Geopolitics of naming: European identity from the ancient Greece to the post-Cold War

The purpose of this essay is firstly to analyze the historical evolution of naming Europe from a geopolitical point of view, considering Korhonen's theory of naming enmeshed in structures and relations of power. Secondly, the objective is to propose a new thought about the role of Central Europe in the post-Cold War period, trying to overcome the simplistic binary notion that leads the entire text, that is, the opposing vision of East and West as two parallel worlds destined to never meet each other. It is possible to consider this work also as a possible response to the question: "In which ways globalization has changed the East-West dichotomy?".

Index

Short Essay   **AISES YOUNG - WE CARE**
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

1. Introduction: naming Europe and Europeaness.

"If we look at the European boundaries from the European point of view, we might easily think of them as belts of concentric circles, where the level of *being European* gradually diminishes" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, XI); this pivotal notion shapes much of the *binary approach* on Europeaness, where the proximity to the West become synonym of civilization and progress. In other words, *spatial and temporal elements are woven together along a morphological boundary which should express gradual degradation and deepening levels of alieness moving further down to the East*. Taking into account this ideological and cultural mindset in conceptualising Europe (Melegh (2006) in his book speaks about the existence of a political and social slope between the two opposite side of Europe), "the name of Europe has been understood alternately as a nominalistic and essentialistic term, with periods of nominalistic changes in its meaning" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 5) with an outstanding constant semantic remodelling as the West has moved progressive towards the East; in fact, "in cartography, for example, the direction east can be transformed into *the East*, a mental region conveying specific ideological, cultural, and political connotations" (Harley 1992). Therefore, not only "the role of language, rhetoric, and naming is a critical but often overlooked factor in forming these spatial frameworks and communicating them with others" (Tuan 1991), *but rather the discourse of naming reflects the majority of the relations of power, legitimacy and knowledge which has leaded our European history*; as argued Hagen (2003, 491), "as with the politics of naming local places, the act of naming plays a basic but central role in politicizing space and places at a regional or even global scale", in addition, Neumann (1996, 2) saw the meaning of Europe substantially "as a speech act".

All this literature on the argument, exemplifies how the political evolution of Europe follows the lines of an *imagined geography of perception of places and people, structuring a complex set of cultural and political practises and ideas that constantly fly over the discrete territorial units*. This conception raises the first important question: How did Europe alter itself during the historical travel "into the imagined realm of the East" (Hagen 2003, 490)? For that reason, this essay, exploring some historical assumptions from the Ancient Greece until the post-Cold War, intends first to tempt to overcome the stagnant literature on naming Europe which sees it as mere evolution of a "centry-periphery formation" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 13) or as a simplistic reduction in dichotomous incommensurable narratives, and second, consequently, *to demonstrate how the geopolitical rhetoric in defining the middle space between Western and Eastern Europe promoted a political and ideological reordering of the idea of Europeaness*. Most analyze the relation with the

Short Essay AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

East just in forming an imagined and Western paternalistic geopolitical map in terms of *return to Europe*, instead, as we will see, I will conclude that after a "period of transition and realignment" (Hagen 2003, 489) the idea of *Central Europe* initially has facilitated the bridging movement from an identitarian region to another divided by the legacies of the Iron Curtain, secondly the revival of a new center not only has condensed the consequences of the collision between "Occidentalism and Orientalism" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 23), but also has promoted a modern redefinition of the East-West division, reacting to the original heading position of the West in naming Europe in thousands of years of history. In conclusion, for that reason the line of argument of Korhonen and Miklossy sometimes seems to me flawed and conservative, since it does not consider how the middle part of the continent is revising the political and economic meaning of Europe, that is to say, an ongoing inner double process of otherness and a possible return to a broad concept of Eurasia.

2. From the Hellenistic "cosmopolitanism" to the messianic role of the West.

The act of naming represents a common political strategy in allocating rhetoric and practices of international relations and so, canvassing the representation of Europe's imagine regional geography; moreover, the use of the term *imagined* does not mean suggesting that names have not real consequences on peoples' lives, rather, on the contrary, they frame whatever discussion of "military strategies, national identity, political economy, and diplomacy in Europe" (Hagen 2003, 492). I am going to demonstrate how *the original concept of Europe had been shifted from a broad debate about the Eurasia paradigm to a restrictive configuration of Europeaness, dominated by a silent Western policy of onomatology of Eastern dismissing, until the post-Cold War period.*

Bearing in mind this background, some have traced the original East-West borders of Europe back to ancient Greece, instead according to others, among which above all we have to include Jahn (1990), Wilson and Van Der Dussen (1995), Gress (1998), "the modern ideas of Europe and the West are largely products of the Enlightment view of the West as synonymous with civilization". However, I assume the two views as interrelated discourses: as starting point, in the antiquity the definition of Europe belongs to Herodotus who mentioned that the world had been divided by unknown persons in three parts: Europe, Asia and Africa, with the Nile and the River Phasis forming their boundaries; so, we can affirm that in Herodotus' geography Greece was the core of Europe and Europeaness. Then, we can surely map the first process of Western cultural discovery and political assimilation of the East during the major Hellenistic realm, as result of the reign of Alexander the Great, which was formed by the so-called *Diadoch kingdoms*; hence, *the Hellenistic civilization represented, through the fusion of the Ancient Greek with that of the Near*

Short Essay   AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

East, Middle East and Southwest Asia, the pioneer European conceptualisation of the progressive Eastern degradation and projection of the world and the primordial clash between Occidentalism and Orientalism narratives; the Greek empire was the first attempt that legitimized the Western enlightening mission in lifting Easterners from any sources of barbarism and primitiveness: *the project of Alexander the Great was the first pan-European program in exporting the Occidental culture and in hypothesizing the reality of a Graeco-Oriental neighbourhood*, connected by the famous *Silk routes*, through the creation of a ruling class by the intermarriage of Macedonian and Persian nobles and a uniform economic and cultural world stretching from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Indus River, held together by the absolute and centralized Greek authority. In few words, *the Hellenistic politics developed the concept of Europe as synonym of "cosmopolitanism"*.

The Hellenistic political utopia highlights how *the starting political thought about the definition of European boundaries was based on the cartographical revelation of the territorial connexion between what the ancestors conceived as real Europe and Asia*; we are talking about a real epistemological turmoil which opened a cultural identitarian crisis for the Westerners and gave rise to the possible definitions of *Eurasia*. "Characteristic of the situation was that the new Enlightenment narrative of progress spread from the West to the East, carrying the overtones of new colonial conquests" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 5), a new *age des lumieres* with the pedagogical objective to reject the Eastern indigenization and to establish a selective, racial and authoritarian expansion of the European landmass towards the East. Accordingly, if the Hellenistic culture reacted to the contact with the East trying to cast a common system of social onomatological heritage, albeit in an Eurocentric framework, we cannot say the same during the centuries from the sixteenth to the eighteenth: the invention of the East "can be seen as a strategy employed by Westerners to turn *time into space*" (Agnew 1998, 32), travelling from the West to the East was like going back in time; the Western Europe became modern, democratic, liberal and civilized, the opposite side, instead, symbol of backwardness, despotism and pre-modernity; therefore, maps drawn during this period tended to *provincialize* all the territories that politically and culturally did not share "the overwhelming progress, and the characterization centred on the maritime states bordering the Atlantic, especially Spain, the Netherlands, Britain and France" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, ibidem), specifically, the process of naming Europe was controlled by a Western *positivistic* argument. So, we can explain the exclusion of Turkey and Tartaria, in spite of the Ottoman "European" history, for the first, and the Orthodox community with a clear link with the Tsar's empire, for the second. Paradoxically, instead, the Habsburg and the "Balkan powder keg" were considered European with Polish and Swedish empires. Russia initially was

Short Essay   AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

conceived as intrinsically Asian with the river Dnepr adopted as defined boundary between the Christian and the Protestant world, in other words, everything that was on the East was considered implicitly pagan; the situation in part changed with the geographer Vasiliy Tatishchev and his new map which permitted to move Russian people in Europe, restoring ancient racist and civilizing discourses about the priority to possess Siberia "in the same way that Spain and Britain possessed most of America" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 6), remarking the agricultural power and progress of the country.

Later, "the name of Europe became deeply essentialized when a new narrative, that of human races, was added to it" (Miklossy and Korhonen 2010, 7): *Europe was transformed into an anthropological Caucasian microcosm*. The inventor of the Caucasian character of Europe was Friedrich Blumenbach: "All physiological grounds point to the fact that this should be the Fatherland of the first people" (Blumenbach 1798, 213). The biblical metanarrative of Blumenbach, who linked the European races to the white family of Noah, marked a significant change in naming the continent which was the main field for the subsequent anti-Semitic principles in the nineteenth century: *from a positivist idea to a xenophobic belief*, by way of explanation, this means that *the priority of defining Europe and establishing Eastern boundaries was reformed into the Western patronage and the messianic role in defending the authentic human kind*. Thus, the Caucasian character of Europe was preeminent in depicting the civilization borderline between East and West, and we can also say that it was the steady *ethnological* justification for the segregation of the Easterners.

3. The collapse of the civilization borderline: the rising of a new European "center".

"The rise of racial discourse and nationalism during the nineteenth century adopted this framework to identify the East as a Slavic realm" (Hagen 2003, 492). Anyhow, during the Inter-War period the civilization edge was essentially the result of the contamination between ethnological and ideological characters: the West receded to encompass only France and Britain as the last democratic bastions in Europe, placed under attack by the spreading of fascist and Soviet communism. This phenomenon of enduring democratic and capitalist characterization and politicization of the essence of Europe reached its apex with the Cold War, when the East-West division was remodelled to reflect the bipolar geography and the American geopolitical needs: not only the official borders of Europe were demarcated on the basis of what was decided with the Yalta Treaty, namely, until the frontiers of the Federal Republic of Germany, but rather, even thought Korhonen believes in a dramatic loss of political significance, the Western

Short Essay AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

part of Europe became the first weapon to fight the alleged Soviet expansionism (it was an American initiative to promote a deeper integration among the Western countries of Europe in the foremost framework of the North Atlantic Alliance with the aim to build a liberal stronghold) and to balance the system of power, giving a response to the strict and monopolistic Russian control on the East, and it is not a case if the end of this war was defined in Europe with the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Afterwards, "despite the end of the Cold War, this bipartite perception of Europe has remained embedded in geographical imaginations across the continent" (Hagen 2003, 493); so do we have to accept that after the period 1989-1991 we did not know any different form of political and onomatological evolution and that the only way to name Europe is through the Korhonen's binary notion? My answer is: *any changes in the geopolitical structure caused changes in the relationship between politics and territory whether on local or international scale*, and it is also true with the post-Cold War period marked by the American withdrawal and by a new project of European integration, that is to say, a new attempt to redefine the concept of European belonging. *My suggestion is to process the last years in terms of the revival of a middle Europe*.

Although the slope between East and West developed through a clear Western imagination, the concept of Europe was adopted, especially with the end of the contraposition between USA and URSS, by scholars and political leaders across the continent. The paramount moment for the elaboration of a Eastern developed image of Europe was the adoption of the Copenhagen criteria in 1993: a new redefinition of being Europeans through an Occidental architecture based on the open market economy with the purpose to exert a new Western magnetism on those people were subjected to the socialist exploitation with the promise of a new future of freedom and prospect to rewrite their political role in the continent. *In this respect, efforts to construct a central European space were specularly overtaken by more pressing efforts to join EU*. Significant tensions developed between plans to build separate political structures for Central Europe and the parallel project of the "return to Europe", a project that not only implied the passive assimilation of the Western governance, but above all a new perception of what could be defined as European values, history and traditions. One of the most important instance in these terms is the formation of the so-called *Visegrad group* comprising Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary; it represented "the most ambitious attempt to give the imagined Central Europe of the 1980s a definite framework for political and economic cooperation" (Hagen 2003, 504). A deep examination of the scheme provided by those states highlights important links between intentions to promote a new regional cooperation and attempts to shape a new central European identity. As noted by Rupnik (1987), naming Central Europe produced the most powerful rhetorical device to redraw the

Short Essay AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

Cold War map of the same Europe: Central Europe is "the part of Europe situated geographically in the center, culturally in the West and politically in the East" and "Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture and a fate, its borders are imaginary and must be drawn and redrawn with each new historical situation" (Kundera 1984, 33-34). In other words, it is hardly difficult to identify a clear geographical borderline, but after 1989-1990 it was an exceptional and profitable onomatology to establish a powerful imagined regional and political geography bridging the differences between East and West, so not as mere reflex of Western culture. In this regard, the transcendental Kundera's pattern found a fertile ground with Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel who inaugurated the first intense inter-governmental discussions in January 1990, underlining the search for a novel geopolitical European agenda: "we have a chance to transform Central Europe from a phenomenon that has been so far been historical and spiritual into a political phenomenon. We have the chance to take a string of European countries...and transform them into a definite special body, which could approach Western Europe not as a poor dissident or a helpless, searching, amnestied prisoner, but as someone who has something to offer" (Havel 1990).

The "return to Europe" had always been the implicit long term goal of the Visegrad Group, "the best chance of shortening the road and catching up with Western Europe" (the Visegrad Summit 1991), but effectively promoted two considerable consequences: 1. Demolition of the submissive political position on the basis of the schedule framed by the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, negotiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops, restructuring economic relationships, stimulating the dialogue with the West, 2. As we saw, after a continuing historical line of depreciation of the name of Europe following the descending Eastern slope, Central Europe offered a profound restructuring of the provincialization of Europe. With regard to this latter point, illuminating are the words of a Polish Foreign Minister, Krzysztof Skubiszewski (1990, 148): "our aim is European cooperation and European unity", then as argued Neumann (1999, 157) "the hard core of Europe will compose a bigger territory" and Geremek (1999, 116) said that the political and economic reforms in the 1990s "allowed many nations in our region to claim that we belong to a single European family"; in a more practical way, we have to read the subliminal message of these discourses, that is, pivotal is the idea that other Eastern or Balkan countries did not belong and would not be part of Europe's new hard core and that Central Europe could be a new political guide in reshaping the meaning of Europeaness or "more European than some great Western cultures" (Enyedi 1990, 143). As stated Hagen (2003, 507) "Central Europe, then, had a very distinct eastern boundary, but a rather blurry Western frontier", or otherwise, I prefer to claim how rather than expressing a step toward the total destruction of the East-West division, it is more reasonable to view the fluid nature of

Short Essay **AISES YOUNG - WE CARE**
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

the Western side of Central Europe as a transitional stage in naming a new East-West divide, as a combative attempt to overturn the spatial concept of Europe.

4. Conclusion: new "centers" and the return to a "cosmopolitan" idea of Europe?

In 1995 the region-building project of the Visegrad Group died. It happened because of many reasons:

-the difficult to transpose the theoretical plan into political realm,

-the broke up of Czechoslovakia,

-the establishing of a undemocratic regime of Meciar in Slovakia,

-new stable relations with Russia,

-the competitiveness among the same countries in highlighting their priorities,

-the lack of support from the West.

So, this explains why many authors are sceptical about the future viability of a separate idea of Central Europe, but I think it is another the aspect worthy of note: *the idea of Central Europe was a powerful political devise in helping Czechs, Hungarians and Poles to redefine themselves and in delineating a new perspective in naming Europe*. Let me know more clear in this sense. The Visegrad program was in a certain way the restoration of the French strategy, with the "Little Entente", to extend the democratic and European principles to the Eastern part of the continent, trying to contain the realization of the Nazi "vital space" through the creation of a Slavic *Mitteleuropa*. As a result, I am saying that was the same West to give the first impulse to the rediscovery of the European roots and, consequently, I am underlining how throughout this process *the geopolitics of naming continues to play a key and fundamental role in institutionalizing and maturing the idea of Europe in relation to the post-communist states, by challenging the established regional geography of Cold War Europe*. However, according to Hearst (2000), "Iron Curtain has fallen, but in many respects a new East-West division in Europe, a so called *lace curtain* to separate an enlarged EU from its new eastern neighbours, is already being carved through the heart of Europe". In simpler words, once that the last civilization borderline was shot down through the facilitate movement from one imagined geopolitical region, the East, to another, the

Short Essay AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

West, also the imagined progression towards the West is not anymore enmeshed in a binary discourse about respectively post-modernity or backwardness, Occidentalism or Orientalism, but especially the EU enlargement to the middle Europe is pointing out new forms of naming which underlines, as the same Korhonen suggests, a novel wide geopolitical conceptualisation of the continent, potentially opened to the assimilation of the previous weird and unknown southern and Eastern world, through the constant revival of new "centres" of Europe: for instance, some, like Painter (1999), Rupnik (1999) or Rose (2001), have sustained how the dominant line of discrimination today could possibly return to a "cosmopolitan" discourse about "differing levels of democratization as a key feature of a new divide", the economic stability and the respect of human rights; this is a new type of politicization of the region enough clear if we look to the ongoing political discussion about the possible Turkish accession or the debate about the European character of Greece in undermining the Eurozone sustainability, or again to the strategic functions of CSCE in monitoring the democratic status of Eastern Europe.

In conclusion, the collapse of the Western messianic argumentation is generating, not only as says Korhonen (2010, 18-19), questions about the real core or centre of Europe (see the Rumsfeld's redescription in "Old and New Europe"), but especially new slightly enlarged vision of EU and NATO, that could show a realistic resurgence of the Hellenistic idea of Eurasia: most Polish, Czech and Hungarian advocate a Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals "with themselves as the obvious candidates for membershisp" (Hagen 2003, 509) and leadership; in Rachman's words (2001, 8), we have to "imagine there is a river running through Europe, dividing east from west, we have to make sure we are on the right side of the river". Could it be a possible *neutral* line of European development against the renaissance of any Western avant-gardist restrictive theory (see Habermas' idea of Kerneuropa) and, following the main concerns of Korhonen, as a more powerful response to the supposed rising of American unilateralism?

Short Essay   AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

References

Agnew, J. (1998) *Geopolitics: Re-visioning world politics*. London: Routledge.

Blumenbach, J.F. (1798) *Uber die naturlichen Verschiedenheiten in Menschengeschlechte. Nach der dritten Ausgabe und den Erinnerungen des Verfassers ubersetztm und mit einigen Zusatzen und erlauternden Anmerkungen herausgegeben von Johann Gottfried Gruber, Doktor der Philosophie.* Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel.

Enyedi, G. (1990) *East-Central Europe: A European region*. Geoforum, No. 21, 141-143.

Geremek, B. (1999) *The transformation of Central Europe*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 24, No. 3, 115-120.

Gress, D. (1998) *From Plato to Nato: The idea of the West and its opponents*. New York: The Free Press.

Hagen, J. (2003) *Redrawing the imagined map of Europe: the rise and fall of the "center"*. Political Geography, No. 22, 489-517.

Harley, J. (1992) *Deconstructing the map*. In T. Barnes, & Duncan (Eds.), *Writing worlds: discourse text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (pp. 231-247). London: Routledge.

Havel, V. (1990) *President Vaclav Havel's speech to the Polish sejm and senate, January 12 1990*. East European Reporter, Vol. 4, No. 2, 55-57.

Hearst, D. (2000) *Lace curtain spoils Poland's view of EU Membership*. The Guardian (European Edition), November 29.

Jahn, E. (1990) *Wo befindset sich Osteuropa?* Osteuropa, Vol. 40, No. 5, 418-440.

Kundera, M. (1984) *The tragedy of Central Europe*. New York Review of Books, Vol. 31, No. 7, 33-38.

Melegh, A. (2006) *On the East-West slope.* Budapest: Central European University Press.

Miklossy, K. And Korhonen, P. (2010) *The East and the Idea of Europe*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Neumann, I. (1996) *Russia and the idea of Europe: A study in identity and international relations*. New York: Routledge.

Neumann, I. (1999) *Uses of the other: "The East" in European identity formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Painter, J. (1999) *New geographies of democracy in contemporary Europe*. In R. Hudson, & Williams (Eds.), *Divided Europe: Society and territory (pp. 107-131)*. London:Sage.

Rachman, G. (2001) *Joining the West*. The Economist, Vol. 359, No. 8222, 8-10.

Rose, R. (2001) *A diverging Europe*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 12, No. 1, 93-106.

Rupnik, J. (1987) *Borders of the mind*. The New Republic, No. 196, 17-19.

Rupnik, J. (1999) *The postcommunist divide*. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 10, No. 1, 57-62.

Short Essay   AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung

Skubiszewski, K. (1990) *Change versus stability in Europe: A polish view*. The World Today, Vol. 46, No. 8-9, 148-151.

The Visegrad Summit (1991) Radio Free Europe/Report on Eastern Europe, Vol. 2, No. 9, 28.

Tuan, Y. (1991) *Language and the making of place: A narrative-descriptive approach*. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 81, No. 4, 684-696.

Wilson, K. and Van der Dussen, J. (1995) *The history of the idea of Europe*. New York: Routledge.

Alessio Romito

Member Aises Young

14/06/2013

Short Essay   AISES YOUNG - WE CARE
www.academy-aises.eu/aises-young
Following us on Twitter @AisesYoung