Central and Eastern Europe: the Globalization Process, and Hybrid Threats, Viewed through Political and Legal Aspects

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Central and Eastern Europe have a special place in the new multipolar world order, shaped by the influence of the European Union, the United States of America, People's Republic of China, and the Russian Federation. To understand the European perspective in the rules-based international order, the geopolitical trajectory of the region and its status in international law should be discussed with regard to the whole scope of historical, political, economic, and ecological issues. The hybrid globalization process includes divisions and armed conflicts initiated for the sake of far-reaching global interests. Central and Eastern Europe today, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, is turned into a frontline of the conflict between the global East and West. Russian militarism, predictably dangerous and insidious, in propaganda presents its thrusts as a reaction to the militarization of the region by the NATO forces. The annexation of Crimea, military invasion into Eastern Ukraine, and arms race are examples of Russian imperialist policies. Robust strategy and meaningful transformations are needed to prepare Central and Eastern Europe for future challenges and threats in a contingent geopolitical environment.

Keywords: globalization, Central and Eastern Europe, sustainable development, multipolarity, hybrid war, terrorism

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Introduction

The concept of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was crystallized in political geography after the World War II when Winston Churchill identified “these Eastern States of Europe” as the lands behind the iron curtain (Wolff, 1994). Originally it described the European part of the Soviet Union and satellite countries on the continent. After the dissolution of the USSR, former Soviet republics and ex-members of the Warsaw Pact started democratic reforms in a rush to join the family of European nations (Taylor & Flint, 2000) and preserve their independence under the protection of EU and NATO.

This paper is aimed to research the historical and geopolitical trajectory of CEE, as well as the further role of Central and Eastern European nations in the sustainable development of Europe and contemporary multipolar world, led to future by the great powers, such as European Union, United States, China, and Russia.

Literature in the field suggests that CEE today is a likely contested region than a player at the international stage.

Describing the interwar power balance in the first half of 20th century, Snyder wrote that Berlin and Moscow were launched colonization of the region, exploiting “the Ukrainian breadbasket” and dividing Poland where Piłsudski attempted to prevent the colonization looking at the lands between Russia and Germany as independent political subjects whose history was linked to Poland, and whose leaders, especially in Ukraine and Belarus, should wish to reunite with a new version of the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (Snyder, 2012).

Applebaum claims that the term “Eastern Europe” is not a geographical term but an outdated political term that belongs to a particular historical period between 1945 and 1989. She proposes to avoid the term because it became negatively stereotyped and because Eastern Europe is no longer a single entity. Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states succeeded in radical reforms, leading to liberal democratic capitalism and EU membership. Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova became crony capitalist societies whose businessmen make money not through economic competition but a symbiotic relationship with corrupt state bureaucrats; in Belarus, despotism was re-established (Applebaum, 2013). It seems that, in her view, CEE countries should either become provinces of Western Europe or remain outside, in the Eastern neighborhood. On the contrary, Horbulin explains the Russian aggression revealed inefficiency and indecisiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which turned out to be unable to prevent and mitigate the risks for Europe in the Mediterranean and Eastern European regions (Horbulin, 2017).

Sakwa notes that the era of globalization is accompanied by deepening disjuncture and contradictions, and European leaders have no coherent response, apart from new “iron curtain” dividing the Atlantic community from Eurasia (Sakwa, 2016). There is a view that Ukraine is the country divided like cold-war Germany by the Berlin Wall, a battlefield between Russia and the West (Higgins, 2017).

Ștefan et al. argue that new members of the EU from CEE have a lower level of economic development compared to Western Europe and are more dependent on foreign capital, given their need to implement policies that contribute to sustainable, harmonious, and socially inclusive economic growth (Ștefan et al., 2019). This view leads to the conclusion that dependence on foreign capital is a strategic weakness of CEE countries, especially those with crony-capitalist economies, making them vulnerable to the influence of economic superpowers with their geopolitical agendas, like United States, China, and Russia.

So, researching CEE trajectory, we should understand which concept of CEE is the most reliable, as a contested borderland or as a geopolitical actor; what internal and external forces drive regional politics, and whether they bring sustainability or contingency into Europe; what kind of legal and political framework is needed to ensure peace and welfare for CEE nations.

Analysis and Discussion

The greatest paradox of geopolitical contingencies is that the main source of it lies in the attempts to build some hegemonic sort of the world order; for example, the nations started WWII in 1940 Berlin Pact wrote that their ultimate goal is the world peace, in which “all nations in the world be given each its own proper place.” Along with dangerous quarrels between the great powers, chaotic violence such as terrorism and international crime (sometimes used as an instrument of geopolitical manipulations), plus ecological emergencies like climate change and the recent pandemic of COVID-19 are factors destabilizing CEE and whole Europe.

The new coronavirus disease has come suddenly and unpredictably from China. The controversy around the origins of the pandemic, mutual allegations that the “Chinese virus” or “USA virus” is bioweapon are typical manifestations of our disturbing era of hybrid wars and conspiracy theories. Proper international investigation of these allegations by the experts of competent UN bodies is needed to find the truth. However, it well may be found that no facts but pure propaganda underlies such accusations. In recent years, after China started the Belt and Road infrastructural initiative in which CEE constitutes a significant cluster of foreign direct investment network (He & Cao, 2019), U.S. media called the initiative “expansionist” and increased criticism of geopolitical rival without any hesitation to denigrate China.

After the collapse of the USSR, China has confidently occupied the niche of the independent player in the world political arena. In contemporary realities, China’s role in global politics is strong and prominent. This can be explained by the powerful development of the Chinese economy, technological leadership, robust military doctrine, possession of the newest military weapons. Their military industry shows dynamic growth and multiplication of the branches of production of advanced battle systems.

China relies on its development exclusively on its own strength, competing with the main imperialist and hegemonic states of the world, namely Russia and the United States, at least in the assessment of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Chinese people have their own concept and ideology of the world order, and they are taking practical steps to secure their global leadership and influence, creating global mechanisms of economic, political, and military leverage. It works; for example, in 1997, the UK returned Hong Kong to China after 156 years of colonial rule. Chinese influence spreads through the proliferation of numerous ethnopolitical communities around the world. Chinatowns thrive in lots of cities, including the economic centers of Europe, the USA, and Russia.

Having more than three millennia of written history, China survived old divisions and created a remarkable culture of community life. The idea of order was a cornerstone of ancient Chinese political thought preserved for today in the popular philosophy of Confucianism. In the current political doctrine, China sees itself as the center of the existing world, considering other countries as “poor” both in the context of history and in modern realities. Communists claim that the doctrine of Atlanticism is outdated and hardly appropriate for Asian countries, especially because “the liberal hegemony” is based on contradictory and false individualistic values that ruin families and society. Strong governance, discipline, paternalism, traditional

family, and communist morality are firmly rooted in the minds of the overwhelming majority of Chinese people to be symbols of success in the 21st century.

Indeed, China managed to build a powerful economy, the first in the world ranking of GDP by purchasing power parity, and to invest a significant part of the wealth to the long-run projects almost everywhere in the world. Investing in strategic sectors of foreign economies, China protects its economy. China's economic assistance in Africa and Asia is a part of the global security strategy aimed for military dominance at the north of the Indian Ocean and over key trade routes of East and West, like in ancient times the Great Wall of China was built to protect the Silk Road. The Islamic world, as a traditional trade partner, accepts Chinese protection and demonstrated its loyalty many times, including silent disapproval of the scandal at the West concerning the detention of Uighur Muslims in the communist re-education camps.

China maintains intensive trade, with the USA being its biggest foreign creditor. Therefore it avoids direct conflict with the United States but helps Moscow to oppose Washington to contain Atlanticist efforts aimed to achieve military domination in the world. One of the results of the policy is the indifferent reaction of Beijing to Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. China abstained from voting for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 "Territorial integrity of Ukraine" and took no steps to support Ukraine contrary to security assurances given in 1994 when Ukraine became a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Similar security assurances were given to Ukraine in Budapest Memorandum by U.S., UK, and Russia; the last after its military aggression against Ukraine tried to blame the United States for an alleged coup in Kyiv. War in Ukraine exposed the vulnerability of CEE and a whole system of international relations where the major players can breach their obligations and oppress neighbors remaining almost unpunished; only economic sanctions were imposed on Russia by European Union and the United States, but not compelled Moscow to withdraw its troops from Donbas and Crimea.

Ukrainian nuclear capacity in the 20th century was the third in the top of world rankings. Still, our peace-loving nation voluntarily decided to renunciate of nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees of Budapest Memorandum. However, one of the signatories to the memorandum launched aggression against Ukraine and other signatories in times of need demonstrated reluctance to support Ukrainian defense from Russian aggression, started in 2014 when president Putin was formally permitted by the Federation Council to conduct military operations in Ukraine. Former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, John Herbst, said, "the Budapest memorandum did not guarantee Ukraine security." Strobe Talbott, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of the State, who pled the negotiations on the memorandum, later explained that the document does not mean the U.S. is willing to come to the defense of Ukraine if it is attacked militarily (Atlantic Council, 2017).

Not only Ukraine targeted by direct military aggression, but CEE and the whole world now became the battlefield of Russian-incited hybrid war, including economic warfare, propaganda efforts, and secret operations. Kremlin openly intends to oppose NATO presence in CEE, including American troops in Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states; in the Russian view, it violates security assurances against NATO expansion to the East given in 1990-1991 to Soviet leaders (Savranskaya & Blanton, 2017). In the eyes of Russian leaders, such vague reason can excuse annexation of Crimea and deployment of a powerful military contingent, unleashing war in Eastern Ukraine. The global community, however, remained almost unanswered

the challenge to international legal norms, historical and cultural traditions of Europe, and universal human values.

Imperialist ambitions of Russia and intentions to claim dominance over the post-soviet region led to six-year hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, bloodshed killed more than 14 000 victims and turned to seek sanctuary near two millions of refugees. Russian aggression in Ukraine is not a genuinely unique situation but a continuation of the chain of tragic events in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia. Frozen military conflicts of a destabilizing nature in Donbas and Transnistria undermine the security of CEE. World turmoil is caused by legal nihilism and unilateralism of undemocratic leadership. It is a dangerous tangle of global problems, which require effective international legal and political solutions.

Unfortunately, international legal bodies have not given a clear answer to complex vital problems and questions, for example, concerning safeguards against abuse of the right to self-defense and limits of the breach of national sovereignty under the performance of doctrine of humanitarian intervention, that Russia deceptively claimed when invaded Ukraine. United Nations works properly when the great powers are interested in it; in other cases, like in frozen armed conflicts in CEE, it relegated to the role of the passive observer.

Neither UN Charter nor UN GA Resolution 68/262 mentioned before aren't prevented Russia from aggression against Ukraine. Another example of the weakness of international law in regard to maintaining peace in CEE was almost neglected Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) on the situation relating to Kosovo. The Yugoslav Wars was a difficult test for Europe's democracy and unity. For the first time since its inception in 1949, NATO resorted to the mass bombardment of European cities. The legitimacy of the military operation was highly disputable; the issue deepened division in the international community and provoked further violent hostilities. The Balkans is a strategic interconnection of routes from Europe to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, many geopolitical interests are intertwined there, and it is important to maintain balance.

Tragic events at the Balkans in 1999 created a precedent on a global scale, threatening the existence of the United Nations, a global organization designed to achieve universal peace, security, and friendly cooperation among all nations on the base of respect to international law and human rights. The world saw relentless killings and destruction, blood, tears, spreading of fear, and the dark side of globalization. It provoked a kind of chain reaction, a rise of cruel policies, authoritarian regimes, and international crime, the greatest of which is terrorism, horribly demonstrated its inhuman nature by killing near three thousand people during September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Center in New York.

It became quite clear that everything in the world is interconnected; one injustice causes another. When hegemonic ambitions of the great powers undermine peace and unity of peoples, it brings no good to anybody, including modern imperialists. And yet, instead of geopolitical modesty, we observe new attempts to oppress the world, arrogant claims of military, economic, and political superiority. Motion pictures and mass media cultivate a vision of the world where killings and aggression are a usual part of everyday life. The new generation of politicians has grown up with ambitions of domination, in the absence of perception of universal human values and culture of peace. They inflate arms race, ready to use new dangerous types of weapons to win the war at any cost.

The forceful imposition of imperialist agendas in CEE under deceptive slogans of "compulsion to peace," "protection of the Russian world," "re-education," "prevention of humanitarian catastrophe" contradicts the very foundations of the rules-based international

order. It is a slippery slope, a path into the abyss that leads to the global catastrophe. Someone calls it the new world order, but it rather seems like moral corruption causing total chaos.

Sustainable development of CEE nations is unthinkable in the case if the region remains contested borderland of the great competing powers, Jurassic park of crony capitalism, and snake nest of terrorists and other organized crime. No nation in the region is strong enough to prevent negative tendencies unilaterally. Instead of surrendering one by one to the humiliating role of buffer states, CEE countries should take effective collective measures as UN Charter suggests. There are historical and cultural preconditions for regional cooperation since the vast majority of Eastern Europeans are Slavic in their linguistic and ethnic origin.

The term “Central and Eastern Europe” has not only political dimension, but historical, cultural, geographical, and logistical meaning. Indeed, CEE’s position in the center of Europe and between the seas is uniquely placed on the crossroads of the global East and West, as well as the global South and North. The political unity of the region was forged from the Early Middle Ages, in particular by the statesmen of the Kyivan Rus and Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, and cultural cohesion emerged in the late 18th century during the Enlightenment. The Jagiellonian idea of the multinational geopolitical alliance in CEE is popular in contemporary Poland; it was supported by Presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Lech Kaczyński, Ambassador Jan Piekło, prominent historian Oskar Halecki, and others (Boichenko, 2020).

There is a puzzle of European integration of CEE, namely, can the region fairly become European remaining also Eastern. On the other hand, there are no clear boundaries between the Western, Central, and Eastern nations of Europe, rather there are symbolic differences. With regard to Ukraine, it considered Eastern European country, but Western Ukraine geographically belongs to Central Europe; this includes Transcarpathia, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, Chernivtsi. In the texts of Western European intellectuals and travelers of the Enlightenment, politically and ethnically diverse CEE was described as a large, neglected region, sandwiched between Europe and Asia, civilization and barbarism. Renouncing communist utopia of the Soviet Union and launching democratic nation-building, CEE chose European civilization, but this choice, for now, have a little chance to be realized.

Regional cooperation in CEE is especially relevant because it can resolve the puzzle of European integration. For example, Polish diplomats promote aspirations of Ukraine to join the EU and economic partnership between Belarus and EU, but Western Europe reacts coldly to this advocacy; as explained Jakub Wolski, it is due to lack of geographical proximity and close historical relations (Bergedorf Round Table, 2005). Collective efforts can help CEE to gain the trust of Western Europe.

Conclusion

The notion of CEE as a battlefield of superpowers struggling for military and economic domination is related to various policies: Russian Pan-Slavism, Eurasianism, and energetic hegemony; Chinese Belt and Road initiative; and the Atlanticism, promoted by the United States. Europe is targeted by hegemonic ambitions from outside, and torn apart by the internal struggle for power and non-systemic sources of contingency like terrorism and international crime. International law, world economy, military alliances, and current institutions of the rules-based global order are not suitable enough and must be reformed to deal with the new challenges like hybrid wars, global pandemics, and chaotic violence.

The geopolitical trajectory of CEE in historical perspective shows the movement of different nations towards cultural and political cohesion, for the progress of European civilization. However, further motion through the trajectory is slowed down by the great powers imposing their own political and economic interests, very far from the care about sustainable development of Europe and the whole world.

The vision of CEE as a buffer zone between Russia and the EU underestimates the strategic potential of the Central and Eastern European nations. So, all the people of CEE should take democratic control over their own destiny and claim the right place at the international stage. It is a hard task, especially during Russian aggression against Ukraine, but there is no alternative to our European choice.

Building a sustainable system of international relations in CEE, we should avoid the recurrence of past controversies and contradictions, commemorating common historical evolution, jointly confronting hybrid challenges and threats of today. Economic cooperation is especially needed to strengthen regional well-being and fix the greatest vulnerability of CEE nations before foreign influence on corrupted elites, economic warfare like Russian energy hegemony, and temptation to surrender sovereignty in exchange for financial assistance of economic superpowers.

CEE needs new architecture of partnership in economic, political, and military spheres on the basis of European values, commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and welfare of the people. Also, we should pursue strengthening of the UN system and the International Criminal Court to make international law completely enforceable, prevent aggressive wars of hybrid nature, and ensure accountability of perpetrators, committed crime of aggression.

International cooperation and call for the fairness of rules-based international order will secure the geopolitical status of Central and Eastern Europe as a key player at the international stage with independent voice in EU and NATO, capable of contributing to global sustainable development, building peace and prosperity on the Earth.

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