Geopolitical Visions of Central Europe*

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At an American geographers roundtable in March 1991, I predicted that the most likely scenario for the post Cold War geopolitical order would be a "unilateralist American order", with a lower probability of a revival of a Cold War bipolar order, centered on the United States and Russia relationship (O'Loughlin, 1992). Events since that time have mostly borne that view out, though new uncertainties - of domestic American priorities, of national rivalries in central and eastern Europe consequent on the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, of a new NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) strategic doctrine, and of European identities - have clouded any expectations made in the months before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Of the world regions affected by the ending of the Cold War bipolar rivalry, no place has been altered as much as central and eastern Europe, that I will mark as the region between the Elbe and the Don (the boundary of Europe in classical times). A dramatic ideological shift from Communist beliefs and practices to democracy and pseudo-democracy, consequent on the geopolitical earthquake that flattened the "Iron Curtain", placed countries into the throes of identity crises, and above all, returned the region to its nineteenth-century "crushzone" position between Russia and Germany (O'Loughlin, 1999; O'Loughlin and Kolossov, 1999).

Key to any discussion about Central Europe is its locational attributes or more specifically, where its boundaries lie. The impossibility of marking the eastern boundary of Europe in a way acceptable to all is clear from a reading of Jordan (1996, pp. 1-27) or Davis (1996, pp. 1-46). Clearly, Central Europe is incapable of being defined by a few characteristics. From the bifurcation of the region by the Cold War border to the debates about who is in and who is not in Europe, as measured by membership in the European institutions, the amorphous nature of European internal and external borders is now fully back on the foreign policy and academic agendas. Marking regions or countries as different from other places has a long tradition in Europe, and is bound up by national and ethnic rivalries. But as Agnew (1999, 91) notes, "as in any classification scheme based on totalizing the differences between units, once the one that the others were defined against disappears, the old regional labels and what they stood for no longer make much sense". Though cartographic conventions require clear lines and symbols on a map, most contemporary geographers are shifting to a concept of region that is more open and discontinuous, and constituted by social relations.

Because they are discontinuous, regions have holes in them (Allen, Massey and Cochrane, 1998). Until the 1970s, regions were used as classificatory devices by geographers and as categories for subsequent analysis, but Massey (1978) turned this method on its head by arguing that regions should be the end product, not the starting point of analysis. Following in this social constructionist tradition, I will examine seven social-political constructions of Central Europe, in the process showing how geopolitical images and regional classifications shape each other.

A major impetus for this paper has been my parallel research on state and nation-building in Ukraine with associated issue of identities and borders. Though limology has a long history in political geography, much of the work is site-and country-specific, ethnocentric, and divorced from larger streams of political geography and social theory (Kolossov and O'Loughlin, 1998; Newman and Paasi, 1998). Ukraine can be examined at three scales - externally in relation to geopolitical blocs, externally with relation to its immediate neighbors (central Europe and Russia) and internally with respect to its diverse regions. One of the key issues that developed in this work is the relationship of Ukraine to Central Europe? Is Ukraine part of Europe or do "Ukrainians have a decidedly orientalist kink in their brains", according to a British diplomat in 1939 (cited in Jordan, 1996, 15). What is the significance of the insistence by some Ukrainian political leaders that the country is part of "central Europe"? As Brzezinski (1997) maintains, if Ukraine is part of central Europe and rejects ties to Russia, then Russia will be no more than a middle-level power in world affairs.

On the question of "Eastern" or "Central Europe", what and where is this place now in the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of communism? Is there such a place anymore or should we speak of Central Europe(s)? The term Central Europe (*Mitteleuropa* in German - Naumann, 1917 - or "*L'Europe centrale*" in French – Parker, 1994, 76-78) has a controversial legacy in geopolitics and has been hotly debated for decades. In this paper, I demonstrate that the notion of "central or eastern Europe" has become more confused or has generated more versions than ever in these post Cold War times. While I present seven geopolitical imaginings of "East-central Europe" in this paper, I make no claims to a comprehensive overview of all possible imaginations since theoretically, there are as many imaginations as imaginators. The main argument in the paper is that one can pick and choose which version of "central

Europe" is most suitable for one's predetermined "geopolitical code". There is therefore no "correct" geo-vision; all are equally useful, open to challenge or biased.

This paper is set within a tradition of political geography that blends research on mental maps with research on geopolitics (Henrikson, 1980). In one sense, classical geopolitics from its inception in the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan for the Anglo-American school or Friedrich Ratzel for the German school has always been involved with the project of changing mental maps, by promoting engagement of the publics and elites in formulating policy based on specific views of how foreign areas were constituted and how these areas could be arranged to meet the foreign policy objectives of the state in question. Critical geopolitics is also an exercise in mental map-making, with a "perspective and a metaphorics of vision….that puts (other) visions in question (O'Tuathail, 1996, 72).   In the international relations literature, the term, "foreign policy belief system" (Holsti, 1962) is used to summarize the all-encompassing lens through which policy -makers see their environment. The critical geopolitics tradition in political geography steps back from the policy-makers view and encompasses both the ideology and locations in a geopolitical vision, defined as "any idea concerning the relation between one's own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a mission or foreign policy advantage" (Dijkink, 1996, 11). Typically, a geopolitical vision is built from a geopolitical code (Gaddis, 1982; Taylor and Flint, 2000), defined as the output of practical geopolitical reasoning, especially how states and places are envisioned and evaluated as to how they contribute to the "national interest".   Before developing a geopolitical code for the short and medium term, a longer perspective of the geopolitical vision for regions, countries or places is necessary. Furthermore, geopolitical codes are set against the backdrop of a geopolitical world order, most obviously in the years of the Cold War, when cartographic perspectives corresponded well to ideological and cultural preferences. In the aftermath of the Cold War, while there is an unchallenged hegemonic U.S. world order (Jaffe, 1997) the matching of geopolitical visions and codes is not so clear and subject to dramatic change depending on regional circumstances. Modifying Benedict Anderson's term, we can think of geopolitical visions as "imagined geopolitics" or "geopolitical imaginations" since they are constructed to fit a larger global or ideological world-view. It generally requires a "other" and "us" distinction and can easily and quickly

evolve over time to fit new domestic or international circumstances. In summary, policy is ultimately

determined by perception - What matters is what the policymaker believes the milieu to be, not what it is

(Sprout and Sprout, 1957).

Geopolitical Visions of "Eastern/Central Europe".

The academic and popular literature on Central Europe is replete with images that hark back to the

(supposed) glory days of the Austro-Hungarian empire, typified by the Emperor Franz Josef cult that has

emerged in many parts of the former empire, and images that look forward to the prospects of joining the

European institutions. Classifying this vast literature, mostly written from the perspective of the individual

nationalities but also containing strategic visions from outside the region (Russia, Western Europe and the

United States), challenges any grouping schema. My clustering links the ideological vision, to the geopolitical

code, contemporary geopolitical options and identities, and the main promoters and detractors of each vision.

Using this methodology, I have identified seven geopolitical visions, though it must be stressed that these are

not exclusive categories and like regional categories, they are not always internally consistent. Instead,

building a geopolitical code often requires the use and re-use of different and mutually-supportive visions. By

so doing, the policy-maker will bond multiple images of a place or history to try to generate support for a

policy position. Thus, NATO in its arguments in favor of the bombing of Yugoslavia in Spring 1999 linked

visions of World War II (ethnic cleansing), geopolitical divides (Europe and its institutions), politics

(democracy versus authoritarianism), and strategy (air campaign and minimal casualties) in building

widespread support in the member states for the campaign against the Milosovic regime.   Each of the seven

geopolitical visions (1. Mitteleuropa; 2. "occident kidnappé"; 3. Crush zone; 4. "Rejoining the West"; 5.

"Third Europe" distinct from Russia; 6. Geopolitical black hole and NATO expansion; and 7. "Chaotic

conception") are treated *seriatim.*

1. Mitteleuropa **:** Though the idea of a middle European zone has been around since Friedrich Schiller's thesis

in the eighteenth-century, its popular use dates from Naumann's 1917 book.   Since the inception of the

concept, its regional boundaries have been variable and highly personalized and the characteristics uncertain, though the dominant image has been that of the German-speaking world *sensu lato* (Schultz, 1989). Mitteleuropa has been consistently the most important geo-vision of Germans since 1870 (Dijkink, 1996) and for Ratzel (1898), the zone to the east of the Second Reich was a savage one and the eastern German/Russian boundary was "not a border between two states but between two worlds".

While German geopolitical strategists and politicians wanted to make a marriage between a geographic concept (neutral-sounding on its face) and the political character of the area, the mixed populations of the territories beyond the immediate German heartland made this impossible. The match of territory and geo-vision could only be achieved via territorial expansion beyond the borders defined by the Versailles agreements of 1919. In opposition to the German *Geopolitik*, French geopolitical writers referred separately to "*L'Europe centrale*" but pre-World War II writers, like Jacques Ancel, generally saw "*l'Europe centrale*" as more narrowly constricted to the lands between the Rhine to Oder and south to the Alps as well as Danubia. Generally they wanted a "pan-Slavic" alliance to keep the Germans at bay (Parker, 1994). However, the improbability of a Pan-Slavic alliance became evident in the mid-nineteenth century, as Russian support for the concept waxed and waned and the merits of close links to Slavic nations became controversial even within the Russian political establishment (O'Loughlin and Kolossov, 1999).

Since 1945, exile and ethnic cleansing of Germans from the east and the formation of nation-states based on a single ethnicity has significantly altered the character of the "*Deutschtum.*" However, the regional dominance of Germans and Germany cannot be conveniently wished away, defining the character of the region in a way that no other group or country does (Garton Ash, 1990). Monitoring and guiding the transition of central Europe as a benefactor and a promoter within the European Union, Germany has clearly reminded all of its central European credentials with the switch of the capital from Bonn to Berlin in 1999. As a magnet for emigrants and refugees from central Europe, as the largest trading and investment partner of the states in the region, as the major player in negotiations on conditions and terms of entry for European Union aspirants, and as the inheritor of the legacy of the century of German-centered war (1865-1945), the Federal Republic cannot escape its geography nor its history.

Geographers have cautioned about the controversial history and legacy of the term "Mitteleuropa" in the context of the recent "*Historikerstreit*" (historians' quarrel) in Germany. The expression "Mitteleuropa" became thoroughly discredited through its use by the Nazis, but in the 1980s, the term was again revived for use as a convenient metaphor for a region that transcended the east-west Iron Curtain divide. In the left-wing circles around Egon Bahr, the German social democrat, as well as amongst others promoting a Central European zone of neutrality, separate from the two blocs of the day (*Neutralität für Mitteleuropa*), it was the Germans and their language that acted as the vital conduit in Europe between East and West during the Cold War (Judt, 1990, 24). Garton Ash (1990, 1993) has stressed the consistent attempt by the West Germans in the Ostpolitik of the Cold War years to convince the East (Communist states) of their good intentions and that "war would never again emanate from German territory." Strongly in favor of stabilization and caught off-guard by the ground-up revolutions in the East of 1989, there is now a cultural-historical discovery of the concept of "Mitteleuropa" in Germany. The key question in the revival of the Mitteleuropa term after 1989, especially in the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, remains whether it implies a distancing from the East (Russia) as well as the West, or more from the East, or more from the West.   Domestically, the central question for Germany remains the issue of whether the country will remain firmly part of the Atlantic world through the European Union institutions or whether it will become more independent in foreign policy and pull the EU closer to the East, enhancing its bridging role between east and west.

2. Un occident kidnappé: Milan Kundera first published his "tragedy of central Europe" in <u>Le Débat</u> (1983) and later in the <u>New York Review of Books</u> (1984) from the perspective of the intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia and adjoining states, bemoaning the sense of loss and being cut-off from Western culture during the second Cold War. For him and others of these circles, the cultural links with Western Europe far outweighed in importance those offered by the political allies of the Warsaw Pact. Kundera decried the impending disappearance of Central Europe, the deleterious effect of Russian domination of the region, and Western ignorance of the vital significance of the central lands for the survival of Europe as a whole (Judt 1990, 31) The "Central Europe" geovision, initiated by Milan Kundera, was carried forward by Vaclav Havel, Czeslaw Milosz, Gyorgy Konrad and Mihaly Vojda, and is curious for its noticeable omission of Germany and the

German question in discussing the history and geography of the region (Garton Ash, 1990). Historically, it looks back to the Austro-Hungarian empire and forward to "post-Yalta." Russian commentators saw Kundera's article statement as a slap in the face to Russian culture and many regret the loss of the chance for a pan-Slavic cultural world explicit in a linking of the west Slavic world to the west European one. But this occidental turn was not generally reciprocated. "The disappearance of this part of Europe from the consciousness of the Western intelligentsia after 1945 represents an astonishing act of collective cultural amnesia" (Judt, 1990, 27). The only people who spoke consistently for the region were the emigrés in Europe and North America and they were usually anti-Soviet. Alarmist calls for cultural protection in the face of Soviet and Communist propaganda were common. "These cultures are on the eve of their disappearance...Does not Europe feel the amputation of a very part of its flesh? Because in the end, all these countries are in Europe, all these peoples belong to the European community" (Mircea Eliade, quoted in Judt, 1990, 33).

What was the world that Kundera and his colleagues saw disappearing. These commentators were working within a view of Central Europe that sees "Central Europe as a state of mind, an idea, a world view" (Judt, 1990, 46). Was it just an enthusiasm for the Austro-Hungarian world – the Vienna of Freud and Mahler or the Prague of Kafka? German was the *lingua franca* of the Enlightenment in Central Europe and the language of many of the universities. Franz Kafka, as a German-speaking Jew in Prague, epitomizes the "in-betweenness" of the Jewish community, caught between the traditional allegiance to German culture and (language) and the new assertiveness of the Slavic nation of Central Europe (Rupnik, 1990, 252). Though generally viewed in the time before World War II as a "*Deutschtum*" (German cultural area), the large region between the Baltic and Black seas can also be seen as a "*Judentum*" (Jewish cultural heartland). Especially in cities and towns, ranging all the way down to small settlements, Jews gave Mitteleuropa a distinctive character. Large Jewish populations were linked together culturally and religiously, as well as by trade and economics (Judt, 1990). The importance of Jewish culture in Central Europe as a link between regions and places that were divided by language, national identity and culture cannot be overstressed. "By the turn of the century, an "enlightened" Jewish bourgeoisie had replaced the Catholic aristocracy as the main force behind the

development of a universalistic, cosmopolitan Central European culture" (Hermann Broch, quoted in Rupnik, 1990, 253). However, for many of those professing the newly-emerging national identities, Jews became equated with capitalists and the class struggle became bound up with the racial-national strife, despite the fact that Jews, especially in the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian empire, were poor and uneducated (Mason, 1997; Oxaal, Pollak and Botz, 1987). Unfortunately, due to the slaughter of World War II and ethnic cleansing in its aftermath, the pluralist cultures of Central Europe, so lauded by Kundera, have been replaced by mono-cultures of various ethnically-based nation states (Applebaum, 1994).

3. Crush zone (Shatterbelt): No other region of the world has attracted the attention of political geographers and geopolitical writers as much as the zone between Germany and Russia. The great power alliance machinations of the late nineteenth-century generated and nurtured a growing interest of early geopolitical writers in the fate of the peoples of the creaking Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires (O'Loughlin and Kolossov, 1999). Both the German and British schools of geopolitics were actively examining cultural-political developments in the area and promoting special relationships and military initiatives for the respective great powers. It was James Fairgrieve (1915) that first introduced the term Heartland in his book on *Geography and World Power* and called attention to the "Crush Zone" of small states that had gradually come into existence between the Eurasian Heartland and the seapowers. He spoke of these states as "largely survivals from earlier time, when political and economic organizations were on a smaller scale..each (with) characteristics partly acquired in that earlier time and partly natural..(each) with sufficient individuality to withstand absorptions, but unable or unwilling to unite with others to form any larger whole" (Fairgrieve, 1941, 329-330). He viewed these states as buffers "precariously independent politically, and more surely dependent economically" (p. 330). His crush zone included "Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Poland, the Balkans. Iran, Afghanistan, Siam and Korea". The uniqueness of these states lay in their roles as possible centers from which the Heartland might be organized. In its modern version, the crush zone came to be known as shatterbelt, defined by Cohen (1963, 1982) as a large, strategically-located region that is occupied by a number of small conflicting states and caught between the conflicting interests of adjoining Great Powers. Cohen went on to apply the concept to regions outside

of Europe, considering the Middle East above all as the classic zone of competition for extra-territorial powers. But writing in the days of the Cold War, with its firm bifurcation of the continent, Cohen no longer considered the Fairgrieve/Mackinder formula of crush zone applicable to the region between Germany and the Soviet Union as it had been in the early days of the century. "Europe outside of Russia is divided into two parts: West and East. Central Europe is no more. It is a mere geographical expression that lacks geopolitical substance" (Cohen, 1963, 218). An open question remains whether the end of the Cold War has returned the region to the *status quo ante.*

Winston Churchill, referring to central Europe in 1920 and the division of the great empires into small nation-states, recognized a different world; "the war of the giants ended, the war of the pygmies begins" (quoted in Dijkink, 1996). The British historian, Hugh Seton-Watson, reflecting on the "*europäischer Bürgerkrieg*" of the first half of the twentieth-century called the region, the "Sick Heart of Europe." Mackinder (1919) above all wanted no unification of Central Europe because of its possible incorporation into the Heartland. "You must have a balance as between German and Slav, and true independence of each.…It is a vital necessity that there should be a tier of independent states between Germany and Russia." He called for seven small independent states based on the seven Middle Tier peoples (Poles, Bohemians, Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks) as constituting a buffer zone. Writing in the same vein, the American, Isaiah Bowman (1922, 294) wanted to take these states and extend Poland through Galicia and Rumania through Bukovina as a continuous belt from the Black Sea to the Baltic sea as a buffer against Bolshevism. The bitter Polish-Soviet war of 1919-20 had temporarily stopped Soviet expansion to the west and Lenin's vision of linking Russian and German workers, but Bowman believed that the Pi³sudski victory was only a temporary halt to the Bolshevik geopolitical aims for central Europe.   In World War II, each of these small states sought help from the external large powers against their smaller, weaker neighbors and in the end, the new boundaries fit the ethnically-cleansed areas.

4. "Rejoining the capitalist West. Before World War II, German trade with the east was very high and totally dominant in the external economic relations of countries like Hungary and Rumania (O'Loughlin and van der Wusten, 1990).   In this geo-economic rather than geo-political visioning of central Europe, we examine an

expectation that the region will again be prosperous as parts of it were in the pre-war period. The evidence for the effects of the post-Communist transition are mixed with privatization and other accoutrements of capitalism much more advanced in the Vizegrad states (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic); in early 1999, only these 4 countries had seen an increase in GDP at purchasing power parity ratios over the respective values for 1990 (Economis*t*, 6 November 1999, 22). With the exception of Slovakia, these three states plus Estonia and Slovenia are the recognized "fast-track applicants" for the European Union, probably within 10 years. Their interest in joining the geopolitical/military organization (NATO) is less than their interest in joining the one that most matters (EU); NATO is viewed by some as a kind of entry price for EU membership. Other EU aspirants (Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states) have had their prospects slowed by visceral Russian opposition to further NATO expansion. For now, limited EU growth will be confined to the few relatively-rich countries while NATO will focus on consolidation. Though theoretically "no one is disqualified by geography or history from joining the EU or NATO", in practical geopolitical terms further expansion will be cautious due to economic costs of absorption and geopolitical fears of upsetting careful regional balances.

Recent economic data on post-communist economic transition confirm the correlation between trends and policies: more Westernization in the form of foreign direct investment and trade growth is followed by better prospects of entry to the European institutions. Hungary has received by far the most amount of foreign investment since 1989, followed by the Czech Republic and Poland. Examining the trade data, a clear distinction is made within the former Communist states between the "safe bets" (the big 5 - Slovenia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and the rest, with Ukraine bringing up the bottom of the barrel as the least privatized and most vulnerable of the post-communist states west of Russia. (Table 1). While one interpretation of Table 1 is that Western trade with the East has expanded rapidly, in fact, its growing at the same pace as trade with the capitalist states. Germany has led in trade volume growth with the former Communist states but its rate of growth is matched by Austria. For Ukraine, trade is still two-thirds with the former Soviet Union and the ups-and-downs that are dramatic each year are the result of the

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Table 1: Trends in Exports and Imports for Selected Countries, 1990 – 1998*

German Exports to and Imports from E.Europe/Former Soviet Union

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Exports	28785	27506	22864	28723	33251	42964	47893	53444	58920
Imports	20856	24910	21808	24719	30974	41121	51545	43343	48711

Austrian Exports to and Imports from E.Europe/Former Soviet Union

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Exports	4312	4517	5129	4555	6129	8184	7053	10660	10421
Imports	3368	3547	3967	3076	4694	5929	6166	7378	7853

Ukrainian Exports to and Imports from Western Europe

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Exports	---	---	836	1129	995	1729	1717	2176	2253
Imports	---	---	1081	2053	1170	2078	3770	4523	3306

Ukrainian Exports to and Imports from the Former Soviet Union Countries

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Exports	---	---	---	4366	5998	9308	9519	8442	4574
Imports	---	---	---	8116	9005	13855	16550	18096	8201

* numbers are in millions of current U.S. dollars. Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics.

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recurrent hiccups in the Ukrainian economy, with trade to and from the West similarly affected. Though

evidence for a panregional clustering of trade on a global basis is still somewhat premature, recent analyses of

trade point to a more regionally-clustered pattern. In general, though, the panregional cores (European

Union, Japan and the U.S.) are cosmopolitan in their global connections, with smaller states in the panregions

becoming more integrated into the regional blocs (O'Loughlin and Anselin, 1996; Poon and Pandit, 1996).

Since it is well-known in the trade economics literature that distance is the most powerful predictor of trade

volumes, it is not surprising that the countries of central Europe are rejoining their historic trading partners to

the west, a trend that is expected to solidify and cement the economic relationship of the two parts of Europe.

5. *"Third Europe" in distinction to Russia:* Commentators during the Cold War, like Yves Lacoste, tried to overcome the simple division of a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain into east and west, and preferred to envision a region that was neither part of the German orbit nor part of the Soviet/Russian world. Lacoste used the term "*troisième ensemble géopolitique*" to describe the lands between the German core and the borders of the Soviet Union, not too dissimilar to what Walter Penck called "*Zwischeneuropa*". Michel Korinman also characterized the region between the Baltic and the Black Sea as "*l'europe mediane*", implicating Russia and western Europe as the marginal parts of the continent (Parker, 1994). Common to these views is an idea of a tripartite Europe, but one that includes Russia.

Russian re-assertions of its European credentials date most recently to the mid-1980s. Mikhail Gorbachev in *Perestroika* (1986) took issue with those, inside and outside the country, who viewed Russia as non-European and made the case for a "common European house". He drew on the influence of Western cultural notions like the Enlightenment to show Western (European) effects on Russia. Of course, as Hauner (1990) demonstrates, Gorbachev made the same statements about the commonality of Russian houses in South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia (in Vladivostok!). More importantly, he conveniently overlooked opposition within Russia to the western civilizational link and an alternative geopolitical perspective that placed Russia neither in the east or west, but in a geopolitical world of its own in Eurasia (O'Loughlin and Kolossov, 1999). It is useful to remember Charles de Gaulle's vision of a Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, without much attention to its internal divisions; the United States was regarded, in this geovision, as a kind of interloper (Judt, 1990, 37).

The break-up of the Soviet Union offered an opportunity to test geopolitical allegiances. With the possible exception of Belarus, political elites opted to distance themselves from Russia and the Russia-inspired Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Ukraine, by reason of its strategic location, size, cultural ties to Russia, and (at the time) nuclear weapons, became the focus of the geopolitical debate. As Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) concluded, the independence of Ukraine was the most significant event in the

post-Soviet chronicle since it marked the end of the Russian empire, the last great 19th empire. Without

Ukraine, Russia is less of a European state now that the bridge to the West, via Ukraine, is falling down.

Domestic political preferences, especially the re-election of President Leonid Kuchma in November 1999,

push Ukraine further and further to the west, reclaimimg Ukraine's credentials as a European country.

Further clarification of the place of Russia in the consciousness of elites and publics in

"*Zwischeneuropa*" is evident in the belief that Russia acts as the "constituting Other for the east European

populations (Neumann, 1997). The attempted distancing from Russia is most evident among nationalist

Ukrainians since their country sits astride a significant language, cultural and religious faultline, with ethnic

Russians constituting 22% of the population. Struggling with historical amnesia on the part of Europeans

(contrast the attention given to the Polish struggle for independence compared to the Ukrainian uprisings),

Ukraine wants to register itself in Western consciousness. Robert Conquest (1990), historian of Stalin's

atrocities, claims that the 7-10 million Ukrainians who died in the 1930s famines were ignored in the West

because Ukraine did not mentally register because it was viewed as a province of the Soviet Union.

Ukrainians were not seen as a people with a claim to nationhood and territory, in the same way as

contemporary Poles or Hungarians did. My conversation with a Ukrainian nationalist, Volodymir S. Biletskiy,

head of the Union of Ukrainian-speaking People, in Donetsk (the predominantly Russian city of eastern

Ukraine) in September 1996 showed the distancing in operation. He said that, despite all the tyranny of

proximity, Ukraine wanted the same relations with Russia that it had with Argentina and claimed that Russia

should be only as prominent in the Ukrainian geo-vision as Canada. He also locationally and geopolitically

placed Ukraine as a "central European state."

"Ukraine's path to Europe lies across Poland" in the words of D. Pavlychko, representative of the

Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine Commission of Foreign Affairs in 1992. In the mid 1990s, Ukraine

mooted the idea of a triangle of Poland, Czech Republic-Slovakia and Ukraine; Poland's government

immediately rejected this idea since Ukraine was at a different stage of post-communist transition, though the

other three countries have repeatedly stated their aim to cooperate with Ukraine. "Narodna Hazeta," a

Ukrainian paper in January 1993 in an article proclaiming "We are Europeans", quotes the French historian

Besancon favorably (from <u>Le Figaro</u>, 6 September 1991): "Historically, there were three Europes; the first, wealthy Europe stretches from Madrid to Vienna through London, Paris, Rome and Berlin. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there existed a second Europe - less brilliant, poorer, but nonetheless European - which included Poland, the Baltics, *Ukraine* (my emphasis), and Belarus. At times, Sweden and Hungary were part of this 'second Europe'. Muscovy comprises the third Europe - poorer still, remote and barbarian."

Not only do central Europeans position themselves with respect to Russia but Russians are also struggling to define their relations with Europe. The question has been evident in Russian debates for centuries: Is Russia European or Eurasian? Is Russia's destiny to be part of Europe or is it to play a separate role as the dominant Eurasian power? The Eurasian geovision posits that Russia is neither uniquely European or Asian but that it has a distinctive Eurasian identity of its own. This debate is tied to a central cleavage in Russian politics between the "westernizers" (Boris Yeltsin, Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais, etc) and the "orientalists" (Vladimir Zhirinovsky or Gennady Zyuganov) who advocate a specific Russian path. Eurasian doctrines started surfacing in the 19th century and after 1917, involved a rejection of communism too. The Eurasian world represents a self-contained geographical, economic, and ethnic whole distinguishable from both Europe and Asia proper. For the national-patriots, the agenda is clear; central control of a unitary Eurasian state by Moscow. For the moderates, the Eurasian option is an effective CIS as a kind of eastern EU (Brzezinski and Sullivan, 1997, 7).

6. Geopolitical black hole and NATO expansion: Since NATO announced its decision to incorporate the three central European states of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, the key issue then and now remains: will this momentous decision enhance and enlarge the democratic Europe that has been built in the half-century since World War II or will it draw a new scar-like line across the Continent, east of the old Iron Curtain, and hinder Russia's *rapprochment* with the West? (R.W. Apple, <u>New York Times</u>, 15 May 1997) In the geopolitical debate about NATO expansion, Madeline Albright and other NATO officials effectively reduced the issue to one of geography, that the three new entrees had met the criteria for membership in the Western security community, thereby belittling the significant geopolitical ramifications of the expansion (O'Loughlin, 1999).

The U.S. public, for example, was never asked to rephrase the Cold War question to "would you risk attack to New York to protect Bialystok?" NATO was careful to point to contradictions in Russian opposition to the expansion plan and highlighted the point that some (westernized elite) prominent Russians were not adamant in their opposition. NATO expansion had something for all of its various proponents. Some wanted defence in depth (more states east of core Europe), others wanted complementary military forces, other wanted the political message of NATO expansion to certain East European states to encourage the western model of development, others wanted NATO members to be able to extend mutual interests beyond alliance territory, others saw out-of-area capability as essential if NATO is to have a credible *raison d'etre,* others wanted to gain access to more military resources, and finally some just wanted to stick it to Russia (Peters, 1995).

The gloom scenario of a kind of a geopolitical black hole was most vividly painted by George Kennan. Harking back to his X article in Foreign Affairs (1947), Kennan warned of the traditional Russian fear of encirclement. NATO expansion "would be the most fateful error of American policy in the whole post-Cold War era….(It would) inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; have an adverse effect on Russian democracy, restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations and impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking" (quoted in R.W. Apple, New York Times, 15 May 1997).

Other issues helped to provoke further fears of a geopolitical black hole. Though NATO was at pains to stress the financial contributions of the new members to the costs of the integration of their armed forces, its clear refusal to set any limits to the possible further expansion to the east frightened both Russian commentators and opposition in the west, whilst encouraging pro-NATO forces in countries like Romania, Bulgaria and Estonia. The fear that NATO would get dragged into internal national disputes was confirmed by the bombing campaign in Yugoslavia in Spring 1999 and the introduction of NATO troops into Kosovo in June 1999, effectively turning it into a protectorate after the departure of federal Yugoslav forces. And though the final fall-out from the Kosovo war has not yet hit, it is clear that one consequence (temporarily, at least) is the suspension in the Russian Duma of any serious consideration of ratification of the START II

treaty or any further reduction in the stockpile of nuclear weapons. The geopolitical ramifications for central Europe, ridden with unresolved territorial issues, of NATO's new role as regional peace-maker will not be evident for at least a decade.

"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland" was Mackinder's famous 1919 aphorism. At the end of the century, it is fair to conclude that NATO controls eastern Europe, though the region remains split between those who are in (Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) and those who are not (Slovenia, Romania and the Baltics). The final divide is still unsettled and will remain so, if current NATO doctrine that allows further consideration of eastward expansion, holds sway. Most East Europeans want desperately to rebuild the bi-polar world of Europe and make a new Iron Curtain, only this time they will be west of it. The new Iron Curtain will be along either the Polish-Ukrainian/Belarusian border or along the Ukrainian-Russian border (if the Ukrainian nationalists prevail). Sir Halford J. Mackinder in speeches in the British Parliament anticipated such a protective zone. In his attempts to build a geopolitical arrangement that would prevent the region from becoming part of "Eurasia", he urged the formation of coherent spatial and ethnic units in South-East Europe that would be supported by the United Kingdom (Kearns, 1993).

For their part, the central Europeans watched a security vacuum develop in Bosnia in 1991-1993 and drew a clear lesson for themselves from that disaster. The Czech president,Vaclav Havel (quoted in Craig Whitney New York Times,16 May 1997): "I believe if it were'nt for NATO, three wars might have been fought between Greece and Turkey in the last decade". NATO is still the most tangible link between the U.S. and Europe and expansion of the organization keeps the U.S. more engaged in Europe and reduces the risk of American isolationism, as in the early years of the Bosnian civil war.

7. Chaotic conception: Eastern Europe as a useful concept no longer exists because the region has no longer a unifying feature, according to Timothy Garton Ash in a speech to Forum 2000, October 1997. In his view, the experience of the post-Communist transitions is now so different between countries that it is not possible to speak of similar societies. The reason why NATO is expanding to three states and no more and why the European Union considers only five fast-track applicants is because of this diversity of experience.   Slovakia

is a good example of a country that has decided to pursue its own path; it could easily have been part of the NATO expansion but essentially disqualified itself.

In the late 1980s, the concept of "central Europe" was developed by Garton Ash in contradistinction to Soviet Eastern Europe; now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, the need for a "self" and "othering" concept is no longer necessary. Rivalries and cleavages that predate the Communist era, such a division of central/Eastern Europe along Catholic and Orthodox lines, have become evident once the cloak of Communist control was removed. As the Economist (November 6, 1999, p. 21) noted, "the problem of how to define the continent's new geography testifies to the pluralism of the new order. History, religion, cultures, peoples; they all count again." There continues to be a questioning and modeling of different forms of capitalism in various countries and while the end result might be an extension of the emerging west European form of capitalism to the borders of Russia, the current crazy-quilt pattern of national policy differences and adaptations to the new economic and political freedoms does not yet allow a regional grouping that is particularly meaningful. The region between the Elbe and the Don is so caught up in its internal dynamism that anachronistic geopolitical conceptions have no wide application or meaning in trying to unravel the relations of the states of the area to the western powers or to Russia. This chaos represents a return at least to the days of the multi-national empires a century ago before the institutionalization of states as representative of some nations, but not others. Hopefully, it will not take a half-century of violence to render a geopolitical identity to Eastern Europe, if one is necessary and advisable, once again.

Conclusions

Central Europe is always at risk of being a product of someone else's imagination (Judt, 1990, 48). Unlike the large states to its east and west, the territory between the Baltic and Black seas is occupied by 20 states and (up to) 50 national groups. A major recent development has been the creation of pseudo-states as a compromise between the demands for full independence and repression of recently-mobilized groups. These pseudo-states have the trappings of statehood (flag, army, police, local control, government, etc) but lack international recognition. The examples of Transdniester, Kosovo, and the Serb Republic of Bosnia could

easily be replicated in other ethno-territorial disputes, as has already happened in Abkhazia (Georgia), Chechnya and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Much depends on the Russian support or opposition to the demands for separation (Kolossov and O'Loughlin, 1999).

The future of central Europe for a long time has rested on the beliefs and practices of outsiders and its fate has been in the hands of extra-regional great powers. Alexander Rutskoy, former vice-president of Russia, asserted in 1994 "it is apparent from looking at our country's geopolitical situation that Russia represents the only bridge between Asia and Europe. Whoever becomes the master of this space will become the master of the entire world. This is why Russia must continue to be a great power" (quoted in Brzezinski and Sullivan, 1997, 5). In contrast, the United States continues to tread on Russian security toes. In September 1997, the US organized joint military exercises including an airlift from the United States to Kazakhstan with airborne forces from Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Uzbekistan, as well as some from Turkey. The main goal of the exercise, in addition to showing U.S. military prowess and long-range capability, was to demonstrate to the Central Asian republics that the U.S. intends to be a player in the region and that the U.S. is not prepared to accept Russian pretensions of having a sphere of influence in the Muslim countries of Central Asia. These exercises and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia antagonized the Russians so much (as have recent exercises in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus with local powers, especially Ukraine and Georgia) that they have taken counter measures, like stepping up naval forces in the Baltic and conducting exercises in Kaliningrad oblast.

The Yugoslav bombing revealed differences between the allies over U.S. dominance of the campaign and tactics. In general, US unilateralism is leaving both allies and adversaries cold. "Never before in modern history has a country dominated the earth so totally as the United States does today.....The Americans are acting, in the absence of limits put to them by anybody or anything, as if they own a blank check in their 'McWorld'. Stregthened by the end of Communism and an economic boom, Washington seem to have abandoned its self-doubts from the Vietnam trauma. America is now the Schwarzenegger of international politics: showing off muscles, obtrusive, intimidating" (Der Speigel, quoted in S. Drozdiak, Washington Post Weekly, 24 November 1997, 15). But another view of U.S. hegemony is offered by Josef Joffe (of

Sûddeutsche Zeitung) in the same *Washington Post* article. "America's power comes from pull, not from push. American values are most closely in tune with the new *Zeitgeist.* It attracts the world's best and brightest, allowing them to rise to the top within one generation. And that makes for a universalist culture with universalist appeal". (See also Joffe, 1997).

The future of central Europe depends, as it has for over a century, above all on the relationship between Germany (now in the guise of the European Union) and Russia. Clamoring to join the European institutions (NATO and the EU) as a bulwark against future links with Russia as well as increasing prospects for a wealthier future, the central European states are working hard to stress their European credentials and hide their checkered and contested pasts. While countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic can stake their claim to "Europeanness" with impunity, countries farther east that share a long history of repression and imperial control, as well as a lack of democratic traditions and entrepreneurial skills, will find it much harder to win the support of the European Union member states. Central Europe, however defined, is splintering across many cleavages but the region remains central to the geovisions of external actors. What remains unclear is the nature of the region to which all, inside and outside central Europe, refer with abandon.

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