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**Central Europe as an Imagined Region**

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## Introduction

In what sense we can speak about Central Europe belonging to European civilization? On the one hand, the very European civilization is to be defined only comparing with other civilizations contrasting to Non-Western civilizations. This contrast or even clash, according to Samuel Ph. Huntington, is a part of fight for its own identity. On the other hand, the spiritual fight between the different European regions helps to define not only these sub-regions, but also the very European region to be limited in its borders not only as a physical body, but much more as a spiritual one with certain *ethos* including historical memory, religious practice, political activity, and life-art. This spiritual whole constituting a certain “being towards death” (Martin Heidegger) is no way a constant with hard borders. On the contrary, it is a dynamic body to be compared with an organism, which both depends on his environment and identifies himself contrasting to it. Even defining a spiritual body as the configuration of its parts, which change every time changing the relationship between each other, we are having in mind also the body’s place in its environment. In this way time and place characterize every spiritual region that develops surrounded by other regions alive in this sense. Central Europe contacting with other civilizations is also a rim of European surrounding to be changed in Central Europe’s spiritual fight. Although we can speak about a certain inter-human *ethos* especially in moral terms<sup>1</sup> the role of a changeable environment has been played in paradoxical way by a part, i.e. by Europe’s sub-region, namely by Central Europe<sup>2</sup>. The treatise of the human world as an environment of European civilization is not only metaphysical, chauvinistic and dangerous, rephrasing Huntington, it does not correspond

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<sup>1</sup> According to Samuel Ph. Huntington, this inter-human moral environment is unchangeable (Huntington 1996).

<sup>2</sup> It does not mean that other European regions could not play this role. I shall just focus my attention to Central Europe that has been supposed as a central place in Europe’s becoming. The task of the article is to analyze namely this central place in different its senses, first of all not in the physical or geographical ones.

to our conception of dynamic interaction between the whole and a part of certain spiritual body<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore the clash of civilizations supposes not only the different cultural wholes that mobilize the political and social bodies in the different sides of civilizational border but also a vanguard region of the fight with other civilization. If we agree with Huntington's thesis that the core of civilization is religion, the very rim of European civilization (Lithuania-Poland) has been settled by the most faithful representatives of this civilization<sup>4</sup>. In this way we face a border region as a concentrate of certain civilization. Therefore I shall consider Central Europe as a centre of the civilizational fight in this article. On the other hand, the role of a representative is inseparable from responsibility regarding not only own region (as political and social part) but also the entire civilization (as cultural whole). In this way the fight of civilizations consists of ethical dimension, which contrary to moral one constitutes the different civilizational identities (differences). The difference between static moral and dynamic ethical regions helps to understand both the fight between different cultural wholes called civilizations and between different cultural lays inside a civilization. As result this second thesis to be developed in this article has to do not only with human action's ethical dimension, which has been always covered by changeable cultural horizon. We suppose this horizon as a utopian co-existential environment for our individual creation inseparable from ethical being in a civilized world. Civilization means in this sense the most common cultural whole that demands our responsibility by creating an existential project, which has been always developed in a certain horizon of *topos* to be created together (utopia).

In order to develop the mentioned theses first of all I shall analyze Central European identity both different and identical with European one, later – Central Europe as a

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<sup>3</sup> We face this contradiction in Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996). If we treat humanity only as a moral unchangeable whole in Kantian sense, it could not be defined as a spiritual alive body, influenced by its changeable parts.

<sup>4</sup> About 85 percents of Lithuanians and about 95 percents of Poles consider themselves as catholic even after a hard civilizational pressure of 200 years with a short break between the wars.

metaphorical region and a kind of Anti-Europe and finally – GDL as the centre of the fight for European civilization. This sequence allows analyzing both the notion of Central Europe to be imagined and European civilization as a tense whole of the different cultural regions in a spiritual fight with each other.

### **European values and Central European identity**

The Central European rim has been defined both as belonging to Europe and as being different. The very notion of Central Europe presupposes something essential both for Europe's becoming and European identity to be formed. We are speaking about Central Europe from geographical, political, cultural or even moral points of view<sup>5</sup>. What characteristics compose the European identity? According to Huntington, the main features of Western civilization are: 1) Catholicity, 2) Latin language, 3) separation of Church from the state, 4) dominance of the law, 5) social plurality, 6) the organs of representation, 7) individuality, 8) heritage of Antiquity (Huntington 1996). The Catholicity should be supplemented by Protestantism not only in order to be more exactly, but also because of Western religious development influenced by opposition from inside and outside while the very Catholicity has been changed<sup>6</sup>. This process by reflecting the dynamism of social and political body interconnects with the situation of social plurality and individuality to be developed in a liberal society. The liberalism as an aspiration of freedom is inseparable from responsibility for a certain society and its political region, i.e. ethical approach, which matures in the fight for a certain region (Central Europe) both in the clashes of the civilizations and in the becoming of the core (European or Western in a broad sense) civilization. On the other

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<sup>5</sup> Central European discourse covers the discussions of politicians, geographers, historians, economists, sociologists, and philosophers.

<sup>6</sup> At least two turns signified by Council of Trent (1545–1563) and Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) has occurred under the influence of the opposition both from inside (an aspiration to renew the Church) and outside (pressure of Protestantism). In the case of Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) we have another variety of Catholicity, namely the Uniated Church played very important role in the fight both for civilizational borders and for Central Europe's identity.

hand, liberalism is inseparable from its borders in the form of law (justice as human reality to be realized), of tradition (Golden Age to be remembered), as well of utopia (Promised Land to be reached). Therefore the all mentioned features constitute a cultural whole with the interconnected parts, the different configurations of which change the very civilization as an alive social and political body acting in an inter-civilizational space.

Huntington stresses the wholeness of these features. But, what stares in the face, is the fact that there is no Western philosophy between the mentioned features. We can miss here the word “Western” because philosophy as searching for wise, different from religious truth, is a special European thought’s construct have been developed together with European self-identification and have emerged only in the mature Western societies herewith becoming the cultural and political leaders of European civilization. However philosophy as love of wisdom to be found, i.e. as a kind of imagined utopia, which forms our art of life transfuses all mentioned features of European civilization. Philosophy being different from religion supposes the tension between believe and reason and the cultural creation in general. In the concrete it supposes the separation of Church from the state as a political way of coexistence inside a society of Western civilization.

As result I suggest a modification of the European civilization’s<sup>7</sup> features interconnected with each other: 1) Catholic, Protestant or Uniated Church, 2) philosophical alternative, 3) liberal aspirations, 4) democratic political way, 5) principle of justice, 6) historical memory reaching Antiquity. This list is both more general and more exact: the separation of Church from the state, social plurality and individuality have been supposed by liberal aspirations of European societies whereas the organs of representation have been supposed by democratic political way; philosophical alternative covers both the historical memory reaching the Antiquity (Athenian democracy), rational activity opposed to religious

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<sup>7</sup> Using the term European civilization instead of Western one I prefer the more regional perspective instead of global one. The article is exactly devoted to the analysis of a certain region, i.e. Central Europe as a part of European civilization to be identified in a spiritual war with other civilizations.

one and the arbitrary principles of justice herewith delivering the ideological utopias that correct the democratic approach.

There is remarkable that this whole of European principles consists of the oppositions, which fill the European life-world with spiritual tension that supposes a cultural variety both in historical and geographical sense. The tension between Catholicism and Protestantism had inspired a number of wars inside European civilization whereas United Church had been grounded in order to integrate orthodox “Lithuanians”<sup>8</sup> into society of GDL and herewith to expand the borders of European civilization. As mentioned, philosophy has always been an alternative to religion, sometimes drastic one after assuming the form of ideology. On the other hand, philosophy nourishes the liberal aspirations and the certain democratic ways of political life to be rational (just) one being evoked by historical memory. Democracy and liberalism constitutes one more opposition constituting both the many historical forms of democracy and the individual activities in European culture to be created. The spread of democracy assuming the form of *demos*’ power towards a creative individual is always dangerous for liberal initiatives directed to cultural renewing, i.e. utopia to be imagined. The set of mentioned principles covers one more hidden tension, namely between European cultural wholeness and spiritual region of Central Europe while both Europe and Central Europe are to be imagined in their mutual tension.

The question arises whether all these principles are to be considered as European values. In order to answer this question we need to define what value is. This is the most difficult curve of our considerations because of the fact that I shall not appeal neither to empirical (sociological questionings) nor to theoretical (axiological analysis) approach. On the one hand, I shall use the tools of cultural phenomenology developed in the book *Reality and Creation: Outline of a Phenomenology of Culture* (Kačerauskas 2008). In this sense

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<sup>8</sup> Since second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century these “Lithuanians” identified themselves as Belarusians and Ukrainians despite of their integration to GDL’s and European societies in religious sense. This divergence re-sounds the cultural variety of the former GDL’s society to be supposed as a model of European society in this article.

every value emerges by participating in the existential creation where intersect the individual region and the social one. On the other hand, our context of cultural regionalistics supposes a certain approach towards the content of value. In this sense a value emerges by setting a creative relationship between European civilization as a cultural whole and its regions as the factors or even actors of its identity. As result we are always speaking about the values having in mind the role of a region in becoming of civilizational identity. In other words, the value is a "forestalled openness" (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*) rephrasing Heidegger (Heidegger 1993: 310) or mini-utopia to be followed both in empirical plane and theoretical one. The values direct us by creating our existential project developed in a cultural (civilizational) environment, as well by researching the interconnections between a cultural region (e.c. Central Europe) and civilizational whole (e.c. Europe).

Back to the mentioned principles, which constitute the oppositions as we have seen. Could the values be in an opposition? This question is not only technical one, i.e. it concerns not only the intrinsic configuration of the mental components in a theoretical system. This question concerns as well the external relationship between regional (practical aspect) approach and global (theoretical aspect) one, i.e. between the different realities of our existential herewith cultural activities. If we remember Plato's harmony of beauty, justice and good it seems that there is no reservation in this closed system of values. On the other hand, our way to this divine harmony to be reached during nine lives is filled by mental dialectics and ethical curves. What concerns the mentioned principles, they do not coincide with the values but not because of some tension or even conflict between their. On the contrary, the spiritual tension could be considered as a hidden value covered all the principles. The similar we can say about philosophical approach that transfuses every consideration concerning the values. That is why I do consider neither spiritual tension nor philosophical approach as the values, which constitute a certain value-system. However the rest principles could be

considered as the values constituting the tense value-system and having been considered from philosophical point of view.

My major thesis is the following: *Central Europe is central being the centre of fight for European values including Western Christianity, liberalism, democracy, justice, and historical memory.* We can invert this thesis: Central Europe is an area of becoming and testing of European values. This role is possible because of the dynamic situation of life-world in the region. I shall focus my attention to a historical political body as a multicultural one in the centre of cultural fight between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. I mean GDL as multi-lingual and multi-religion region, which had been an area of “the clash of civilization” (Huntington) for five hundred years. On the one hand it was a rim of West European civilization to be tested and even improved. In this sense a political body being in very rim of a civilization is a pattern for becoming of a certain life-world. GDL had been the pattern of certain liberalism (*veto* right), parliamentarism (seims), democratism (election of the king), tolerance (equal rights for protestants, partly for orthodox believers and Jews), unionism (union with Poland, Church union), expansion of Western Christianity (mutation of Lithuanian Orthodox Church to Uniaten Church) historical memory reached Antiquity (myth of Palemonas as Lithuanian nation’s founder who purportedly came from Roman Empire). On the other hand, this historical Lithuanian society had matured in this life-world as the area of European ideas’ circulation<sup>9</sup>.

Every myth serves both the regional ideology and civilizational integration. According to Lithuanian origin’s myth, Palemonas together with 500 men came to Lithuania from Roman Empire escaping from tyranny and founded here a new society. This myth as an imagined historical picture first emerged in the chronicles of 15<sup>th</sup> century had mirrored the political reality after Lithuanian society’s entering Western civilization. On the other hand the

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<sup>9</sup> Until now GDL is a pattern of European culture for Belarusian people, who are searching for Belarusian identity which is different from the Russian one.

myth had supported the national ideology different from Sarmatian one after entering Lithuanian-Polish union. Therefore Palemonas' myth in a strange way had served both civilizational ties and a regional identity in prejudice of regionalism of higher level<sup>10</sup>. Palemonas' myth as certain seeing of nation's past had been as well a core of future's picture, i.e. of political utopia. This utopia has always been inseparable from both defense of Western life-world in the civilizational clash and resistance to certain regional assimilation. Imagined Palemonas' programme of freedom makes a border society responsible for both Western values and a regional identity. Moreover Palemonas fights in his way also against Western tyranny, i.e. against a betrayal of Western values in very West. The Palemonas' escape means both a renewing way of a civilization and the expansion of this civilization. Palemonas being a mythical hero of a nation's past is still fighting for nation's reborn, for utopia to be realized in every new life-world that includes social and political co-existence in exchangeable environment.

Despite the many intersections of different social environments<sup>11</sup> or political bodies we have to do with a certain regional quantum, the borders of which coincide with the borders of imagined national *topos*. If the GDL's noblemen identify their life-world with this *topos* to such a degree that they falsify their genealogical tree in behalf of a mythical hero, they inscribe themselves into historical space of Palemonas' socio-political fraternity. History always covers a mythical aspect not only being inseparable from mythical-hypothetical aspirations of scientific mind<sup>12</sup>, but also having an imaginable region inseparable of our future's memory. Nobility means namely the responsibility for the destiny of regional quantum called nation, which shares the same values with other nations of a civilization. Despite historical memory the national quantum keeps its borders despite the change of

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<sup>10</sup> According to Artūras Vasiliauskas, the Palemonas' myth is incompatible with Sarmatian ideology (Vasiliauskas 2001: 19), although sometimes they both have co-existed (Vasiliauskas 2001: 31) after certain changes in social and political life-world.

<sup>11</sup> I have analyzed it elsewhere (Kačerauskas 2008: 172-183).

<sup>12</sup> Comp. Paul Feyerabend (Feyerabend 1993) and Thomas S. Kuhn (Kuhn 1970).

language the nobility speaks. Moreover national quantum having integration's power becomes a factor of civilizational bordering. This is the case of "Lithuanian" project of Uniated Church, the covering of which serving the "Lithuanian" integration's intentions has signified the borders of Central Europe herewith European civilization until now<sup>13</sup>.

Values as "the regulative principles" (Immanuel Kant) are both real and imagined. They are real in having influence on life-world as well as our behaviour within it and they are imagined as the outcome of our dynamic creativeness. According to our thesis, Central Europe is imagined as the field of the fight for the mentioned ideas. The success of certain ideas is possible only after testing them in the middle of the fire of cultural fight. Identity of Central Europe, whose borders intersect different countries, corresponds not only to a certain cultural similarity, but also to this role of improvement of Western ideas under the extreme conditions.

### **Metaphorical region and anti-Europe**

On the one hand, Central Europe has been a region in pursuit for ages. On the other hand, this region was formed under the influence of different historical events and visions. As mentioned, the most influenced factor of Central Europe formatting was a different civilization and its expansion to this key region. The paradox is following: after temporal victory of other civilization this region used to lose the privilege to be called central or even Europe. Thus the region after losing the position of cultural fight used to lose his identity as Central Europe. This can we say both about Tsar's and Soviet area. The expansion of Soviet

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<sup>13</sup> According to Huntington (Huntington 1996), the Eastern border of Western civilization herewith of Central Europe coinciding with the Eastern borders of Estonia and Latvia crosses Belarus and Ukraine, i.e. signifies the former GDL's Eastern borders slightly retreated after 200 years long Russian assimilation. This line between Central Europe and Eastern Europe is also a break-line between different civilizations (Catholic and Orthodox one). According to Andrzej Sadowski, "we can clearly distinguish Central-Western and Central-Eastern Europe. The Central-Western consists of the countries and societies of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia and Slovenia. The societies and countries of Belarus Republic, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Greece belong to the Central-Eastern Europe" (Sadowski 2009: 90).

policy, i.e. power, buried Central Europe as such. In other words, the borders between Western and Eastern civilizations had been transferred to the West. Similar German *Reich* buried Central Europe after the expansion to the East. In addition to that, the very notion of Middle Europe (*Mittleuropa*) had become a legitimating of German expansion. Thus Central Europe is not geographical and even geopolitical notion, i.e. the subject of power expansion<sup>14</sup>. Instead of this, it is more moral obligation for people who fight for certain ideas to be embodied by testing them in the new, i.e. imagined life-world.

We can remember Milan Kundera, György Konrád and Czesław Miłosz discussing about Central Europe as future region to be created by responsible persons<sup>15</sup>. Central Europe as a future region to be remembered illustrates our thesis about future's memory. The very public discussion is a step to the idea of responsibility to be tested in the centre of fight for moral obligations. My following thesis is: *the very notion of Central Europe is inseparable from its moral content, i.e. imagined ideas to be obliged as maximas of life in a certain life-world*. In other words, living space in Central Europe is inseparable from creative aspirations of its free and responsible participants. The attempt to erase this region from both Western and Eastern sides obliges to follow this idea even more. In this way Central Europe instead of geographical region has become a metaphorical and imagined one to be followed by some nations. Therefore Central Europe could be considered also as a regional quantum with all spiritual (not only geographical) connotations. According to Gerard Delanty, the notion of Europe also emerges like an idea to be imagined and created by the leaders who have certain political aims (Delanty 2002).

If we understand politics as public *polis* for mutual discussions about the ideas to be realized in the future, political aims mean creative co-existence inseparable from moral obligations to other participant of life-world to be created. However, instead of Kant who

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<sup>14</sup> Geopolitical point of view presupposes Central Europe as more flexible to the expansion of USA power.

<sup>15</sup> Similar situation can be seen in contemporary Belarus, whose identity is inseparable from the responsibility of free men (women) belonging to Central Europe.

believed in eternal piece and trans-human values<sup>16</sup>, I prefer the opinion that moral ideas appear only in the spiritual fight, i.e. in the *polemios*, which is possible only in the public personal discussions. The Delanty's idea of indefinable notion of Europe has another aspect: Europe as public life-world has become too anonymous, i.e. without any borders<sup>17</sup> herewith losing any regional quantum. However, anonymity and responsibility are contradictory notions. Thus extended life-world without any borders stops to be *polis*, i.e. polemical environment for the new ideas to be realized. That is why united Europe needs other regional quanta including Central Europe and independent countries. My next thesis is: Central Europe serves the becoming of Europe's identity. And *vice versa*: the identity of Central Europe depends on contrary parts of imagined Europe.

The identity of Central Europe is based both on the contraposition to Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Thereby Central Europe is "anti-Europe" (Delanty). In this sense it is a factor of Europe's dynamism, which has been supported by the fight between different ideas of our life-world. *Central Europe is a subject of fight for the right to create its own life-world, i.e. for free co-existence that is inseparable from responsibility for own existential region.*

### **Instead of conclusion: GDL as the centre of the fight for European values**

The identity of every region is inseparable from the past to be imagined in the light of our future plans. The interest in GDL as historical region is actual at least for five European nations<sup>18</sup> that search in this historical-political body for their "imagined identities" (Anderson) in Europe. There is no accident that the studies of GDL have been increasing in the societies, which are searching for their place in the common European space and are creating their own

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<sup>16</sup> Instead of "human" Immanuel Kant had used the term "reasonable creature". We can ask if Kant's ethics is transcendental.

<sup>17</sup> Despite of a number of different associated members of European Union (EU), the question arises whether EU has the borders.

<sup>18</sup> Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia.

identity in this way<sup>19</sup>. On the one hand, GDL had been a part of Central Europe as a very specific region of the fight for European identity. On the other hand, GDL as multicultural but united society could be a pattern for EU in its fight for responsible co-existence. One can say that former Yugoslavia had been also a multicultural society until the war between its nations. On my opinion, this case does confirm instead of denying my thesis about regional quantum and their moral role in the becoming of European civilization. Firstly, Yugoslavian society could not integrate the European values on the base of a national quantum despite very closed languages. Secondly, Yugoslavian society has not been responsible for Central Europe's region whereas the borders of European civilization including Central Europe divided this society. And finally, the Eastern borders of former Yugoslavia did not become the fight area for European values. In other words, there was too little war, which did not cover fight for a certain utopia (myth) to be remembered in a socio-political fraternity. This all is not case of GDL, the eastern borders of which had embodied the forpost of Central Europe as a fight area for European values. However it was possible only after integration inside a national quantum, although the former "Lithuanians" had spoken in very different languages (baltic and slavic). Therefore the identity of EU is inseparable from the history of its moral fight for the borders of its political (public) body to be imagined in the light of common European future. In this way, the historical memory is the subject of imagination, which is a part of public activity as the creation of European identity. We can remember Adam Mickiewicz who reflected the GDL as reality to be recreated in the fight for own political body<sup>20</sup>. I would like to conclude with words of other honoured citizen of GDL Miłosz<sup>21</sup> who said in his speech of Nobel prize: we all are only the chains between past and future. Central Europe as an imagined region with its historical political bodies is a factor of European becoming.

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<sup>19</sup> Belarus and Ukraine.

<sup>20</sup> Poetical activity of Adam Mickiewicz turned to political one when he organized Polish legion.

<sup>21</sup> Czesław Miłosz considered himself as the last citizen of GDL.

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