

# Visegrad group Shared Identities

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# Identity

- Conceptualised in the process of continuous construction (contestation, negotiation etc)
- Both the outcome of social practices and prerequisite for them
- A product of both choices of actors and of social structures
- Encapsulated in boundaries and bonds

# Shared Identities

- Central Europe (legacy of Habsburg and “Zwischeneuropa”)
- Eastern Europe
- New Europe

# Central Europe

- *Mitteleuropa* between Russia and West (Friedrich Neumann 1915)
- *Stredni Evropa/Europa Srodkowa* (Tomas Masaryk, Milan Hodza, Jozef Pilsudski and their political followers)

# Central Europe

- Central Europe – united by democratic traditions, shared history and culture (Istvan Bibó, Jan Patočka, Oskar Halecki, journal *Kultura*)
- Central Europe – as cultural and political project in the 1970s and 1990s: Jenő Szucs, György Konrad, Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera and the democratic opposition

# Central Europe

- Central Europe as a postmodern landscape in the eyes of Western intellectuals ( eg. Claudio Magris "Donau" 1986)
- Visegrád Four 1991.

# **East European Identity – Boundaries and Borders**

- Physical and military border
- Political border
- Economic border
- Communication border

# Fernand Braudel

- Les événements
- Les conjonctures
- La longue durée



# **East European Identity – Boundaries and Borders**

- Religious border
- Civilisational border
- Mental border of mutual stereotypes

# Stereotypes

## **WEST**

- Prosperity
- Development
- Technological progress
- order

## **EAST**

- Poverty
- Stagnation
- backwardness
- disorder

# Stereotypes

## WEST

- Rule of law
- Work of ethics
- Belief in human dignity

## EAST

- Lawlessness
- Sloth
- Contempt for the individual

# **Bonds binding East Europeans**

- Commonality of geographical territory and its geopolitical consequences ( Center – Periphery relation)
- Commonality of past experiences and memories (late modernisation, specific process of nation building, double experience of war followed by long total rule)

It was a principal theatre of the genocide of European Jews, of systematic social and ethnic cleansing policies, the terrain of deployment of the greatest military machines, and of burnt earth; of forced population movements, of flight; and of a liberation that was to a great extent the replacement of one foreign occupation by another. There is no point in the map of this region, no family, no biography that is not marked by this double experience.

This is the central zone of the "century of extremes"

Karl Schlögel, 2009

"Places and Strata of Memory. Approaches to Eastern Europe", *Eurozine*, published on line 2008-12-19

# Bonds binding East Europeans

- **Behaviour patterns of "homo sovieticus"**
  - Moral relativism
  - Learned passivity, helplessness and the acceptance of state paternalism
  - Demand for egalitarian distribution as opposed to meritocratic justice
  - Blaming the system for personal failures and raising claims against the state as opposed to self-reliance
  - The emphasis on security as opposed to readiness for risk

# Behaviour patterns of "homo sovieticus"

- Passivism and escape to the private sphere as opposed to public participation (electoral absenteeism)
- Dwelling on the remembrances of the past instead of actively anticipating and constructing the future (pessimistic view of the future)
- Dogmatism and intolerance in thought as opposed to the recognition of pluralism and tolerance

# **New Europe or just Europe? New Dynamics**

- The New East?
- Asymmetry of interest, perception and memory
- The Dissolution of Eastern European Bonds?
- Western Europe or New Europe ?



# Some recommended books

- Barth, Fredrik 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, London.
- Braudel, Fernand. 1980, *On History*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.
- Chirot, Daniel (ed.). 1989. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Melegh Attila, 2006, *On the East-West Slope. Globalization, nationalism, racism and discourses on Central and Eastern Europe*, Budapest: CEU Press.

# Some recommended books

- Neuman, Iver 1999, *Uses of the Other. The East in European Identity Formation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Said, Edward 1978, *Orientalism* , New York: Vintage Books.
- Todorova Maria. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolff, Larry. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
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# Some recommended books

- Walicki, Andrzej. 1994. *Poland between East and West*. Cambridge-Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Törnquist Plewa, Barbara. 2002. “The Complex of an Unwanted Child: The Meanings of Europe in Polish Discourse”. In Mikael af Malmborg & Bo Stråth (eds), *The Meaning of Europe*. Oxford-New York: Berg.

Thanks !!!