

**UACES 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Edinburgh, 1-3 September 2008**

Conference papers are works-in-progress - they should not be cited without the author's permission. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s).

**[www.uaces.org](http://www.uaces.org)**

**Barbarians at the gate...**  
**The ideas of Europe in Central – Eastern Europe**

by

Barbara Curyło

Opole University  
Department of International Relations  
Institute of Political Science  
Collegium Civitas  
The Redaction of *The International Affairs Review*  
Katowicka St. 89  
45-061 Opole  
[www.politologia.uni.opole.pl](http://www.politologia.uni.opole.pl)  
[www.psm-iar.uni.opole.pl](http://www.psm-iar.uni.opole.pl)  
e-mail: [bcurylo@uni.opole.pl](mailto:bcurylo@uni.opole.pl)  
tel. 0048 77 452 74 60  
fax 0048 77 452 74 69  
mobile 0048 504 203 501

As a consequence of Eastern Enlargements of the European Union there appear a situation in which actors of different political experiences, history and culture are to discuss and develop a common coherent vision of Europe what seems to be a huge challenge. A potential success of the undertaking would be a sum of variety of variables and questions that require answers. Some of the questions are as follows: has Central - Eastern Europe developed its own idea of Europe; is it possible to make different visions of Europe compatible; what exactly is Central - Eastern Europe; what has changed in the comprehension of Europe; can Central - Eastern Europe enrich the vision of Europe and offer a new thinking about Europe.

The paper tries to draw a sketch of potential answers to those questions from the perspective of Central - Eastern Europe, particularly its geopolitical conditions and historical experiences which determined that European thought in this region is mostly of intellectual character. The paper is divided to three parts which focus on three different periods: first, the phase of Eastern bloc; second, the phase of transformation and pre-accession period; third, the post-accession period. Each of the periods resulted in a specific understanding of Europe. However, in spite of the fact that during each period Central – Eastern Europe viewed Europe differently, there could be noticed some unchanged elements. On each stage of Central – Eastern European road Europe constantly remains a final destination.

### *The phase of Eastern bloc*

While being forced to linger in unwanted Soviet order, most of Central – Eastern European states commonly shared a dream which was Europe, understood as the West. That dream had a multi-level character and went far beyond a political dimension. In political considerations Europe represented all that Central – Eastern Europe lacked – democracy and its all traits and qualities, among others, ability to enter freely into integration structures resulting in mutual gains. But, predominantly, Europe was a wide intellectual project like a promised land, contrary to waste land that Central – Eastern Europe had become because of its many-sided subjection to Moscow. In that reasoning Jaltan order was regarded as totally artificial, denying previous state of European matters. In order to emphasize their conclusion Central – Eastern European intellectuals used a parabola of Europe as a living organism that was broken into pieces: the brain (the so-called West) was separated from the heart (the so-called East). That comparison suggested that there were no significant differences between Western and Eastern European states and they altogether should constitute one entity - Europe. As Václav Havel convinced, Central and Eastern European countries, like e.g. Hungary or Czechoslovakia „by virtue of their entire history, spiritual and intellectual

traditions, culture, atmosphere and geopolitical position belong to the classical European West, and any separation of them from that West would be suicidal for the whole of Europe (something anyone with even rudimentary knowledge of European history should understand).<sup>1</sup> However, since the separation in multitude aspects took place, Central – Eastern European intellectuals started to look for categories and definitions that would maintain the linkage between two parts of Europe. As a result of those endeavours a concept of *Central Europe* was created. The term *Central Europe* embracing some of the CEE countries, mainly Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, first appeared and was used in the 80. in order to encourage the states to strengthen their efforts to resist the communist system and to support the project of forming a region in a political aspect.<sup>2</sup> However, what was the most important in the concept was the conviction that the region had its all roots in the West despite the fact of acquiring Eastern features deriving from political circumstances, which were naturally considered temporary and unable to affect the genuine “Europeanness” of Central – Eastern Europe. Erasing the word “Eastern” was meant to prove what Milan Kundera, a Czech writer, claimed that Central - Eastern Europe was “the West in the East”.<sup>3</sup> In that reasoning Europe consisted of three entities of different political, economical, social and cultural structures: Western Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe embracing Russia.<sup>4</sup> Undeniably, the postulate of Central Eastern European identity deeply associated with the West was so intensively expressed that Timothy Garton Ash concisely noticed that during Cold War Europe was divided into two parts: the West that had Europe and the East that believed in it.<sup>5</sup>

However, there lied a certain dychotomy and a kind of peculiar paradox in the notion of *Central Europe*. On one hand, the sense of belonging to the West and the belief in the supremacy of European values in Central – Eastern Europe were highlighted, but on the other hand the ephemera of culture and civilization that could be diagnosed in the region<sup>6</sup>, meaning the sense of lack of endurance and stability resulting from discontinuity of sovereignty had its consequences in deepening the emptiness of thoughts that prevented from defining specific features and values of Central – Eastern Europe and at the same time estimating decisively the ones of Western Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> V. Havel, *A call for sacrifice. The co-responsibility of the West*. In: „Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 73, No.2, March/April 1994, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> M. Todorova, *Isn't Central Europe dead?* In: *Central Europe: core or periphery?* Ch. Lord (ed.), Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen 2000, p. 220

<sup>3</sup> M. Kundera, *Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej*. In: „Zeszyty Literackie”, No. 5, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> E. Brix, *Przyszłość Europy Środkowej*. In: *Europa Środkowa. Nowy wymiar dziedzictwa 1991 – 2001*, J. Purchla (ed.), Kraków 2002; see more about definitions of CEE in historical perspective W.B. Newsome, “*Dead Land*” or “*New Europe*”? *Reconstructing Europe, reconfiguring Eastern Europe: “Westerners” and the aftermath of the World War*. In: „East European Quarterly”, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, March 2002.

<sup>5</sup> T.G. Ash, *Free world. Why a crisis of the West reveals the opportunity of our time*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2005.

<sup>6</sup> W. Kaute, *Europa Środka jako formacja kultury*. In: *7 granic, 8 kultur i Europa*, B. Gołębiowski (ed.), Łomża 2001.

### *The phase of transformation and pre-accession period*

Along with the collapse of Eastern bloc and all processes accompanying it, Central – Eastern European states entered into phase of shaping their newly regained statehood and defining the directions of their foreign policy. As a natural consequence of European dreams in Soviet times, CEE states turned towards their understanding of Europe which became embodied in the European Union. However, the difficulties of transformation processes, those expected as well as the unexpected ones, resulted also in marasmus in working out a coherent Central – Eastern European vision of Europe. The integration aspirations of CEE states were not followed by the distinct answers to the important questions: what is Europe in the newly formed international order and what can be offered to that Europe by CEE states. Instead, Central – Eastern European leaders focused on actions designed to provide a quick membership in the already existing structures rather than intellectual divagations.

The reasons for the aforementioned could be diagnosed in the processes that were commonly experienced by most of CEE states despite their differences in such areas as: geopolitical situation of the country (like e.g. its strategic importance to the region), economic resources and potential (i.e. structure of economy, level of modernization), political and social history (like previous democratic and independence experiences) and culture (e.g. individualistic or paternalistic culture, religious or secular approach)<sup>7</sup>. The processes were connected with striving with the history, managing transformation courses and forming a sense of regional identity.<sup>8</sup>

In the understanding of Central – Eastern European states history was regarded in the category of an unfinished process. The Soviet subjugation as well as frequently experienced discontinuity of independence in the past caused a certain gap in development in comparison with the Western states. That gap had its consequences not only in the large distance between two parts of Europe and the pressure of overcoming it, but, most importantly, in the way the states comprehended performing their politics. Unfinished history became a constant point of reference in each and every matter whether it was substantiated or not, causing political debates that sounded like searching for political Vendetta rather than drawing constructive conclusions from the turbulent past.<sup>9</sup> What is more, every-day political rhetorics unchangeably contained the dogmatic domination of

---

<sup>7</sup> M. Illner, *Second thoughts on the transformation in Eastern and Central Europe*. In: *European societies. Fusion or fission?* T.P. Boje, B.v.Steenbergen, S. Walby (eds.), Routledge, London – New York 1999, p. 241. See more: *Demokracje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w perspektywie porównawczej*, A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1998.

<sup>8</sup> B. Curyło, *Central Europe – unfinished project?* In: “The International Affairs Review”, No. 1(152), 2005, pp. 126-131.

<sup>9</sup> L. Stan, *The vanishing truth? Politics and memory in post-communist Europe*. In: “East European Quarterly”, Vol. XL, No. 4, December 2006, p. 387.

sovereignty and supremacy of tradition or religion rather than values of civil society. Moreover, as a result of unfinished history CEE states turned towards ethnic and even nationalist arguments in the relations within the region. The fall of Eastern bloc defrosted old national antagonisms and animosities concerning especially national minorities what turned out to be a problem which could not be easlily solved by democratization as it was previously presumed.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of transformation courses CEE reformers repeatedly followed the fallacy that introduction of a new system could be simply based on Western patterns. The consequences of constructing democratic order without taking into critical consideration the specific features of the region as well as drawng conclusions from Western experiences were that CEE states did not manage to avoid typical weaknesses of young democracies, e.g. fragility of civil society or incoherence of democratic institutions. Very soon it turned out that CEE states found themselves in the trap of a vicious circle of necessity of finishing the process that had been introduced and struggle with numerous paradoxes of it, like e.g. capitalism with a human face, the revival of old communist habits and return of post-communist elites, revisionist and populist voices, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Kristian Gerner once observed that: “the liberation from *Pax Sovietica* revealed that there did not exist any *Central Europe*”.<sup>12</sup> The intellectual concept of *Central Europe* that was so appealing in the 80. did not take a form of commonly shared identity in the 90. despite commonly shared similarities as well as common interests on the road to the European Union. Although there appeared some sparks of regional co-operation, among others, the Visegrád Group, which soon, however, turned out to be euphemism.<sup>13</sup> The initiatives were mainly designed for the EU integration purposes but opted mostly for “being together in the waiting room” rather than factual alliance. The consequences could be seen during pre-accession period, especially accession negotiations during which the CEE candidates chose thoughtless *Drang nach Westen* rather than thoughtful competition.<sup>14</sup>

If to consider the ideas of Europe in Central – Eastern Europe during the transformation period, they have to be considered with reference to the phenomena mentioned above, however not exclusively. In the middle of XX century Witold Gombrowicz, a Polish writer, claimed that Central and Eastern Europe had never generally played a creative role in great European processes, like e.g.

---

<sup>10</sup> M. Dauderstädt, A.W.M. Gerrits, *Democratisation after communism: progress, problems, promotion*. In: “International Politics and Society”, No. 4/2000, [http://www.fes.de/ipg/itp4\\_2000/dauidopti2.htm](http://www.fes.de/ipg/itp4_2000/dauidopti2.htm).

<sup>11</sup> J.S. Melich, *The relationship between the political and the economic in the transformations in Eastern Europe: continuity and discontinuity and the problem of models*. In: “East European Quarterly”, vol. XXXIV, No. 2, June 2000, p. 133-134; see more: J. Zielonka, A. Pravda, *Democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.

<sup>12</sup> M. Todorova, op.cit., p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> A. Ágh, *The politics of Central Europe*, Sage Publications, London 1998, p. 218 and the next.

<sup>14</sup> B. Curyło, *A thoughtful competition or a thoughtless Drang nach Westen? The comparison analyses of the way of chosen Central and Eastern European states to the European Union through the prism of accession negotiations*. The paper presented during Warsaw East European Conference. 3 Annual Session, Warsaw University, 5-8 July, 2006.

French or Russian Revolution. In most cases the region could not afford to decide on European matters and remained as a receiver of decisions made somewhere else.<sup>15</sup> A few decades later it appeared that Central – Eastern Europe had not acquired the ability to reverse its previous fate and contribute in a constructive manner. The pre-accession period was mainly for adopting European standards and preparing for integration which at first was treated with uncritical enthusiasm. However, as the process of approaching between two parts of Europe gained complexity and became problematic, the enthusiasm began to melt gradually on both sides. On the wake of growing indifference the crucial point of European ideas in Central – Eastern Europe was focused on convincing all reluctant about the necessity and inevitability of enlarging European Union to the East and substantiating it as not just another enlargement but as unprecedented event in the history of Europe. Europe as an idea invariably remained a dream therefore Central – Eastern European intellectuals as well as political leaders expected a determined engagement of Western circles in the issue of defining united Europe's future. At the same time, because of unfinished history Central and Eastern Europe suffered from a malady of mistrust towards Europe, perceived as an area in which strong nations tend to dominate and impose their will on weaker ones.<sup>16</sup> That specific paradox in comprehending Europe had an impact on European thoughts and generated a chain reaction consequences that could be observed in political behaviours of CEE leaders. First of all, Europe became regarded as a cartel of the richest countries which either allowed poorer ones to approach on unbearable conditions or refused to approach at all. As a result there appeared a rhetorics of a second-hand membership. That naturally brought about serious levels of frustrations what was additionally combined with a psychological syndrome called complex.<sup>17</sup> It meant that due to traumatic history or contradictory transformation processes Central – Eastern European states needed to find some sort of outlet, which eventually took form of euroscepticism or even europhobia as a result of disappointment of Europe.<sup>18</sup> While reflecting on the EU reforms, CEE governments were constrained by the fears of restricting their state independence and therefore were inclined to maintain rigidity towards European ideas of the slightest supra-national character.

In general, the transformation and pre-accession period did not favour the creative comprehension and work on ideas of Europe in Central – Eastern Europe. Partly it resulted from internal problems that the region faced during that time and partly it was caused by the intensive

---

<sup>15</sup> W. Gombrowicz, *Dziennik (1967-1969)*, Kraków 1992.

<sup>16</sup> C. Lewandowicz, *Kategorie członkostwa w elastycznej Europie*. In: „Polska w Europie”, No. 3(37) 2001, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> A. Warmiński, *O niektórych filozoficznych i psychospołecznych uwarunkowaniach zjawiska tolerancji/nietolerancji*. In: *Skąd przychodzi Antychryst Kontakty i konflikty etniczne w Europie Środkowej i Południowej. Fakty – interpretacje - refleksje*, T. Fałęcki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, Kraków 2004, pp. 40-55.

<sup>18</sup> See more: J. Hughes, G. Sasse, C. Gordon, *Saying 'Maybe' to the 'Return to Europe': elites and the political space for euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: „European Union Politics”, Vol. 3(3), 2002, pp. 327-355.

sense of disappointment by Western attitudes in which nostalgia for old order and unwillingness to deal with former Soviet mass were present.<sup>19</sup> That is why there could be risked a statement that Central – Eastern European thought did not work out its alternative version of European idea, but rather rest on something unspecific what could be defined as 'the Europeanness myth'.<sup>20</sup> That notion meant to indicate that Central – Eastern European intellectuals and political leaders repeatedly defined Europe through the prism of abstract but at the same time contradictory values in the case of formal as well as material realms. As a matter of fact, in order to define 'Europeanness' CEE states did not follow the patterns of a really existing system but based their knowledge of Europe on preferences, expectations, frustrations and, many times, demands of political conjuncture in their internal scene.

### *The phase of post-accession period*

Anxiously expected Eastern Enlargement of the European Union eventually took place in 2004 and that event poured a considerable amount of soul to the European thought in Central – Eastern Europe. Among multitude European ideas that rose on the wave of the 'return to Europe' there appeared one of the most far-reaching character – the idea of the Second European Union.<sup>21</sup> The datum-point of the concept is that Europe after enlargement should no longer strive with its immanent paradoxes. Quite the opposite, it should draw conclusions and make of them a background for future intellectual, political and institutional arrangements. One of the most significant paradox is a phenomenal ability to conjoin the divergence of particular states' interests and convergence of basic values and standpoint, to combine heterogeneity and rivalry between states with equally strong desire to establish European power and coherent internal European order.<sup>22</sup> In this concept the First European Union (1952-2004) is regarded as a faulty community depriving Europe of its logical development in accordance with its pluralistic nature what was dictated by the demands of international strategic games. The division of Europe to the West and to the East caused irremediable losses because it stopped historically balanced development, mutual cooperation, exchange of ideas and general incontestable enrichment. However, what is undeniably the most crucial loss is that Western Europe lost its perception of Central – Eastern Europe, started to act as if there was no Central – Eastern Europe and became afraid of Central – Eastern European

---

<sup>19</sup> V. Havel, op.cit., p. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> M. Marody, *Spoleczeństwo polskie w jednoczącej się Europie*. In: „Kultura i Społeczeństwo”, No. 4, 1997, pp. 53-54.

<sup>21</sup> See more: K. Szczerski, *Stupor Mundi. Europa jako polityczny paradoks*. In: *Tożsamość Starego Kontynentu i przyszłość projektu europejskiego*, D. Pietrzyk-Reeves (ed.), Biblioteka Jedności Europejskiej, Warszawa 2007, pp. 210-228; T. Gabiś, *Od Unii Europejskiej do Imperium Europejskiego*. In: *Tożsamość Starego Kontynentu i przyszłość projektu europejskiego*, D. Pietrzyk-Reeves (ed.), Biblioteka Jedności Europejskiej, Warszawa 2007, pp. 229-249.

<sup>22</sup> K. Szczerski, op.cit., p. 210.

barbarians.<sup>23</sup> And it is Central – Eastern Europe that can remind Europe of its exceptionality and identity which was squandered during Cold War artificial division which served only political purposes what is particularly justified when to consider 'the Europeanness' of both parts of Europe in cultural aspect.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Europe needs the Second European Union in order to overcome such mental confinements and regain a chance to spread wings.

As it is claimed the foregoing reflections should find their confirmation in institutional system of the Second European Union. The fundamental assumption is that European political system should be determined by openness and capability to self-regulation. Such a system should not aim at expanding its structures but generating and supporting a resilient European politics that would contain two basic presumptions. First, European system and European politics would guarantee the independence of those objects that are not to take part in integration process, such as: culture, identity or social structures. Second, at the same European system and European politics would work out some sort of “a communication code” that would allow to integrate all the rest. As a consequence, the Second European Union would consist of several functional subsystems which would participate in the decision-making.<sup>25</sup>

In the institutional model of the Second European Union the principle of decentralization of administrative, economic and cultural level is accompanied by the principle of centralization in the political and military sphere.<sup>26</sup> The head of the Union is a president, elected by the European Council, who is responsible for European foreign and security policy. Additionally, the president appoints the president of the European Commission and the latter appoints commissioners. Such a presidential arrangement allows the Union to act decisively and quickly in the international arena and, among others, to seat in the Security Council of the United Nations.<sup>27</sup> The institutional system of the Second European Union is furthermore strengthened by the European Parliament in political dimension and some institutions in cultural dimension, like the Institute of European Memory and the Museum of European History.<sup>28</sup> Although the Second European Union has no wish to interfere with culture and identity of particular states, it is considered important to lay foundations for a commonly shared sense and pride of 'Europeanness'.

The establishment of the Second European Union requires some essential changes, among others, the change of a capital. Brussels was perfectly as well as practically substantiated as a capital of Western Europe during Cold War but nowadays it can no longer remain a source point

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 212-213.

<sup>24</sup> The examples of the above often focus on comparing 'the Europeanness' of cities sharing common European roots like Vienna, Prague and Crakow or convincing there there are no significant differences in Central – Eastern European nationalism in comparison to Western national movements, like in the case of e.g. Bask; ibidem, p. 213-214.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, pp. 216-217.

<sup>26</sup> T. Gabiś, op.cit., p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 239.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 244.

because Eastern Enlargements moved the geopolitical gravity to the South-East. Besides, the change of capital would also present a significant symbolic meaning – it would announce the emergence of a new European quality that looks ahead but draws conclusions from the past. Among many European cities pretending to become a central point, the capital of Slovakia – Bratislava – is frequently mentioned because of its geopolitical and symbolic advantages. First of all, due to its central position on the map of Europe Bratislava seems to be predestined to radiate in all directions in respect of politics, economy and culture. Secondly, it opens and broadens the space for new strategic alignments, not only traditional French-German ones, but for many others that would appear if occasion arises. Thirdly, Bratislava offers the perspective of further enlargements to the South and to the East, including Balkan states, Turkey, Ukraine etc. Finally, Bratislava as a capital of a small state guarantees that there is no room for imperial longings of big nations.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of the Second European Union is an idea of primarily intellectual character and leaves a lot of space for profound considerations concerning political and structural points of reference. It, however, confirms some conclusions which can be drawn from the first years of Central – Eastern European states' membership in the European Union. Most of all, they confirmed what had been faintly presumed by them during the pre-accession period that the European Union had nothing to do with the European dream they had been dreaming since the emergence of the Iron Curtain. Painfully for them, it turned out that Europe was a club of contradictory interests and hard compromises in the first place and a community of common ideas in the second. And even more painfully CEE states realized that nothing could be taken for granted and they could not expect a special treatment and satisfaction simply because of a difficult past. So that the concept of the Second European Union is somewhat a trial of drawing analogy to the 'European dream' as well as an alternative to the ideas of 'Europe of a few speeds' that from time to time some Western European politicians come up with in order to escape a little bit from the Central - Eastern European barbarians.

\*\*\*

The ideas of Europe have always been important part of political thought in Central – Eastern Europe, mainly as points of reference to the reality that this region repeatedly lacked. Regardless of political circumstances, Europe has been perceived as a promised land and the answer to all the questions. While considering the intellectual essence of European ideas one cannot resist the impression that Central – Eastern Europe has continuously shared the convictions of Zygmunt Bauman who wrote in his work entitled *Europe unfinished adventure* that: “never before has this very planet needed rowdy and willing to adventures Europe. Europe that is capable of looking beyond its own borders. Europe that is critical about its narrow-mindedness of points of view and

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, pp. 240-241.

megalomania. Europe that is dreaming of overcoming its own condition as well as the condition of the rest of the world. Europe that is enriched by the sense of duty of global mission”.<sup>30</sup> And undoubtedly, Central – Eastern Europe has always wanted to be a part of such adventure.

---

<sup>30</sup> Z. Bauman, *Europe unfinished adventure*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2005.