

CENTRAL EUROPE AS AN IMAGINED REGION

Tomas Kačerauskas

Department of Philosophy and Political Theory,
Vilnius Gediminas Technical University,
Saulėtekio al. 11, LT-10223 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: tomas.kacerauskas@vgtu.lt

The article deals with the conception of Central Europe in the perspective of clash of civilizations. The author's 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. The minor theses are the following: 1) the very notion of Central Europe is inseparable from its moral content, i.e. from imagined values to be obliged as maximas of life in a certain life-world; 2) Central Europe serves as the becoming of Europe's identity and *vice versa*, the identity of Central Europe depends on contrary parts of imagined Europe. The author considers Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) as a historical rim of European civilization and the area for the becoming of Central Europe.

Keywords: Central Europe, European civilization, imagination, region, values.

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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 in comparison to other civilizations contrasting to non-Western civilizations. This contrast, or even clash according to Samuel Ph. Huntington, is a part of a fight for its own identity. On the other hand, the spiritual fight between 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 the body's place in its environment as well. 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 terms¹ 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 Europe². 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 to our conception of the dynamic interaction between the whole and a part of certain spiritual body³.

Therefore, the clash of civilizations supposes not only different cultural wholes that mobilize political and social bodies in 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 civilization⁴. In this way we face a border region as a concentrate of certain civilizations. 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 the 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 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 a result this second thesis to be developed in these 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 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.

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

² 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 its different senses, first of all not in the physical or geographical ones.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

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 view⁵. 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 (1996). The Catholicity should be supplemented by Protestantism not only in order to be more exact, but also because Western religious development influenced by opposition from inside and outside while the very Catholicity has been changed⁶. 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 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 as of utopia (Promised Land to be reached). Therefore, all mentioned features constitute a cultural whole with the interconnected parts, 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 has been developed together with European self-identification and has 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 belief 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.

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

⁶ At least two turns signified by Council of Trent (1545–1563) and Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) have 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 Uniate Church played very important role in the fight both for civilizational borders and for Central Europe's identity.

As result I suggest a modification of the European civilization's⁷ features interconnected with each other: 1) Catholic, Protestant or Uniate 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 one and the arbitrary principles of justice herewith delivering the ideological utopias that correct the democratic approach.

It 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 Uniate Church had been grounded to integrate orthodox "Lithuanians"⁸ 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 after assuming the form of ideology. On the other hand, philosophy nourishes liberal aspirations and certain democratic ways of political life to be rational (just) one being evoked by historical memory. Democracy and liberalism constitute one more opposition constituting both many historical forms of democracy and 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 the 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 the 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 every value emerges by participating in the existential creation where the individual and the social regions intersect. On the other hand, our context of cultural regionalistics supposes a certain approach towards the

⁷ Using the term *European civilization* instead of *Western* one I prefer a more regional perspective instead of a 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.

⁸ Since the second half of 19th century these "Lithuanians" identified themselves as Belarusians and Ukrainians despite of their integration to GDL's and European societies in religious sense. This divergence resounds the cultural variety of the former GDL's society to be supposed as a model of European society in this article.

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 a result we always speak 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 as by researching the interconnections between a cultural region (e.c. Central Europe) and civilizational whole (e.c. Europe).

Let us be 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) and global (theoretical aspect) approaches, 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 them. On the contrary, the spiritual tension could be considered as a hidden value that covered all the principles. Similarly we can talk about the 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 on 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 the very rim of a civilization is a pattern for the 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' circulation⁹.

Every myth serves both the regional ideology and civilizational integration. According to the myth of Lithuanian origin, 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 15th century and had mirrored the political reality after Lithuanian society's entering Western civilization. On the other hand, the myth had supported the national ideology different from Sarmatian after entering Lithuanian-Polish union. Therefore, Palemonas' myth in a strange way had served as both civilizational ties and a regional identity in prejudice of regionalism of higher level¹⁰. Palemonas' myth as certain seeing of nation's past had been as well a core of future 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 the 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 the 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 environments¹¹ 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 on 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 mind¹², but also having an imaginable region inseparable of our future's memory. Nobility means namely the responsibility for the destiny of regional quantum called the nation, which shares the same values with other nations of a civilization. Despite historical memory the national quantum keeps its borders in spite of the change of 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 Uniate Church, the

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ I have analyzed it elsewhere (Kačerauskas 2008: 172–183).

¹² Comp. Paul Feyerabend (Feyerabend 1993) and Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn 1970).

covering of which serving the “Lithuanian” integration’s intentions has signified the borders of Central Europe herewith European civilization until now¹³.

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 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 the following: after temporal victory of other civilizations 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 be said both about Tsar’s and Soviet area. The expansion of Soviet 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 (*Mitteleuropa*) had become a legitimating of German expansion. Thus, Central Europe is not geographical and even geopolitical notion, i.e. the subject of power expansion¹⁴. Instead of this, it is more a 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 persons¹⁵. 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

¹³ 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). 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).

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

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

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 believed in eternal piece and trans-human values¹⁶, 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 borders¹⁷ 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 conclusions: 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 nations¹⁸ 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

¹⁶ Instead of “human” Immanuel Kant had used the term “reasonable creature”. We can ask if Kant's ethics is transcendental.

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

¹⁸ Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia.

increasing in the societies, which are searching for their place in the common European space and are creating their own identity in this way¹⁹. 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. In 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 basis 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 the case of GDL, the eastern borders of which had embodied the outpost 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 body²⁰. I would like to conclude with the words of other honoured citizen of GDL Miłosz²¹ 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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¹⁹ Belarus and Ukraine.

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

²¹ Czesław Miłosz considered himself as the last citizen of GDL.

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VIDURIO EUROPA KAIP VAIZDIJAMAS REGIONAS

Tomas Kačerauskas

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Vidurio Europos samprata civilizacijų konflikto perspektyvoje. Didžioji autoriaus tezė: Vidurio Europa yra vidurio, būdama kovos dėl Europos vertybių, įskaitant Vakarų krikščionybę, liberalizmą, demokratiją, teisingumą ir istorinę atmintį, centras. Mažosios tezės: 1) pati Vidurio Europos sąvoka neatskiriama nuo moralinio turinio, t. y. nuo vaizdijamos vertybės, įpareigojančios kaip tam tikro gyvenamojo pasaulio gyvenimo maksima; 2) Vidurio Europa tarnauja Europos tapatėjimui ir, atvirkščiai, Vidurio Europos tapatumas priklauso nuo vaizdijamos Europos prieštaringų sandų. Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė nagrinėjama kaip Europos civilizacijos istorinis pakraštys ir Vidurio Europos tapsmo vieta.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Vidurio Europa, Europos civilizacija, vaizdijimas, regionas, vertybės.

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