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### The idea of East-Central Europe and its role in shaping the logic behind Eastern Partnership

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## The idea of East-Central Europe and its role in shaping the logic behind Eastern Partnership\*

**Abstract:** The EaP embodies a potent idea and a policy-framework that equips the EU with a set of tools to address the specificity of the EU's eastern neighbours, certainly apart from Russia. The EaP presents itself in this context as a seminal, even if largely implicit, attempt to consolidate the idea of East-Central Europe as an entity that is culturally and politically independent from Russia. Paradoxically, the concept and, indeed, the idea of East-Central Europe have not been as firmly established in the popular consensus as the inhabitants of the area in question would have assumed even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, following the collapse of communism in 1989, a simple mention by the political establishment, e.g. in Poland, of its prospective European integration, was received by many in so-called West with an unease. It has taken another nearly three decades for the idea of cultural and political distinctiveness of East-Central Europe to be recognized. Still, the case of Ukraine suggests that it is far from being consolidated. Therefore, if our concern today is Ukraine, but also Russia and its European vocation, it is necessary that the ideas that have shaped the prevailing conception of the region and its identity are re-thought. The objective of this paper is to do just that.

**Keywords:** East-Central Europe, ideas, Russia, Eastern Partnership (EaP), Oskar Halecki

### Introduction

Paradoxically, the concept and, indeed, the idea of East-Central Europe have not been as firmly established in the popular consensus as the inhabitants of the area in question would have assumed since the late 80s. Indeed, following the collapse of communism in 1989, a simple

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mention by the political establishment, e.g. in Poland, of its prospective European integration, was received by many in so-called West with an unease. What Polish politicians would present in terms of a return to Europe, many in the West would see only with a great suspicion. Even if Bronisław Geremek made a convincing case for Poland's place in Europe, several attempts, including Bill Clinton's meeting with Václav Havel back in 1994, were needed to convince the West that East-Central Europe was a part of Europe and that it was important both for Europe and the US. It has taken another 25 years though for another idea to consolidate, i.e. that there is a difference between the Soviet Union/Russian Federation and countries that were occupied by it for a prolonged period of time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The conceptual and ideational vagueness that have obscured the understanding of the specificity of this part of Europe rendered it particularly difficult for countries claiming their sovereign rights to these areas to have their voice heard in matters vital for their independence on the international stage. The more important it has been therefore for Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary to uphold their Euro-Atlantic vocation. And if today, i.e. more than a quarter century following the Round Table talks in Poland, it seems that the concept and the idea of East-Central Europe have consolidated, the case of Ukraine proves that conceptual, ideational and arguably geopolitical delimitations in/of the region are as blurry as they could be. The more relevant it is to dwell on these issues. It is in this context that one should view the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

The EaP embodies a potent idea and a policy-framework that equips the EU with a set of tools to address the specificity of the EU's eastern neighbours, but not Russia. The EaP presents itself in this context as a seminal, even if largely implicit, attempt to consolidate the idea of East-Central Europe as an entity that is culturally and politically independent from Russia. By default, the EaP also opens up the possibility of decoupling the fate of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine from Russia. Therefore, if our concern today is Ukraine, but also Russia and its European vocation, it is necessary that the ideas that shape the prevailing conception of the region and its identity are re-thought. The argument shall be structured as follows. In the first part, an insight into the emergence of the concept of East-Central Europe is offered and the figure of Halecki, a Polish

historian in exile, is introduced. Against this backdrop, the struggle of ideas that shaped the US' view of Europe in the post-WW2 period is discussed briefly so as to highlight the ambiguity of the concept of East-Central Europe. The remainder of the paper traces the evolution of and the rise in popularity of the very idea of East-Central Europe over time, a concept that rendered Halecki so controversial a few decades earlier. Conclusions follow.

## **1 East-Central Europe: an insight into the emergence of the concept and Halecki's role in it**

As a geopolitical and cultural whole, East-Central Europe has been the effect of changes that took place on the map of Europe as a result of the Second World War (WW2).<sup>1</sup> Prior to that several rather general ways of referring to this part of Europe were employed. In other words, historians had often used the term Eastern Europe, a term that included also Russia. Central Europe was another frequently employed term, whereas this idea gained the geopolitical dimension as *Mitteleuropa* a hundred years ago in Germany. The term East-Central Europe was never used by historians. And yet, the term East-Central Europe should be associated with the entrance of the Soviet Union, i.e. the rebellious heir of the old Russian Empire of the Tsars, into a geographical area that – previously partitioned by three great empires, incl. Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia, re-gained independence following WW2. When the Polish historian Oskar Halecki settled in the US following WW2 he was quick to realize that the status of East-Central Europe in the mainstream narratives was at least ambiguous.

Halecki was one of the most prominent Polish historians and Warsaw University professor prior to WW2. In exile, he only took the position at Fordham University, “a Catholic university which was for sure not in the category of Harvard, Columbia, Yale, Princeton, etc.”<sup>2</sup> Fol-

1 This contribution uses some material previously published by the Author in Polish, cf. M. Filipowicz, *Emigranci i jankesi. O amerykańskich historykach Rosji* [The Emigres and their Students. American Historians of Russia], Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie KUL, 2007.

2 I quote Piotr Wandycz who while explaining the mechanisms behind American academic careers told Sławomir Łukasiewicz that there were basically two ways of succeeding, i.e. one could graduate from an US university or arrive from Europe to the US in fame. Wandycz continued: “But this [the latter option – M.F.] did not always work. Even for Halecki who came here already a schol-

lowing the war, Halecki was subjected to harsh critique by the communist party members, including Władysław Gomułka himself. While Gomułka could hardly be considered as a careful reader of the Halecki's works, written mainly in English... However, Halecki was also criticized by domestic, Polish, historians. In exile, Halecki realized that the US' public opinion, similarly as that in Western Europe, did not find the decisions of the Yalta conference of 1945 problematic. In other words, the general perception of the decisions reached back in 1945 was ignorant of the actual implications of the Yalta conference. While the role of Russia in this conference was recognized, and Russia was not supported by the West, it was still considered an actor to be fearful of. The spotlight of the narrative on Yalta would therefore focus on Russia, effectively obscuring the existence of and the conference's implications for countries located beyond East Germany's eastern frontier. This is how, what we claim to be East-Central Europe today, fell in cognitive oblivion of several generations of voters and politicians in the West. Halecki was determined to challenge this status quo.

If Halecki was not popular in Poland, he was equally unpopular in the US; perhaps, except for the Catholic circles. His manifestation of religion and fervent defence of Pope Pius XII would suffice to explain his marginalisation on the academic scene. Another reason that added to Halecki's controversy<sup>3</sup> was related to what he wrote about Russia. Specifically, three of Halecki's texts gained a certain popularity, i.e. an essay devoted to the concept of the history of Europe<sup>4</sup>, a vast synthesis of the history of East-Central Europe<sup>5</sup> and, finally, a basic mono-

ar, known for numerous international conferences. Halecki had actually never had a position in the American academic life he deserved. He was an outsider; besides, the aversion towards Catholics was very strong at the time, which changed with Kennedy's presidency. Halecki was a devout Catholic, he belonged to the American Catholic Historical Association and was even its president, which worked to his disadvantage." P.S. Wandycz, *O federalizmie i emigracji. Reminiscencje o rzeczach istotnych i błahych. Rozmowy przeprowadził Sławomir Łukasiewicz* [About federalism and emigration. Recollections about issues important and not. Conversations between P.S. Wandycz and S. Łukasiewicz], Lublin: Towarzystwo Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2003, p. 51.

- 3 P. Wandycz, 'O dwóch historykach' [About the two historians], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 32, 1975, pp. 61-65.
- 4 O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, London-New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950, Polish translation: *Historia Europy – jej granice i podziały*, trans. J.M. Kłoczowski, Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1994.
- 5 O. Halecki, *Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1952.

graph devoted to the history of the Church union<sup>6</sup>. In order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the criticisms towards Halecki in the US, it is also necessary to stress that since the very beginning of his stay in the US, he sought to resist the dominance of Russian studies<sup>7</sup> in the universities. Instead, he strove to establish a proper place for area-studies that he called, East-Central Europe.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the timing to pursue this idea was not particularly conducive. In other words, the intellectual atmosphere in the academia was unfavourable from the very beginning since the field of Russian studies was consolidated. At first, Russia evoked admiration and attention as an ally. Afterwards, it attracted attention rather than admiration as an enemy during the Cold War. Therefore, what in the US was called Slavic or East European Studies was devoted predominantly to the study of Russia. Against this backdrop, the only thing that Halecki could do in order to induce any meaningful change was to change and clarify the terminology so as to highlight the difference between the study of Russia and the study of the area between Germany and Russia.

Active in the academia of the broadly conceived West already before WW2, Halecki was well aware that he could not challenge the status quo by seeking to make a case centred around one country, even

- 6 O. Halecki, *From Florence to Brest (1439-1596)*, New York: Fordham University Press 1959, the earlier edition, also in English, the Roman edition, by Sacrum Poloniae Millenium, Roma 1958; Polish translation: *Od unii florenckiej do unii brzeskiej*, trans. A. Niklewicz OSU, vol. 1-2, Lublin-Rzym: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1997.
- 7 A lot about it was mentioned, for example, in his correspondence with his disciple Józef Jasnowski. Cf. M. Dąbrowska (ed.), *Oskar Halecki i jego wizja Europy*, Warszawa-Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012, p. 163.
- 8 More about this and about Halecki: J. Kłoczowski, *Europa Środkowowschodnia w historiografii krajów regionu* [East-Central Europe in the historiography of the countries of the region], Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1993; idem, 'Oskar Halecki i jego walka o miejsce Polski w Europie' [Oskar Halecki and his fight for a Poland's place in Europe], in: H. Bułhak (ed.), *Z dziejów polityki i dyplomacji polskiej. Studia poświęcone pamięci Edwarda hr. Raczyńskiego, Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na wygnaniu* [From the history of Polish politics and diplomacy. Studies dedicated to the memory of Edward hr. Raczyński Polish President in exile], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1994, pp. 397-406; S. Łukasiewicz, 'Federalistyczne atrybuty historiografii Oskara Haleckiego' [Federalist attributes of Oskar Halecki's historiography], *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 1, 2003, pp. 12-29; R. Stobiecki, 'Twórczość emigracyjna Oskara Haleckiego (1891-1973). Próba charakterystyki' [Oskar Halecki's work in exile (1891-1973). Characteristic], in: J. Faryś, R. Nir, M. Szczerbiński (eds), *Studia z dziejów Polski i Europy w XIX i XX wieku. Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Piotrowi Stefanowi Wandyczowi* [Studies in the History of Polish and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The book is dedicated to Professor Piotr Stefan Wandycz], Gorzów Wielkopolski: Sonar, 2004, pp. 581-592.

if it was medium-sized and had a respectable nation. In other words, Halecki knew that it would not be enough to get the very much needed attention of the public opinion in the West and thus challenge the dominant status of studies devoted to Russia, and as a consequence the perception and concepts employed to refer to an area that was neither Russia nor Germany. Therefore, Halecki decided to choose a wider option, i.e. an emphasis on an entire area. The advantage on focusing on an area was two-fold. On the one hand, it was free from possible criticisms that would hint to nationalistic pettiness. On the other hand, it created the opportunity to make a common case for the sake of several small and medium-sized countries located in the said region. While upholding the historical, cultural and political distinctness of East-Central Europe, Halecki stressed the existence of historical bonds between Russia and Germany. In this way, implicitly, he reified the existence of an area between Germany and Russia. Interestingly, Halecki denied Russia the status of a European country. In his view, both from the historical and contemporary perspective, Russia was culturally alien to Europe.

## **2. The struggle of ideas that shaped the US' view of Europe in the post-WW2**

Halecki's conception of East-Central Europe did not reverberate in the US and the West in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Essentially, it was forgotten for many years. Stephen Kotkin, one of the most intelligent and solid American historians, who greatly added to the study of the Polish contribution to Russian and East-European studies, noted:

Try to imagine the intellectual life of the post-war West without the Polish emigration. The Polish impact has been especially immense when it comes to views on Russia. Czeslaw Milosz lectured at Berkeley with uncanny empathy on Dostoevsky. Leszek Kolakowski, the renowned moral philosopher at Oxford and Chicago, entombed Soviet Marxism as well as Western Marxism in his monumental trilogy, and composed an immortal parody of revisionist scholarship on Stalinism [...] Andrzej Walicki of Notre Dame struck brilliant portraits of Russian populism and the Slavophile-Westernizer divide, and then delivered his own eulogy for the Marxist faith. And beyond the history of ideas, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the grand strategist and perceptive analyst of the Soviet Bloc, served as National Security Adviser (un-

der Carter), while Richard Pipes, the grand synthesizer of imperial Russian history, also found his way into the National Security Council (under Reagan). The University of Pennsylvania's Moshe Lewin became the acclaimed village elder among historians of Soviet Russia's peasant inheritance, monstrous bureaucracy, and the supposed dynamics of the system's evolution. The itinerant Isaac Deutscher, based eventually in England, achieved biographical mastery over Stalin, ultimately cast out Trotsky as prophet, and talked up Khrushchev, until he was banished. And there have been many others, notably Adam Ulam [...].<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, while mentioning Miłosz, Kołakowski and others, Kotkin did not utter a word about the older generation of Polish emigration. That is neither Oskar Halecki (1891-1973) nor Jan Kucharzewski (1876-1952) who lived in the US at the end of his life and whose important text was published in English, nor Henryk Paszkiewicz (1897-1979) who published some of his works in the US were mentioned. The important point is that this omission was not accidental. Rather, it indicates a certain generational change. That is, the works of Halecki, Kucharzewski and Paszkiewicz, although discussed in the expert circles, did not exert any greater impact on the intellectual life of the U.S. In contrast, however, the generation (or perhaps generations) of Miłosz, Kołakowski, or Pipes in particular, or slightly younger Walicki, have had an influence, directly or indirectly, on the US' public opinion. Each of these authors addressed a very specific aspect related to history, culture, society of the area that in this paper is referred to as East-Central Europe. Through their work therefore these authors ignited an interest and gradually a realization that between Europe's West and Russia a culturally and politically distinct area is located and – given its role on the shaping of the very fabric of the US society – it deserves greater attention. It is in this way that the concept of East-Central Europe, introduced earlier by Halecki, has returned to the surface of the debate.

9 S. Kotkin, 'Kremlinologist as Hero', *New Republic*, vol. 223, no. 19, 2000, p. 45.

In the first two works as well as in articles published in the US academic journals<sup>10</sup>, Halecki claimed that Eastern Europe<sup>11</sup> could not be limited to Russia or even that Russia should be excluded from this area. Halecki argued:

Eastern Europe would, therefore, be the region between the Holy Roman Empire, or the Teutonic and Romance nations, on the one hand, and Eurasian Russia, i.e. those Eastern Slavs who found themselves in certain periods of history outside the European community, on the other hand. He continued: [...] Eastern Europe, as defined here, is no less European than Western Europe. As soon as the identification of Eastern Europe with the realm of Orthodoxy or – what is much more misleading – with Russia is abandoned, it appears that the eastern part of Europe, far from being uniform, is even richer in variety than the western.<sup>12</sup>

Halecki thus synthesised the history of Russia in the following way:

Freed from her own Asiatic conquerors [the Mongols – M.F.], Moscow nevertheless continued to develop on lines which G. Vernadsky has justly compared with the basic trends of the Ottoman Empire and – as far as the system of the first Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, is concerned – with the distinctive features of present-day Bolshevism. In spite of the 'anglomania' of this now admired despot, his political philosophy [...] placed his Russia outside Europe to no less an extent than it had been under the Tartars.<sup>13</sup>

Halecki highlighted the similarities between Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible. When discussing Peter's reforms, Halecki questioned

10 O. Halecki, 'Polish-Russian Relations. Past and Present', *Review of Politics*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1943, pp. 322-338; idem, 'The Historical Role of Central-Eastern Europe', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 232, 1944, pp. 9-18. Another text by Halecki met with particular polemical reactions: 'Imperialism in Slavic and East European History', *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1952, pp. 1-26. Cf. polemics: N.V. Riasanovsky, 'Old Russia, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1952, pp. 171-188; O.P. Backus III, 'Was Muscovite Russia Imperialistic?', *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1954, pp. 522-534.

11 Paradoxically, although Halecki paid attention to the need to specify the terminology, he himself was inconsequent in his terminology: in *Limits and Divisions* he uses the term Eastern Europe which he used before the war but in some works published earlier he had introduced the term Central-Eastern Europe which later, in a modified version, he introduced in 1952 in his *Borderlands of Western Civilization* where he wrote about East-Central Europe.

12 Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, op.cit., pp. 118, 121.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

if these reforms made Russia a truly European country. Rather, he argued, these reforms established foundations for the construction of something that he referred to as 'an Eurasian empire under Russian control'. Halecki wrote:

*To that community* [European community – M.F.] the political participation of such an overwhelmingly large extra-European empire in the European Concert constituted a permanent thread which became clearly apparent at the Congress of Vienna, after the traditional balance of power had been destroyed through the partitions of Poland. Napoleon's experience, repeated one hundred years later by the Germans, now Russia's immediate neighbours, proved that it was not Russia – easy to invade, impossible to conquer – but the much smaller countries on the European continent which had to fear for their security.<sup>14</sup>

In *Borderlands of Western Civilization*, Halecki returned to the problem of the place of Ruthenia and Russia in the history of Europe. He noted that

Mongol domination was indeed a major catastrophe in the history of Russia. It was that Asiatic impact that alienated her from Europe and, much more than the earlier Byzantine influence, made her different from and opposed to the West.<sup>15</sup>

He challenged the argument that taking the lead in the Ruthenian lands by Muscovy resulted in moving the capital city only. He wrote:

It [the Moscow State – M.F.] was a new political creation where the local autocratic tradition was reinforced by the governmental conceptions of the Mongol Empire. That empire was much more despotic than the Christian Empire of Constantinople had ever been, and at the same time much more aggressive, with an unlimited program of expansion. As soon as Muscovite Russia, trained under such an influence, felt strong enough to liberate herself from the degrading yoke of that disintegrating empire, she took over its role in Eastern Europe, later to include its Asiatic part also by means of another process of colonization. But for that very

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> O. Halecki, *Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Safety Harbor: Simon Publications, 2000, pp. 87-88.

reason Moscow under her 'czars', as the grand princes later called themselves like the Tartar khans, became a threat to all free peoples of East Central Europe, who soon found themselves placed between German and Russian imperialism.<sup>16</sup>

From a different angle, and in a different study, Halecki put a thesis about the Russian roots of Soviet expansionism in order to conclude in reference to US policy:

What guarantees ought to be requested in order not to repeat the mistakes which were made from 1941 to 1945? These are not for the historian to determine. He has, however, the right to say that if the statesmen are to be prepared by scholars for planning and obtaining a better solution of Slavic and East European problems, then the scholars must realize at long last that the non-Russian part of Slavic and Eastern Europe is a field of study clearly distinct and different from the field of Russian Studies and that it deserves the same attention as a subject equally important in itself, and not merely as an appendix which is justified for inclusion on the ground that the material will assist the development of a more complete understanding of Russia.<sup>17</sup>

"Moliere's famous aspirant to a medical degree understood this logic well when told to explain why opium puts people to sleep. He answered that opium had a soporific quality" – thus Riasanovsky quoted *The Imaginary Invalid* and put a thesis, opposite to Halecki's, that the claim about "the Russian imperialist specificity" came down to such a logic.<sup>18</sup> The future author of the synthesis of the history of Russia in this way indirectly referred to the postulate of the Polish scholar to necessarily separate Russian studies from East-Central studies.

### **3. Riasanovsky and the question of the 'specifically Russian' imperialism**

Riasanovsky attempted to prove that there was no 'specifically Russian' imperialism. To this end, he argued that over the years the British Empire, not without a reason, was considered as "the most imperial

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem, Imperialism in Slavic and East European History*, op.cit., pp. 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Riasanovsky, op.cit., p. 188.

of all empires, and for good reasons”, whereas “the partition of Africa by France, Great Britain and several other countries has been considered by many experts as the classic example of imperialism, even though Russia took no part in that partition”<sup>19</sup>. The Russians were definitely overtaken by the degree of aggression by the Portuguese and the Dutch when they built their empires. Therefore, if empires showed the national character of the imperialists, could one omit the Spanish conquest, Italian colonies or the Belgian Congo? Halecki argued that Louis XIV and Napoleon should be remembered as international aggressors. The international threat posed by both imperial and Nazi Germany was much greater than Russia had ever posed until Hitler was defeated and Stalin and Communism were strengthened.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, it was Ruthenia and Russia that used to be the victims of aggression, like during the Mongol yoke. There is no Russian specificity when it comes to the need of defending a country against an aggressor,

although Dmitrij Donskoj of Russia at Kulikovo, Don Juan of Austria at Lepanto, and John Sobieski of Poland at the gates of Vienna all won great and lasting victories, they are not therefore regarded as imperialists.

Halecki therefore argued that “one has to recognize militarism and aggression as a part of the warp and woof of European history and world history in order to consider the development of Russia in its proper perspective”<sup>21</sup>

Halecki was, according to Riasanovsky, highly biased. Sensitive to any symptoms of Russian aggression, he did not notice the aggression directed against Russia:

Professor Halecki’s article represents a highly perceptive, though somewhat one-sided, study of Russian imperialism, and similar analyses have been made of the policies of Germany, and of the behavior of many other European countries as well. Poland, for instance, has been accused of repeated aggression not only by ‘Great Russian’ historians, but also by historians from Lithuania, from the Ukraine,

19 Loc.cit.

20 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

21 Ibid., p. 174.

and from several other lands besides. Even Luxemburg was famous for its feats of arms once upon a time.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, he claimed in reference to the Polish-Russian relations:

After all, the relationship of a perfect villain to a perfect victim is a rather rare occurrence in history, especially when the issues continue over hundreds of years and include some of the most complicated situations in the annals of mankind.<sup>23</sup>

In the polemic with Halecki, willy-nilly, Riasanovsky referred to tested Russian stereotypes. That is, Riasanovsky referred to the Lithuanian aggression against Novgorod the Great, to Polish aggression of the Time of Troubles. Finally, he questioned the libertarian character of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth

it is only the historians of Poland who are favourably impressed by the results of ethnic cooperation in Polish states or Polish-led federations. Most of the historians of Lithuania, and of the Ukraine, and of White Russia appear to come to quite different conclusions, a fact which might be of considerable significance, for it takes more than one to cooperate.

Besides, the famous Polish liberties were enjoyed only by “a small proportion of Polish subjects and lay as a heavy burden on the masses”, oppressed by “the aristocratic Polish regime”, which was by no means a unique situation in Europe<sup>24</sup>. Even the partitions did not result solely from Russian fault and specificity:

The participation of Russia in the partitions of Poland was an act of flagrant aggression, at least to the extent that it involved the subjection of ethnically Polish people to an alien and unwanted rule. But even in the case of Poland, Russian imperialism was more than matched by Austria and especially by Prussia, which seized the very core of the Polish state, whereas Russia gained primarily Ukrain-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-179.

ian and White Russian provinces, the inhabitants of which were no more enthusiastic about Poland than about Russia.<sup>25</sup>

There is only one step for Riasanovsky to a certain apology of the Curzon line:

Neither lord Curzon, who is responsible for the famous line, nor the Allied governments which upheld it, were at all pro-Soviet. The line however, had the simple virtue of being an approximate ethnic boundary between the Poles and Eastern Slavs, which was not true of the eastern boundary which the Polish republic managed to win for itself by force of arms. In addition to the obvious differences of language and background, there the fact that the Ukrainians and the White Russians were Orthodox or Uniate, whereas the Poles were Roman Catholic, and religion has proved to be an extremely important force in determining nationality and allegiance throughout the history of Eastern Europe.<sup>26</sup>

This controversy will remain open. Both scholars referred to different national and historiographical perspectives. When leaving aside the great rhetoric of Riasanovsky's polemics and omitting some classic eristic arguments, one thesis is strong: the history of Russia is part of the European history as much as the history of France, England, Germany or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Riasanovsky, to some degree, was in a better position, at least from the perspective of the academic world, quite liberal by nature: ultimately it was him who 'extended' Europe which the 'Russophobe' Halecki attempted to 'narrow'. Also the reference to rich examples from Western Europe was a good step: American educated readers knew this problem much better than the Eastern European issues and putting Russia in this perspective could bring these issues closer. Eventually, Russia did not turn any better or worse than England, France or Germany and sometimes was even less aggressive than Portugal or Holland, not to mention the fresh memories of Nazi Germany. On the other hand, Halecki's arguments could convince the supporters of the Cold War course: the scholar indicat-

25 *Ibid.*, p. 181. Nota bene, when writing about the Prussian partition acquisitions, Riasanovsky, more or less subconsciously, used a more connotatively 'aggressive' verb 'to seize' whereas when he mentioned Russian acquisitions he used a 'milder' verb 'to gain'.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

ed the Russian roots of Soviet expansionism which was a real threat for America and the West in the 1950s. However, in the long-run, this Cold War shadow turned out to be a burden for Halecki, i.e. academic circles generally frowned upon the views which – although not rightly – could be associated with McCarthyism. However, even if Riasanovsky seemed to speak from the universal position of a scholar, without identifying himself as a Russian and with no explicit introduction of the thread of his ethnic involvement, he set Halecki up in his polemics – although never explicitly – as a biased Polish historian who criticised Russia and simultaneously justified Polish historical traditions.

#### **4. Halecki and his idea of East-Central Europe today**

As far as Halecki's conceptualization of East-Central Europe is concerned today, not only its non-nationalistic character should be stressed but also Halecki's perception of Russia should be highlighted. In other words, to refute the criticisms of the alleged nationalistic character of Halecki's view of Europe, it is necessary to draw the interpretive context in which Halecki's ideas originated. Halecki was brought up in the German cultural circle as a son of a Germanised Ruthenian and a Croatian. A Pole by choice, Halecki was aware that had he spoken from the position of a Pole and on behalf of Poland only, his arguments would not have been received with any interest in the West. Therefore, Halecki decided to speak about a wider area, of which Poland was a part, which came under Soviet (or, in Halecki's view, Russian) rule as a result of the decisions taken in Yalta in 1945. From his perspective, East-Central Europe, since historically it belonged to the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, it also belonged to Europe. Therefore, it deserved Europe's support and attention. From a different angle, it needs to be stressed that intellectually, Halecki was a typical product of the Habsburg monarchy. He knew little about Russia, he never had any contacts with this country and his contacts with Russian scholars were next to nothing. This is why it was easier for him to consider Russia as a historically and contemporarily non-European entity. His strong anti-Communism was also of significance as it considerably influenced his perception of the USSR, i.e. the modern heir of the Russian Empire.

Halecki did not gain any favour for his views from wider academic circles in the US where scholars were rather eager to listen to historians of Russian origin or were mistrustful towards something that they treated as a symptom of Polish nationalism and Russophobia. However, he did not entirely lose since – at least in Columbia in New York – he managed to separate East-Central studies from Russian studies and to establish, in 1954, the East-Central European Center, as a part of the Institute for the Study of Europe. It was supposed to focus on the research on the countries between Germany and Russia on the one hand, and between the Baltic Sea and the Aegean Sea on the other.

Following WW2, the region behind the iron curtain did not raise any greater world interest. Naturally, America and the West noticed more dramatic moments such as the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956 or in Czechoslovakia in 1968, but this did not lead them to challenge the post-Yalta order. This order was slightly disturbed by Milan Kundera when in *The New York Review of Books* in 1984 he published a renowned essay on *The tragedy of Central Europe*<sup>27</sup>. The ground for it had already been prepared by the events in Poland: a great social rebellion and the establishment of *Solidarność*, which were unsuccessfully suppressed by martial law declared by General Jaruzelski.

The popular awareness that there is a difference between East-Central Europe and Russia/the Soviet Union reached the surface of the intellectual debate in the West. Kundera succeeded in what Halecki had not previously, i.e. the idea became popular. The real change was brought about by the events in Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1989 which led to the collapse of the Communist regime in those countries, and to the most symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall.

What is important, these events were combined with the internal disintegration and final collapse of the Soviet Union which led to its decomposition and brought an opportunity for the western Soviet republics to break away from Russia.

Halecki's idea, earlier known only to a few meticulous historians, suddenly returned; this time having a second serious and quite real chance to get to the mainstream debate on Europe. This idea was renewed by the Lublin historian, Professor Jerzy Kłoczowski, who – un-

27 M. Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, pp. 33-38.

der a discreet intellectual protectorate of John Paul II – established intensive contacts with intellectuals and historians from Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. In time, Kłoczowski also attempted to draw historians from Czechoslovakia (mainly the future Czechia) and Hungary into cooperation. Thus, the International Federation of East-Central European Institutes was established as a virtual entity in fact but with a real centre in Lublin. The Association of the Institute of East-Central Europe was established there and in 2002 the Minister of Foreign Affairs established the Institute of East-Central Europe where a few synthetic visions of the history of the region were prepared. Professor Kłoczowski managed to engage prominent historians from Poland (Henryk Samsonowicz), from abroad (Piotr Wandycz), from Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania or even from France (Daniel Beauvois who later on started contesting the concept of East-Central Europe). In Lublin, pioneering histories of Ukraine and Belarus were written by historians from these countries. For Ukraine, the authors were Natalia Jakovenko and Yaroslav Hrytsak, for Belarus – Hienad Sahanovich and Zakhar Shybieka.

Kłoczowski's idea, not so much in its assumptions as in practice, had a certain weakness: it was limited to the former territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth although there were active attempts of dialogue with Czechia and Hungary. The development of the situation in Belarus caused the marginalisation of the official interest in the ideas from Lublin as well as the marginalisation of the scholars taking part in East-Central initiatives. No history of Lithuania was prepared within this initiative, which already in the 1990s seemed to herald the problems in the Polish-Lithuanian relations. The affairs took a different turn in Ukraine, which the Lublin centre was most actively interested in. The growing popularity of the idea of East-Central Europe was visible when the chances increased for Ukraine's European choice whereas the concept was weakened when the Ukrainian affairs disappeared from the centre of the Polish policy directed more towards the Visegrad circle. However, the historical explanation, taken from Halecki's texts, can be given to both East-Central and Visegrad ideas.

## Conclusions

The EaP takes the divisions and identities of today's Europe as a given. Implicitly, as a policy-framework, the EaP re-confirms and consolidates the idea of the existence of a geographical area to the east of the EU, an area that is politically distant from both the EU and the Russian Federation. As such, this implicit assumption upon which the EaP is built gives credit to those, that like Halecki, argue that there is a certain distinctiveness about the area that we refer to as East-Central Europe. In this view, the EaP may serve a distinct role in Europe's history, i.e. it constitutes another, very important step, in the process of auto-definition of Europe as a political and cultural entity. Poland in this context, as the key promoter, along with Sweden, of the very idea that eventually led to the launch of the EaP, has played a pivotal role in this process. Viewed from the perspective of historiography, it may have been a turning point in Europe's history in that the existence of East-Central Europe as a politically and culturally distinct part of Europe has been re-affirmed.

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