CENTRAL EUROPE AFTER 1918. A SHORT OUTLINE[1]

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Abstract

This paper analyses changes in the region's states, and the evolution of Central Europe's (CE) position in the international environment. Since forming in 1918, the new CE independent states have remained a focus for neighbouring powers and Western powers. The paper looks at the background for the historical, political, economic, demographic, cultural and geopolitical importance of Central Europe. Three essential periods can be distinguished, the first being the

post-WW1 period, when after the downfall of Austria-Hungary and the weakening of Germany, Russia and Turkey, a number of independent states emerged. The lack of Western assistance and insufficient mutual cooperation meant that CE countries became subject to aggression from Berlin and Moscow. After WW2, the region was forcefully reintegrated into the Soviet Union – and its states were subjected to political, social, economic and cultural degradation. The downfall of the Soviet Union and democratic transition in the states of Central Europe contributed to the regional economic and security integration. EU membership and close ties to the USA forged significant possibilities for development and becoming a subject of European policy. Historical experiences show that Central Europe has had a significant impact on international security in Europe. The region's states of increasing significance have the capability potential to forge their own concepts of close regional political and economic cooperation.

Keywords: Central Europe, Russia and Central Europe, integration and disintegration of Central Europe, Central European security, Visegrád Group (V4), Eastern Partnership, Three Seas Initiative

General description, definition of the term Central Europe, and history of the region till the end of the Second World War

For the purposes of this text, we broadly define Central Europe (Halecki 1994, pp. 149-149; Moczulski 1999, p. 312; Křen 2005, pp. 22-28)[2] as a region between Sweden, Russia, Turkey, Italy and Germany, flanked by three seas: the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea, of approximately 2,75 million square kilometres, divided into 23 states (Wiśniewska et al. 2016; Całus 2016; Olszański 2017; Górecki 2016)[3].

2   O. Halecki meant that European characteristics would be better defined by division into four parts: Western Europe, Central-Western Europe, Central-Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe than into just two parts, Western and Eastern (1918). Central Europe was to contain German countries (Central-Western Europe) and nations based eastwards from Germany (Central-Eastern Europe). To the so-defined Central-Eastern Europe belonged all states independent in the interwar period, lying between Scandinavia, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. Halecki considered the region as geographical and historically heterogenous, which might be a basis for two or three federal unions; the Czech point of view – J. Křen meant that Central Europe is in fact limited to the area of Poland, Czech and Slovak republics, Austria and Hungary.
3   As seen from the North: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia (FYROM), Bulgaria, Greece. There are four territories in the region controlled by Russia - Kaliningrad district enclave, so called Transistria (an unrecognised state alienated from Moldova in 1991-92, Russian: Pridnestrov'e), parts of Donetsk coal basin, and the Crimean Peninsula (alienated from Ukraine in 2014).

The northern part of the region consists of plains with numerous rivers, lakes and forests. The spines of the region are the Carpathian and Sudeten Mountain ranges, linked in the West with the Alps, and Danube river, the biggest in the region, going in a south-easterly direction with its estuary on the Black Sea shore. The central part of the region is upland and mountainous, and the Southern part is predominantly mountainous. The climate of the region is of transitional character, between continental and sea climate in the Northern part, and Mediterranean in the South. Inhabited by approximately 190-200 million people (2017), the region is capable of producing high quality food and industrial goods thanks to the large mineral deposits, crops and animal farming. The services sector of the economy (tourism, IT) has significantly grown. Historically, the Southern, Western and Northern parts of Central Europe were the European continent's economic semi-peripheries (and the Eastern part of CE was a periphery).

The Western part of the region (today's Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland) became part of Latin Christian civilisation in the 2nd-10th centuries AD (Halecki 1994, pp. 210-226; Wandycz 1995, p. 12; Kłoczowski 1993, p. 34)[4]. Simultaneously, it's Southern and South-Eastern part (today's Greece, Montenegro, Macedonia/FYROM, Albania,

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4   O. Halecki stated that Poland had a key geographical and historical role in the making of Central Europe as separate entity. In the Jagiellonian period, i.e. in 16th C. AD, it was a centre of a federation, and for a short period covered a vast territory almost identical with all of Central Europe. He ranked Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as parts of Central Europe. For Byelorussia and Ukraine Halecki foresaw three perspectives: adherence to Russia, or independence - then those countries would form actual Eastern Europe, or maintain historical ties with Central-Eastern Europe. The most important part of Halecki's considerations was his understanding of European culture with its leading idea of freedom, and specifically its balance between freedom and authority as antithetical to anarchy and nihilism: from the very beginning of the European tradition a belief was embedded in it, that freedom must be organised, otherwise it will fall into anarchy. Christianity embraced the idea of human dignity. The balance between dignity and authority assumes respect for all of the democratic states and their right to join unions with efficient common authority; P. Wandycz considered Central-Eastern Europe as Poland, Bohemia and Hungary within their historical boundaries, as a core for the region between the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean and Black Seas; J. Kłoczowski considered Slavic Europe as a geographical and cultural unit. He distinguished three regions: Central-Eastern Europe, Southern-Eastern Europe and parts of former Kyiv Ruthenia. The processes of Westernisation and 'Byzantification' were of essential meaning for the division. Kłoczowski pointed out the separate lines of progress in the Slavic-Byzantine circle, consisting of Russia (Moscow) and Ruthenian lands belonging to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland. In the latter ones, the Byzantine world met the Latin world, preparing the creation of separate Byelorussian and Ukrainian nations.

Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova) belonged to the Byzantine civilisation circle (Kisielewski 1992, p. 31)[5]. In 988, Kiev Ruthenia (covering most of today's Ukraine), accepted the Byzantine Christian missions into the Byzantine area. In the 11th c. Eastern Orthodox Christianity reached the territories of today's Belarus and Western Russia. In the 13th c. Latin Christianity reached the territories of future East Prussia, Estonia and Latvia and, finally (in 1385), Lithuania. The religious division remained until the first half of the 20th c. with two distinct changes that originated with Jewish immigration, mostly to urban settlements (approximately since the 12th c.), and the Ottoman Turkish Empire expansion in the 15th c. in the Balkan area. Muslim communities in Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia (FYROM) and Montenegro remain from this process (halted by the decline of the Turkish Empire following the 1683 defeat at Vienna). The Reformation was marked by the rise of Protestant communities in towns and areas populated by Germans, and in parts of Hungary (including its Eastern part, Transylvania).

In Central Europe there are 25 national groups of more than 500 thousand people, defined by language[6]. The majority of them (abt. 60%) are Slavic. The largest national groups are Ukrainians, Poles, Romanians, Hungarians (with the significant Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries), Greeks and Czechs. The diasporas of some of the Central European nations (Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian) exist outside of the region.

The oldest political powers in region were the Hungarian, Czech and Polish kingdoms, the Kiev Ruthenian duchies, the Moldovan duchy and the Teutonic Order and Livonian Order of Sword confederated Baltic states. After the demise of

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5   In T. Kisielewski's approach Central Europe is a cultural and geographical unity. This double characteristic is a result of the historical fates of its nations, as a transitional region for the Latin and Byzantine civilisations. The core of the geographical range of the term 'Central Europe' were Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. Central Europe was not a closed geographical unit, its range was frequently broadened according to its transitional character. Kisielewski excluded Croatia and the Baltic countries from Central Europe. He assumed, that Central and Western Europe held identical beliefs concerning democracy and human rights. Balkan countries: Romania, Bulgaria, (then) Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece were seen by Kisielewski as belonging to the Southern-Eastern Europe.
6   Albanians, Armenians, Austrians, Belarusians, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Czechs, Estonians, Finns, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Roma, Macedonians, Moldovans, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Ukrainians. There are also Montenegrins (about 340 thousand). Tatar and Jewish populations can be estimated to be about 350 and 200 thousand respectively.

the latter at the turn of the Medieval and Early Modern ages, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (or 'Republic' and 'Republic of Two Nations', also covered a vast part of the former Kiev Ruthenian duchies) rose in strength and significance; it's Jagiellonian dynasty also ruled – although for a brief period – the Czech and Hungarian kingdoms (Kłoczowski 1993, p. 20). The 16th c. saw the expansion of Austria, a previously peripheral German state that managed to acquire the Czech and Hungarian kingdoms under the Habsburg dynasty. Sweden's attempts to gain hegemony in the Baltic area and it's outback in the 17th c. (terminated by the defeat at Poltava in 1709) seriously weakened the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its role was taken over by Prussia – a German monarchy ruled by the Hohenzollern dynasty that originated from the former Teutonic Order state. Prussia was already able to threaten the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the first half of the 18th c., and soon after forged an alliance with the rising power of the Russian Empire (formerly the Moscow Empire), the absolute monarchy ruled by the Romanov dynasty. The Russian (Moscow) Empire successfully attempted to advance westwards in the late 17th c., acquiring i.a. Eastern parts of today's Ukraine. The second half of the 18th c. saw the further rise in strength of Austria, Prussia and Russia, boosted by the partitions and demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772-1795), and consecutive defeats of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, pushed southwards. The Napoleonic interlude (1806-1814) was marked with ephemerid changes (the forming of the Illyrian Provinces on the Dalmatian Adriatic coast and the Duchy of Warsaw). The failure of the invasion of Russia (1812) and Napoleon's subsequent defeat were sealed with the Congress of Vienna's (1815) political and territorial decisions concerning i.a. Central Europe that remained valid for nearly a century.

In the 19th c. Central Europe belonged to four powers: the Russian Empire, Prussia (part of a united German Empire from 1871), the Austrian Empire (the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1867) and the Ottoman Turkish Empire. During this century, the Balkan states gained independence, mostly at the expense of Turkey. The demise of the abovementioned Central European powers in the First World War (1914-1918) resulted in the creation or restoration of several national states between Germany and Bolshevik Russia (the Soviet Union from 1922) (Kłoczowski 1993, p. 5; Wandycz 2003, pp. 13-16). The fact that new Central European states managed to remain and gain stability changed Western attitudes towards the region (previously seen as an area controlled by great powers). The term 'Central-Eastern Europe' was introduced in Polish science in 1928 by Jan Rutkowski in his

speech delivered at the historians' congress in Oslo; the definition was developed by Oskar Halecki. Halecki defined Central-Eastern Europe as a space between Germany and the Soviet Union, extending from Finland to Greece (Kłoczowski 1993, p. 19). Simultaneously in Polish foreign policy, there emerged the concept of so called Intermarium (*Międzymorze*) (Okulewicz 2001, pp. 20-24, 97, 108-113; Deszczyński 2013, p. 255; Nowak 2015, pp. 29, 34, 62-65; Chodakiewicz 2016, p. 101)[7]. The matter of whether states of Byzantine heritage (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Macedonia/FYROM, Montenegro, Albania, and Romania) alongside the states of Latin Christian heritage (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia) belong to Central Europe is still discussed in historic and political sciences. The affiliation of the Baltic States is also spurious - they are sometimes, alongside Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, seen as Central-Eastern Europe (that would confine the term 'Eastern Europe' to the Western part of Russia). The historical and economic ties of Estonia and Latvia with Scandinavian states results in affiliating them (alongside Finland) to the Nordic (Northern European) states. In the mid-war period (1918-39), Central European states often argued over territories and minority populations. Almost all of these states had low development capital and were not able to forge joint economic organisations that could compensate for the failure of trade ties and relative migration freedom similar to those from the pre-1914 period. The slow economic development of Central European states was caused i.a. by insufficient investment from Western states, especially the USA (Chodakiewicz 2016, pp. 14-17; Mieroszewski 2012, pp. 66, 143)[8]. It made CE countries vulnerable to the *Nazi* German *Reich* attempts

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7   A. Nowak: After the First World War the Western Powers assumed, that Russia must remain part of the world's peace order, even with the detriment for the rights of the nations neighboring with it; there was no admittance of fact, that 'small' states were entitled to run their own policies in defiance of the great powers; M. J. Chodakiewicz pointed a coniunctural approach of the Western powers towards *Intermarium*.

8   M.J. Chodakiewicz saw *Intermarium* as a project of *cooperating nationalisms*; the region of coexistence, convergence and collision of many cultures, was historically a steadfast defender of Western civilization despite the long periods of external rule: *Intermarium is the furthest eastwards extended part of Central-Eastern Europe.* He ranked to the Central-Eastern Europe the territories of former the 1st and 2nd Polish Republics and it's dependencies like Moldavia (80% of Intermarium area). Chodakiewicz saw *Intermarium* as *eclectic outpost* of West, separate from West and East, with the features of both; J. Mieroszewski regretted the fact, that little and medium Central European states after 1918 instead of federating were running the outdated policies of maintaining their sovereignty and independence, and their controversies were used by European powers in their strategic games; He assumed, that small Central-European countries will either federate, or become satellites of Germany or Russia.

to make some of them (especially Balkan countries) economically dependent.
The concepts of regional integration were not supported by the great European
powers; the Western powers on the brink of the next great war decided to sacrifice
country after country in exchange for the promise of peace: in March 1938 -
Austria, in September of that year - Czechoslovakia. The sobering moment came
in March of 1939, when the German *Reich* occupied the Czech territory, created
the puppet Slovakian state and annexed the Lithuanian seaport of Klaipëda
(Memel) (Chodakiewicz 2016, p. 119)[9]. Although the United Kingdom and France
decided to oppose Adolf Hitler (Tebinka 2009, pp. 209-210), the German *Reich*
and the Soviet Union forged an alliance (August 1939). The German-Soviet 'treaty
of non-aggression' (the so called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) contained a secret
clause concerning the division of Central European states (Finland, Estonia,
Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania) in relevant Soviet and German zones
of influence. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact resulted in the abolishment of the
independent states' zone by April 1941: some of them lost independence (like
Poland, fighting on its own against the German and subsequent Soviet invasion;
the Baltic states were annexed by the USSR), others were smashed as a result
of a hostile coalition attack (Yugoslavia) or vassalised by the German *Reich* (like
Romania) (Bullock 1994, pp. 103-104; Niewieżyn 2000, pp. 77, 128, 133; Żerko 2009,
pp. 113-114). As a result of the German invasion in 1941, the Soviet Union joined
the Western Alliance, and demanded from the UK and USA – in return for the
war effort contribution – recognition of its hitherto annexations (Estonia, Latvia,
Lithuania, parts of Finland and Romania, and 51% of Polish territory). The Polish
government in exile tried to counteract, proposing a Central European Union
consisting of regional unions: a Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation (extended
to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Hungary), and a Yugoslavian-Greek
Union (extended to Bulgaria and Albania) (Ponczek 2001, pp. 211-212; Kamiński
2005, pp. 14-15, 48-53, 14-15, 74-76, 95-96, 142-147, 151-158; Łukasiewicz 2010,
pp. 3-34; Łaptos 2012, pp. 24-26; Kornat 2012, p. 36)[10]. The close cooperation of the

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9 M.J. Chodakiewicz: Poland refused in 1939 to participate in the partition of Intermarium
alongside with Germany and Soviet Union, and therefore sealed it's fate.
10 J. Łaptos assumed, that Sikorski did not limit himself to considering a Polish-
Czechoslovak federation only. Sikorski wanted to develop his federalist plans for Europe
in cooperation with the then Belgian, Czechoslovak, Greek, Dutch, Yugoslavian, and
Norwegian governments-in-exile and the Free French Committee in London); M. Kornat
distinguished three non-identical terms: federalism, 'prometheism', and 'Intermarium'. The

unions proposed would prevent the revival of German and Russian expansionism. However, in 1943-45, the Western powers (the USA, UK, and later France) in the series of Grand Alliance conferences (Tehran, Moscow, Yalta) agreed to create the Soviet zone of influence in Central Europe, extended from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea, and which meant communist serfdom for more than 100 million people (Grudziński 1980, pp. 132-135, 155-156, 185; Łukasiewicz 2010, pp. 30-31, 42-45; Kastory 2004, pp. 243, 258; Łaptos 2012, pp. 52-55; Lane and Wolański 2009, pp. 22-29; Grzeloński 2013, pp. 266-269, 296)[11].

idea of the federation was a vision of the reconstruction of the multinational state covering the former 1st Republic's territories. 'Prometheism' was an idea for breaking up the Soviet Union into national states. The 'Intermarium' (Baltic-Adriatic) idea assumed forming a block of states– even without breaking up the Soviet Union – and was formed in 20 already. The fulfilment of the 'Intermarium' idea was thwarted by Czechoslovak integration concepts.

11   Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego (IPMS), sign. Prezydium Rady Ministrów (PRM) 54, S. Ropp, *Report of 10th March 1941 on activities of the Polish Information Center in New York*, (est. *Eastern Europe's Future*, 21st February 1941), MID, 2242/41/USA, London, 30th April 1941, pp. 13-15, (Report stated that four senior officers of American command prepared a report stating that Poland in union with Czechoslovakia would be strong enough to defend against Germany on the river Oder-Lower Silesia line, and against the Soviet Union on the 1921 frontier with the annexation of East Prussia. A union with the Baltic States and Ukraine with the eastern frontier on the Dnepr, Berezina and Daugava rivers line would be seen as more efficient ('Great Slavic Federation'). A simultaneous forming of the 'Latin union' in the West was also suggested; both unions would balance the influence of Germany and Soviet Union); sign. PRM100, S. Ropp, *Essential elements of Polish question in America* [*Zasadnicze elementy sprawy polskiej w Ameryce*], 7th June 1943, pp. 170-175; sign. PRM112/2, *Note for minister Kwapinski concerning works of British and American governments' economic experts [Notatka dla ministra Kwapińskiego o pracach brytyjskich i amerykańskich rządowych ekspertów gospodarczych]*, London 19th August 1943, pp. 262ff; P. Grudziński: Despite the opinions of the Foreign Office and Eden, Churchill supported the regional federations as well as the need for the political and economic unification of Europe, the so called United States of Europe. In March 1943, Churchill proposed forming a European organisation (Europe's Council) for peace and security matters. The proposed Council would hold executive, lawmaking and jurisdiction powers, and would unite the European free states (maintaining national traditions and sovereignty). The council's armed forces – consisting of national and international units – should be ready for immediate action. The Council's members would be great powers, states, unions of states – federations and confederations. Churchill intended to reconcile the interests of great powers and lesser states. In Roosevelt's opinion, the regional federations in Europe allied with UK would not guarantee the maintaining of peace, and would contribute to rivalry with the Soviet Union; S. Łukasiewicz: During the visit of S. Welles, US Deputy Secretary of State, to Paris in the spring of 1940, minister. Zaleski passed to him the Polish government's memo concerning the European war; the memo mentioned the future new and free Europe, organised as a federation to guarantee a lasting peace. After the US entry into the war, American authorities formed a special committee to study the matters of the future order in Europe, and in its parts; a federation of the Low Countries, a northern union – Scandinavia, Polish-Czechoslovak federation, Greek-Yugoslavian confederation, East-European organisation,

The Grand Alliance powers' decisions taken in Yalta in February 1945 were confirmed by the subsequent Soviet Army advance, which by Summer 1945 reached a line extending from Schwerin on the Baltic Sea coast, through Magdeburg, Erfurt (Germany), Plzen (Czechoslovakia), Linz (Austria), Szombathely (Hungary), Maribor (Slovenia) to Trieste (Italy) on the Adriatic coast. The zone of Soviet dominance included (as seen from the North) – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – annexed by the Soviet Union, the middle (since 1945: Eastern) part of Germany and Eastern part of Austria – both as Soviet occupation zones, Poland (robbed of its Eastern territories, with a replacement in the former Free City of Danzig and former Eastern German territories reaching the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers), Czechoslovakia (lost its Eastern Carpathian Ruthenia province to the Soviet Ukraine), Hungary (within its Trianon Treaty boundaries, i.e. without its wartime annexations), Romania (lost its Eastern provinces: Northern Bukovina, annexed by Soviet Ukraine, and Bessarabia – transformed into Soviet Moldova), Yugoslavia, Albania, and Bulgaria (within its Neuilly Treaty boundaries, i.e. without its wartime annexations). The so-called Königsberg enclave (i.e. the Northern part of former East Prussia – initially planned to be annexed by Poland, then called Kaliningrad District) was annexed by the Russian Soviet Republic. Eastern parts of Poland were annexed by Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Belarus and newly formed Soviet Lithuania (Chodakiewicz 2016, pp. 129-133)[12].

There were no distinct territorial changes in the region until 1989 – except for the 1955 reunification of Austria and subsequent withdrawal of Soviet occupational forces. Berlin – formally a free city occupied by the forces of the four great powers – was divided into a free world enclave (consisting of the US, UK and French occupation zones) and the capital of the German Democratic Republic (DDR/GDR);

Danube confederation, and Bulgarian-Yugoslavian union; A. Kastory: Anthony Eden in October 1942 submitted to Churchill the so called *Four Powers Plan*,which foresaw the domination of the allied powers in the post-war world. The plan assumed breaking the Intermarium by recognising the Soviet frontiers of 1941; J. Łaptos: Americans were analysing the efficiency of the regional federations on economic grounds and reconciling controversies among the states, but they did not assume basing the matters of peace and security in Europe on such organisations; T. Lane and M. Wolański: Polish and European federalists in USA were hoping for the support of the US government for the federalist plans for the reconstruction of Europe, following American federal ideas. However, the American national interest prevailed over ideology.

12 M.J. Chodakiewicz: Years 1939-1947 were for Intermarium the time of Hobbes' 'war of all against all' resulting in millions of casualties – and its engines were Berlin and Moscow.

in fact, a Soviet puppet state was established in its occupation zone in 1949), and ultimately isolated in 1961 from the West by the infamous Berlin Wall. After the conflict with Stalin, socialist Yugoslavia left the Soviet Bloc in 1948. In 1969, Albania took an orthodox communist course, left the Soviet Bloc and forged close liaisons with Communist China. In Central Europe, only Greece remained a free country (thanks to the significant British military effort and despite the Soviet-backed communist insurgency) – and managed to join the Euroatlantic community, alongside a neutral Austria. The majority of Central European countries were cut off by an imaginary barrier that Winston Churchill called 'The Iron Curtain'. Finland managed to retain limited autonomy, giving Moscow control over its foreign and military policy (so called 'Finlandisation'). Yugoslavia, ruled by a gradually liberalised national-communist regime, stayed at the crossroads between West and East.

Central Europe 1945-89

The next chapters shall concern only the 12 countries belonging to the Soviet zone: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova (former Bessarabia) – annexed by the Soviet Union (remaining there till the fall of communism as parts of the so called internal empire) and the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria – being formally independent, but basically puppet Soviet states, ruled in a dictatorial manner by 'their own' communist parties[13].

It should be noted that two countries of the first abovementioned group (the Eastern part of Belarus, the middle and Eastern parts of Ukraine) were in the most

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13   Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich we Wrocławiu, Papiery Klaudiusza Hrabyka, sygn. 16314/II, K. Hrabyk, *Co to jest Międzymorze*, pp. 9-13, (In a keynote published in the 1951 book *Za waszą wolność i naszą*, edited by the National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent, Klaudiusz Hrabyk, a Polish journalist and politician described the Intermarium as a Central European region between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas. Hrabyk stated that in the interest of international security and balance of power in Europe, this region must not be controlled by any external power. In his opinion, only the unification (for example as a confederation) of the region's nations would secure their political, economic, cultural and national independence from Germany and USSR/Russia. In spite of national, religious, language and historical differences, those nations shared the tradition of state relationships, political and cultural affiliations, and common threats to national existence).

difficult situation – because they had been under communist rule since 1921, with the cruel interlude of the German occupation (1941-43). Soviet dominance in Central Europe was not accepted by the region's nations. Between the 1940s and 1960s in Poland, the Baltic States and Western Ukraine, Soviet rule was met with armed resistance (declining with time). Soviet authorities suppressed the resistance in the newly acquired lands, organising mass deportations of people to the distant and inhabitable outskirts of the empire (Far North, Siberia, and Kolyma). To maintain their gained power, communists in the Central European states destroyed the political, institutional, economic, social and cultural structures, and deprived people of their rights and property. Communists were not able to gain and maintain power without the enormous support of Soviet security services and military and their criminal activities directed against the societies of subjugated countries. The regimes constructed social support with the means of propaganda and appeasing the people with the promise of material and social advantages (it was impossible without collaboration with the communist authorities). The power in fact was granted to the authorities by Soviet Union – and the main means of maintaining it were the political monopoly of the communist party, security services and army commanded by officers loyal to Moscow. The party leadership, military and security services commands were appointed – with rare exceptions – by Moscow. Their main tasks were: containing unrest in the Soviet influence zone, gradual sovietisation of societies, deepening of the dependence of ruled states on the Kremlin, and, last but not least, preparing for a future war against the free world.

The political and economic institutions were created to control the "people's democracy countries". In 1949, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (SEV/ COMECON) was formed. The organisation's name was misleading: it worked predominantly for the tightening of ties between Soviet Bloc countries and Moscow. The Soviet Union was strengthening the economic dependency of the Bloc's countries by supplying them with cheap raw materials, oil and gas (and building special infrastructure to transport it, i.a. the 'Druzhba'/'Friendship' pipeline), metal ores and cotton. The Soviet Union was the main market for the Eastern Bloc economies. The exchange prices were underestimated for the benefit of the Soviet side. Communist countries were pressed to invest in the heavy armaments industry, communicational infrastructure (East-West highways) that would solely serve militarisation and Soviet strategic plans for invasion of the

West. The expenses for armaments were very high and did not contribute to the overall productivity of Central European countries – only maintaining their economic backwardness. The Bloc countries tried to compensate for the losses suffered in trade exchange with Soviet Union, and to close the economic gap separating them and Western countries, taking redundant loans from the West, and buying obsolete technology there.

The other Soviet tool used to control the armed forces of Central European states was the Warsaw Pact, established in 1955 as NATO's Eastern dummy (Jarząbek 2008, passim). The Pact's task was to build the local pro-Soviet military elites, performing all Moscow's order without question, and to fully subordinate the commands of "brotherly armies" to the Soviet command. Every year, the Warsaw Pact's armies practised a full scale conventional and WMD attack on Western Europe. The substantial part of weapons and equipment used by Soviet allies was produced in the USSR or on a Soviet license, and – not coincidentally – was of older generation design.

One of the aims of the communist totalitarianism was control of cultural life – and establishing of so called 'socialist consciousness'. To the end of the first half of the 1950s, such control was radical (it included, for example, a ban of performing and listening to jazz music, a ban of abstract art and modernist architecture, persecution of some branches of science like genetics, sociology, etc.). The grip was later gradually loosened – to different extents in various Soviet Bloc countries, with transient tightening of the official course. Authorities attempted to promote Soviet authors' achievements in education, science and the arts, thanks to their media monopoly and censorship. Access to Western culture was rationed. However, such attempts were unsuccessful. The need for free speech in the Soviet Bloc contributed to the rise of so called 'second circuit' of culture, information and science (i.e. without the censorship – as opposed to the 'first circuit', consisting of officially acknowledged media and edition houses) – as a subsoil for the democratic opposition movements. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) agreements (1975) substantially boosted the emergence of the opposition movements in the Soviet Bloc.

The communist system was hostile towards religion. The model communist state ought to be 100% atheist. From the first years of Soviet domination, clergymen were murdered, Church superiors were imprisoned (Polish, Hungarian and Czech

Primates: Stefan Wyszyński, Jószzef Mindszenty, Josef Beran), monasteries were dissolved and monks interned, Church property was seized, religious education was banned from schools, and religion was also eliminated from public life. In the majority of Soviet Bloc countries – with the limited exception of Poland – religion was confined to private worship (and the latter could also provoke persecution).

Despite the overwhelming control exercised by state and party, protests and social mutinies occurred – caused mainly by poor salaries and low living standards. The first serious protest broke out in June 1953 in Plzeň (Czechoslovakia) and was suppressed by domestic security forces, the next one, the June 17th 1953 protest in East Germany, was far greater in scope and had to be suppressed by the Red Army. The next uprisings broke out in 1956 in Poland (June) and Hungary (October-November). The Hungarian uprising was suppressed by massive Soviet forces, thousands of Hungarians were killed, and dozens of thousands fled the country. 1968 saw protests in Poland and reform loosening the communist grip in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak attempts to build 'socialism with a human face' were ended by the invasion of Warsaw Pact forces (predominantly Soviet, but with Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian and East-German contributions) and the following 'normaliszation' (i.e. return to the dictatorial rule). The 1970 and 1976 workers' protests in Poland were ruthlessly suppressed – the 1970 protest in the seaports and shipyards on the Baltic coast was crushed – with a significant loss of life – by the army, the 1976 protest was suppressed by law enforcement agencies (Eisler 2012, p. passim; Sasanka 2017, p. passim). For Poland, the 1970s were the turning point: the combined downfall of the socialist guided economy,the activity of the opposition movement, and the impact of Pope's John Paul II teachings concerning freedom and dignity resulted in the success of the wide social protest in 1980, and the forming of the free trade union 'Solidarność' ('Solidarity'). That peaceful revolution had a long-term influence. Although crushed by the communist military *coup-d'etat* in 1981, Solidarity revealed to the world (and the Soviet leadership too) that communism was finally bankrupt. However, it took the next 10 years for there to be political changes in Poland. In 1989-1991, Mikhail Gorbachev's new Soviet liberalising policy was echoed in Poland with an agreement made between the communists and part of the opposition, which resulted in the controlled dismantling of the Soviet Bloc.

Central Europe 1989–2017

The decomposition of Soviet Bloc and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1989-91 were caused by: economic inefficiency (worsened by a drop in the price of exported goods), social and national protests in Soviet republics (Baltic and Caucasian ones, and in Soviet Ukraine), the activity of freedom movements in Soviet Bloc countries, and efficient, assertive Western policy, started by the US President Jimmy Carter at the end of 1979, continued more strongly by his successor Ronald Reagan and the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The transitional period called 'post-communism' had begun.

Central European transition appeared to be diverse in character. The former GDR was finally reunited with West Germany and efficiently de-communised. As a part of today's Western state, East Germany shall not be taken into account any longer in this text.12 countries of the former Soviet zone remain in existence: 6 of the Soviet 'external' empire (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) and 6 of the 'internal' empire (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, and Ukraine), inhabited by approximately 135 million people.

The most important tasks of the newly elected (after decades of mock democracy) governments were: getting rid of Soviet occupational forces, abolishment of imposed political structures (communist parties, military and civil security agencies), disposal of the international tools of Soviet dominance (Warsaw Pact, COMECON), and realignment of payments in international trade. The abovementioned tasks were – more or less successfully – achieved; however, the de-sovietisation process continues (on a different scale in particular states).

The downfall of the Soviet Union in 1991 facilitated the regaining of independence for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine, and the establishment of new independent Belorussian and Moldovan states. Central European parliaments and governments started the democratic transition process resulting in the forming of parliamentary democracy and a free market economy. The most troublesome issues were: the restitution of property, institutional transformation, and removal of the influence of communist elites. The lack of domestic capital resulted in the sale (for bargain or symbolic price) of companies of national significance to foreign companies, speculation capital, and post-communist elites.

The national and political conflict – frozen under the Soviet dominance – led to the peaceful disintegration of Czechoslovakia (1992) and emergence of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Nevertheless, the region avoided an outbreak of the war like that in Yugoslavia. State frontiers set in 1945-1947 remained fundamentally untouched till 2014. Central European nations begun to seek integration with Western political, economic and security organisations to strengthen their independence and progress. The extension of NATO began in 1999 with the admission of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. In the next few years, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria followed. However, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova have chosen another way.

Belarus, under the authoritarian rule of Aleksandr Lukashenko, formed a Union State with Russia (marked with close military cooperation) (Kłysiński and Żochowski 2016; Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013). The uneven foreign policy of Ukraine (ruled alternately by pro-Western and pro-Russian governments) resulted in fragmentation of the state's territory (Olszański 2017), partitioned in 2014 by Russia. Moldova – the smallest and poorest of the abovementioned three states – teeters on the brink of a conflict with Russia over Transistria and reunification with ethnically closest Romania (Całus 2016). Apparently, the integration of these three countries with NATO is not possible in the nearest future because of these issues.

After 2004 – in two stages – all 9 new NATO member countries joined the European Union. Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia adopted the common European currency (Euro), marking their advanced integration with the EU. All (without Belarus) of the abovementioned Central European countries are represented in the Council of Europe. During preparations for integration with Western structures, Central European countries also improved their mutual relationships.

In 1991, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland formed the so called ' Visegrád Triangle', a regional cooperation coordination organisation (called the ' Visegrád Group', V4 from 1993, consisting of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). The V4 Group meetings are held several times in a year on the different levels of governing bodies.

In 1994, the V4 countries formed the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). CEFTA was invented to help the V4 countries to compensate for the economic collapse after the demise of COMECON and the USSR. In the following

years, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia (FYROM), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo joined CEFTA. The countries that joined the EU were forced to abandon the organisation.

In 1989, the regional cooperation platform was formed by Hungary, Austria, t Yugoslavia and Italy, and joined later by Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. The platform adopted the name of Central European Initiative (CEI) in 1992. The meetings of CEI prime ministers and ministers are held annually. CEI initiates projects concerning infrastructure cohesion, security, law enforcement and illegal immigration containment (Chodakiewicz 2016, p. 423)[14]. Since the appointment of Vladimir Putin (2000) Russia has moved in an authoritarian direction. The centralisation of political and economic power alongside armed forces' modernisation is aimed at enhancing Russia's return to the international scene as a world power. Moscow assumed the post-Soviet area as an exclusive zone of influence; only the Baltic States were able to leave it and integrate with NATO and the EU. The Western aspirations of former Soviet republics met with various political, economic and military measures. The Russian (and other) minorities were used by Kremlin to weaken the countries of their residence[15], as well as other circumstances like energy dependence; Moscow imposed high prices on wanted materials, or restricted access to the Russian market, even against previous agreements. A relatively new method of pressure is cyber-attacks and on-line info wars (Darczewska and Żochowski 2017; Darczewska 2016). The other – old-fashioned, but still used – method of pressure is military manoeuvres, supposed to be a clear threat of war (Wiadomości.wp.pl, 73a, 2015; Wiadomości.wp.pl, 57a, 2015; Wiadomości.wp.pl, 53a, 2015; Wilk 2017).

14 M.J. Chodakiewicz: Central European Initiative (1989) was the first platform of cooperation of the states from the post-Soviet area with their Western neighbors. It's long-term aim was integration with European Union. The GUAM group – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova – should be also mentioned.

15 In 2013 the major Russian minority populations lived in Ukraine (6-7 million people), Belarus (800 thousand - 1 million), Latvia (600 thousand), Estonia (300 thousand), Lithuania (200 thousand) and Moldova (200 thousand). Minor groups of Russians live in Finland, Poland and Czech Republic.

Russia protests against the removal of Soviet imperial symbols from public space in other countries, tries to interfere in elections (i.a. by financing agents of influence). Such circumstances have led some observers to the conviction that the April 10th 2010 Smolensk airplane crash that killed Poland's President Lech Kaczynski was in fact a Russian terrorist attack (Komunikat Podkomisji 2 Feb 2018) (as revenge for L. Kaczynski's contribution to the solution of the 2008 Georgian crisis and his impact on Ukraine's Western aspirations).

Russia efficiently blocked Moldovan national aspirations. The intervention of the 14th Army enabled the creation of the Transistria (*Pridnestrov'e*), the unrecognised state on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border. Since 1992, Russia has also been using political and economic means to foil Moldovan attempts to integrate with the West. Russian armed forces are still stationed there, despite the 1999 Istanbul agreements obliging Russia to withdraw its troops from Moldova by 2003. In 2006, Russia announced that the 14th Army wouldstay in Moldavia until an unspecified moment of 'pacification'.

In 2014, Russian forces invaded Ukraine in apparent retribution for the latter's signing of an Association Agreement with the EU. Russia annexed the strategic Crimean Peninsula[16] (gaining ultimate military superiority on the Black Sea), and enhanced the forming of the two unrecognised states in Donetsk coal basin (the Donetsk and Luhansk 'People's Republics') – both territories inhabited predominantly by Russians of Ukrainian citizenship (TVN24, 490099, 2014; Wiadomości.wp.pl, 41a, 2015). The conflict in Donetsk region continues in 2018.

It should be noted that Moscow also uses a soft means of policy; the local circumstances such as political divisions and varying awareness of threats (of a civilisational and cultural character) are always taken advantage of. Russia promotes the propaganda image of it being the only world power committed to the defence of Christian values; such campaigns find some audience in the Central European countries, where the West and especially the EU are seen –

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[16]   National census (2001) – Autonomic Republic of Crimea: Russians 1180,4 thousand (58,3%), Ukrainians 492,2 thousand. (24,3%), Crimean Tatars 243,4 thousand (12%), Belorussians 29,2 thousand. (1,4%), Tatars 11 thousand (0,5%), Armenians 8,7 thousand (0,4%), Jews 4,5 thousand (0,2%), Poles 3,8 thousand (0,2%), Moldovans 3,7 thousand (0,2%), Azerbaijanis 3,7 thousand (0,2%), in *State Statistics Committee of Ukraine.* [12.04.2017] http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/

not without some foundation – as adversaries of the abovementioned values. Russian propaganda has a particular impact in Orthodox countries like Greece, Serbia, Belarus, parts of Ukraine, and to a lesser extent Bulgaria and Romania. The abovementioned Balkan countries viewed Russia as a traditional ally against Turkish imperialism and Islamic dominance; especially in Serbia during the last ethnic and religious conflicts in which the country was involved (for example in Kosovo). With the actually rising political importance of the militant Islamic factor, Russian influence may increase. Authoritarian developments in Turkey (despite its NATO member status) are aligned with the country's aspirations of becoming the Sunni Islam political centre again. Such situation makes the lesser Balkan counties anxious (not fully unfounded) for their territorial integrity. Russia seems to be a power that guarantees the status quo, and perhaps also an agent that may facilitate territorial gains in favour of Orthodox countries (for example in Bosnia in favour of Serbia) (DW.com, 30, 2017; Wyborcza.pl 2017)[17].

The other factor that should be taken into consideration is demographic collapse. Numerous countries in the region see a negative natural increase, resulting from economic migration (especially of young people) to the West, low birth rate, and lower life expectancy. Bulgaria offers an extreme example of demographic collapse: over 25 years (1990-2015), the country's population fell by 20% (from 9 to 7 million people). The demographic situation may cause some noxious phenomena: an ageing society, limiting progress in some branches of the economy, and in the long-term perspective, also the inevitable ethnic and cultural transformations. 21st c. Central Europe has so far managed to avoid conflicts of an ethnic and cultural character – except for the Balkan countries with large indigenous Muslim populations (like Turks in Bulgaria, Albanians in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, and Bosnians in Serbia). The demographic collapse may cause serious conflicts of cultural and ethnic character in the future. However, this seems to be a less pessimistic scenario than predictions concerning the current situation in Germany and France. It should be stressed that demographic regress mainly affects the Christian population in the Europe.

17   Russia's response for the EU – Western Balkan summit was an announcement of the Russian ambassador in Skopje, Oleg Shcherbak, that Russia's aim in Balkan countries is containment of access to EU and NATO of Macedonia (FYROM), Bosna and Herzegovina and Serbia. As far as it concerns Bosna and Herzegovina, Russia will encourage it's part, Serbian Republic, to break the actual union (cf. Górzyński 2017).

At the end of the present decade, the core of the Central European zone consists of – according to demographic potential – Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (i.e. almost 100 million inhabitants living on nearly 1.4 million square kilometres of territory).

Poland, as the biggest Central European country, tries to contain Russia's imperial appetite in the region. The strategic aim of Poland is integrating with the Western political, economic and military structures of all countries placed between the EU/NATO and Russia. An independent Poland leads the policy of maintaining the independence of its neighbourhood from Germany and the USSR/Russia in the north and south (so called 'vertical line') aimed at stabilisation of the region. Warsaw is now promoting two integration projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Poland and Sweden, in cooperation with the Czech Republic, started in 2009 (in the general frame of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy) the so called Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative (Ananicz 2009, pp. 1-4; Wojna and Gniazdowski 2009, p. 5; Zielińska 2011; Cianciara 2014, p. passim; Sadowski 2013; Vegh 2014; Wiadomości.wp.pl, 09a, 2015). The EaP aim is tightening the cooperation with Eastern European countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Caucasian zone countries: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The signing of the EU's Association Agreements with the abovementioned countries, and then – after the transitional period of adaptation to the EU's standards – beginning the EU accession negotiations, is expected as a future final result of the EaP initiative. The fact that the three most advanced states in EU integration (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova) are internally destabilised by Moscow is not coincidental. The EU and NATO became strategic rivals for Putin in the countries bordering Russia (Milewski 2016, pp. 48-49; TVN24, 490269, 2014; Wiadomości.wp.pl, 40cb, 2014; TVP.Info, 61, 2014)[18].

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18   Milewski: interview with British general, Sir Richard Shirreff; former commander in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe – SACEUR 2011-2014. Sir Richard Shirref in his book *2017: War with Russia. An urgent warning from senior military command* stated: Russia has practice in destroying of state's integrity from within by manipulating of public opinion, raising of ethnic conflicts and cyberwarfare.

In 2015, Polish President, Andrzej Duda, and Croatian President, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic initiated an international political and economic cooperation project of 12 EU Central European countries called the Three Seas Initiative (Trimarium) (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) (Krawczyk 2017, pp. 2-17)[19]. The Trimarium initiative summits were held in 2016 in Dubrovnik (Croatia) and in 2017 in Warsaw (Poland) – the last one with the participation of US President Donald Trump. The next Trimarium summit will be held in 2018 in Bucharest (Romania). The task of the Trimarium initiative is tightening regional economic cooperation in the fields of transport and logistics (for example the project of 'Via Carpathia', a highway linking Lithuania and Greece), liquid gas energy (for example – to use the LNG terminal in Świnoujscie, Poland, for increasing energy security in the region), electronic communication etc. This cooperation in the Trimarium framework is expected to strengthen the economic potential of this part of the EU. The countries of the Trimarium produce 11.3% of the EU's GDP (2016); for comparison: Germany produces 21.1%, the UK – 16%, France – 15%, Italy – 11.3%, and Spain – 7.5% (wPolityce.pl 2017) It seems that Central Europe is awaiting better perspectives for economic and social growth than Western Europe in the next decade. The expected progress may contribute to the reducing of the distance between the Central European countries and the West (as it was in the 14th and 16th centuries).

Conclusions

Before 1918, Central Europe was divided between Austria-Hungary, the German Reich, the Russian Empire and Turkish Ottoman Empire. The downfall of the abovementioned powers contributed to the emergence of a number of independent states in Central Europe, however economically and military weak and conflicted. The indifference of Western powers towards the development of Central European countries was used by Germany and the Soviet Union:

19   R. Krawczyk distances himself from the project, considering historical, cultural and religious differences between Trimarium states. The interests of those countries were seen as connected to EU rather than region.

both powers started the next world war together to crush the Versailles system and establish their hegemonies. After the war, the Soviet Union with Western powers' approval forcefully unified Central European states. It caused numerous rebellions in Central European states that were historically and culturally bound with Western civilisation. After the downfall of communism and disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central European states came through democratic transition and reintegrated with political, economic and military structures of the West. Despite the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia did not come to terms with the independence of countries in Central Europe. Russia runs a policy of destabilisation of Central European countries, using political, economic, military and cultural pressure – and tries to destroy the concepts of closer regional cooperation.

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Appendix 1. Map of Central Europe (the core of the area is marked)