Chapter 8

Central Europe

Balázs Trencsényi

Geographical Notions and Imperial Agendas before World War I

The geographical notion of Central Europe can be traced back as far as the synthesis by the German scholar of the Late Enlightenment, Johann August Zeune (1808).[1] In this book, *Mitteleuropa* was a notion of secondary importance, with rather blurred geographical coordinates. In his understanding, *Mitteleuropa* as a geographical space was characterized by the coexistence and also clash of German and Slavic populations wedged between Southwest (including regions from the Pyrenees through Italy to the Balkans) and Northeast Europe (including Scandinavia and Sarmatia—that is, the Polish and Russian lands). In another work, Zeune (1820), combining physical and cultural factors, proposed a triadic scheme including *Nordeuropa, Mitteleuropa,* and *Südeuropa,* and subdivided *Mitteleuropa* to three separate regions, that of the Carpathian Lands (inhabited by various populations, most importantly Hungarians, Romanians, and Slavs), a Germanic region, and a French one. This hesitation reflects the transitional moment when the shift from the traditional North–South axis to the novel East–West one was taking place.

The political conception of Central Europe, though not yet tied to the notion itself, can also be traced back to early nineteenth-century discussions about the balance of power in Europe and the legitimization of the Austrian empire. This idea appears in the political utterances of the mastermind of the conservative Holy Alliance, Count Klemens Metternich, but also in the writings of the reformist Karl Ludwig von Bruck. It also appears in the writings of the Czech national leader František Palacký, who in 1848 rejected the incorporation of Bohemia into the German national framework and argued instead for the maintenance of a multinational Austrian state in the middle of

Europe that offered the possibility of free national development for its Slavic inhabitants. In its turn, the German national project also relied on the notion of the "center of Europe" as a framework of self-description. Thus, the German nationalist Ernst Moritz Arndt spoke of the center of Europe as the geographical location of the German nation, while the economic thinker Friedrich List envisioned a unified Germany in close cooperation with Austria and Hungary as the new core of European politics (see Schultz 2004, 277).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of Central Europe (*Mitteleuropa*) appeared relatively frequently in the geographical literature, but in these works it was more of a morphological concept, denoting the core territories (trunk) of Europe, in contrast to the peripheries, which, however, were more important in terms of historical development. At the same time, the notion gradually acquired a political connotation, since the countries covered by it were the broadly defined German space, including the Holy Roman Empire, plus the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and Hungary. By the late nineteenth century, this became a more or less common concept in German and Austrian geographical scholarship, as is evident from the work, first published in the series "The Regions of the World" edited by H. J. Mackinder, of the German Joseph Partsch. Partsch (1904) focused on the German and Austrian lands as the core zone of Europe, but also included the adjacent regions ("from the Western Alps to the Balkans") in a common geopolitical space.

Wartime Transnationalization: In Search of an Integrative Principle

The concept of Central Europe emerged as a keyword in international politics during World War I, with the reception of the idea of *Mitteleuropa* formulated by the German liberal nationalist Friedrich Naumann (1915). However, Naumann's vision was only one of the manifold formulations of this idea (along with the works of the geopolitician Karl Haushofer and the historian Hermann Oncken) and it was also interpreted differently by different audiences. In the German context, *Mitteleuropa* denoted a concentric framework pitting the continental German-dominated center against the Eastern and Western peripheries (North and South became in this context less important, as the main dividing lines were vertical). A conceptual alternative, which sought to express this vertical dimension even more explicitly, was the notion of *Zwischeneuropa* coined by Albrecht Penck (1915), which was meant to be the spinal column of continental Europe, to be organized into a state federation under German leadership.

In Austria, the German-Austro-Hungarian "core" of Europe was constructed with relatively closed symbolic barriers toward the West, but with

a more dynamic Eastern border zone, which potentially also included Austria-Hungary and the Balkans (Hassinger 1917; see also chapter 12 of this volume). There was also an alternative Austrian voice which negated the existence of Naumann's *Mitteleuropa,* as is clear from the work of the Austrian cultural geographer Erwin Hanslik (1917), who accused Naumann and German scholarship in general of having no first-hand knowledge of the Slavic world. Instead the Austrian scholar projected a dividing line of Eastern and Western civilization, ranging from the Baltic to the Adriatic, and cutting the Habsburg Monarchy into two.

The concept of *Mitteleuropa* generated debates especially in those contexts that were most directly concerned with the reformulation of the German geopolitical orientation in terms of economic, military, and eventually political integration of the lands between Russia and Germany. In the Polish cultural space, it was primarily discussed in terms of a possible regional economic integration among the socialists, who had been engaged with the problem of nation-state versus imperial developmental models since the turn of the century (a problem reflected in the debate of Rosa Luxemburg and Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz). In Hungary, the strongest response came from the civic radicals around Oszkár Jászi, who read Naumann's proposal not in its original context, promoting a sociopolitical integration of Germany and the small nations in the zone of Austrian and German influence, but as a possible solution to the ardent nationality conflicts in Austria-Hungary, incorporating these nations into a federal scheme (*Középeurópa* 1919).

Naumann's conceptualization had considerable repercussions even in states that fought on the other side. Thus, for instance, the Romanian politicians and intellectuals arguing against entering the war on the side of the *Entente* based their argument on a geopolitical counter-position of Russia and Central Europe. This camp brought together Moldavian conservatives (who sympathized with Germany as a model of organic modernization and focused on regaining Bessarabia while being more open to compromise in the question of Transylvania) with populists and socialists, who looked at the Tsarist Empire as a retrograde autocratic state hindering progress all over Eastern Europe. This anti-interventionist position often turned vocally pro-German after the occupation of part of Romania by German troops in 1917, and cooperation was often framed in terms of integration into a common Central European civilizational and economic space (see Boia 2009).

In other East Central European contexts, however, Naumann's work evoked less positive reactions. Thus, predictably, Masaryk (1918) rejected this framework and offered a common regional narrative for the "small nations" between Germany and Russia instead. Turning to the Anglo-American ex-

perts and intellectual public, he referred to the concept of Central Europe as a tool of German domination, suggesting instead "New Europe." Eventually, after the war, he started to use also the notion of Central Europe, although he kept to the basic idea of delimiting this geographical zone as that of small nations and thus excluding Germany from it altogether (Masaryk 1925).

Interwar Multiplication: Between Nationalism and Transnationalism

After 1918, one can observe a proliferation of regional notions linked semantically to Central Europe. While there was a general drive to nationalization under the aegis of the agenda of national self-determination, there were also important discussions on transnational political or economic frameworks of (re)integration, and here Central Europe had a certain salience, especially in neutralizing the politically much more loaded Habsburg/imperial referential system. Due to the different local political and cultural contexts, however, morphologically there was a growing differentiation according to different national linguistic-geopolitical imageries and also according to different cross-national disciplinary cultures.

While in the German context *Mitteleuropa* was becoming less salient, there were other alternative notions, such as *Zwischeneuropa,* which was championed by Giselher Wirsing (1932), close to the *Die Tat* circle, who fused the ideas of Conservative Revolution with geopolitics. In contrast, the notion of Slavic Europe, used prominently by Czech and South Slavic scholars, to a certain extent overlapped with Central Europe, but had a very different geopolitical agenda, excluding the Germans. At the same time, Western descriptions of Central Europe still understood Germany as a constitutive part of it well into the 1940s. This can be seen in the geographical work of the prominent French specialist, Emmanuel de Martonne, who covered both Germany and its Eastern neighbors in his project (de Martonne 1930–31; see also chapter 12 in this volume).

Originally driven by political motives, the non-German part of Central Europe became the object of regional inquiries incorporating national cases (see, e.g., the works by R. W. Seton-Watson), anchoring political observations in a historical narrative. Importantly, the regional terminology was not stabilized, as can be seen from the titles of periodicals launched at this period, such as *L'Est Européen* in Warsaw, *L'Europe Centrale* in Prague, and *L'Europa Orientale* in Rome. The national and disciplinary frames also reinforced each other in creating divergent local usages—what a Hungarian or a Croat would refer to as Central Europe would be put under *Südostforschung* or *Ostforschung* in Germany.

The most important scholarly debate on the Central and/or Eastern European regional framework was in historiography. The Czech Slavist Jaroslav Bidlo (1927) was a proponent of Slavic comparatism, and also subscribed to the civilizational distinction of a Greco-Slavic Eastern Europe, shaped by Orthodoxy, and a Latin-German Western Europe giving birth to Catholicism and Protestantism, marked by dynamism and rationalism. Rejecting this taxonomy, the Polish historians Oskar Halecki and Marceli Handelsman suggested an Eastern European framework, which was supposed to integrate all the small nations between Russia and Germany, regardless of ethnic and linguistic kinship. The implication of their argument was obviously the rejection of Germany as the natural center of the region, on the one hand, and the rejection of Russia as the core of Eastern Europe, on the other. Halecki (1924, 1934) at the 1923 World Historical Congress in Brussels argued for an Eastern Europe consisting of Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus, while relegating Russia to the Eurasian space (thus explicitly following the Russian Eurasianists). Another criticism of Bidlo's analysis came from the Sudeten-German historian Josef Pfitzner, who rejected the exclusive Slavic focus of the regional discourse and talked of a shared historical region inhabited by Germans and Slavs (see also chapter 9 in this volume).

A particularly interesting conceptualization came from the Moravian local patriot and scion of an ennobled Jewish industrialist family, Victor von Bauer (1936). He argued for a specifically multiethnic post-Habsburg *Zentraleuropa,* stressing the importance of Jews as a modernizing factor and seeking to demarcate the region from the imperial German territories, arguing that Central European Germans had a very different character than those living in the Reich. Representing another ideological tradition, but also stressing multiethnicity as a key marker, the Slovak politician and political theorist Milan Hodža turned to the notion of Central Europe in the context of the agrarian regionalist project, stressing the common sociocultural features of these nations underlying his vision of peasant democracy—and the need to overcome economic nationalism, which prevented the development of a mutually advantageous division of labor in the region (Hodža 1936).

In Hungary, the Central European paradigm, which had a considerable impact on the left liberal (civic radical) intellectual circles in the 1910s, was challenged from different directions. Integral nationalists, who dominated the political establishment, kept to a geographical conceptualization (such as the "Carpathian Basin"), which stressed the concentric nature of the broader region around "Rump Hungary." At the same time, the agrarian populists, who rejected the irredentist nationalism of the Horthy regime, generally preferred the concept of Eastern Europe. The populist perspective of "Eastern European peasant nations" had many faces. It could catalyze the somewhat

confused but definitely conciliatory vision of László Németh (1935), but it could also intersect with the paradigm of *Volksgeschichte,* which fed into a new version of radical ethnopolitics. At the same time, the Central European discourse did not entirely disappear and received a strong impetus from the periodical *Apollo,* which explicitly aimed at the creation of a "Central European humanism" and sought to bring together urban liberals, agrarian populists, social democrats, and also moderate conservatives on a common regionalist platform (Gál 2001). The Central European paradigm also provided a comparative framework for the conservative legal historian Ferenc Eckhart (1941), who placed the history of the medieval and early modern constitutional doctrine around the Crown of St. Stephen into a regional context.

A different conceptual usage characterized the transnational network of economic experts seeking to restore some sort of regional economic cooperation and mutual preference system in the territory fragmented by the protectionism of the new nation-states. A characteristic figure of this discourse, deploring the "Balkanization" of the region (*Balkanisierung Mitteleuropas*) is the Hungarian-Jewish Elemér Hantos, working with Austrian and German businessmen and experts within the framework of the *Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag* and later the Mitteleuropa-Institut, with branches in Vienna, Brno, and Budapest (Müller 2010). It is important to stress that, in the vision of Hantos and his colleagues, reconstructing the economic unity of *Mitteleuropa* was a step toward *Paneuropa* that is a broader framework of economic and political integration. Consequently, their use of *Mitteleuropa* was rather flexible, basically referring to Germany and the lands of the former Habsburg Monarchy, but depending on the actual arrangement, they extended and restricted it in different directions.

While the radicalization of politics in the 1930s destroyed these plans of pragmatic reintegration of Central Europe, during World War II, in the context of the search for a more lasting model of regional coexistence than that of the post–World War I arrangement, which was based on the absolutization of the principle of national self-determination and nation-statehood, the supra-ethnic federalist discourse again came into play. It catalyzed a number of projects, some of which, such as that of Milan Hodža, used Central Europe as a key term (Hodža 1942). Similarly, the Polish-Jewish left-wing émigré Anatol Mühlstein (1942) published a programmatic text in the United States about setting up the United States of Central Europe, which would have included Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Austria, with the possible entrance of Greece, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states.

Simultaneously, the Foreign Research and Press Service, a British think tank headed by Arnold Toynbee, also came up with a number of policy papers discussing the reorganization of the region along federal lines in 1942–1943.

For some time, the idea was to set up two units as the guarantee of a sustainable postwar order, one in East Central Europe and another in Southeast Europe, but eventually these plans were dropped as it became increasingly clear that this zone would fall under Soviet control.

The Decline of the Central European Conceptual Framework

As a consequence of the division of the continent into Soviet and Western spheres of interest, the salience of Central Europe quickly declined after 1945. Looking more closely, however, one finds various spatial notions, especially in the early postwar years, which can still be genealogically connected to this concept. An interesting case is the set of discourses stressing in-betweenness, designating the respective national context for a mediating role in-between the Western democracies and the Soviet model. This was particularly strong in Czech political discourse, promoting a kind of local democratic socialism that often used the metaphors of the "bridge" and the "center" in this context (Schulze-Wessel 1988; Bugge 1993; Brenner 2009). After 1948, this option was silenced and any local production of the discourse of in-betweenness was overwritten by a more inflexible binary opposition of socialist East and capitalist West.

Between 1945 and 1948, however, comparative regional historical research in the region underwent a short but unprecedented flourishing. An important trigger was the preparation for the peace treaty, which made research into the history of the region a priority. In the Hungarian case, a new generation of researchers with a good knowledge of the cultures and languages of the region emerged in the late 1930s, originally entrusted with the task of providing a response to the historical propaganda of the "Little Entente." After the war, however, this group, including Domokos Kosáry, Zoltán I. Tóth, László Makkai, and László Hadrovics, authored a series of important works focusing on the traditions of coexistence in the region. Their *Revue d'Histoire Comparée* (1943–1948), which fused a regional comparatist agenda with an attempt to present the Hungarian perspective on the nationality problem, also represented a hub of international cooperation ranging from Paris to Warsaw. But even in this context, the notion of Central Europe was increasingly abandoned. It is indicative that István Bibó (1946) in his famous essay talked about the "misery of Eastern European small states," proposing a historical reconstruction of the "failed" nation-state formation in the region, with the intention to return to the model of democratic nationalism.

Similarly, the Czech Josef Macůrek's (1946) comparative history of Eastern European historiography put forward a flexible regional framework based on the combination of socioeconomic and cultural factors. Importantly, his

understanding of Eastern Europe was remarkably inclusive, going beyond both the post-Habsburg Central European space and also the conventional Slavic framework.

The years of the climax of the Cold War witnessed a symbolic geographical reconfiguration of political discourse along a bipolar East–West divide: on the one hand, the countries falling into the Soviet sphere of interest were inserted into an Eastern European common space, overwriting the previous Central, Southeastern, Slavic, and other similar categories, while in the countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain, the West became almost the only geographical framework. This holds true even for Greek public discourse, which historically and geographically was rather distant from Western Europe. Simultaneously, one could also witness the disappearance of *Mitteleuropa* from German discourse—in the East due to its perceived "imperialistic" connotations, while in the West due to its anti-Westernism, which the new Euro-Atlantic integration policies wanted to obliterate.

As for the local historical production in the Stalinist and immediate post-Stalinist periods, the Eastern European paradigm became dominant. It usually stressed the economic and political backwardness of the region in comparison to Western capitalist development, a view based mainly on agrarian history. Using the Engelsian thesis of the *Zweite Leibeigenschaft,* characterizing the areas east of the Elbe, it created a common historical space conspicuously including both Prussia and Russia. Authors following this paradigm located a number of common features in the "distorted" socioeconomic development of these countries, at least until the advent of socialism, when all of a sudden they were supposed to have emerged as the vanguard of modernity.

The first serious historical model justifying this perspective was developed by the Hungarian Zsigmond Pál Pach (1964), who focused on early modern agrarian history. Gradually these local socioeconomic histories became integrated into a transnational research community dealing with social substructures of East European history, represented by Hugh Seton-Watson, and the theories of underdevelopment/center-periphery developed by Alexander Gerschenkron and Immanuel Wallerstein. In Hungary, the most sophisticated formulation of this theory of backwardness and of the center-periphery economic interaction can be found in the works of economic history by György Ránki and Iván T. Berend (1974), who worked in close intellectual contact with Gerschenkron and Wallerstein. Significantly, they gradually moved toward the notion of "East Central Europe." The work of the Polish Marian Małowist and Witold Kula was in many ways comparable, focusing on the global distribution of labor and pointing to the historical roots of the backwardness of Eastern Europe (see Sosnowska 2005). From a different perspective, focusing on the comparative history of national movements, the

Hungarian Emil Niederhauser (1977; 2003) also framed his object of analysis in terms of a "broad" Eastern Europe, which also encompassed Southeastern Europe.

A Central European Utopia?

The first signs of the revival of the Central European paradigm in the context of a new discourse of regionalization can be linked to the activities of émigré historians. Oskar Halecki (1950; 1952) turned back to the interwar conceptions but reshaped them after 1945 in the context of the Cold War, talking of East Central Europe and West Central Europe (which in his model overlapped with Germany). He stressed that a common East Central European history was rooted in a common geographical space, but at the same time he was against geographical determinism and also pointed out the dynamic relationship of different zones. He identified three subregions that structured the broader East Central European region: the Great Plain in the north, the Danubian Basin, and the Balkans.

The 1950s–60s also saw the intensification of global historical interest in the post-Habsburg cultural and intellectual heritage, manifested in such works as Robert Kann's monograph (1950) on the Habsburg Monarchy as a multinational state, or the study on the history of the idea of Central Europe by Jacques Droz (1960). Another pioneering work exemplifying the rekindled interest in Habsburg and post-Habsburg cultural history was the path-breaking study by the Trieste-based literary scholar Claudio Magris (1963) on the "Habsburg myth." In this book, Magris reconstructed the context of the emergence of a nostalgic modality of extolling the Monarchy as a land of coexistence and tolerance, especially in comparison to the aggressive homogenizing programs of the successor states in the interwar period.

Cultural history and comparative literature were two of the main resources of the reemerging Central Europeanist historiographical discourse. From the 1960s on, the Central European modernist canon could be revalorized in literary history and then in cultural history, A case in point is the pioneering work, repositioning of the Prague structuralist tradition, by the great survivor and communist fellow-traveler Jan Mukařovský. A key event in these terms was the recanonization of Franz Kafka as a Central European writer rooted in the Prague cultural context, which reached its symbolic high point at a 1963 conference on Kafka's oeuvre organized by the reform communist intellectual Eduard Goldstücker (Goldstücker, Kaufman, and Reimann 1965). As the concept of alienation became a basic ideologeme of existentialism and revisionist Marxism, modernist writers and artists of the first three decades of the twentieth century, hitherto rejected as examples of bourgeois decadence,

were recontextualized in terms of a specific regional heritage. This was formulated in an especially cogent way by the most important Czech revisionist Marxist philosopher, Karel Kosík ([1969] 1995), whose symbolic geographical repositioning of Czech culture in the context of the crisis of 1968 was linked to his attempt to legitimize socialism with a human face, as against the "totalitarian" and "alien" Soviet repression, a train of thought which became a blueprint followed by authors like Milan Kundera as well, although without the reference to a specific socialist path.

In the case of Kundera, the most important ideological move was to relink the "tragedy of Central Europe" to the Western public sphere in the context of the general disenchantment with communist ideology after 1968. The appeal to the conscience of Western intellectuals not to forget the portion of Europe captured by Soviet tyranny could thus become a central part, a mobilizing myth, as it were, of an emerging cultural-political discourse on civil society, which conferred global significance on the Eastern European dissidents (Kundera 1984).

From the mid-1970s onwards, the question of Hungary's symbolic geographical self-positioning also became an important issue in intellectual debates. Up to the 1970s, the Central European framework was marginal in Hungarian historical production and remained alive only in the works of émigré politicians and historians, who nourished some sort of sympathy for the plans of a Central European federation serving as a neutral buffer zone between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-American sphere of interest (see, e.g., Wagner 1971, a book of essays by Hungarian émigrés in which Central Europe is equated with the "Danubian nations"). However, with the increasing participation of Hungarian scientific institutions in the European academic "joint ventures," and the emerging political program of harmonizing Hungary with the "Western democracies," the concept of Central Europe once again came to the fore and shaped research projects that were previously at the margins of official cultural politics.

This was the case with the work of Péter Hanák, whose fascination with the everyday life and high culture of turn-of-the-century Budapest was revalorized in view of the growing respect for a common Austro-Hungarian heritage (the collection of his most important essays is Hanák 1988). His main contribution was to reintegrate the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy in its post-1867 form into its transnational cultural, political, and economic setting, documenting the breathtaking process of sociocultural modernization at the turn of the century, and thus challenging the latent nationalist presumptions of Stalinist historiography, which asserted the semicolonial position of Hungary within the Monarchy. He also explicitly criticized those authors (such as Gerschenkron) who saw a common Eastern European

feature in the fact that capitalism was imposed from above, by the state, on these societies. In contrast, he inserted Hungary into a Central European space dominated by a common urban culture borne mainly by the emerging German and Jewish bourgeoisie.

The gradual rediscovery of many intellectual paradigms of the pre-Communist periods created a plurality of approaches and discourses, and loaded the issue of historical regions with immediate relevance. The best known product of this atmosphere is arguably Jenő Szűcs's (1983) *Sketch on the Three Regions of Europe.* Since its appearance, the essay was hailed as a Central Europeanist manifesto, even though it was actually rooted in local debates on backwardness and the clash of national communist and antinationalist Marxist narratives of history in the 1960s, the so-called Erik Molnár debate. Rejecting the national communist narrative, Szűcs also challenged the geographical framework of Marxist economic history that divided Europe categorically between East and West. While Szűcs accepted the hypothesis of a profound structural difference between Western Europe in the traditional sense and Hungary, Bohemia, or Poland, he challenged the binary opposition of East and West, suggesting the existence of a transitional zone that displayed Western social and cultural phenomena in a more superficial manner, but that could still be clearly distinguished from the "Eastern" (that is, Russian) pattern of development.

First published in a samizdat publication dedicated to the memory of István Bibó, but consequently republished by the so-called official press as well, Szűcs's essay had enormous influence, launching a public debate on the place of Hungary in Europe that reverberated until the early 1990s. In the historical profession, the most interesting exchange of ideas on this issue took place between Péter Hanák and Szűcs himself (Szűcs and Hanák 1986). Arguing mainly from the perspective of cultural history, Hanák proposed a triangular model in which Central Europe, including Austria and Switzerland, would be equidistant from East and West. In turn, Szűcs insisted that the East Central European countries—that is, historical Bohemia, Hungary, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—were peripheries of the West. The importance of these discussions reached beyond professional historians, introducing the idea of historical divergence between Hungary and the Soviet-dominated Eastern camp to the general public.

A series of studies stemming from Polish historiography from the 1960s onwards also sought to place Poland into a Central European regional framework. Jerzy Kłoczowski and Aleksander Gieysztor have been concentrating on the Middle Ages, especially the processes of Christianization and state formation in the territories at the Eastern confines of the Holy Roman Empire. In their vision, these "newcomer" nations began with a considerable delay but

managed to assimilate the European sociocultural structures and eventually formed a peculiar type, which, its internal varieties notwithstanding, can be described as a common historical region. This narrative had an obvious political message as well: before 1989, the emphasis on common Western Christian spiritual roots and Western institutional traditions buttressed the argument against the "unnatural division" of Europe as a consequence of Yalta.

Another branch of Polish historians, including Józef Chlebowczyk (1980), analyzed the Central European experience through the lens of the problem of the national movements. Chlebowczyk defined East Central Europe in a very wide sense, referring to the zone between Russia and Germany, bordering the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean, and Black Seas. It is indicative of Chlebowczyk's approach that, breaking with the Polish tradition of extrapolating from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to the whole region, he considered the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy the core of the region.

In Czech historiography, the prominent dissident Jan Křen (1979) was among the first to revive interest in the Central European federalist heritage and also made important steps in creating a Czech-German transnational historical narrative. This vision influenced the key historical work of Czech samizdat culture in the eighties, which also criticized the Czech nation-building project from a regional and supra-ethnic perspective (Podiven 1991; published in excerpts in 1987–1988). An important development in this context was the founding of the journal *Střední Europa* (Central Europe) in 1984. This represented one of the ideological subcultures of the opposition, trying to offer an alternative to the historiographical discourse of the former reform communist dissidents. The politically conservative circle around the journal revived some elements of political Catholicism, and had a more ambiguous opinion about the Masarykian heritage. Its protagonists turned back to those sources (among them Masaryk's main intellectual adversary, the positivist and conservative Josef Pekař) who were more favorable to the Habsburg heritage.

Literary studies also contributed to the growth of awareness of the culture of Central Europe. Responding to the internationalization of research transcending the borders of ideological blocs, the seventies also saw a number of research initiatives seeking to create an East Central European regional history of the Enlightenment. Among others, the series of conferences (*Les Lumières en Hongrie, en Europe centrale et en Europe orientale*), held in Mátrafüred between 1971 and 1984, brought together researchers from France and other Western countries with scholars from the "Eastern bloc"; the need to place these cultures on the map of international research prompted some sort of discursive regionalization. Representing another research hub, that of comparative literature, the Hungarian scholar Endre Bojtár (1986; 1993), a specialist in Baltic studies, was at the forefront of devising a transnational literary

history of Central and Eastern Europe. Significantly, he also included Russian developments in his analysis, but made it clear that he considered the Russian context rather different from those of Central Europe, mainly because the existence of an imperial state structure made the Russian imperial project incomparable to those "small cultures" that faced the "death of the nation" as a realistic danger in the nineteenth century.

By the 1980s, a number of international venues emerged, such as *Cross Currents,* a "yearbook of Central European culture" published between 1982 and 1993, which sought to gather various local discussions on the region as well as the representatives of the "Western" academic community interested in Central European cultures. Also, a political discourse of Central Europeanism started to form on the other side of the Iron Curtain as well, seeking to recreate a regional framework going beyond the actual political divisions, as is exemplified by the work of the Austrian politician Erhard Busek and his colleague Emil Brix (1986).

Simultaneously, in West Germany a debate on the meaning and relevance of *Mitteleuropa* intensified, linked to the reemergence of questions about the geopolitical and historical identity of Germany. While there were voices seeking to revive the Prussian state tradition, this raised serious concerns in view of the peaceful coexistence with the countries of the Soviet Bloc. Eventually, the overwhelming majority of the participants in this discussion opted for a symbolic geographical framework placing the *Bundesrepublik* firmly in Western Europe. At the same time, the discussion opened a symbolic space for arguments, like that of Karl Schlögel (1986), about the necessity of making German society conscious of the specifically Central European traditions of multiethnicity and cultural plurality, both in the sense of the German contribution to the destruction of this plurality during the Nazi period, and also because it offered a possible way out of the cultural and political deadlock created by the Cold War.

It is important to note, however, that beyond the more politically driven interest in each other (which made Central Europe a frequently used ideologeme, alongside "civil society" and "antipolitics"), with a handful of exceptions there was a very limited interpenetration of the Western and East Central European historical canons, which is only partly explained by the lack of linguistic competence. One could rather say that the debates on Central Europe mostly ran parallel to each other in these countries.

Transition and Conceptual Transformation: Moving Eastward

While the 1970s–80s saw an upsurge in use of the concept of Central Europe, this does not mean that it completely relegated the notion of Eastern Europe

to the background. A number of influential cultural and political histories were written that still sought to encompass different national pasts into an Eastern European regional master narrative shaped by the "center and periphery" theories, such as the book by Robin Okey (1982). This approach reached its climax in the work of two American-based scholars, Daniel Chirot (1989) and Andrew C. Janos (2000). Incidentally, both of them were dealing with Romania (although Janos worked also on Hungary), which in the 1970s was the focus of scholars interested in the problems of peripheral modernization. However, it is interesting to note that for them Eastern Europe and East Central Europe were not conflicting concepts, and they seemed to use the two notions more or less simultaneously.

In contrast, the most ambitious attempt to write a synthetic history of Central Europe in the context of the euphoria of the transition was Piotr S. Wandycz's *The Price of Freedom* (1993). The Polish-American scholar combined Halecki's approach to Central Europe as a territory in-between Eastern and Western Europe with theories of center/periphery relations. Accordingly, Wandycz described Central Europe as a "semi-periphery," and identified a number of common traits that characterize the development of Central European nations, especially the Poles, the Czechs, and the Hungarians, whom he considered Central Europeans par excellence. These features included a delayed state formation in the Middle Ages; a reopening economic gap between Central and Western Europe in the sixteenth century; a divergence between intellectual, institutional, and socioeconomic development; a chronic gap between the elites and the masses; and the presence of an urban bourgeoisie that was ethnically different (mainly German and Jewish) from the titular nation.

One would have expected the events of 1989 to bring an unprecedented flourishing to the Central European paradigm of historiography in the countries where this paradigm reemerged in the opposition discourse in the 1980s. All the more so since the Marxist social historians who championed the "supranational" paradigm of Eastern European backwardness sometimes literally died out or became institutionally marginalized. The case, however, is much more ambiguous. In the context of the transition from state socialism, Central Europe for a moment seemed to be a central notion (although it was never hegemonic: the first framework that transcended the Cold War bloc logic—the Alps-Adria cooperation scheme—omitted it, for instance, while, interestingly, including Italy), but it soon lost its salience. It was definitely central to the creation and rhetoric of the Visegrad cooperation, but even though the framework survived, the internal tensions between these political elites soon undermined the common Central European self-conceptualization, as can be seen from the way the Czech prime minister of the time, Václav Klaus, repudiated it as a meaningful concept from the perspective of his country's

Western integration. The mid-1990s also saw a powerful criticism of the Central European ideologeme coming from authors who pointed to the implicit exclusive potential of this regional notion, using such interpretative models as "Balkanism" or "nested orientalism" (see Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997; see also chapter 7 in this volume). As a consequence, in the countries where it had been traditionally most important, the Central European debate was considerably toned down.

In Hungary, with the passing of the first euphoria and the appearance of serious political cracks between the countries, the idealist vision of Central Europe also became problematic. Rejecting the normative image of Central Europe characterizing the dissident discourse of the 1980s, Ignác Romsics, for instance, turned to the simultaneous use of a number of frameworks, from the Danubian Basin to East Central Europe, signaling a multiplicity of nation-centered and supranational perspectives (Romsics 1997).

As for the Polish context, the Lublin Institute of East Central Europe, organized and led by Jerzy Kłoczowski, emerged as the main venue for regional comparative research. Keeping to the traditional Polish understanding of East Central Europe, Kłoczowski's institute used the Central European paradigm to integrate Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Belarusians into a common symbolic framework with Poland. Furthermore, the concept of Northeastern Europe, popularized mainly by the German historian Klaus Zernack, also provided an alternative transnational framework for Polish historians, linking them mostly to the Baltic region rather than to the Czechs and the Hungarians. Similarly, in the Czech context, Central Europe became less central to the cultural and historical discourse. Thus, the magnum opus of Jan Křen (2005) on the history of Central Europe can also be considered more the climax of a pre-1989 tradition than a new start for a Czech Central Europeanist historical school.

Interestingly enough, the "Central Europeanist" narrative fared much better in contexts where pre-1989 antecedents were scarce, such as Romania. This is exemplified by the interdisciplinary cultural project *A Treia Europă* (The Third Europe), based in Timişoara, a city with a multiethnic past in the traditionally multicultural Banat region (Babeți 1997). Drawing on the 1980s canonization of the Central European heritage, the group launching *A Treia Europă* constructed Central Europe as especially a literary phenomenon, and also sought to introduce this paradigm to Romanian public discourse with an underlying agenda of local identity-building.

All this fits into the broader process of "localizing" supranational regional frames, which became a common strategy for a number of local elites seeking to reshape their symbolic geographical relationship to the West and to their respective administrative centers (the most important Central Europeanist

examples are Vojvodina versus Belgrade, Banat versus Bucharest, Galicia versus Eastern Ukraine). Along these lines, a number of cities with a multiethnic past, such as Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg, Cluj/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, Timişoara/Temesvár/Temeschwar, Chernivtsi/Cernăuți/Czernowitz, and Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg came to be described, both in the scholarly literature and in the local discourses of self-branding, as *pars pro toto* Central European, linking their multiethnic transnational microregion to a broader framework, usually tied to the Habsburg heritage most tangible in architecture (see, e.g., Andruchowytsch and Stasiuk 2004).

Conclusions

To sum up, one can establish a number of general trends that organize the dynamism of the conceptual transformation under scrutiny. One of the most important factors is the gradual disappearance of Germany from the Central European referential system by the post–World War II period, moving the center gradually to the East, as it were. Another trait is the strong propensity to historicization—that is, the attempt of most speakers to project back the actual regional framework to some past state of affairs. Third, there is no consensus at all on who is in and who is out; the geographical frame has been radically elastic depending on who is speaking. Fourth, Central Europe as a regional notion exemplifies the ambiguous coexistence of the national and the antinationalist frames of mind, characteristic of most constructions of mesoregional identity. It can challenge the nationalization of space but can also function as a sort of concentric vision legitimizing a particular nation-state building project. Similarly, the concept has both powerful inclusive and exclusive potentials: Central Europe was often used as a counter-concept of something else (originally more of the West, later of the East), but at the same time it also served the purpose of creating symbolic bonds between national frameworks that seemed to be in permanent conflict.

As for conceptual alternatives and variants, we have encountered a particularly rich set of notions, all linked to the symbolic center, such as Central, Middle, and "in-between." We also found a number of specifications: the most common is East Central Europe (*Ostmitteleuropa*), sometimes also appearing as Central-Eastern, but occasionally morphing into North-Central. In certain cases, one can find debates between adherents of different specifications, such as the case of the Hungarian discussion, when Emil Niederhauser argued for Central-Eastern Europe against the East Central Europe of Hanák and Szűcs (see Gyáni 1988). One can also find nationalized regional notions, as with Danubian or Carpathian Europe in the Hungarian case, serving as a kind of minimalist Central Europe focused on Hungary. There are similar Austrian

and Polish tendencies as well, framing Central Europe as coextensive with the Habsburg Empire or the lands of the *Rzeczpospolita,* respectively.

As for the dynamics of externally produced notions, one can find a common trait of the gradual disappearance not only of Germany but also Switzerland and Northern Italy from the mainstream depictions of Central Europe, which became almost complete by the 1950s. In different national academic contexts, however, this process had different chronologies. Thus, for instance, French scholarship removed Germany from Central Europe later than Anglo-American scholarship. It is in this context that Droz wrote about *Europe Centrale balkanisée* in reference to the interwar period. As we can see, the Anglo-American cultural history of the 1960s–70s was extremely important in relaunching the notion, and this also conditioned the public discourse of Western Europe to be receptive to the new Central Europeanist cultural-political discourse of the 1980s. This also provides a rare instance of an ideological transfer going the other way, in the sense that, in this case, East Central European authors managed to shape the global discourse and, at least for a decade, emerge as active partners in reconceptualizing key notions of political reflection, such as "civil society." This privileged moment, however, ended rather abruptly after 1989, when the transition script of "Westernization" subscribed to by most local actors led to quick disenchantment on the part of many observers, as is clear from Ralf Dahrendorf's (1990) famous statement that the East Central European transition actually did not contribute any original idea to global political thought.

Last but not least, while the original counter-concept of Central Europe seemed to be primarily the West, or the West and the East together, in the 1970s–80s it became definitely the East. (This is true even though there was an implicit critical edge toward the West as well, which was blamed for "sacrificing" Central Europe to secure its own welfare). We can also see that these poles of conceptualization could be turned into adjacent notions, thus using Central Europe as a proxy of the West (or a "kidnapped West"). Other important counter-concepts are Russia and the Balkans. In the case of Russia, the attempt to incorporate it into a common regional framework led to the collapse of the Central European paradigm (taken up by "Eastern Europe"), while the Balkans could be rejected but also incorporated, as is usually the case with the intentionally loose concept of East Central Europe.

On the whole, compared to other mesoregional concepts, Central Europe has definitely been one of the most intensively used and discussed and it can be considered one of the paradigmatic mesoregional frameworks. With regard to the work of Halecki, it can also be argued that it was precisely this notion that launched the very discussion on historical regions. While it has been deconstructed from various directions during the last hundred years (by the ad-

herents of the Masarykian "New Europe" during and after the Great War, by the supporters of an Eastern European framework in the interwar agrarian populist and post–World War II Marxist intellectual contexts, or by those critics who accused the Central Europeanist paradigm championed by the anticommunist dissidents of using double standards to exclude Russia and the Balkans), it still proved to be rather flexible and prone to reappearing in various historical moments when the need to create some sort of common political and intellectual framework transcending the national framework became pressing.

Balázs Trencsényi is professor at the history department of Central European University, Budapest. His main field of interest is the history of modern political thought in East Central Europe. Among his recent publications are the coedited volume *Regimes of Historicity in Southeastern and Northern Europe, 1890–1945: Discourses of Identity and Temporality* (2014) and the coauthored monograph *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central* Europe, vol. 1, *Negotiating Modernity in the "Long Nineteenth Century"* (2016).

Notes

1. On the *longue-durée* history of the notion, see Sinnhuber 1954; Droz 1960; Stirk 1994; Hadler 1996; Cede and Fleck 1996; Schultz 1997; Lendvai 1997; *Mitteleuropa* 2008.

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