, p. 156.

says throughout the 1920s. While his intellectual and artistic *Mitteleuropa* was in many respects more attractive (if also more naïve) than Naumann's, it too was seriously flawed, for it represented a turn away from politics that involved an innocent appeal to dangerous mystifying concepts. Thus, the Salzburg Festival was to be a cultural expression of a »Bavarian-Austrian tribe« (»*Stamm*«); the crisis of the twenties was to be overcome by a »conservative revolution« and a new Reich. For the right-wing historian Heinrich von Srbik, similar notions served to warm up ideas of a *Mitteleuropa* in Metternich's sense.

Hitler's *Anschluss* and the neutralization of Austria in 1955 silenced such speculations and dreams for a while, but *Mitteleuropa* stayed alive among exiled East-European writers during the sixties and seventies (see, for instance, György Sebestyén's *Notizen eines Mitteleuropäers* and his journal *Mitteleuropa*), became a hot topic during the *glasnost* of the eighties, and acquired a new significance after the collapse of the Soviet empire, when a wave of nostalgia about Vienna, Austria, and the Monarchy flooded Eastern Europe.²⁴ Germany's center of gravity has shifted to the East through the reunification, but this has revived and intensified Polish and Czech preoccupations with German hegemony. And the well-intended but highly questionable German role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia has fed similar fears in the Balkans.

Mitteleuropa is then a historically loaded term that focalizes the eastern part of Europe from a predominantly German perspective, with explicit or implicit hegemonic intentions. Naumann, for one, freely admitted that *Mitteleuropa* was suggested by German self-interest, though he claimed that this coincided with that of other groups and nations in the region. Whether this was true at the time of World War I is highly questionable; it certainly isn't true today. When Naumann wrote his book, a certain transnational middle-European culture was still alive, consisting of rich German and Yiddish traditions, which stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Danube delta, with centers in Prague, Budapest, Lemberg, Czernowitz and elsewhere. That culture is epitomized for us today by the canonized names of Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel, Paul Celan and Rosa Ausländer, Elias Canetti, Joseph Roth and Karl Franzos, Sholem Aleichem, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Robert Musil; it also included hundreds of newspapers, journals, theaters, and cultural societies. German, and especially German-Jewish culture acted as a glue, an integrating force, among the various ethnic groups.

These seeds of a German yet genuinely transnational East European culture were burned in Auschwitz, uprooted when the Germans were ethnically cleansed in several countries after the war, and further minimized through the Jewish exodus of the last decades. A German-oriented »*Mitteleuropa*« concept may be used in historical studies that stress the German and Yiddish cultures of the region, but the disappearance of these cultures makes a present- or future-oriented use of the term either vacuous or a euphemism for a new German imperialism. A German-oriented concept of »*Mitteleuropa*« is not the appropriate means to achieve the reconciliation that the nations and ethnic groups of Eastern Europe genuinely need. More appropriate is the pressure that the European Union exerts on the various countries seeking admission to the Union. Ultimately, however, reconciliation must come through a revision of the self-image that these various cultures have constructed of themselves in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

III Eastern Europe

If »*Mitteleuropa*« is both linguistically and ideologically oriented towards the German cultures, Eastern Europe gives undue emphasis to Russian hegemonic policies. As Larry Wolff has shown, the term was introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries, when east/west distinctions became more important in Europe than the traditional north/south ones:

The polarization of Europe between Italy and the northern barbarians, so obvious to the ancient Romans, so convenient to the Renaissance Italians, survived into the eighteenth century as a rhetorical form. William Coxe, publishing in 1785 his *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*, could still sum them up as »my travels through the Northern kingdoms of Europe.« Yet this geographical perspective had begun to appear seriously anachronistic, and it was the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Poland and Russia would be mentally detached from Sweden and Denmark, and associated instead with Hungary and Bohemia, the Balkan lands of Ottoman Europe, and even the Crimea on the Black Sea.²⁵

25 Wolff, Larry: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford UP 1994, p. 5.



30 Miłosz, Czesław: Central European Attitudes. In: Schöpflin/ Wood 1989, pp. 118-126, p. 116f.

31 Ibid., p. 116.

32 Ibid., pp. 117-122.

33 Brodsky, Joseph: Why Milan Kundera is Wrong about Dostoyevski. In: New York Times, February 17, 1985, p. 33 [Repr. in: Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture 5 (1986), pp. 477-83].

34 Cf. Todorova, Maria: Imagining the Balkans. New York: Oxford UP 1997.

35 Schöpflin/ Wood 1989, p. 20.

36 Miłosz 1983, p. 7.

ness« was continually confronted with other identities. The historical role of Central Europe was in this perspective to defend and reinforce »Europeanness«, acting as a kind of »early warning system« or »sensor« of problems that threatened its identity. As Miłosz admits, Central Europe is hardly a geographical notion; yet even if its boundaries are not easily traceable on a map, one can draw sufficiently clear »mental lines« that seem to be more durable than the borders of states.³⁰ These mental lines connect Miłosz's »baroque Wiłno« with the »differently baroque Prague or the medieval-Renaissance Dubrovnik«. They also foreground certain ways of feeling and thinking, »a tone and a sensibility not to be found elsewhere.«³¹ Miłosz finds this unique tone and sensibility in an »awareness of history«, in the cultivation of »irony« as a response to »self-pity«, in a philosophic scepticism towards grand narratives such as Marxism; in an instinctive »Hegelianism«; in »dark visions of the future« but also in »civic commitment« and »utopianism«.³² Whether these are not rather aspects of his personal worldview, or whether this sensibility could not be found beyond Central Europe is a matter of debate.

›Central Europe‹ was an integrating transnational notion, to which many artists and intellectuals from the region, for instance the Hungarian film director István Szabó, still subscribe. But it soon became evident that it was also divisive, for several groups felt that it aimed to exclude them. Joseph Brodsky³³, but also Tatjana Tolstaya and other Russian writers, were outraged that they, who also suffered greatly under Soviet totalitarianism, were suddenly regarded as being on the »other side of the fence«, to some extent even associated with suppression. Balkan writers and intellectuals³⁴ objected, in turn, that the emphasis on »Central Europe« was a way of excluding the Balkans from the region. It is, indeed, true that for many »Central Europeanists« the label served to associate them with the West and to distinguish themselves from the more »primitive« or even »barbaric« people to the east and south. George Schöpflin's ›Central Europe‹ is a »transitional, transmittory and liminal« area between »Latin and Orthodox« lands, a »part of Western Christianity«,³⁵ carefully distinguished from lands associated with Eastern Christianity and Islam.

According to Miłosz, the entire region east of Germany and west of Moscow has been until recently perceived as a »white space [that] could have easily borne the inscription *Ubi leones* (*Where the lions are*), and that domain of wild beasts included cities as Prague [...] Warsaw, Budapest and Belgrade.«³⁶

Those who object to the idea of ›Central Europe‹ argue that it merely banishes Miłosz's imaginary lions to the East and the South. Todorova's book *Imagining the Balkans*, like Miłosz's essays on Central Europe, attempt to rehabilitate an area, to cleanse it from the image of savagery that Western observers have ascribed to it throughout most of the 20th century. Commendably, she tries to do that not by pushing the wilderness yet another step further south, but by recognizing the positive effects of the long Ottoman occupation of the Balkans. Yet, in a defensive move against ›Central Europe‹ she is herself divisive with respect to the North, »peeling off« from it the rehabilitated notion of the Balkans. Indeed, a number of artists and intellectuals from the Balkan countries attempt to recuperate the ›Balkans‹ as an integrating cultural concept. Whether the people of the region will respond positively to this, overcoming the ethnic, political, and economic forces that are still pitting them against each other, will remain to be seen.

V East-Central Europe

›East-Central Europe‹ a quite recent, and geographically also somewhat vague term, was probably introduced to avoid the undesirable historical connotations of the alternatives. The most ambitious attempt to define it historically is a little-known article by the Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs of 1983, which develops ideas of István Bibó's long suppressed and now classic study from 1946, *A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága* (*The Poverty of the Small States in Eastern Europe*).³⁷ Both Bibó and Szűcs are concerned with the (lack of) democratic traditions in the region. Bibó, writing on the eve of the Cold War, speaks of Eastern Europe, while Szűcs, writing on the eve of perestrojka, wants to peel off an East-Central segment from Eastern Europe, admitting that it fell behind the West in developing its democratic traditions but claiming that it is, nevertheless, more democratic than the Europe east of it.

Szűcs's subtle and densely argued piece received less attention than it may deserve, and his vision of the historical development may never be accepted. It has been attacked severely

37 Bibó, István: A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága. [The Misery of the Small East-European Countries]. Budapest: Új Magyarország 1946. [Also in: Válogatott tanulmányok (Selected Works). Vol. 2. Budapest: Magvető 1986, pp. 185-266].



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by John Neubauer (Amsterdam)

38 Todorova 1997.

and somewhat unjustly by Todorova for excluding, or in any case neglecting, the Balkans³⁸ – a criticism she levels also against Schöpflin and Wood. But one may adopt the term without Szűcs's assumptions, by defining it as referring to an area that was historically a theater of struggles against German and Russian hegemonic threats, as a liminal and transitional space between these political and cultural powers in the west and the east respectively. Seen this way, it is a long but relatively narrow strip stretching from the Baltic countries in the north to Macedonia in the south.

What are the advantages and shortcomings of this mapping against the other ones discussed above? On the western side, the resolutely drawn boundary separates the area from the German cultures of Germany and Austria. While this plays down the historical presence of German culture in the region and the affinities that existed and partly still exist between the metropolitan cultures of »Central Europe«, it recognizes the national emancipatory movements that have dominated the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The eastern border of East-Central Europe is most difficult to draw, for it is resolute only in a negative sense, by not stretching the region to the mountains of the Ural and the Caucasus. But should one include in it the areas now covered by the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia? The answer to this will depend on whether one regards their culture as part of Russia's hegemonic power, or as one that has historically been repressed by it. The answer will have to be differentiated, though in the balance historical as well as present-day political considerations would lead me to argue that the differences with East-Central Europe outweigh the common bonds.

Drawing the border on the southern side is also problematic, though for different reasons. For Serbia or Bulgaria, for instance, Russia was, at least until 1948, an ally rather than an oppressive power. Above all, the countries of the Balkan had a different history from those lying to the north of them, because of their longer domination by the Ottoman Empire. Todorova rightly argues, that for the Balkans the legacy of the Turkish occupation is crucial, though perhaps she overstates its positive effects. It left behind not only a large Muslim population and a wealth of social, cultural, religious, and political traditions, but also national myths, legends, and literary creations about fighting the Turkish invaders, which continues to shape the region's notions of ethnicity and nation. The role of the Kosovo myths in recent conflicts shows that this tradition can fan chauvinism and hatred.

Analogous questions, whether the northernmost, Baltic part of the region shares its history with the area south to it are less problematic. While Swedish power did play an important role here, it was by no means as decisive as the Turkish one in the Balkans. Struggle against German and Russian political, commercial, and cultural interests has been as crucial for the history of the region as for the region lying south of it.

While one may argue about the precise boundaries of an East-Central Europe, and alternative mappings are certainly possible, there are overwhelming advantages in distinguishing a region that was traditionally a battleground of conflicting interests. Trying to find common features for the region is not merely and not even foremost a question of protecting it against its »big brothers« to the east and the west and, historically, to the south. The real advantage would be to reconceptualize the region internally, to divert attention away from the internal differences and internecine conflicts that have done so much damage, especially since the emergence of modern nationalism. The regions remarkable ethnic, linguistic, and religious variety led to emancipatory struggles that were as often directed against powers within as against the external hegemonic powers. The Hungarian struggle against Habsburg power was, for instance, paralleled by the struggle of the minorities in Hungary against Hungarian hegemony. When in 1827 Hungarian was made the language of instruction in the schools, this was a victory for the Hungarians against the Habsburgs, but a blow to the Slovak, Croatian, and Romanian struggles to emancipate their language. Similar clashes between hegemonic and minority interests had finally doomed Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. But if all ethnic groups went through a process of identity forming that brought them into conflict with other groups in the region, the very analogy between their trajectories also interrelated their histories – a matter that the national accounts of the region's history have systematically ignored or suppressed. While the attraction to the European Union has created a powerful transnational momentum in East-Central Europe, a lasting reconciliation between its peoples can only come about if a regional understanding is able to overcome the focus on what is ethnic and national.



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