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Anterooms and salons of East-Central Europe in the contemporary post-Soviet geopolitical conceptions

Key words: Poland, Russia, East-Central Europe, a common European house

1. East-Central Europe

At the very beginning I would permit myself to present the basic thesis: *The fact, that on the brake of XIV and XV century in four countries of Eastern Europe the universities were founded, tells us about the common development of this part of Europe – that part of a continent where the traditions of the Eastern European and Western European countries meet. The same elements that divided Rome and Constantinople for centuries were at the same time the pushing power of the central European countries' development. The influences of those two parts of Europe met and still meet here, creating a specific atmosphere of tolerance and understanding for the different point of view and for different cultures.*

Being the inhabitant of this part of Europe from my first day, living in different countries of this region, and later being a specialist in the field of ethnic, religious and political geography, in each country, I had met a thesis that „our country is a bridge between East and West – in our country East meets West”. Sometimes these words are just a phrase, but sometimes it happens to be a scientific thesis. It would be good to make an attempt to create a list of the countries pretending to be „a bridge between East and West” (such position

of a certain country brings to mind a discussion about the situation of the „Center of Europe” in a particular country – but you never know what kind of the center it is about – geographical, density of population or something else). One can say that “East meets West” in such countries as: Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Check Republic, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, as well as Bulgaria. The same is true, excluding the countries of the East-Central Europe, for Spain, for example, where the culture of Europe and the culture of the Middle East brought here by the Saracens are mixed together. The same position may be taken by Portugal. Together with the countries mentioned above (justified by their geographic position) Turkey has a background to struggle for a name of “the bridge between East and West”. The thesis about the place where „East meets West” is doubtful in many abovementioned cases, but it is often is used as a promotion slogan, to invite the tourists.

Traditionally the term: Central Europe is equal with the term: Mitteleuropa. If somebody wants to underline the role of the described region as the bridge between East and West should use the term: East-Central Europe. The term „East-Central Europe” was introduced by the Polish historian Oskar Halecki

in the 50-ties of the XX century¹. Making a research over the East European countries Halecki had noticed that some of these countries have similar features in their history. Distinguishing these countries from the rest of Europe, Halecki had declared that the countries traditionally under the influence of Germany and Russia create a specific part of the continent – East-Central Europe. This part of Europe differentiated by prof. Halecki ideally responds to the list of the countries I had enumerated above – the countries aspiring to be the bridge between East and West.

As for two countries itemized above – Romania and Bulgaria – there are some doubts, as they are the countries between Russia and Germany. Russia has for long been sure that these two countries are within the Russian sphere of influence, or how we say today „a sphere of its strategic interests”. But the definitely bigger influence on this territory, as contemporary history shows, belongs to Turkey, and in some part, to Germany. That is why, in my opinion, it is possible to exclude Romania and Bulgaria from the so-called map of the East-Central Europe.

2. “An anteroom”, “a salon”, or “a common European house”?

“Anterooms” or “salons” are the space elements of the common „European house”. It is possible to talk about the different types of the space: cultural space, religious space, language space, military space, geopolitical space etc. – for example economic and industrial space. I would like to make an analysis of the geopolitical space from the point of view of the modern post-Soviet geopolitical conceptions.

Whether Poland and East-Central Europe are the „anterooms” or the „salons” of Europe, it depends mostly on the size of the „European house” and secondly it depends on the arrangements of the „rooms” in the „house”. Depending on where we acknowledge the boundaries of Europe, of that “common European house”, it is possible to determine where are „salons” and where are „anterooms”. So, we are coming to the most traditional question of the geopolitical thought – where Europe starts and where does it end? As for the western boundaries of Europe – there are no difficulties: they are formed by the coast of the Atlantic

Ocean², as for the eastern boundaries – the issue is more problematic. Very often this issue is formulated in a more primitive way, e.g.: is Belarus in Europe? Or does Ukraine belong to Europe? Is Russia part of Europe? In the scientific works and in the consciousness of the Russian Empire inhabitants during the last 200 years the eastern boundary of Europe was moved more and more east³. At the same time Russia very often „had increased its distance” from Europe and in some periods even „separated itself from Europe”. Finally the geographical boundary of Europe was installed along the Ural Mountains. The czar Peter I (The Great) had cut down „the window” to Europe for Russia, to the European reality (often even against the Russians will). This is the most traditional presentation of the czar Peter the Great activities in his strategy to increase the power of the state.

A conception of the „common European home”, as determined by one of the most known Russian emigrants Vladimir Bukovsky, was an idea of the western left powers and at the same time an idea of Moscow. Later the Soviet Union had collapsed and Moscow stopped participating in this plan. During the era of the President Vladimir Putin the old „configuration of the house” returned on the agenda in the foreign policy. Generally we can say that the idea of this plan is simple: to deprive the countries situated between the European Union and Russia (or the area of the former Soviet Union) of choice. „The principle was very simple: if you are not satisfied being part of the Eastern Bloc, „Brussels” will incorporate you. Or the opposite scenario: if European Union doesn’t fit for you – the only perspective is to become close to Moscow”⁴.

From the times of the czar Alexander III (1881–1894) the process of division of Russia from the West had started⁵. In August 1917 the Russian prime-minister

² It is not so obvious because for the inhabitants of the Central Europe or East-Central Europe “West” is usually associated with the western European countries, but in the some geopolitical conceptions “West” includes Northern America, as the countries formed by the European emigrants and representing the similar with the European values. Н.А. Наптов, *Геополитика*, Москва 2004, p. 287.

³ S. Matjunin, *La Russie et l'Europe du Centre-Est: question territoriale, stratégique et géopolitique* [in:] *L'Europe du Centre-Est dans l'espace européen. Entre l'Est et l'Ouest*, J. Kłoczowski (ed), Lublin, 2004, p. 94–99.

⁴ V. Bukovsky, *Russia may fall apart*, „EUROPA”, 31 may 2006, p. 12.

⁵ С. Валянский, Д. Калужный, *Понять Россию умом*, Москва 2002.

¹ O. Halecki, *Trzy Europy*, Lublin 1995.

A. Kerensky had published „the program of the division from the world's economy”, which had created very popular (even up till now) concept of the isolation, and self-sufficiency of Russia. The Russian scientist, known as one of the precursors of the Russian geopolitics, N.J. Danilevski in his most known book, published on the brake of XIX and XX centuries, and widely used by the Russian experts, came to the conclusion that “Europe is hostile towards Russia”⁶. Danilevski was sure that Russia will never be one of the European countries, but will become a superpower close to the whole community of the European states.

3. Russian point of view

If Russia wants to base its external policy on a concept of the isolation, from the geopolitical point of view, it should possess some space, foreground, some sphere of influence, which will be a buffer between Russia itself and the rest of the world. Such foreground for Russia were and still are the countries of the East-Central Europe or Central Europe. In this case we have a very precise answer to the question: „salon” or „anteroom”. From the Russia's point of view – with no doubts – the states of East-Central Europe are the „anteroom”.

Another point of view, well known from the Russian and Ukrainian geopolitical works, is based on the classical geopolitics. Following Chelford McKinder, a famous Russian expert in geopolitics, Vladimir Dergachev, declares that this part of Europe neither is the „anteroom” nor the „salon”, but is the area of concentration of different energies – geopolitical energy, economic energy, social energy etc.⁷. This conception of the energy concentration, as well as the concentration of the natural resources, population, culture, religion in the East-Central Europe almost precisely covers the lines of the edges of the tectonic platforms and had appeared already on the brake of XIX and XX centuries. During that time, the geopolitics' scientist Chelford McKinder had formulated the famous phrase: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World”⁸. It means

that the described region is not the outskirts of Europe, it seems to be more the door to Europe, the open door for the East-West negotiations. It is not surprising then, that now we observe the clash of the political interests in this part of Europe: the East-Central Europe towards Germans and Russians, Poland between East and West, and, last but not least – between the EU and USA. It means that here we have a hank of the political and economic interests, mix of the spheres of influence, strategic spaces, cultural vans. That is why it is especially interesting for me – how this region is perceived from East, from the side of the forming states, that now are not speaking the same voice as the Soviet Union, but are finding their own way.

This is why I had decided to title my paper: “Anterooms” and “salons” of East-Central Europe in the contemporary post-Soviet geopolitical conceptions. Here, I'd like to refer to a story, that took place in Warsaw several years ago. I was participating in the international conference about Russia. Among the famous guests there was professor Sergei Karaganov, the foreign policy advisor of the President Jelcyn, at that time, and at the same time the Director of the Europa Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. During the coffee brake I had asked professor Karaganov what is his opinion about the development of the East-Central Europe, and what the researches his institute were doing in that direction. He had looked at me for a moment and then answered: „There is no such Europe”. This statement is not a separate opinion of Mr. Karaganov. It rather often appears in the geopolitical publications on the post-Soviet space. Even in the schools textbooks a division of Europe is presented very simply – Europe consists of three parts: continental West (France, Spain, Portugal, Great Britain is included into the Islander West together with the USA), Central Europe (Austria, Hungary, Germany and Italy) and European part of Russia⁹. As we can see there are no Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia on this Russian map.

During the period after the Second World War, in the reality of the two polar geopolitical construction of the world, the Soviet attitude towards that part of Europe, that we are trying to define as „East-Central Europe” (or in the concepts of some Russian researchers as „Central Europe”), can be presented by a saying used in USSR, and widespread in the rest of the countries of this area: „a chicken is not a bird, Poland is not an abroad” (Курица не птица, Польша не заграница). This means

⁶ Н.Я. Данилевский, *Россия и Европа*, Петербург 1995, p. 107.

⁷ В. Дергачев, *Цивилизационная геополитика*, Киев 2004.

⁸ А.Дугин, *Основы геополитики*, Москва 1997, p. 47.

⁹ Н.А. Нартов, *Геополитика*, Москва, 2004, p. 287.

that the described part of Europe was not treated as separate, but perceived as the alliance territory, where the state boundaries and the national and states differences were not so important, because these countries were incorporated by force to the socialist camp. Even after the collapse of communism, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union I have heard several times, even from the representatives of the Russian intellectual elites, a term: „Vistula Land” [Kraj Nadwiślański]. This is a good example of the new Russian imperialistic way of thinking. A phenomenon of the revival of the modern Russian imperialism is not really investigated and is considered as a real threat to the independence of the East-Central European countries, including, naturally, Poland. Several years ago I had even permitted myself to create a small theory called „wicket theory”. The Russian view of Poland and the whole East-Central Europe, is very similar to the view on a wicket – when it is functioning correct, it doesn't take any attention of a man, as if it wouldn't exist. It becomes noticeable only when it stops to work properly, and creates some problems.

Returning back to the issue „an anteroom or a salon” it is possible to declare that the place of the East-Central Europe and its boundary will depend on a place which will be given to Russia in the „European house”. Basing on this thesis it can be said that the East-Central Europe ends where Russia starts. From the point of view of the contemporary geography (especially physical one) Eastern Europe covers a big part of Russia, and that is why it is so important to use the geographical terms precisely – not East and Central Europe, but East-Central Europe. In the first case we are launching together two big different European areas Eastern Europe and Central Europe, and in the latter case we are talking about the specific region of Europe, which is neither the German, nor Russian.

The main idea of the proposed paper is to investigate how the geopolitical works in Russia identify East-Central Europe. In the vast Russian literature of this issue there are many different definitions. For example: „Awkwardly titled East-Central Europe is a part of the central European region that some time ago belonged to the socialist camp”¹⁰. So, it is again an attempt to narrow all the common elements in culture and history of the region to the fact that it was under the Soviet

occupation after the Second World War. It is absolutely opposite to the basic ideas of the actual western concepts and to the historical facts.

In the Russian geopolitical literature exists a very exotic term: „limitrof”, derived from the latin word „*limitrophus*” – bordering, to identify the countries of the Central and East Europe, which were incorporated into the socialist camp¹¹. These are the classical examples of indoctrination, when a well know phenomenon is explained by the absolutely external and inappropriate reasons. It seems to be, according to the Russian authors, that, a specificity of the East-Central European countries is caused not by the common elements in their history, religion, common geopolitical conditions (situation between the German and Russia), but only by the fact that these countries for the short time were in the socialist camp.

An analysis of the geopolitical concepts of Europe, and especially East-Central Europe, has to start from Russia, because Russia itself is the reference which determines the place of the selected region on the map of Europe. The author who had become a symbol of a new geopolitics on the post-soviet space is Alexander Dugin. His book „Basics of Geopolitics”, published in Moscow in 2000¹² had become especially known in the West when it became a text-book in the Academy of the General Head-Quarter of the Russian Army. In the small vocabulary, attached to the book we can read about Europe: „Central Europe – this is a space between Russia and the Atlantic coast of Europe. Traditionally is considered as the sphere of the dominating German influences”¹³.

Sergei Pereslegin in his book „Tutorial for games on the world chessboard” determines that on the European sub-continent (?) the issue of the geopolitical boundaries is not so obvious. As for the Eastern Europe the issue of the boundaries is discussed for several centuries by politicians and journalists. Actually, the definition of S. Huntington is used to provide a boundary between the Eastern and Western Christianity – along the eastern border of Poland (S. Huntington 2003). „The clash of civilizations” by Samuel Huntington may also fit to the area of East-Central Europe, where, for the centuries, western European civilization clashes with the

¹⁰ Я. ШИМОВ, *Россия и Центрально-Восточная Европа: отказ от комплексов или строительство новых преград?* 13 February 2001, www.russ.ru [11.11.2011].

¹¹ С. Валянский, Д. Калужный, «О Западе, который пыжился, пыжился, а Россия сама по себе», Москва 2004.

¹² А. Дугин, *Основы геополитики*, Москва 2000.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 910.

civilization Byzantine¹⁴. It is worth to pay attention on how the eastern boundary of the East-Central Europe is described in the „politically correct version” – this is the boundary of the states, but in reality the boundary of the different faiths – Rome Catholic Church and Orthodox Church – is the boundary between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabet.

From the geopolitical point of view the religious divisions are of secondary meaning towards the geographical division. A natural boundary dividing European sub-continent on the east is a line of the rivers Western Dvina – Dnepr, which strategic meaning was important in the each Russian war against the European countries. The territory between the Dnepr and the Oder is cut by the big rivers (Vistula, San, Neman) and by the difficult for traverse range of the Carpathian Mountains. In other words, this is so called „weak point”, and the benefits from the possessing of this territory are controversial. In this place Russian and European subcontinents have another similarity as in the case of the boundaries clash of the lithospheric plates that is marked by the earthquakes and the volcanos' eruptions the sphere of the mutual influence of the geopolitical subcontinents is distinguished by the extreme instability. Here, not only the states, but the nations, as well, appear and disappear¹⁵.

According to the Russian specialists in geopolitics „a union with the limitrophs” is for Russia a way to bankruptcy. As well as for any other country that would make such union. The inclusion of the „limitrophs” into NATO will soon provide the destabilization of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization. If on the territory of Russia will appear the normal states it would be necessary to use this instability of NATO¹⁶.

As we can see geopolitics in this part of Europe become the issue dividing the continent, underlining the differences of the civilizations.

In the autumn of 2006 there was some activity on the line Warsaw – Moscow. That gives a good opportunity for trying to define a vision of Central Europe or East-Central Europe among the political elites of Russia. In the meantime Russia is still looking for the American conspiracy and declares strengthening of the geopolitical game for Caucasus. Russia considers this region as

a potential and real source of instability. The former minister of defense of Russia, Sergei Ivanov, had accused all the countries of this region of selling former soviet weapons to Georgia. In the spring 2007 he said that he was worried by the deliveries of the weapons from Eastern Europe to Georgia. The number of the accused countries was limited by the Minister up to seven of the East and Central Europe¹⁷. At the same time the former press-attache of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, (actually the Minister) was threatening Poland to „take the adequate steps (...) if the elements of the NATO or American nuclear defense system will be installed in Poland” (the warning was combined with the new proposals of the cooperation in the field of energy). The former Minister of the Foreign affairs was trying to make his press-attache declarations more soft, declaring, that the Polish-Russian relations are of a great value for Russia (this method of the different presentation of the important positions in the foreign policy is already well known). The experts do not rule out the movement of the Russian rockets installations closer to the Polish border if the elements of American anti-missile system appear on the Polish territory¹⁸. Just when you at the title of the mentioned article it is easy to understand what are the moods of the contemporary two-sides relations.

The construction of the Northern Gas Pipeline is a signal, that Russia doesn't trust Poland, on the other side Poland suspects that Russia and Germany had made an agreement „over the Polish heads”. The former Polish Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Adam Rotfeld, is sure that „this is an appropriate time for the improvement of the Polish-Russian relations (...) For us the fundamental condition is Russia's acceptance of the equal rights of Poland, and to avoid the Russian post-imperial tendencies”¹⁹. The issue of the historical legacy is the most important issue for Russia. Russia reacts strongly to all the attempts to rise the historical issues (problems – demands?). Sergei Markov, the director of the Russian Institute of the Strategic Researches, is declaring directly, that Poland has to decide: either the issue of Katyn, or the good relations. „Why Russia started a dialogue with Poland in this case again? (...)”

¹⁴ S.P. Huttington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji i nowy kształt ładu światowego*, Warszawa 1997.

¹⁵ С. Переслегин, *Самоучитель игры на мировой шахматной доске*, Москва–Санкт–Петербург 2005.

¹⁶ С.И. Валянский, Д.В. Калужный, *Понять Россию умом*, Москва 2002, p. 464.

¹⁷ T. Bielecki, *Kreml oskarża NATO*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 30.09–01.10.2006, p. 6.

¹⁸ Z. Krzyżanowski, *Kij i marchewka Kremla*, „Dziennik”, 04.10.2006, p. 8.

¹⁹ E. Olczyk, Z. Krzyżanowski, *Dialog wznowiony. Wizyta szefa MSZ Rosji: dyplomaci wierzą w zmiany. Eksperti wątpią*, „Dziennik” 06.10.2006, p. 4.

Russia wants to have a clear dossier in the negotiations of the Cooperation agreement with EU²⁰. This is also opinion of the experts, for example the article by Włodzimierz Marciniak titled „Kremlin sees Union, not Poland. An agreement with EU is for Russia more important than the relations with Poland” – declares the specialist of the eastern politics²¹. This opinion once again confirms the proposed above “wicket theory”.

4. Conclusion

In Poland the Warsaw geographers' school is still the most powerful and considers geopolitics as a non-science (pseudo-science). In spite of this some of the centers – especially the University in Lodz – are engaged in this direction, because geopolitics is noticeable in the external policy formulation in many countries. It is correct when we talk about Russia and Russian relations towards the western neighbors. On the post-Soviet territories geopolitics is noticeable everywhere: in the analytical reports, in the politicians presentations, at the universities. It can be said that in this region geopolitics had grown to the level of ideology. This is a result of the process in which the new countries, emerged after the USSR collapse, are looking for their place on the contemporary political map of the world. On this map Russia is trying to present its influence as the superpower, to integrate its society around the idea of „a specific Russian fate – the fate of the chosen”. That is why it is so important, as it becomes the issue of the „geopolitical enemies”²². In Russia through all the times the external enemy helps to integrate the society around the own idea. Even though the new Russian Defense Doctrine doesn't point to those external enemies, from the basic principles of this document we can assume, whom Russia includes into its external enemies. It is clear, that luckily the East-Central Europe did not find its place on the list of the Russian enemies. But it is also not on the list of the „geopolitical friends”. This region is outside of the Russian Federation interests, away from the area of the Russia's influence. Russia, in spite of everything, knows the geopolitical value of this region and does not want to lose the relations with the different countries

in this region, as well as with the East-Central Europe as a whole. The role of the East-Central Europe in the development and mixture of the cultures, languages, religions was and is very creative, inspires more rapid development and causes larger tolerance. Probably this is an answer on the question about the pace of this part of Europe in the world divided by boundaries – the role of the bridge over the divisions.

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²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ W. Marciniak, *Kreml widzi Unię, nie Polskę*, „Dziennik” 05.10.2006, p. 27.

²² В.А. Петров, *Геополитика России. Возрождение или гибель*, Москва 2003, p. 5.