

review
received: 2003-08-27

UDC 327.39:323.1(4-12)

CENTRAL-EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE: AN AREA OF GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOCULTURAL CONTACT

Milan BUFON

University of Primorska, Science and Research Centre of Koper, SI-6000 Koper, Garibaldijska 1
e-mail: milan.bufon@zrs-kp.si

ABSTRACT

The paper examines three particularly relevant issues concerning Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as an area of geopolitical and geocultural contact. The first issue that the paper addresses is the geographical and geopolitical positioning of the examined area and its delimitation. Furthermore, it focuses on the transformation processes of the political map of the area following the changed geopolitical scenarios and relations between states and ethno-linguistic groups. Finally, the article briefly presents the opportunities for cooperation and integration that result from the intertwining convergence and divergence processes and from potentials for the stabilization of the area within the framework of European integration.

Key words: Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, geopolitical transformations, geocultural intersections, political geographical processes, integration perspectives

EUROPA CENTRO-ORIENTALE E SUD-ORIENTALE: AREA DI CONTATTO GEOPOLITICO E GEOCULTURALE

SINTESI

L'articolo vuole esaminare tre problemi particolarmente rilevanti per l'Europa centro-orientale e sud-orientale in quanto area di contatto geopolitico e geoculturale: in primo luogo vengono affrontati le questioni che concernono il posizionamento geografico e geopolitico ed il problema della delimitazione territoriale dell'area in esame; in seguito vengono trattati i processi di trasformazione della carta politica dell'area in conseguenza dei mutati scenari geopolitici, ma anche delle mutate relazioni tra stati e gruppi etno-linguistici; alla fine, l'articolo si propone di presentare brevemente le prospettive di cooperazione ed integrazione che derivano dall'intreccio tra tendenze di convergenza e divergenza e dalle potenzialità di stabilizzazione nel quadro dell'integrazione europea.

Parole chiave: Europa centro-orientale e sud-orientale, trasformazioni geopolitiche, incroci geoculturali, processi politico-geografici, prospettive di integrazione

INTRODUCTION

The article will exam three major issues related to Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as an area of geopolitical and geocultural contact, namely: problems concerning its geographical and geopolitical situation and delimitation; the political geographical past and current processes, frequently conflictual, related to its 'contact' status; and finally, co-operation and integration processes as a result of the shift from divergence to convergence potentials within the area and from its more recent stabilisation in the frame of growing European integration. This area, usually labelled as Central-Eastern Europe, is not easily defined. In a recent article, John O'Loughlin (2001) asserts that 'one can pick and choose which version of "Central Europe" is most suitable for one's predetermined "geopolitical code"', suggesting that there is therefore no "correct" geo-vision and all are equally useful, open to challenge, or biased. Thus Central-Eastern Europe is basically a product of the definer's imagination, determined not by its actual rooted geographical position but rather by its fluid geopolitical position among the European regional powers or most recently between the super-powers during the bipolar division of the continent throughout the second half of the 20th century. It was mostly perceived as "Mitteleuropa" until the Second World War, when the German influence was stronger, and became "un occident kidnappé" during the period of Soviet Russian control after the Second World War. It also functioned, however, as a geopolitical "Shatterbelt", a geocultural "Gateway", a "Third Europe" between Western and Eastern Europe, and thus was seen as a geopolitical "grey zone", a basically "chaotic territory" to be ruled and controlled, or as a "buffer zone" to be established and maintained as long as the geopolitical situation would allow, and within which the political map could be changed according to the variable ratio of influence among the regional powers.

This article will focus primarily on Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as that part of Europe which has traditionally represented a European "frontier" or rather "contact area", even in the period when Europe has actually being commanded by "marginal" or "extra-European" forces. This region is now becoming crucial in terms of enlargement strategies of the EU and NATO, both trying to find a new way between convergence and divergence tendencies in this part of Europe, but also to test if the European "unity-in-diversity" integration programme is practicable as a real alternative to a possible global "melting-pot" future development.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND RE-LOCATION

When locating different European countries in central, eastern, western, southern or northern Europe, we have first consider the difficulty in providing a general

and acceptable geographical regionalization of the continent, and secondly that geopolitical and geocultural labels have often proved t be more powerful instruments, dividing Europe in the second half of the 20th Century only in the West and the East part (Cohen, 1963), following the bipolar divide. Only after the fall of the Iron Curtain has attention been placed on Central or Central-Eastern Europe as an area of political and economic transition under increasing "Western" influence, but also wrought with political fragmentation and ethnic conflict.

In a cartographical sense, Continental Europe (without Iceland) extends in an East-West direction from the 10th meridian west to the 50th meridian east; from this point of view the area between the 15th to the 25th meridian east could be considered "central", as the area between the 50th and the 55th parallel, considering that in the North-South direction, Europe extents from the 70th to the 35th parallel north. In this way, Poland would be the only country located at the intersection of these two "central" zones, representing somehow the geometric centre of Europe.

Despite these objective considerations, the regionalization of Europe usually follows a different approach, which takes into account the actual climatic and cultural landscapes of the European continent. From this point of view we usually put southern Europe below the 45th parallel, northern Europe above the 51st parallel, and western and eastern Europe beyond the 7th meridian east and the 24th meridian east respectively. Thus central Europe could be defined as the area limited in the East-West direction by the 7th and the 24th meridian, and in the North-South direction by the 45th and the 51st parallel, including Switzerland, Northern Italy, Southern Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Northern Croatia, Southern Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Vojvodina (Northern Serbia), NW Romania and SW Ukraine. The line passing between Prague and Brno, Linz and Vienna, Ljubljana and Zagreb, represents the divide between western and eastern central Europe. Countries located on the Balkans south of the 45th parallel (Southern Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Southern Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia, Greece and NW Turkey), on the other hand, form the southern-eastern European region, to which also Eastern Italy is functionally attached.

The article will thus direct its attention primarily to the above defined Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (CE&SEE) not as a pivotal "blue banana" in terms of geoeconomic development, but as a sort of geostrategic and geocultural "green banana", acting as a possible and alternate conflict or cohesive element in Europe, and representing on a wider geopolitical scale the western margin of the geopolitical line dividing the Eurasian continental core from the European and Asian maritime rim – an area along the former Iron Curtain, but also a

region to which new geostrategic links could be associated as the result of the enlarging processes of both NATO and the EU (the so-called "Euro-Curtain").

Problems of geographical location and re-location are also due to the transformation and inter-relation of the myriad European international organisations (Bagnoli, 2001). These are both economic and political or security organisations, such as the Council of Europe (CE), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the European Union (EU). The CE was founded in 1949 as an association of representatives of the parliaments of its members, the number of which increased from the original 14 "western" European countries connected with the US within the post-war 'Marshall plan' to cover all European countries (45 states in all), including the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus, and the former Yugoslav republics: the last admitted countries are Armenia and Azerbaijan (2001), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2002), and Serbia and Montenegro (2003). The CE has promoted several important conventions (one of the last was the Convention on the protection of national minorities, signed in 1994) calling for member countries to adopt them into national legislation. In 1994 the OSCE replaced the former Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, established at the Helsinki Conference in 1975. At that time it included 35 countries (all European countries except Albania plus the US and Canada); now the organisation includes 55 members: the original 35 states plus Albania, all countries of the former Soviet Union (14) and 5 countries emerging from the former Yugoslavia (the Serbian-Montenegro federation was suspended until the end of 2000).

The NATO is, similarly to the OSCE, an organisation that goes beyond the European space. Its basic idea was to strengthen contacts between the US and their partners on both sides of the Atlantic at the time of its establishment (1949 members: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and United Kingdom); in 1952 Greece and Turkey were also included, and Western Germany was added in 1955. In 1966 France decided not to be part of the military committee (as a consequence, NATO headquarters was moved from Paris to Brussels), Spain was not included in this committee when it joined in 1982. Following the momentous changes of the 1990's, NATO transformed itself in a wider organisation for security in Europe, open to new partners, and for the first time it went beyond the former Iron Curtain when Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were invited to join in the late 1990's. As a consequence, these former communist countries plus Slovakia were also invited to become members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (based in Paris from the end of 1960), and including six more countries

(the above-mentioned plus Korea and Mexico) from the original group of twenty-four 'Western' states (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and US). Future developments of both NATO and the OECD are still uncertain. Some member states are supporting further enlargements in order to provide new responses to challenges of global economics and security, particularly after the September 11, 2001 events. Others maintain a more restrictive position. NATO reacted first with the development of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which provide a stable link between the 19 NATO member countries and 27 other countries (Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). Among this group, seven countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) eventually joined NATO in 2004. Certainly it is not a coincidence that at the same time Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia also became members of the EU.

The EU still represents much more an economic than a political organisation, but it became increasingly successful in knocking down tariffs and other internal barriers and in the establishment of a common European market, which more and more countries have joined since its establishment as the European Economic Community under the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Its pan-European potential became clearly evident after the 1990 geopolitical transformations and it is confirmed by the greatest enlargement in the EU's history, which was completed in May 2004 when ten new members (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) will join this organisation. With the prospect of further enlargement at the end of the decade, at least Bulgaria and Romania and possibly also Turkey, Albania and four or five (in the case of partition of the Serbian-Montenegro federation) former Yugoslav countries may join. Additionally, there is a special partnership known as Common European Space (CES) between the EU and the countries that remained in the European Free Trade Association (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). The majority of the CES countries (except Ireland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and the UK) adopted the so-called Schengen agreement, which allows free cross-border circulation of people. On the other hand, not all the EU countries have adopted the common currency (the Euro), and within the EU, there is a compact territorial block, consisting of nine countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Benelux, Germany, Austria and Italy), which are at the same

time integrated in the Single Market, the Euro Zone and Schengen Space. Thus the integration process in the European continent is very complex and has developed at different territorial scales and quality levels.

All these developments have produced an intense process of re-location and re-orientation of CE&SEE countries. The Czech Republic, for example, is now able to re-join the social and economic environment in which it once represented one of the most developed regions, even though for many people (geographers included) it remains a "Central-Eastern" European country, while its southern neighbour, Austria, is usually labelled as "Western" in spite of the fact that its capital, Vienna, lies some 200 km further east than Prague! Slovakia, whose capital Bratislava is only 50 km from Vienna, is still mentally perceived by many Europeans as a 'Far East' country. It also has only half the population of Hungary and the Czech Republic, and about 1/8 of the population of Poland, and seems therefore both economically and strategically "less interesting" than its neighbours.

The same could be said for an even smaller country that is often confused with Slovakia: Slovenia. This Austrian southern neighbour has only about 2 million inhabitants but has a per capita GDP which is almost double of that of the Czech Republic, placing Slovenia in the top position among the EU new members, even if it is considerably less "visible" than other countries in the next enlargement group (Rey, 1996). Its strategic position on the cross-road between North and South, and West and East seemed to be for the Slovenian leaders a sufficient reason for being included in NATO during its first post-1990 enlargement, and they were quite disappointed when they found that the Slovenian application was not granted. But the fact is that Slovenia, as a former Yugoslav republic, was at that time – and partly is still – considered as a "south-eastern", that means "Balkan" country in the strategic and intelligence offices of the US and NATO. In the case of Slovenia, the geographical relocation is particularly interesting: until 1918 it belonged to the Roman Germanic Empire and the Hapsburgs, being thus included among the Central European countries and having strong economic and cultural relations with Vienna and Prague, whilst in the period of the Yugoslav kingdom and Tito's federal Yugoslavia it turned towards Belgrade and Zagreb, which in turn are now replaced by Brussels and Vienna. In the Yugoslav latter period, Slovenia was presenting itself as a country "on the sunny side of the Alps", meaning "on the southern side", whilst the current tourist slogan concerning Slovenia is "the green heart of Europe" thus putting the country once again into a Central Europe context. Its location remains controversial even in Slovenian geography textbooks: most have opted for Central Europe while some have preserved the formerly more common "southern" European position.

This "border" situation of Slovenia between Central Europe and the Balkans was in fact confirmed by both the former and the current presidents of the US when visiting Slovenia. Mr. Clinton stressing that the US and the Western countries are expecting that Slovenia will play a major role in bringing coexistence practices in the region, and Mr. Bush (during his first summit with Mr. Putin at the Brdo castle near Ljubljana in June 2001) asserting that Slovenia represents a "successful story" in terms of democracy and economy which should serve as a good example also for other former Yugoslav republics. But the Bush-Putin summit in Slovenia which contributed to make the country more "visible", bringing out its "qualities" and thus making it eligible for the next NATO enlargement, has also started a debate as to whether Slovenia would not receive greater benefits by remaining "neutral", as a sort of Alpine-Dinaric Switzerland, and maintaining at the same time its leading position in the former Yugoslav region (Bufon, 2002a).

A GEO-CULTURAL AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTACT AREA

Another important issue concerns the geo-cultural location of the CE & SEE region (Carter, 1996) which represents basically the contact area between the three major European ethno-linguistic areas – the Germanic, the Romance and the Slavic – and other geo-cultural units (Ugric, Albanian, Greek, Turkish). The meeting point of the Germanic, Romance and Slavic areas is situated at the tripoint between Austria, Italy and Slovenia, but Austria, Slovenia and Hungary are the only European countries linking as many as four different ethno-linguistic environments. On a different scale, Bulgaria performs the same intermediate function in respect to Slavic languages on one side, and Romanian, Greek and Turkish on the other. Whilst major ethno-linguistic areas developed until the end of the first Millennium and have remained since virtually unchanged at the macro-level, other cultural borders arose during the second Millennium, starting with the division produced by religion.

As Johan Galtung pointed out in 1994, the first borderline between East and West followed the schism of 1054 between Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, dividing Russia, Belarus, the major part of Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece from what became Western or "proper" Europe. But some decades later another line developed: the schism derived from the declaration of the Crusades in 1095 between Christianity and Islam. He puts Sarajevo at the centre of the two cultural and civilisation divides, driving parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (Kosovo), Macedonia and all Albania to Islam. The last European schism of 1517 brought a further division within Western Europe, namely between

Protestants and Catholics, but was not as effective as the previous two. These cultural lines of division are, in Galtung's opinion, on the base of the formation of three different macro-regions: the Catholic-Protestant Romance-Germanic "European Union", the Orthodox "Russian Union", and the Muslim "Turkish Union". Again, these three macro-regions meet in the Balkans, making this part of Europe simultaneously the "frontier" between the "two Europes", and between Christian and Muslim civilisation.

The above considerations open up the issue of the geopolitical location of the CE&SEE. The area started to be perceived as a "Middle European zone" or rather as a possible area of expansion by both Germany and Russia. On the one hand, the stability of the Hapsburg empire increased the German influence in Central Europe, developing the concept of "Mitteleuropa" as an association of a German majority partner with its Slavic and Hungarian minority partners (Sinnhuber, 1954). On the other hand, the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire in South-Eastern Europe increased the Russian influence in the area. After the big changes of the political map following the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the major European powers, especially France and Britain, tried to reinforce their relations with the CE&SEE by supporting the newly formed states in order to keep both Germany

and the Soviet Union at bay. In this period, Germany and Italy increased their aspirations for expansion into CE&SEE: the former cited its "Drang nach Osten" imperative to get control over the "Heartland" following the principles of "Geopolitik", while the latter tried to re-establish the Roman and ancient Venetian "limes" and to get control over the Adriatic as its "Mare Nostrum" (Battisti, 2000).

The scene changed again after World War Two when the Soviet Union extended its control over the greater part of CE&SEE. The Iron Curtain, the new border between East and West, produced the division of Germany, the neutrality of Austria and a special "fifty-fifty" status for Tito's Yugoslavia, which allowed it to develop a westward oriented economy under a communist regime and an active international policy that put it on the head of the "non-allied" group of world nations. The rest of Europe and the world were largely controlled by the new super-powers: the East European countries being divided by numerous mini "iron curtains" to prevent multilateral communication and all relations which were not oriented towards or through Moscow; the West European countries, particularly those in the front-line as Germany, Italy and Greece, representing a sort of US protectorate limiting their internal and international political life.



Fig. 1: The political and ethnic structure of the Austrian empire before the first world war.
 Sl. 1: Politična in etnična struktura avstrijskega imperija pred prvo svetovno vojno.

In 1990, after almost half a century of apparently stable post-war subdivision into two blocks, each with its sphere of influence, the European continent has found itself in a whirl of radical changes that on the one hand have triggered a series of new processes and on the other have uncovered those that have been ever present in a more latent form. These events have somehow led to a logical normalisation of the new status quo and to the removal of the Second World War geopolitical consequences: Germany has reunited, whereas the small CE&SEE nations have found themselves in the same development phase, in which the outbreak of World War II overtook them – the phase of national emancipation (Bufon, 1996). The greatest problems produced by the disruption of the previously existing balance of power were found in former Yugoslavia, where the carefully established multi-cultural and multi-national structure could not be adapted to the new nation-state model. The political weakness of the EU has led to more direct American actions in the Balkans which succeed in bringing cease-fire conditions in the area but not in preserving or re-establishing multicultural habits. The creation of some protectorates on the contact line between Catholic/Croatian, Orthodox/Serbian and Muslim/Albanian and Bosnian cultural spaces involves a permanent engagement of NATO forces in the area and thus a reinforcement of the US presence and influence in this part of Europe (O'Tuathail, 2001). In fact, the control of the European-Asian contact area between the Balkans and the Caucasus remains an important geopolitical "game" between the US and Russia.

In conclusion, there are two different geopolitical situation and development perspectives in CE&SEE. On the one hand the southern part of the region still represents an area of conflicting interests between the US as the only world super-power and Russia as a regional power with a great territorial potential in Eurasia. From this perspective, the Balkans may be seen as an extension of the Middle-East and Central Asian "shatter-belt" in which divergence is prevailing over convergence. On the other hand, the northern part of the region represents the "frontier" of EU enlargement towards the area formerly controlled by the Soviet Union (Cohen, 1982). The traditional relationship between Germany and Russia on which the geopolitical situation of central Europe has traditionally depended can now be replaced by the relationship between an enlarged EU (within which both Germany and Italy are expecting to play a major regional role) and the so-called RU. In fact, the CIS countries (Belarus and Ukraine in particular), show a strong tendency toward reintegration (Kolossoff, 1996). In this way, a future economically-based functional partnership between the two units is in prospect, giving to the northern part of the CE&SEE a "gateway" function which will promote convergence or integration processes. But at the moment the CE&SEE is still in a peripheral eastern

and south-eastern position from the European "core" and there are no tangible signs that the "success stories" of the northern members can be easily replicated by its southern counterpart.

THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHICAL PROCESSES: NATIONS AND STATES

We have first to consider first some historical background in order to understand the major issues regarding past and present political geographical transformations in CE&SEE, and future co-operation and integration perspectives. Perhaps the first political geographical divide between East and West appeared here in 395, when the Roman empire split into two parts. The legacy of this partition is still present in the area: not only because the border between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire persisted as the southern border of the Hapsburg Empire and represents today the eastern border of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the northern border of both inner Serbia and Bulgaria, but also because it provided the territorial base for the Muslim expansion in Europe when the Ottoman Empire replaced Byzantium in the 14th Century. This border line also produced the development of a more stable Catholic/Protestant Roman German Empire and the less stable Eastern Roman Byzantine empire where the Orthodox culture has been superseded by Islamic culture, thus creating the ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious puzzle that now distinguishes this region and makes every political geographical decision controversial.

The first territorial political units in the area between the Baltic and the Mediterranean Sea appeared between the 10th to the 14th Century when the Duchy of Poland, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kingdom of Croatia (which was included in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1097), the Venetian Republic, the Papal States, Bosnia (from the 12th to the 14th Century), the Kingdom of Serbia (from the 12th to the 14th Century), the kingdom of Macedonia (976-1018) and Bulgaria (the latter appeared already in the 8th Century) were all formed.

This intermediate period was followed by a cycle of re-formation of stable large empires, lasting from 1550 to 1850, which incorporated parts of CE&SEE. The Hapsburgs took control over a great part of central Europe including Northern Italy, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Southern Poland, Western Ukraine, North-western Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Northern Serbia (Vojvodina); Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by the Austrians in 1878 and annexed to the monarchy in 1908. The rest of the territory was included in the Ottoman empire which spread to reach Moldavia (in that period known as Bessarabia) until 1812. Internal boundaries were also important: the border between the Austrian and the Hungarian Kingdom was formed around the year 1000 and remained almost unchanged

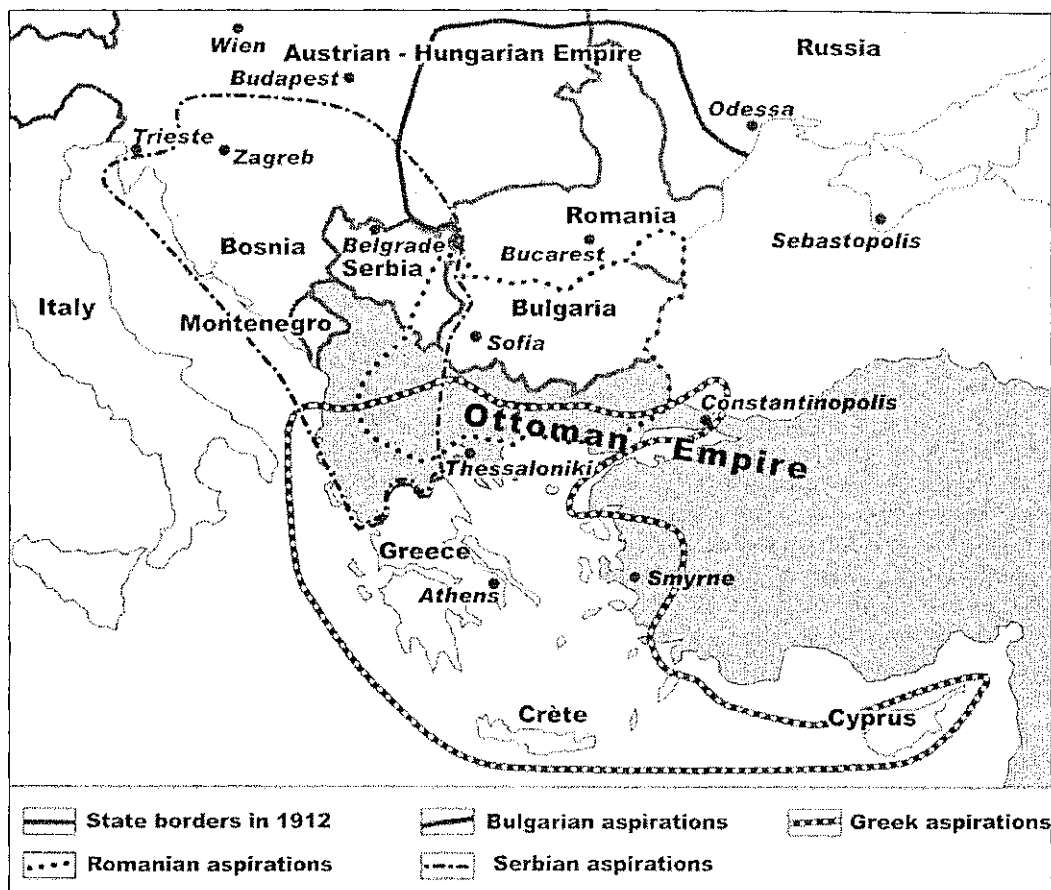


Fig. 2: The partition of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the 20th Century and territorial aspirations of the Balkan countries.

Sl. 2: Razkroj Osmanskega imperija v začetku 20. stoletja in teritorialne ambicije posameznih balkanskih držav.

since then. The current political borders between Slovenia and Croatia, Austria and Hungary, and Czech Republic and Slovakia, which are all based on this historical divide, represent therefore some of the oldest borderlands in Europe and have thus been quite influential in the creation and the persistence of separate ethno-linguistic areas.

Finally, a cycle of disruption of multinational empires and development of modern nation-states began in 1850 and continued until the end of World War One. In 1866 and 1871 respectively Italy and Germany united; in 1878 Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece became independent. A further contraction of Ottoman control in the Balkans in 1913 permitted the establishment of Albania, the enlargement of Serbia over northern Macedonia, Greece over Epirus and southern Macedonia, and Bulgaria over Rumelia (current south-eastern Bulgaria), eastern Macedonia and western Thrace. At the end of the First World War, a new situation appeared on the political map of CE&SEE. The multinational Austrian empire split into new nation-states or

smaller multinational units: Poland was re-constituted and received the north-eastern belt of the former territory of the empire with the city of Lvov, Czechoslovakia included not only the areas inhabited by Czechs and Slovaks but also a small part of Ukraine, Italy gained the South Tyrol, current western Slovenia and the Istrian Peninsula, Yugoslavia was formed as a multinational association of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (the Slavs of the South), Hungary's reconstituted territory remains the same today, Romania acquired a great portion of the formerly Hungarian territory in the west and Moldavia in the Northeast, while Greece took over Western Thrace from Bulgaria.

This situation would not change considerably after the end of World War Two: Czechoslovakia lost its Ukrainian extension, Italy lost the major part of the territory in the upper Adriatic gained after World War One, and Romania lost Moldavia and the territory north of the Danube as well as the territory north of Varna on the border with Bulgaria. Developments after 1990 are known enough and will not be repeated here: basically

all multinational states broke into national "pieces", an operation that appeared to be much less complicated in the case of former Soviet Union and particularly Czechoslovakia, which had already reinforced its federal constitution already in 1989 (as a federation of Czechs and Slovaks), than in the case of former Yugoslavia.

There are some major issues regarding political geographical transformations that should be stressed at this point. One concerns the different forms of cultural nationalism that emerged in the region: a unification process in its western part (Germany and Italy), where small political territorial units merged in a single state, but a partition process in its eastern part where large multinational empires disunited into separate nation-states directly or after an intermediate stage in which nations with greater affinity constituted smaller multinational federations (Bufon, 1998a). This intermediate stage lasted perhaps for a longer period than expected because the Iron Curtain froze all political geographical processes and thus also the political map of CE&SEE. But both the unification and the partition forms of cultural nationalism have had the same goal: they were seeking to create separate nation-state – political territorial units around a dominant nation or ethnic group.

For this very reason, the implementation of the idea on which cultural nationalism was based ran up against serious problems of territorial delimitation where linear political boundaries needed to coincide with cultural, most often ethno-linguistic borders. And the latter are difficult to defined, being more a border zone of intermingling than a clear line of division. Major difficulties in adopting a nation-state model have thus been faced in those areas where the former Ottoman Empire produced a high ethnic fragmentation and a complex system of cultural identities based on religion, language and ethnic affiliation. Croats and Serbs, for instance, use essentially the same language but their separate identity is founded on a different history, religion and alphabet (Klemenčič, 2001). There are few differences also between Serbs and Bulgarians (originally a Turkish group from the Volga region who settled in the Danubian region in the 7th Century): the language is slightly different but religion and alphabet are the same. Bosnians are ethnically Serbs or Croats by origin and speak Serbo-Croatian but had been Islamized by Turks during the Ottoman period: their peculiarity derives from the fact that they are not only one of the few European nations that had been recognised as such by religious rather than by ethno-linguistic features, but also because this recognition came under a communist regime. It was actually Yugoslav president Tito that gave to Bosnian Muslims the status of "nation" even though at that time only a few of them were real believers. Another example of "invented" nation are the Macedonians who used to be associated with Bulgarians first and then with Serbs at the beginning of the 20th Century. They were also recognised as a

separate nation by Tito, but never by Greece which insisted on the regional derivation of Macedonians and imposed on the country after its independence one of the longest names ever given to a state: "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" – FYROM. But Macedonia as the contact area between Greeks, Albanians, Serbs and Bulgarians became known in Europe even earlier: its mixture of ethnic groups, languages and religions gave the name to the fruit salads (macedoine) served in western European hotels and restaurants.

The relationship between state and nation became one of the greatest political geographical issues in CE&SEE and the basis for the transformation of the political map of the region in the 19th and 20th Century. Especially in the first half of the 20th Century, the drastic resurgence of nationalism sought to solve the lack of correspondence between political and cultural borders in a further implementation of the "cuius regio eius religio" principle driving a practice of intensive ethnic cleansing ("reclamation" was the word that, more in line with the modernist theme of the times, the Italian fascist regime used for the Italianization practice in provinces where a non-Italian language was spoken) over the conquered territories or over the territories that the leading elites wanted to control (Bufon, 2001). These policies were executed by political-military forces through violent assimilation or directly through physical elimination of the undesired subjects. Massive compulsory migrations of Greeks from Turkey or Turks from Greece and Bulgaria after the First World War are notorious enough; during or after the Second World War evacuations involved mainly Jews, Poles and Germans.

Reducing the number of the German and other politically dominant groups in "Mitteleuropa" was thus not only a consequence of war events but also a precondition for the development of nation-states in CE&SEE. Here, the "late" cultural nationalism produced a large number of small countries, in which there is actually no room for the "stateless" because every single ethnic group has slowly developed its national character and finally emerged not only as a cultural, but also as an autonomous political entity. Today's ethnic structure of the countries in the region shows that Poland, Albania, Hungary, Austria, Italy and Czech Republic could be included in the category of "real nation-state" with the dominant nation representing more than 95% of the population; this group of countries is followed by the category of "prevailing nation-states" (Germany, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Croatia) where the dominant group represents from 85% to 95% of the entire population. We may consider as "relative nation-states" those countries in which the existing dominant group counts from 75% to 85% of the total population and is therefore associated with one or stronger minority group. The only two countries of this type in the region are Macedonia and the current fed-

eration of Serbia and Montenegro. Along with Switzerland, there is only one multinational state left in the region: Bosnia and Herzegovina where, accordingly to the 1991 census, the Muslims represented the relative majority of the population (50%), followed by Serbs (32%) and Croats (18%). But we must consider that ethnic cleansing in the territory of former Yugoslavia has not only changed or rather "normalised" the ethnic structure of the individual countries, but has also deeply affected the past spatial distribution of the individual ethnic groups. Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, has experienced a radical re-distribution of its constituent national groups (Corson, Minghi, 2001), and the same could be said for Serbs in Croatian Krajina or, more recently, Serbs in Kosovo and Macedonians in the areas under ethnic Albanian control. In addition, attention is drawn to the difference between autochthonous minorities who tend to preserve their original identity and minority migrant groups who tend to integrate into the dominant group. The latter are becoming increasingly important in the developed "western" European countries but are also already present in CE&SEE countries: for example, in Slovenia more than 10% of the total population is made by migrants from other former Yugoslav republics (Gosar, 1993).

Even more important for the past and present political geographical conditions in the region seems to be the percentage of the dominant group which has been separated from its mother-country by political boundaries. Currently as much as 45% of ethnic Albanians and 20–25% of ethnic Hungarians and Macedonians live outside the country in which they represent the dominant nation. On a different scale, the same phenomenon interests Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, the Serbian-Montenegro federation and Romania where the percentage ranges from 5% to 10%. This situation is another direct consequence of prevailing cultural nationalism. Because of the past political and historical events many cultural and linguistic groups have been separated by shifting political borders, and different ethnically mixed areas and national minorities have been created. In the Balkans, in particular, each country and nation has cultivated a mythical memory of its past role and territorial extent, causing irredentistic expectations and tendencies to create political border disputes. On the one hand nation-states were trying to instrumentalize their own minorities living in the neighbouring countries for the achievement of their political goals. Yet, on the other, they were seeking to obtain an ethnically more homogeneous state territory to avoid foreign interference. Particularly after World War One, the principle of the protection of national minorities, recognised as legal subjects, was introduced, but it gave rise to a series of internal and international frictions, which countries tried to solve with the introduction of certain forms of reciprocity. But as the concept of reciprocity is partially in-

compatible with the principle of national sovereignty, widely accepted after World War Two, in the great majority of cases reciprocity was simply removed from international political practice. After the events of 1990, minority issues seem to constitute a real stumbling block in CE&SEE and it is no coincidence that among the fundamental conditions for recognition of the new states which appeared in the region and for their integration into the various European international associations, the achievement of an acceptable level of minority protection measures for EU application occupies a pre-eminent position (Bufon, 1996).

CONCLUSIONS: CO-OPERATION AND INTEGRATION PERSPECTIVES

Co-operation and integration perspectives in CE&SEE may be discussed on two different but inter-related levels. The first is at the level of what could be called "regional globalisation" or the integration of an increasing number of CE&SEE countries into a wider European and trans-continental dimension; the second concerns regional aspects of cross-border co-operation. A direct consequence of the first process continues to be the actual dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War structural and mental legacies associated with it in the region, but it has also had the effect of transferring both EU and NATO borders eastward, opening up the problem of establishing a new partnership between the EU and what we called "Russian Union". To the south-east, however, the process will open up the need for a "New Deal" for former Yugoslavia and the area between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, a crucial contact area between Europe and the Asian "Near East" (O'Tuathail, 2001). In general, CE&SEE presents different models of organisation of a multinational space on the fringes of the EU, ranging from convergence to divergence. Thus, Europe is simultaneously undergoing processes of centralisation and fragmentation. These processes pass through the nation-state and increasingly bring into relief questions of collective identity between modern and functional aspects of the "demos", and primordial and cultural aspects of the "ethnos". In this perspective, advocates of an open, culturally plural European society are seeking to reduce the power of the state by boosting both the power of the region and that of the EU. For the optimist, Europe, by giving high priority to the idea of multiculturalism, will become the first post-modern political system of the 21st Century; but to the pessimist, the continuing combination of "unity" and "diversity" will only be a recipe for inefficient federalism and the artificial reproduction of fragmented cultural identities (Williams, 1997).

Some are arguing that the pace of change and increasing alienation will occasion greater resistance in culturally more traditional societies, particularly in those

actually *straddling* the EU's expanding frontier. Bugajski, for instance, is warning that in multiethnic countries of this region with large and territorially compact minorities, cultural, linguistic, religious and regional differences will continue to fan frictions and conflicts, especially if political reforms and administrative decentralisation fail to satisfy rising minority aspiration for cultural and political self-determination (Bugajski, 1995). But exactly the same arguments can be made on the development of regionalism *within* the EU. A difference can be detected perhaps in the fact that within CE&SEE, given the size and the structure of nation-states of the region, there is a closer relationship between the cultural (nation) and the functional (state) dimension reinforced through their experience in terms of cultural nationalism, which is in contrast with the situation in the western and eastern part of the continent. In addition, cross-border co-operation has already transformed previously suspect or fragile CE&SEE strategic regions into pivotal nodes in an expanded European network of communication and trade, among the Germanic and Romance, and the Slavic cultural areas and regions.

For this reason, regional aspects of cross-border co-operation are particularly important in CE&SEE. Research investigations in central European border areas, and in the Upper Adriatic in particular (Bufon, Minghi, 2000), have shown that the intensity of cross-border co-operation depends above all on the presence on both sides of the border of urbanised areas and also of national minorities. Furthermore, traditional cultural and social ties continue to exist on the basis of consolidated former territorial units. This situation could be explained by the need for the local population to maintain the historical-regional structure even when affected by border changes. Paradoxically, the greater the problems in the political division of a homogeneous administrative, cultural and economic region, the greater the probability for such a politically divided area to develop into an integrated border region. These new forms of cross-border regionalism are of particular interest in CE&SEE, where they have not only an important functional role to play in the implementation of social and economic integration at the inter-state and inter-regional levels, but also in the preservation of cultural features and the strengthening of inter-ethnic coexistence and co-operation (Klemenčič, Bufon, 1994). This is especially the case in those areas settled by national minorities or autochthonous border regional communities, and such border areas are more a rule than an exception in Europe.

Of course, there are important differences within CE&SEE in terms of both cross-border co-operation potentials and practices. Germany has established numerous new "Euroregions" along its eastern border with Poland and Czech Republic. They are organised in a similar way to the "Euroregions" which have been established in the 70's and 80's on its western border and

have now become the model for local institutional cross-border co-operation in Europe (Bufon, 1998b). The common characteristic of this type of co-operation is that "Euroregions" are an instrument for promoting cross-border formal and functional contacts in areas where these contacts are rare or, at best, poorly developed. In the case of eastern German border areas this situation is combined with a general under-development of the border region and a lack of proper potentials, and "Euroregions" are perceived as a major resource for acquiring funds from the European programmes which support cross-border co-operation and regional development in general. The same situation of gradual reconstruction of the space around the Iron Curtain can be found along Austria's eastern border sections with Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, even if "Euroregions" here are developing considerably slower than along the German border.

On the other hand, in the Upper Adriatic as an area of contact between Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, potentials and practices for cross-border co-operation are quite different (Bufon, 2002b & 2003). Here, institutional cross-border relations are based on the Alpe-Adria Community, a broad association of Alpine, Pannonian and Adriatic border regions, which was established thirty years ago as the first international body embracing regions from both sides of the Iron Curtain. In addition, local functional border problems (for instance between Italy and Austria, Italy and Slovenia, or between Austria and Slovenia) are usually solved within special bilateral agreements which date back almost 50 years despite the Iron Curtain. This frame was very helpful in driving the region from a potential conflict area into an area of co-existence. Hence, local authorities until now have not seen sufficient reasons for adopting the "Euroregion" cross-border co-operation model, even though local cross-border co-operation could be further strengthened, particularly between twin border towns. In fact, local cross-border contacts on the functional and socio-cultural levels along the more urbanised Italo-Slovene border are already outgrowing the given institutional background and are in general also more intense than cross-border contacts within "western" border regions (Bufon, 1993; 1994).

The broader "Alpe-Adria" model, more than the locally based German "Euroregion" model, served as an example for the Carpathian Euroregion, which since 1993 has tried to promote cross-border initiatives in the border region between Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Ukraine (Sueli-Zakar, Czimbire, 2001). However, both history and the current economic, social and spatial structure of the region are challenging its efforts. Slovakia and Romania often perceive the association as an instrument for Hungarian "expansion", aimed at encouraging the autonomy of the Hungarian ethnic minorities in their countries. Another greater obstacle to

cross-border co-operation in this part of CE&SEE is represented by state centralisation and the prospected integration of Hungary in the EU that will bring an intensification of border control in most sections of its borders with its non-EU neighbours.

In the southern part of CE&SEE there are virtually no specific regional or local frames that might support cross-border co-operation. The lower Danubian and the southern Balkans (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece), for instance, have many common interests (central among which are combating pollution and the reconstruction of economies) (Pickles, Smith, 1998), but few co-operation initiatives. Socio-cultural and ethnic conflict resolutions represent probably the major issue in the western part of the Balkans, particularly those deriving from the contact between the ethnic Albanian and non-Albanian populations. Below the level of the control of international forces trying to keep the conflicts down, there is a huge

"deregulated" space in which borders do not represent a major obstacle to illegal trade and traffic which concern weapons as well as drugs, refugees, migrants and prostitution. This is actually the part of CE&SEE in which the local dimension comes closest to the global dimension, connecting both sides of the Adriatic and directing illegal traffic either across Montenegro and Albania (DeL'Agnes, Squarcina, 2000), or across Slovenia to Italy and thus into the EU. And from this perspective too, CE&SEE seems to be crucial for understanding and solving the basic problems of the future of our continent, in which the relationships between convergence and divergence processes, functional integration and cultural coexistence, as well as local and global intersections within the EU and between EU and "the rest of the world" are far from being controlled or properly dealt with.

SREDNJE-VZHODNA IN JUGO-VZHODNA EVROPA: OBMOČJE GEOPOLITIČNEGA IN GEOKULTURNEGA STIKA

Milan BUFON

Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Koper, SI-6000 Koper, Garibaldijeva 1
e-mail: milan.bufon@zrs-kp.si

POVZETEK

Članek obravnava nekaj osnovnih problemov, ki izhajajo iz spreminjajoče se geopolitične in geokulturne strukture srednje in jugovzhodne Evrope pred in po padcu železne zaves. Posebej so prediskutirani še procesi nacionalizma ter oblikovanja nacionalnih in multinacionalnih držav kot elementov součinkovanja divergentnih in konvergentnih teženj v družbi in prostoru. Obravnavano območje je namreč ključnega pomena pri razumevanju potencialov inter-kulturnega sodelovanja ter integracije na evropskem kontinentu. Regija predstavlja pomembno geopolitično in geokulturno stičišče med različnimi evropskimi makroregijami, kakršni sta na primer po Galtungu protestantsko-katoliška "Evropska unija", pravoslavna "Ruska unija" in muslimanska "Turška unija". Trenutno je obravnavano območje še vedno na vzhodni in južni periferiji evropskega »središčnega prostora" in je deloma zajeto v nemško oziroma italijansko "vplivnostno območje". Na to območje se usmerjajo širitvene strategije EU, hkrati pa še vedno predstavlja nekakšno vmesno cono geostrateških vplivov ZDA in Rusije, še posebno Balkanski polotok kot podaljšek bližnjevzhodnega "shatter-belta". Članek se zaključuje s krajšo diskusijo o razvojnih perspektivah, ki zadeva tudi različne oblike bodoče organizacije tega multinacionalnega prostora na robu EU ter nekatere regionalne vidike čezmejnega sodelovanja v alpsko-jadranskem (Avstrija, Italija, Slovenija, Hrvaška), alpsko-panonskem (Avstrija, Slovenija, Madžarska, Hrvaška), južnojadranskem (Italija, Albanija, Črna gora) in spodnjepodonavskem ter južnobalkanskem (Romunija, Bolgarija, Grčija) prostoru.

Ključne besede: srednje-vzhodna in jugo-vzhodna Evropa, geopolitične transformacije, geokulturna prepletanja, političnogeografski procesi, perspektive integracije

REFERENCES

- Bagnoli, L. (2001):** L'estensione de l'Europe selon les organisations internationales européennes. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 595-606.
- Battisti, G. (2000):** La géopolitique de l'Adriatique – un résumé historique. In: Sanguin, A. L. (ed.): *Mare Nostrum – Dynamiques et mutations géopolitiques de la Méditerranée*. Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 265-274.
- Bufon, M. (1993):** Cultural and social dimensions of borderlands – the case of the Italo-Slovene transborder area. *GeoJournal*, 30, 3. Dordrecht – Boston – London, 235-240.
- Bufon, M. (1994):** Per una geografia delle aree di confine: il caso della regione transconfinaria italo-slovena nel Goriziano. *Rivista geografica italiana*, 101. Firenze, 197-219.
- Bufon, M. (1996):** Some political geographical problems of transition in Central Europe: the case of Slovenia. In: Carter, F. W., Jordan, P., Rey, V. (eds.): *Central Europe after the Fall of the Iron Curtain*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 73-89.
- Bufon, M. (1998a):** Nationalism and globalization – a Central European perspective. *Annales*, 12/98. Koper, 7-14.
- Bufon, M. (1998b):** Le regioni transfrontaliere nel processo di unificazione europea. In: Bonaverò, P., Dansero, E. (eds.): *L'Europa delle regioni e delle reti*. Torino, UTET, 126-142.
- Bufon, M. (2001):** From geopolitics to political geography – the new European challenge. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 335-346.
- Bufon, M. (2002a):** Slovenia – a European contact and border area. *Annales*, 12, 2002, 2. Koper, 445-472.
- Bufon, M. (2002b):** Confini, identità ed integrazione – nuove prospettive per l'alto Adriatico. Trieste, SLORI.
- Bufon, M. (2003):** Cross-border co-operation in the Upper Adriatic. In: Anderson, J., O'Dowd, L., Wilson, T. M. (eds.): *New Borders for a Changing Europe*. London, Frank Cass, 177-196.
- Bufon, M., Minghi, J. V. (2000):** The upper Adriatic borderland: from conflict to harmony. *GeoJournal*, 52. Dordrecht – Boston – London, 119-127.
- Bugajski, J. (1995):** *Nations in Turmoil: Conflict and Cooperation in Eastern Europe*. Boulder, Westview Press.
- Carter, F. W. (1996):** Central Europe – fact or geographical fiction? In: Carter, F. W., Jordan, P., Rey, V. (eds.): *Central Europe after the Fall of the Iron Curtain*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 9-44.
- Cohen, S. B. (1963):** *Geography and Politics in a World Divided*. New York, Random House.
- Cohen, S. B. (1982):** A new map of global geopolitical equilibrium. *Political Geography Quarterly*, 1, 223-241.
- Corson, W. M., Minghi, J. V. (2001):** Instant analysis in political geography – prediction and the test of time. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 813-828.
- Dell'Agnese, E., Squarcina, E. (2000):** Le canal d'Ortrante comme espace transfrontalier. In: Sanguin, A. L. (ed.): *Mare Nostrum – Dynamiques et mutations géopolitiques de la Méditerranée*. Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, 91-100.
- Gosar, A. (1993):** Nationalities of Slovenia – changing ethnic structures in Central Europe. *GeoJournal*, 30. Dordrecht – Boston – London, 215-223.
- Klemenčič, V., Bufon, M. (1994):** Cultural elements of integration and transformation of border regions. *Political Geography*, 1, 73-83.
- Klemenčič, M. (2001):** Croatian national identity. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 851-861.
- Kolossov, V. (1996):** Geopolitical scenarios far eastern and central Europe in a post-bipolar world. In: Carter, F. W., Jordan, P., Rey, V. (eds.): *Central Europe after the Fall of the Iron Curtain*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 63-72.
- O'Loughlin, J. (2001):** Geopolitical visions of Central Europe. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 607-628.
- O'Tuathail, G. (2001):** The Bosnian war and the American securing of "Europe". In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 797-812.
- Pickles, J., Smith, A. (1998):** *Theorising Transition – The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformations* (eds.). London, Routledge.
- Rey, V. (1996):** The new Central Europe: waiting for convergence? In: Carter, F. W., Jordan, P., Rey, V. (eds.): *Central Europe after the Fall of the Iron Curtain*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 45-62.
- Sinnhuber, K. A. (1954):** Central Europe – Mitteleuropa – Europe Centrale: an analysis of a geographical term. *Transactions and Papers of the Institute of British Geographers*, 20, 15-39.
- Sueli-Zakar, I., Czmir, K. (2001):** The political geography and geopolitical role of the Carpathian region. In: Antonsich, M., Kolossov, V., Pagnini, M. P. (eds.): *Europe Between Political Geography and Geopolitics*. Roma, Società geografica italiana, 659-672.
- Williams, C. H. (1997):** European regionalism and the search for new representational spaces. *Annales* 10/97. Koper, 265-274.