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A Conceptual History



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Chapter 9

Eastern Europe

Frithjof Benjamin Schenk



Where is “Eastern Europe”?

Locating Eastern Europe on contemporary mental maps of the continent is a difficult endeavor. First, we have to face the problem that the terms “Osteuropa,” “Eastern Europe,” “L’Europe orientale/l’Europe de l’Est,” “vostochnaia Evropa,” “Europa wschodnia,” etc., have different meanings and are not equally embedded in the various European languages. While we can find, for example, a lengthy entry on “Osteuropa” in the most recent online edition of the German *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* (2015), there is none on “Eastern Europe” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* online (2015). “According to general *geographical* usage [my emphasis],” we learn from the German *Brockhaus*, “Osteuropa” comprises the “countries of the Eastern part of Europe, i.e., Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the European part of Russia.” In the meantime, the encyclopedia emphasizes that the German term “Osteuropa” denotes in *popular* usage “all areas located eastwards of the (historical) German language border without regional and ethnical differentiation.” According to the United Nations Statistics Division, “Eastern Europe” encompasses the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (“Composition of ... groupings” 2015). In contrast to this definition, the *World Factbook* (2015) of the CIA treats the Russian Federation as a part of Central Asia, whereas Ukraine and Belarus are regarded as parts of Europe.

This short list, which could easily be prolonged, illustrates the extent to which mental maps depend both on geographical points of view and on competing regional concepts in different scholarly and political discourses. Even within one field of regional studies, such as, for example, “Eastern European

history,” one barely finds a consensus on where to draw the geographical boundaries of one’s own field of expertise. Whereas historians in the English-speaking world who study Eastern Europe are usually experts of the history of Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia, their German colleagues treat this part of the world mostly as belonging to East Central Europe (*Ostmitteleuropa*). Russia and the Soviet Union (sometimes the whole cultural sphere of Eastern Slavs and Orthodoxy) are regarded here as “proper Eastern Europe” (*Osteuropa im engeren Sinne*) (Zernack 1977; Kappeler 2001).

Contrary to most other concepts of European mesoregions, “Eastern Europe” has always been almost exclusively a term denoting an “other” and “foreign” geographical, political, and cultural space. This sphere is located “eastwards” of one’s “own” territory and often charged with ambivalent or negative attributes and stereotypes. Whereas in the contemporary German language “Osteuropa” usually denotes a political and cultural territory stretching eastwards from the border of the rivers Oder and Neisse and the Bohemian mountains, people in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary mostly claim to be inhabitants of Central, not Eastern, Europe. In Ukraine and Belarus, many people conceive of themselves as living not in Eastern Europe but *between* Western and Eastern Europe (Maxwell 2011). Further in “the East,” in Russia, philosophers and historians have for centuries been debating their country’s relationship with “the West” (*zapad*) (Danilevskii 1920). But Russia has never been conceptualized in these disputes about the national “self” as part of Eastern Europe (Neumann 1996). The Russian term *vostok* (East) has always been a signifier of “the Orient” (*Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* 1971). Thus their own country has been conceptualized on Russian mental maps since the nineteenth century variously as its own cultural space (for example in debates on the relationship of “Russia and Europe,” or in Eurasian ideology; see chapter 10 in this volume) as an integral part of the orthodox or Slavic world (Slavophiles) and as the embodiment of “progress” in global history (the Soviet Union as part of the Socialist world) (Thum 2003; Faraldo et al. 2008). “Eastern Europe” is apparently the only mesoregion on the mental maps of Europe without any significant potential or appeal as a concept of collective self-identification (see Orlinski 2006).

The Genesis of the Concept

The idea to divide Europe into a Western and an Eastern hemisphere is a rather recent historical phenomenon. The traditional model that separated the continent into a civilized “South” and a barbarian “North” lost its predominance only at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries (Lemberg 1985). Until the dawn of the nineteenth century, British,

French, and German textbooks of political and physical geography, for example, presented Russia predominantly as a “Northern” (not as an Eastern European) country. Tsarist Russia “migrated” at the beginning of the nineteenth century on the mental maps of Europe from the “North” to the “East” of the continent. This cognitive dislocation reflected both a terminological shift and a “transformation of the political and ideological world view in large parts of Europe” (Lemberg 1985, 90). At the same time, the new geographical discourse on an East-West dichotomy in Europe was partly compatible with the traditional division of Christianity into “Western” (Catholic and Protestant) and “Oriental/Eastern” (Orthodox) churches (*ecclesiae occidentalis/orientalis*). The imagined legacy of the schism of 1054 has been stressed again and again in the discourse on Eastern Europe since the nineteenth century, most prominently in Russian religious philosophy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in Western debates on the traditions of Europe’s bipartite division during the Cold War, and most recently in Samuel Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996).

The term “Eastern Europe” (*östlicher Teil Europas*) was apparently used for the first time at the beginning of the eighteenth century in geographical literature (see chapter 12 in this volume). In 1730 it appears in the title of a book written by the Swedish officer Philip Johan von Strahlenberg (Tabbert), who, as a Russian prisoner of war, accompanied the German scholar Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt during his scientific expedition to Siberia in 1720–1727. Von Strahlenberg (1730) published his detailed travel report in Stockholm, labeling Siberia “das nord- und ostliche [*sic*] Teil von Europa und Asia.” Since von Strahlenberg’s book was also well received in the Russian academic world, the term “Eastern Europe” (*vostochnaia Evropa*) can also be found in Russian sources from the 1750s on (Miller 1750, 11). Apparently one of the first geographers to propose a division of Europe into a Northern (*Europe septentrionale*), a Southern (*Europe meridionale*), a Western, and an Eastern part (*Europe orientale*) was the French scholar Joseph Vaissette. In his *Géographie historique, ecclésiastique, et civile* (1755), the Benedictine monk suggested subsuming Poland, Great Russia, and the European parts of the Ottoman Empire (“Turquie d’Europe”) under the label “Europe orientale” (Vaissette 1755, 2ff., 106ff.). But the majority of Western scholars kept adhering to the traditional way of partitioning Europe into three mesoregions (“Nord,” “Midi,” “Milieu”) until the beginning of the nineteenth century (Adamovsky 2005, 599–600).

After the Congress of Vienna, French, Italian, and German geographers almost simultaneously tried to adopt their textbooks to the new political order of the continent. Both well-known scholars, such as the Danish-French geographer Conrad Malte-Brun or the Italian Adriano Balbi, and lesser-known fig-

ures, such as the German Johann Günther Friedrich Cannabich, contributed with their works to the regional subdivision of Europe. Cannabich (1817), for instance, suggested partitioning Europe into a Western and an Eastern hemisphere. Whereas Cannabich described Eastern Europe as a rather opaque mesoregion with vague boundaries, Malte-Brun suggested a clear-cut division of Europe into five mesoregions taking into account the new *political* borders of the continent. The founding father of modern geography in France suggested in his *Géographie universelle ancienne et moderne* (1816) a concept of Eastern Europe (*Europe orientale*) comprising exclusively the countries of Russia and Poland (Malte-Brun and Mentelle 1816, xxix–xxx). Later he sketched a slightly different Eastern Europe, subdivided into a “partie boréale et partie centrale” (European Russia, Poland, Republic of Cracow) and a “partie australe” (European part of the Ottoman Empire, Greece, Ionian Islands) (Malte-Brun 1830, 468–69).

Another important geographer contributing to the scholarly discourses on regional subdivision of Europe was Adriano Balbi. As early as 1817, he suggested substituting the traditional tripartite model with a bipolar one, differentiating between an “Occidental Europe” and a single “Oriental Europe” (Adamovsky 2005, 600). The publication of his *Abrégé de Géographie* (1833) made his new idea of subdividing Europe available to a broader international readership. He suggested a border dividing “Western” and “Eastern Europe” along a virtual line in the north–south direction, which crossed the “center of Europe,” situated to the west of Warsaw. “Eastern Europe,” located eastwards of this meridian, encompassed Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the Ionian Islands, Cracow, Greece, Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldova (Balbi 1840, 104). Balbi’s model was widely noticed both in Western and Eastern Europe. In 1833 a detailed review of the book appeared, for example, in the Russian journal *Teleskop* (Nadezhdin 1833).

In fact, the term “Eastern Europe” (*vostochnaia Evropa, vostochnaia chast’ Evropy*) also became an integral part of the geographical vocabulary in Russia in the early nineteenth century. But the term “vostochnaia Evropa” was used in Russian geographical literature of the 1830s and 1840s as a rather neutral signifier, denoting a spatial unity that was most often identical with the territory of the Tsarist Empire (Pavlovsk 1843, 5). Apart from this usage, the term “vostochnaia Evropa” also took on new meanings in the course of the nineteenth century, referring either to the territory of Orthodox Christianity (Savel’ev 1840) and/or Slavic civilization (Grech 1830, s.v. Pavel Iosif Shafarik) or to a spatial entity with a distinct historical development (that is, “Russia”) (Polevoi 1829, 22; Solov’ev 1870, 5, 52). This differentiation of the concept “Eastern Europe” in the Russian language coincided with parallel developments in regional discourses in the West.

Russia's shift on the mental maps of Europe from the "North" to the "East" of the continent at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century resulted first from an increasing "Orientalization" of Tsarist Russia by Western scholars, and second from a semantic reduction of the meaning of the term "North" and "Northern Europe," where Russia previously used to be located. Both German philology and the movement of "Scandinavianism" contributed to a redefinition of the regional concept "Norden," denominating now in the first place the countries of Scandinavia: Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (see Lemberg 1985, 64–66, as well as chapter 2 in this volume). In the meantime, the developing disciplines of Slavic philology and linguistics began to define the geographical range of Slavic languages in Europe as a distinct cultural and spatial unit. Johann Gottfried Herder can be regarded as an important *spiritus rector* of the idea of Slavic unity and of Eastern Europe as a predominantly Slavic space. In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1792), Herder drafted a vision of one peaceful Slavic nation inhabiting a vast territory between the Baltic and the Adriatic Seas located east of Germanic (and Romanic) peoples (Herder 1792, 36ff.). This image had a strong impact on national and pan-national movements (pan-Slavism) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (for example, Danilevskii 1869; English transl. 2013).

The third group of scholars that substantially contributed to the development of the concept of Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were historians. One of the oldest history books with the term "östliches Europa" in its title was published in 1774 by the Swedish historian Johann Thunmann. In the introduction to his book, Thunmann juxtaposes the historical development of the "Western European peoples," on the one hand, and that of "Eastern Europe," on the other. As an indication of the different stages of historical development in both parts of the continent, he picks the progress of national historiography. Whereas in the Western part of the continent "Enlightenment has made significant steps toward perfection [of historical scholarship]," in "Eastern Europe [historiography] is in a different shape: Here it is an unploughed, wild and deserted field" waiting for cultivation (Thunmann 1774, 3–4).

This verdict is symptomatic of a specific normative discourse of Western scholars writing about historical developments in the Eastern part of Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. As Larry Wolff (1994) has argued, the concept of Eastern Europe was "invented" in the late eighteenth century by Western philosophers of the Enlightenment as a specific spatial entity located between a "civilized" Western Europe and a "barbarian" Asia, whose outstanding feature was its backwardness in comparison to an idealized West (see chapter 1 in this volume). According to Wolff, it was neither its geographical

location nor its ethnographic character that made a country or region "Eastern European" in the view of the Western philosophes: it was its location on an imagined time scale of universal historical "progress." In this worldview, an idealized (liberal) West represented the highest level of civilization and historical development, whereas Eastern Europe still had a long way to go in order to catch up with this vanguard of humankind. While Asia, according to Wolff, was perceived by Western scholars of the eighteenth century as a sphere of eternal stagnation, Eastern Europe was accorded a potential for historical progress.

In a number of critical reviews of his book, Wolff was accused of using for his argument historical source material in which the term "Eastern Europe" does not appear (Confino 1994, 510; Lewis and Wigen 1997, 229; Adamovsky 2005, 592–94; Drace-Francis 2006, 61; Franzinetti 2008, 364). Moreover, some critics argued that not only Eastern Europe, but also other regions at the European periphery were ascribed in various discourses the attribute of comparative backwardness in comparison to an idealized (Western) "center" (Confino 1994, 507; Struck 2006). All this may be perfectly true. Nevertheless, Wolff's thesis that Western scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries invented "Eastern Europe" *avant le mot* as a space of historical backwardness and as a "counter-concept" of an idealized "progressive West" finds corroboration when analyzing the *usage* of the term "Eastern Europe" in Western historiography and political discourse of the late eighteenth and especially early nineteenth centuries.

Interestingly, Eastern Europe was labeled "backward" by representatives of both the conservative and the liberal political camps. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is probably one of the most prominent authors of the former category. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1840), he promoted a tripartite regional division of Europe that would take into account the contribution of various peoples (and geographical regions) to the development of world history. Greece and Italy—that is, "Southern Europe"—had been the "theatre of world history" when the "Center and the North of Europe" were still "uncultivated." Later the *Weltgeist* took residence in the "heart" or the "Center of Europe" (*Mittelpunkt Europas*) where France, Germany, and England are located. The "North-Eastern states of Europe"—"Poland, Russia and the Slavic Empires"—joined the "alignment of historical states" only at a "late stage." Since that time "they have been establishing and cultivating constantly the connection [between Europe] and Asia" (Hegel 1986, 133). Hegel's thesis that Eastern Europe was a latecomer in human history could be interpreted in two different ways. One option was to condemn this part of the continent as "backward," "uncivilized," "barbarian," and "semi-Asiatic"; the other was to idealize the East as a land of the "future," "salvation," and

“spiritual renovation.” Whereas the former argument laid the foundation for Western liberalism’s critical discourse about Eastern Europe (that is, Tsarist Russia), the latter led to various forms of adulation and glorification of the East as the spiritual savior of a rotten West. Both discourses were fueled during the nineteenth century by authors from both Western and Eastern Europe.

One of the first scholars to use “Eastern European history” as an umbrella term for the analysis of the past of Poland and Russia was the German Ernst A. Herrmann. In his *History of the Russian State*, he defines the “Eastern affairs”—the developments in the “geographical sphere, where Russian power started taking root”—as the subject of Eastern European history (Herrmann 1860). Like many of his contemporaries, Herrmann treated Eastern European history almost synonymously with the history of Russian imperial rule. According to his analysis, Russia’s “Eastern-Asiatic features” had a strong influence on her historical development (Herrmann 1846, 712). Because of her “oriental-Slavic geographical [dis]position,” Russia was not able to develop any political regime other than despotism. Due to the adoption of Christianity, Russians were undoubtedly “superior to all other [Asian] peoples who are entrenched in the un-free religions of the Orient.” But “because of its distant and only superficial relationship with the peoples of the Occident, the Russian nation needs to attract the achievements, energy and potential of a higher developed intelligence [from the West] and—against its own will—to bow to the global dominance of Roman-Germanic education and knowledge” (Herrmann 1846, 712). In this short quotation, we can find in a nutshell all the features of the new, arrogant Western image of Eastern Europe as a backward historical space, longing for its “civilized” master from the West. Especially in German political thinking of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this concept of Eastern Europe had a large influence.

In nineteenth-century French liberal historiography, Eastern Europe and Russia were considered almost identical spatial entities. After the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and the suppression of the Polish November uprising in 1830–31, Russia had become the antirevolutionary *gendarme* of Europe, a development observed by liberal circles in the West with great suspicion and fear (Gleason 1950). As Hans Lemberg has convincingly argued, negative attributes from Western discourses about the “Orient” were thus increasingly integrated into and projected upon popular images of Russia and Eastern Europe (Lemberg 1985, 68). The idea that Europe can be divided into a Western hemisphere of liberty and an Eastern space of despotism was a widespread conviction in French political debates in the first part of the nineteenth century (Cadot 1967; Adamovsky 2006). In 1822, for example, the French writer and ecclesiastical *fonctionnaire* Dominique Dufour de Pradt

(1759–1837) identified “a decreasing slope of liberty” in Europe (Dufour de Pradt 1822, 116). The perception of Eastern Europe as a backward sphere of despotism could also mix with ethnic definitions of the region. The French author and translator Ernest Charrière (1841–42, 167), for example, was convinced that there is a “Western race” (*race occidentale*) and an “Asiatic race” (*race asiatique*) differing substantially from each other. From his point of view, “proper Europe” (*l’Europe, telle que nous la concevons d’après nous*) ends at the river Oder and in the Julian Alps. On the Eastern side of this imagined frontier, there is a “different Europe” (*une autre Europe*), a “semi-asiatic Europe” forming a bridge between “the West,” and “the Asian barbarity” (Charrière 1841–42, 170).

“Eastern Europe” in International Historiographical Debates after World War I

Already in the late nineteenth century, only a very few Polish historians could agree with the Western idea that Russia and Poland must be regarded as parts of one historical mesoregion. In the era of nationalism and emerging national historiographies, transnational concepts were not very popular in Eastern Europe, for obvious reasons. Historians made strong efforts to draw distinctive borders between competing national subregions within Eastern Europe. Conservative Catholic historians like Franciszek Duchński, Wincenty Lutosławski, or Feliks Koneczny emphasized the idea that Russia was Poland’s civilizational “Other,” and that their country should be regarded as an integral part of the cultural sphere of “Latin (i.e., Catholic) civilization” (Wise 2011). From their point of view, Poland’s historical mission has always been to protect Europe from its Asian enemies, such as the Mongols, Turks, and Russians (*antemurale christianitatis*). In this context, the Russian suppression of the January uprising in 1863 was conceptualized as a new Mongol (Asian or “Turanian”) invasion into the heartland of Western civilization (Wise 2011, 75).

After World War I and the emergence of new independent nation-states on the territory of the former Russian, Habsburg, German, and Ottoman Empires, the question of where “Eastern Europe” might be located and how to define the field of expertise of “Eastern European history” became topics of European scholarly debate (see chapter 11 in this volume). It was the Polish historian Oskar Halecki who first raised this issue at the fifth International Congress of Historical Sciences in Brussels in 1923 (Arnason 2010, 146–49). In his talk Halecki argued that Eastern Europe must not be considered as a uniform but as a subdivided historical mesoregion (Halecki 1924). The territory beyond Germany’s eastern border might be called “Eastern Europe,”

according to Halecki, only in a “geographical sense.” In terms of cultural belonging, “a large part, which is colloquially called Eastern Europe (Europe orientale), has indisputably always appeared as a domain of *Western* civilization (civilisation *occidentale*)” (Halecki 1924, 76–77, my emphasis; see also chapter 8 in this volume).

Halecki’s mission was obviously to disentangle the histories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and of Tsarist Russia on the maps of Western political thought and historiography. Whereas Poland and the realm of the Empire of Kiev, from his point of view, had formed a historical spatial unity since the ninth and tenth centuries, this “New Europe” (*Neu-Europa*) (as he called it later) (Halecki 1935, 8) fell apart when the principality of Moscow ascended as a new political center in the twelfth century, and when the Russian territory was conquered by the Tatars in the thirteenth century. Since then, Eastern Europe had been divided into two “distinct parts” (Halecki 1924, 81). The emerging state of Moscow, Halecki argued, became “definitively a separate world” (83). Halecki, whose regional concept of Eastern Europe had a very strong impact on historical scholarship both in Central Europe and the West (Zernack 1977, Conze 1993), kept on writing and publishing on this topic in the 1930s and—after his emigration to the United States (1940)—in the 1950s (Halecki 1935; 1950; 1952). In his later writings, he pointed out that since the thirteenth century Russia must not be regarded as part of European history at all (Halecki 1950; Okey 1992, 107). After the rule of the Tatars and Russian autocracy, it was the regime of Bolshevism that had finally alienated this part of the world from Western Civilization and its “Eastern borderlands”—that is, East Central Europe (Halecki 1935, 18; 1952).

Apart from Halecki’s model, which was supported (with some modifications) by the German Josef Pfitzner, among others, at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Warsaw in 1933 (Pfitzner 1934), Eastern Europe could still be conceptualized in a different way in scholarly debates after World War I. For instance, the Czech historian Jaroslav Bidlo, who also participated in the Warsaw conference in 1933, suggested a model of Eastern Europe as a space embodying a distinct civilization (Bidlo 1934; 1935). Bidlo, who was influenced by Russian Slavophilism and the writings of the German religious philosopher Ernst Troeltsch (1922), draw a distinct line between the “Western” (Romano-Germanic) and the Byzantine-Slavic *Kulturkreis*, stressing the cultural differences between the civilizations of Orthodox and Western Christianity. Like Halecki, Bidlo regarded Poles, Czechs, and Slovenes as part of the Western world, though in his case the key factor was their affiliation with the Catholic and Protestant churches (Halecki 1935, 18). From Bidlo’s point of view, Western and Eastern Europe had embarked on different paths of historical development not only in the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries, but already in the year 330, when Constantinople was founded and Western and Eastern Christianity started drifting apart.

Eastern Europe as a Space of German Influence and Domination

In no other European country did the concept of Eastern Europe have such an impact on the development of respective regional studies and new academic subdisciplines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than in the German-speaking countries. In 1841, the first chair of Slavic studies was installed at the University of Breslau (today’s Wrocław). During the next decades, Slavic studies became part of the curriculum also at the universities of Prague, Vienna, Leipzig, Berlin, Munich, and Königsberg. After Theodor Schiemann had been nominated the first professor of “Osteuropäische Geschichte” at the University of Berlin in 1892, the first seminary of East European history was inaugurated there in 1902 (Kappeler 2001, 221–44). This decision was primarily motivated by contemporary politics, as it was some years later at the University of Vienna. Due to increasing tensions with the Russian Empire in the age of imperialism, there was an urgent need for specialists in Russian affairs in the German and Austrian capitals.

After the disillusionment with the expansionist dreams of an enlarged German empire in Eastern Europe (*Land Ober-Ost*), and after the loss of a large part of Western Prussia, the province of Posen, and Upper Silesia to Poland, the concept of Eastern Europe underwent a significant transformation in scholarly discourses in post-World War I Germany. Representatives of the so-called *Ostforschung* began systematically to conceptualize Central Europe as a “sub-Germanic space” (Beyrau 2012). *Ostforschung* (research on the East) was an umbrella term denoting a variety of academic disciplines and institutions doing research on the history, economy, ethnography, geography, culture, and societies of Germany’s Eastern neighbors. The common ground of this kind of interdisciplinary research—apart from a clear anti-Polish stance—was the assumption that Eastern Europe had been historically, and would be in the future, a sphere of German influence. Even if only a few researchers were later directly involved in the preparation of plans for ethnic cleansing and the Holocaust, there is little doubt that *Ostforschung* had a strong impact on contemporary political visions of German expansion into Eastern Europe and on respective National Socialist (NS) plans of national and racial segregation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1939 (Klessmann 1985; Burleigh 1988).

After Germany’s attacks on Poland and the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1941, Eastern Europe was conceptualized by numerous German scholars as a

backward space that needed to be subjugated, exploited, and “liberated” from “Jewish domination.” In June 1942 the German agronomist Konrad Meyer provided Heinrich Himmler with a memorandum proposing a systematic social reconfiguration of the recently conquered territories of Poland and the Soviet Union. According to the *Generalplan-Ost*, twenty-five million ethnic Germans should take residence in this newly available “living space” (*Lebensraum*), whereas the original Slavic and Jewish populations were to be resettled, expelled, or killed (Rössler 1993; Herb 1997). The “space of the East” (*Ostraum*) had to be arranged in a “proper order” by German settlers. They should help the economically “useful elements” among the local population to develop this backward and “empty” land. Even if the Generalplan-Ost was not fully implemented due to the development of the war, its murderous effects on the societies of Poland and the Soviet Union are too well known. The authors of this scholarly vision were not directly involved in actions of deportation, resettlement, and murder. But they produced a “scientific” blueprint for regional “development” of “the East” that made the NS perpetrators feel that their cruel deeds served a larger rational plan promising Germany a “bright future.”

Apart from this brutal vision of a “backward” and “barbarous” Eastern Europe, waiting to be subjugated by its German “masters,” the “European East” (*europäischer Osten*) has also been perceived and conceptualized in German philosophical and political thought since the late nineteenth century in a significantly different way. Since the Romantic era, conservative political thinkers have been idealizing Russia, and in a more general sense the “European East,” as a stronghold of Christian values and political stability (Koenen 2005, Thum 2006). When the Western way of life came under rising criticism at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, philosophers like Oswald Spengler praised the Orthodox East as a counter-concept to the rotten West (*Abendland*) (Spengler 1922). Spengler and other adherents of Russian civilization were deeply influenced by the ideology of Slavophilism, praising Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox culture in general as alternatives to Western cultural models. When, for example, the German scholar Walter Schubart (1938) published his book *Europe and the Soul of the East*, he predicted the decline and self-destruction of the “Faustian-Promethean” West and praised the dawn of a “new man” in “the East,” a man who had an “Eastern soul” and who was a product of both Russian-Orthodox traditions and the revolutionary spirit of October 1917.

“Eastern Europe” as a Concept during the Cold War Era

After Germany’s defeat in World War II and the expansion of the Soviet sphere of interest toward the West, the imagined borders of Eastern Europe

on the mental map of the continent shifted significantly once again. In his famous speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946, Winston Churchill described an imagined line “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic” as an “Iron Curtain” descending across the continent (Churchill 1981, 881). This new border divided “the free democratic world” in the West from a “Soviet sphere” in the East. Echoing the spirit of Churchill’s Iron Curtain Speech and the ideological master narrative of “the West,” the British historian Arnold Toynbee warned the listeners of the BBC in 1952 of the “constant [Russian] threat from the thirteenth century till 1945” and proclaimed, “We do not want to see the Russian brand of tyranny spread.” (Toynbee 1953, 7; 1947, 203) Clearly aiming at “Orientalizing” the Soviet Union under Stalin, the American-German sociologist Karl August Wittfogel, in his influential study *Oriental Despotism* (1957), presented Russia alongside China and ancient Egypt as a political order of a peculiar kind.

Churchill’s address was received in both policy and public arenas in the United States with great enthusiasm. Stalin, on the contrary, harshly rebutted the Iron Curtain speech, accusing the United States and their allies of being “little different from Hitler” (Engermann 2010, 35). According to communist ideology, fascism was the logical outcome of capitalism. Consequently, Soviet propaganda saw the United States as moving on the path toward fascism most recently trodden by Germany (Engermann 2010, 31). From the Soviet point of view, it was the West that was threatening freedom and peace in Europe, a continent that had been recently liberated from fascism in the Great Patriotic War by the Red Army. From this perspective it is not surprising that some years later the Berlin Wall was labeled in official GDR terminology as the “bulwark against fascism.”

While analyzing and describing the new bipolar world order, Western scholars deliberately followed prevailing traditions of the mental West-East divide of Europe. In Western political discourse of the Cold War era, the terms “Soviet/Communist Bloc,” “countries of the Warsaw Pact Treaty,” “Eastern Bloc,” and “Eastern Europe” were used almost synonymously. The term “Eastern Europe” was attributed a predominantly political meaning in Western languages after World War II. In many Western countries, most notably in the United States, between the end of World War II and the 1960s huge investments were made both by governmental and nongovernmental agencies in order to build up new academic institutions that should produce urgently needed knowledge about the new enemy in the (communist) “East” (Engermann 2009). Likewise, in many countries in Western Europe, most notably in West Germany, joint research on a politically defined Eastern Europe reaching from the GDR in the West to the People’s Republic of China in the East mushroomed during the Cold War years (Oberländer 1992; Unger 2007; Kleindienst 2009).

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, in the meantime, the “capitalist West” became the constituting Other of the Socialist bloc. But the concept of Eastern Europe was only rarely accepted as terminology of self-denomination in the political discourse of the Soviet Union or the Socialist bloc. One of the few examples of this practice is the official *Short Course* (*Kratkii kurs*) on the history of the Communist Party of the USSR written by Stalin in 1938 and revised after World War II (Commission of the Central Committee 1939). In the chapter on “dialectical and historical materialism” (4.2), one reads that “in the space of three thousand years three different social systems have been successively superseded in Europe: the primitive communal system, the slave system and the feudal system. In the eastern part of Europe [v vostochnoi chastii Evropy], in the USSR, even four social systems have been superseded” (History of the Communist Party 1939, 118). Apart from this example, neither “Eastern Europe” nor “the East” were used as concepts of collective identity after World War II in official propaganda in the Soviet Union and the Socialist countries of Central Europe. Instead, the commonwealth of Socialist countries was labeled officially either “COMECON-states,” “states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization,” or just “Progressive Bloc” (Péteri 2010, 5–6). At the same time, renewed nineteenth-century images of Slavic unity (Slavophil Bolshevism) (Radchenko 2011, 13–15) or historical narratives stressing the long tradition of Eastern European (Slavic-Baltic) alliances against the Teutonic “Drang nach Osten” were officially promoted in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.

Whereas we can hardly find any usage of the term “Eastern Europe” in the official political discourse of the “Socialist bloc,” there were, nevertheless, cautious attempts to attach a deeper historical meaning to the term in the academic field. One example is the Hungarian historian Emil Niederhauser, who in 1958, from a Marxist perspective, made a plea to perceive and conceptualize “Eastern Europe” as a distinct historical region with common structural features (Niederhauser 1958; 2003). This area, reaching from the Western border of “today’s Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia” to the “European part of the zone of Russian settlement,” had been, according to Niederhauser, strongly influenced since the Middle Ages by similar historical developments: Eastern Europe might be characterized first as a realm of Slavic settlement and—even more importantly—as a sphere of belated historical development. “Historical backwardness is a very significant feature of Eastern European development,” claimed Niederhauser (1958, 360). Apparently this way of historical reasoning and thinking had adherents in the countries of the Socialist bloc until the 1980s. Iván T. Berend, another Hungarian historian, claimed as late as 1986 that “Eastern Europe has evolved not in four decades but over the centuries” (Berend 1986).

In Western Europe, too, the idea that the countries of the Socialist bloc had a century-old common history was very popular after 1945. Nevertheless, a consensus concerning where to draw the boundaries of a historical mesoregion “Eastern Europe” and how to define its structural specificities was hard to find. On the one hand, there were proponents of the concept of Eastern Europe as a space of “backwardness,” reaching from Poland in the West to the Soviet Union in the East (Chirot 1989). Apart from this rather vague definition, we can find a competing model of Eastern Europe in the English academic discourse, referring to those countries located between Germany and Russia that gained independence shortly before or after World War I (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia) (Kaser and Radice 1985). This definition of Eastern Europe as an area of newly (or re)established nation-states after the fall of the empires of the Romanovs, Habsburgs, Hohenzollerns, and Ottomans is still very popular in English-speaking academic discourse today (Held 1992; Berglund and Aarebrot 1997).

In West-German historiography, the tradition of Ostforschung, stressing the entanglement of East European and German history and portraying Eastern Europe as a space of German destiny, could be felt until the 1990s (see, e.g., the series *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas* [Boockmann, Buchholz, and Conze 1992–2002]). One example of this is the German sociologist and theorist of nationalism Eugen Lemberg, who in 1950 published a collection of lectures on “Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union” (Lemberg 1950). “Eastern Europe” is presented here as a counter-concept to “the West” (*Abendland*), a space with vague boundaries (either space “behind the Iron Curtain” or the USSR) and populated by “Eastern Europeans” (*Osteuropäer*). This type, writes Lemberg, of the “man of the East (*Mensch des Ostens*) has been influenced neither by the philosophy of the Western Middle Ages nor by the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. He was not trained in logical and rational thinking and is not emancipated. Here [i.e., in Eastern Europe] the individual is not standing in the center of the world, [the individual] is not the origin of reasoning. The individual is not as important as it is in the West. Due to this fact we can find an astonishing readiness to die among Eastern Europeans” (Lemberg 1950, 18).

Since the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of German scholars has made a strong effort to give a new, scientific meaning to the notion of Eastern Europe in the academic discourse. Most prominently, the historian Klaus Zernack (1977, 31–66) presented Eastern Europe as a historical mesoregion comprising four subregions: “Eastern Central Europe” (*Ostmitteleuropa*), “Southeastern Europe” (*Südosteuropa*), “Northeastern Europe” (*Nordosteuropa*) and “Russia/Eastern Europe in the narrower sense” (*Osteuropa im en-*

geren Sinne). Eastern Europe has a double meaning in Zernack's definition. In the first and broader sense, it encompasses the whole area of Halecki's "new Europe"—that is, those regions beyond the Eastern border of the empire of Charlemagne, which, after the ninth century, became objects of Christianization and state/nation-building. "Eastern Europe" is understood here as a dynamic mesoregion, a "Europe-in-the-making," or a region "growing into Europe" (Zernack 1977: 30). On the other hand, "Eastern Europe in a narrower sense" is identical with Russia or a geographical and political space that had been influenced for centuries by Russian Orthodoxy, Russian language, and Russian imperial rule (Zernack 1977, 59–61).

In the 1980s, a number of outstanding intellectuals from Central Europe fundamentally challenged the imagined bipolar division of Europe into a Western and an Eastern bloc. Intellectuals from Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia refused to accept the idea that their countries should now belong to a politically and ideologically defined Eastern Europe. Most prominently, in his famous essay of 1984 the Czech writer Milan Kundera bemoaned the "tragedy of Central Europe," making a strong plea to mentally disassociate Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and the other people of this "kidnapped Occident" from Russia and the Soviet Union (Kundera 1984; see also chapter 8 in this volume). In the intellectual debate triggered by Kundera and other intellectuals, "Eastern Europe," and most prominently Russia, served as Central Europe's constituting Other (Neumann 1993). Stressing the legacy of the schism of 1054, Kundera wrote, "'Geographic Europe' (extending from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains) was always divided into two halves which evolved separately: one tied to ancient Rome and the Catholic Church, the other anchored in Byzantium and the Orthodox Church. After 1945, the border between the two Europes shifted several hundred kilometers to the west, and several nations that had always considered themselves to be Western woke up to discover that they were now in the East" (Kundera 1984, 33). Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary were, from Kundera's perspective, undoubtedly part of "the West": "On the eastern border of the West—more than anywhere else—Russia is seen not just as one more European power but as an *other* civilization" (34). The "totalitarian Russian civilization is the radical negation of the modern West" (37).

Alongside the debate among philosophers and writers, Central European historians, most prominently the Hungarian Jenő Szűcs in the 1980s, promoted the idea of a tripartite Europe consisting of a Western, a Central, and an Eastern historical mesoregion (Szűcs 1988; idem 1990). Thus he followed the paths trodden by Polish, Czech, and Hungarian intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like Halecki, István Bibó, and others. Focusing on historical structures of *longue durée* from the Middle Ages to

modernity, Szűcs developed a scheme of five European mesoregions: Scandinavian Northern Europe, Mediterranean Southern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe. Focusing on the latter three entities, he portrayed Eastern Europe as the continent's most "non-Western" historical mesoregion. Here neither the differentiation of state and society nor the division of ecclesiastical and governmental powers took place. After the partition of Poland and Russia's expansion to the West in the late eighteenth century, "the homogeneous entity of Eastern Europe [from the White Sea in the North to the Black and the Caspian Seas of the South, from the lands of Poland in the West to the Ural Mountains in the East] had finally taken shape (in order to merge immediately with the term 'Russia')" (Szűcs 1990, 16–17). The historical mesoregion of Central Europe, which Szűcs was most interested in, was attributed a "middle position" between the "Western and the Eastern model" (see chapter 8 in this volume).

Epilogue: Remapping Eastern Europe after 1989/1991

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the concept of Eastern Europe experienced yet another fundamental change in its long history. Joining NATO and the European Union between 1999 and 2004, the countries of Central Europe succeeded in escaping a politically defined Eastern Europe. This shift in the geopolitical order of Europe did not leave mental maps in Western countries untouched. Academic institutions that had studied the history and social developments of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for decades now experienced a deep crisis of identity (Creuzberger 2000). As a consequence, both in the United States and in Western Europe governmental funding was substantially relocated from interdisciplinary area studies on Eastern Europe to other areas of research. Meanwhile, the breakup of the communist bloc in 1989 pushed the Russian and the East European academic fields apart. A large number of research centers and academic journals that previously focused on Eastern Europe and the countries of the Soviet bloc now are interested in "Eurasian studies" (van Hagen 2004; see also chapter 10 in this volume). Nevertheless, the notion of Eastern Europe has not disappeared from our mental maps. It has survived for example in the idea of a cultural sphere of "orthodoxy," which Samuel Huntington has described as one of the world's pertinent and competing "civilizations" (Huntington 1993; 1996). In the academic field, Eastern Europe has been newly conceptualized as a space of Jewish history and living area of Eastern European Jews (The YIVO Encyclopedia). Moreover, Eastern Europe can still be regarded as a highly important Other in debates of collective identity in Central Europe, for example in Poland (Marung

2010). Last but not least, the notion of Eastern Europe has itself become an object of historical analysis in the last decades, both in Western and in Eastern Europe (Wolff 1994; Neumann 1996; Schenk 2002 and 2013). In fact, this short overview of the emergence, usages, and various meanings of the term "Eastern Europe" can be regarded as part of this most recent shift in the concept's long and multifaceted history.

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