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On Central European Identity

Abstract: The aim of this article is to indicate the specificity of the identities of Central European nations and religious communities, both in terms of *sameness* and *distinctiveness*. This purpose is served by the structure of the article, which consists of four parts. The first part defines the concept of collective identity. The second shows the geographic, geopolitical, and geo-cultural profile of Central Europe. The third part indicates the importance of religion in the process of building and strengthening national identities in the Central European region. The fourth and final part analyses the cultural and world-view differences between Central Europe and Western Europe, drawing on the results of empirical research. As a result of the analyses carried out, the main culture- and civilisation-related differences are indicated, with particular emphasis on the religion, between Central Europe and the Asian East on the one hand (in a historical perspective) and Western Europe (in a contemporary perspective).

Keywords: Central Europe, identity, religion, victimhood, sovereignty

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wskazanie na specyfikę tożsamości środkowoeuropejskich narodów i wspólnot religijnych zarówno w wymiarze *sameness* (swojskości) jak i *distinctivness* (odrębności). Służy temu struktura artykułu, składającego się z czterech części. W pierwszej zdefiniowano pojęcie tożsamości zbiorowej. W drugiej części wskazano na kształt geograficzny, geopolityczny i geokulturowy Europy Środkowej. W części trzeciej wskazano na znaczenie religii w procesie budowania i umacniania tożsamości narodowych w regionie Europy Środkowej. W części czwartej – ostatniej – przeanalizowano różnice kulturowe i światopoglądowe pomiędzy Europą Środkową a Europa Zachodnią, odwołując się do wyników badań empirycznych. W efekcie przeprowadzonych analiz wskazano na podstawowe różnice kulturowo-cywilizacyjne, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem sfery religijnej, występujące między Europą Środkową a azjatyckim Wschodem z jednej strony (w ujęciu historycznym) oraz Europą Zachodnią (w ujęciu współczesnym).

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Środkowa, tożsamość, religia, wiktymizm, suwerenność

Introduction

The concept of identity made a dizzying career in public discourse and in the field of social sciences at a time of great postmodern deconstruction and of the widespread questioning of certainties. It emerged, as it were, in response to a series of doubts, uncertainties, and difficulties in defining one's own or someone else's identity, based on characteristics considered essential for a given entity: an individual or a social group (nation, ethnic group, regional group, religious group, etc.). There exists a fundamental consensus that identity is attributed to a specific person or group of people rather than to nature, space, or artefacts. Therefore, the term "Central European identity" should be understood in terms of a certain mental shortcut referring to the "social substrate" that constitutes Central Europe – a space with a turbulent history and controversial borders (this will be discussed in more detail later, in a separate section). This primarily refers to the peoples formed from similar historical experiences, who lived in a "compressed zone" (of civilizations, empires), which Central Europe had been since the late Middle Ages. Besides nations, one should also point out supranational religious communities. It is not possible, though, to identify a relevant supra- or trans-national group, which could be called "the Central Europeans".

The objective of this article is to point out the singularity of the identity of Central European nations and religious communities, both in terms of sameness (*swojskość*) and distinctiveness (*odrębność*), in relation to both Russia and Turkey and to the West. For this purpose, the article is structured in four parts, which consider certain historical and contemporary variables that differentiate the identity of Central Europe from that of its two neighbouring regions: Western Europe and the broadly construed East. In the first part, the concept of collective identity will be delineated in more detail. In the second part, I will endeavour to answer the question of the geographic, geopolitical, and geo-cultural profile of Central Europe, by portraying the region in terms of a geopolitical chessboard and a space where the impossibility of political autonomy and the experience of loss of sovereignty are a universal experience, resulting in a centuries-old perception of victimhood. Within the third part, I will point to the importance of religion in the process of building and strengthening national identities in the Central European region. I intend to show the importance of the idea of *antemurale christianitatis* in shaping one's own portrait and image in relation to the nations of Western Europe, as well as to elucidate the significance of ecclesiastical institutions, patron saints, and religious leaders in the construction of collective identities. In the fourth and final part, I intend to show the cultural and world-view differences between Central

and Western Europe, drawing on the results of empirical research, carried out on a representative sample of the inhabitants of the respective European countries.

I am fully aware of the fact that I am describing the phenomena and processes, which are fundamentally unmeasurable and unquantifiable (especially in relation to the second and third parts of this article) and thus require further, more in-depth (comparative on a regional scale) empirical research. Of key importance here is the analysis of the historical determinants of the emergence of distinctness of Central Europe, overlaid with the results of contemporary empirical research regarding Central European societies.

1. What is (collective) identity?

The subjects of national identity can be both individuals and groups, although subjects of the former type appear to be significantly privileged and primary. The distinguishing feature of their position is their ability to reflect, which the collective subject is deprived of, for it constitutes its identity in an intermediated manner [Ścigaj 2004: 155, 167]. The identity of a nation can therefore be realized solely in the members of the collective in question. Thereby, it is necessary to have the active commitment of these individuals and their constant renewal of a choice once made. Piotr Mazurkiewicz states that such a national identity can last "only as long as its participants refer to it *en masse* in the process of self-definition. Otherwise, it is in danger of turning into a sort of fiction officially sustained through propaganda activities" [Mazurkiewicz 2001: 43]. Samuel Huntington also notes that group identity is essentially more enduring than individual identity, showing less susceptibility to change [Huntington 2007: 33]. This nature of collective identities, Paweł Ścigaj observes, does not imply, however, "that they can be reduced to the identities of individuals". In his view, collective identities, including national identities, can be treated in a manner similar to Karl Raimund Popper's "third world" [Ścigaj 2004: 155, 167; Popper 1992: 148-149]. They are initiated and constructed by individuals; however, while undergoing objectification, they exceed the perceptual capacities of particular individuals. In this perspective, national identity can be considered in terms of a symbolic space, objective with respect to individuals, whose "shape, however, depends on the choices made by individuals identifying themselves with selected elements of this symbolic space constituted by the conscious designs of political subjects" [Ścigaj 2004: 155, 167].

National identity appears to function in two different dimensions. The question "Who are we?" implies both the question "Who are we in or of ourselves?" and

the question "Who are we in relation to OTHERS?". The process of identity formation can be seen in both positive and negative terms. On the one hand, it is about becoming aware of one's own characteristic traits; on the other hand, it is about contrasting oneself with others, "stigmatized" in various ways [Bauman 1995: 99nn]. Both axes, – writes the sociologist Bronisław Misztal – "when they become the actual determinants of social action and behaviour (…) contribute to the contemporary phenomenon of identity" [Misztal 2005: 24]. In the academic literature, one can find neat and fitting terms for both approaches: *sameness* and *distinctiveness* [Jacobson-Widding 1983: 159; Taboada-Leonetti 1981: 137-167; Rembierz 1999: 14; Peterson-Royce 1982: 27]. For collective identity, including national identity, is determined both by a sense of continuity and cohesion, as well as a sense of distinctiveness in relation to other groups [Bokszański 2006: 37; Ricoeur 1992: 33nn]. It should be pointed out that both categories render it possible to define (a) the nation as a social group in its distinctiveness, and (b) the nation as part of a broader (supranational) community. In the literature, the latter option is much less frequently explored and described, yet it is beyond doubt that being part of a supranational community is accompanied by both a sense of sharing the same values and by a perception, shared with the other nations, of distinctiveness in relation to other supranational communities.

And finally, it should also be mentioned that there are ongoing discussions in the social sciences regarding the question whether national identity is an expression of the self-awareness and self-knowledge of individuals identifying with a given national community, or an expression of mediated self-awareness of the national group. Or – perhaps – should it be judged based on the observation of some, often hidden and invisible to the "naked eye" through cultural codes and "lifestyles"? In other words, should national identity be reconstructed by referring to the opinions about itself by the majority of the representatives of a given national group (or – by referring to the views of its "spokespersons", e.g., political and cultural elites), or – disregarding the declarations of awareness – should attention be devoted to the analysis of a given national culture, to the modes (prevalent patterns) of behaviour, to objective indicators of national identity? This dilemma reflects the tension between sociological and anthropological paradigms.

2a. Where does the centre of Europe lie? Problems with defining Central Europe

The discussion of where Central Europe lies and what its boundaries are goes back essentially to the period when thinking about Europe in terms of a division into a civilized South and a barbaric North was abandoned, to be replaced by thinking in

terms of a division into the West and the East. Piotr Wandycz observes: "although there existed two Roman empires, the Eastern and the Western, contemporaries did not think in terms of an East-West division" [Wandycz 2003: 12], although Andrzej Nowak traces the beginnings of the formation of the East-West polarity to the early ninth century – the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor of the renewed Western Roman Empire (in opposition, as it were, to Constantinople as the full-fledged heir to Rome) [Nowak 2022]. Until the twilight of the Middle Ages, the main dividing line was defined 'roughly' by the former Roman *limes*, which were not accompanied by extensive borderlands on either side that could be considered a separate cultural entity. The division into the East and the West, taking shape in the final two or three centuries of the waning Middle Ages, initiated by the Great Schism (1054), entered a decisive phase with the so-called grand geographical discoveries and with the industrialization of the West [Samsonowicz 1999]. The aforementioned North-South axis began to lose its significance along with the progress of the Muslim conquests – at that time, Europe (in the cultural sense) lost its South (first in Spain and Southern Italy, then in the Balkans), and simultaneously, the Christianisation of the Germanic tribes shifted the 'centre' of Europe towards the North.

The end of the Middle Ages, i.e., the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Europe, which was accompanied by the emergence of Central Europe (from the Western perspective – Eastern Europe) as a reaction to the onslaught from the East. The first "Asian thrust" was the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, which laid waste tothe lands of the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Hungary. The second "thrust" was the Ottoman invasion of the lands of the present-day Balkans, which began in the mid-14th century and was only stopped at the gates of Vienna in 1683, while the Turkish yoke was finally cast off by the Balkan nations as late as at the turn of the 20th century. The third "Asian thrust" is linked to the establishment of the Russian Tsardom in the 16th century, after three centuries of subjection of the Rus' nobility to the Mongol rule (with all its corresponding civilizational consequences). While the threat from the Ottoman state had gradually diminished since the late 17th century, the threat from Moscow was increasing. Just as the Turkish march towards the Atlantic was stopped at Vienna, the Russian-Bolshevik march to the West was halted and pushed back outside Warsaw (Radzymin) in 1920.

The last two "thrusts" in particular, which constituted a radical negation of European civilization, resulted in the formation of a front line, several hundred

kilometres wide, in defence of the Judaeo-Christian, Greek, and Roman values. At the same time, protected from the East by the joint efforts of the Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Hungarians, Wallachians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats, the Western Europeans – the English, Spanish, Italians, Portuguese, and Dutch – were beginning their conquest of the New World and rapid enrichment through numerous expeditions and the development of intercontinental trade. It could be said that the process of the formation of Central Europe was, on the one hand, a response to the thrust from the East and, on the other hand, the result of the inability to join Western Europe, especially in the socio-economic domain (the formation of an early capitalist economy, the dynamic development of cities and their "interconnectedness through networks"), either because of the involvement in the fight against the Tartars, Turks and Muscovy, or because of the progressive economic underdevelopment of this part of Europe, which was not afforded the benefits of early industrialization. Finally, the frontier between Central and Western Europe was based on the line of two rivers: the Elbe and the Leitha [Szűcs 1995].

Thus, a rather broad geopolitical zone was created between Russia and Turkey on the one hand, and Austria and the Italian and German states on the other. Without entering into a debate with the numerous paradigms of Central Europe, it should be noted that there are **two fundamentally different ways of understanding the region** present in contemporary scholarly and political discourse.

The first one, let us call it **inclusivist**, postulates the inclusion in the region of all those ethnoses and religious communities that are situated within the broad geo-cultural spectrum between Russia and Turkey to the East and Germany and Italy to the West (the status of Austria remaining problematic). This approach to Central Europe presupposes an internal religion-civilizational pluralism, for a region thus delineated, described by Karol Wojtyła, influenced by the Russian theologian and ecumenical activist Vladimir Solov'ev, as a "Europe of two lungs" [Wojtyła 1994; Zenderowski 2003: 26-30; Mazurkiewicz 2004], includes national cultures shaped in both Latin and Byzantine civilizations (but not in the Moscow version!). Central Europe, thus defined, comprises of 19-20 countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia (North), Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. The status of Kosovo, which is not recognized by as many as seven countries in the region: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, remains problematic. In this approach, Greece and Austria are very rarely included in the

Central European region. The leading representative of this current of conceptualization of Central Europe, which includes the Balkan region and the former western Soviet republics, is the eminent Polish historian Oskar Halecki, who divides the region of Central Europe into two areas: Central-Eastern Europe (as outlined above) and Central-Western Europe comprising the German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) [Halecki 1950, id. 2000]. This mode of thinking about Central Europe is also close to Bohdan Cywiński [Cywiński 2003].

The second manner of defining Central Europe, which we can call **exclusivist**, entails restricting the boundaries of Central Europe to those national cultures from the geographical space described above that have strong links with Latin culture, formed on the foundation of Catholicism and later also Protestantism. This kind of understanding of Central Europe in a sense "pushes out" of the region, into the depths of an undefined East, those ethnoses which were formed based on the Orthodox civilization, albeit at the same time not incorporated into the Russian or, earlier, Byzantine civilization; on the contrary, they resisted such incorporation in numerous uprisings and revolts. Central Europe, in this sense, encompasses ten countries: the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, or also Austria, as well as parts of Belarus, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. Such an interpretation of Central Europe's identity and borders is proposed by Krzysztof Dybciak [Dybciak 2001; Dybciak 2004], as well as by the influential Polish historian Piotr S. Wandycz, who, by using the term "East Central Europe", limits its coverage to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, while taking into consideration the changing borders of these states over the course of history [Wandycz 2003: 11].

In the present text, I argue for the inclusivist definition of Central Europe, the primary feature of which is the division into the Latin (Catholic-Protestant) and Byzantine (Orthodox) parts – the two traditions that have both competed against each other throughout history and created a space for cooperation and cultural diffusion.

2b. Central Europe as a geopolitical chessboard. Problems with political autonomy and Central European victimhood

After the loss of sovereignty by Serbia at the end of the 14th century, Hungary at the beginning of the 16th century, Bohemia at the beginning of the 17th century, and – finally – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of the 18th century, Central Europe was progressively becoming a geopolitical chessboard for

external powers. One can say that **from the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, there a process of disempowerment of Central Europe** that had different origins and causes, which would have to be discussed in a separate article. First Turkey, then Austria, Russia and, in the 18th century, also Prussia, the nucleus of the later German Reich, laid claim to specific parts of Central Europe, dividing them among themselves either by military conflict (the Balkans) or diplomatic arrangements not involving the launching of a war (partitions of the First Polish Commonwealth). It is worth noting at this point that the aforementioned states represented different religious domains: Catholic, Islamic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant.

The situation where the Central European nations were deprived of real political autonomy (sovereignty), the trauma caused by the loss of their own state or living in circumstances of permanent threat to their national existence, significantly shaped the identity of the inhabitants of the region (see the table below). Poles, one could say, were in a rather privileged position, as they had been without their own state for "merely" 123 years, and if one counts the time of existence of the Principality of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland, even a shorter period. Among the peoples of Central Europe who possessed their own states in the Middle Ages, those who were deprived of their own statehood for the longest time were the Slovenes (1169 years) and the Slovaks (1085 years, if we consider Czechoslovakia as a state in which the Czech people possessed political sovereignty),1 the Croats (766 years), the Ukrainians (751 years),2 the Montenegrins (626 years), the Albanians (520 years), the Bulgarians (510 years), the Serbs (419 years), the Lithuanians – 349 years (or 123 years counting the state community with Poland), the Hungarians (326 years), the Czechs (298 years, if one considers Czechoslovakia as a state in which the Czech nation enjoyed political sovereignty).

[1] The early medieval nuclei of Slovenian and Slovak statehood, present in the historiography of both nations, are quite commonly contested due to the ephemeral nature of these state entities and the fact that it is difficult to unambiguously identify these with the (exclusively) Slovenian and Slovak ethnicities.

[2] In this case, the problem is the ongoing dispute between Russia and Ukraine over the heritage of the Kievan Rus'.

Table 1. Traditions of statehood of the nations of Central Europe

Country	Loss of independence	Independence (19th-20th century)
Albania	1392 (1)	1912
Belarus (n-XX)	--- (2)	1991*
Bosnia and Herzegowina	11th century (3)	1992**
Bulgaria	1018 / 1398 (4)	1908 (5)
Croatia	1102 (6)	1868 (7) / 1918-1941 (8) / 1941-1945 (9) / 1991
Czech Republic	1620 (10)	1918 (11) / (occupation 1939-1945) / 1993 (12)
Estonia (n-XX)	1940 (13)	1918-1940, od 1991
Hungary	1541 (14)	1867 (15) / 1918
Kosovo (n-XX)	--- (16)	2008 (17)
Latvia (n-XX)	1940 (13)	1918-1940, od 1991
Lithuania	1940 (13)	1918-1940, od 1990
Macedonia (North) (n-XX)	---	1991**
Moldova (n-XX)	---	1991*
Montenegro	1170 (18)	1796/1878-1918; since 2006 (19)
Poland	1795 (20)	od 1918 (occupation 1939-1945)
Romania	---	1878 (21)
Serbia	1389/1459 (22)	1878-1918, since 2006 (23)
Slovakia	833 (24)	1918 (25) / 1939-1945 (26) / 1993 (27)
Slovenia	822 (28) / *1941-1945 (occupation)*	1991**
Ukraine (n-XX)	1240 (29)	1991*

Source: Own compilation based on publicly available data on the periodization of state systems.

1) The Kingdom of Albania (*Regnum Albaniae*) was created by Charles of Anjou in the western part of the Balkan peninsula from the Albanian territory he conquered in 1271 at the expense of the Despotate of Epirus. Starting in 1272, Charles began to use the title of the King of Albania.

2) The Russian boyars participated in the construction and development of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and its history and traditions are considered by Belarusians as an integral part of their historical-cultural identity.

3) Bosnia constituted an autonomous political unit in the 10th century, falling under the control of Byzantium and subsequently Serbia and Hungary in the 11th century. Bosnia regained its independence for a brief period at the end of the 14th century. The years 1377-1391 mark the reign of the first Bosnian king, Tvrtko I of the House of Kotromanić dynasty. In the first half of the 15th century, Bosnia split into smaller feudal principalities that recognized the supremacy of Hungary, while in the second half of the 15th century, the Turkish conquest of Bosnia begins and lasts until the second half of the 19th century.
4) Bulgaria was established in 681, founded by Asparuh. A powerful state was formed with its capital in Pliska (from 895 in Preslav) and lasted until 1018, when it was conquered by Byzantium. Bulgaria regained sovereignty in 1185, only to lose it again in 1398, this time to the Ottoman Turks.
5) Bulgaria was a principality from 1878 but became fully independent only in 1908. In 1878, the Congress of Berlin established two Bulgarian states dependent on the Ottoman Empire – the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. Bulgaria captured Rumelia as early as 1885, which was officially recognized with Bulgarian independence in 1908.
6) The Kingdom of Croatia became an integral part of the Crown of St. Stephen (Kingdom of Hungary).
7) Croatia enjoyed political autonomy within the borders of Hungary (1868-1918).
8) From October to December 1918, a state of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs existed on the rubble of Austria-Hungary, which eventually, together with Serbia and Montenegro, became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS), and from 1929 – of Yugoslavia.
9) Between 1941 and 1945, a so-called Independent State of Croatia existed, dependent on the Third Reich. In addition to most of present-day Croatia, the new state included Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem. The easternmost part of the state was Zemun, one of the districts of Belgrade.
10) In 1515, the Jagiellonians concluded the Vienna treaty with the Habsburgs, concerning the succession of the Bohemian throne to the Austrian rulers in the event of the extinction of the Bohemian line of the Jagiellonians. In 1516, the son of the deceased Vladislav II, Louis the Jagiellonian, succeeded to the throne but died in battle, childless, in 1526. Henceforth, the Catholic Habsburgs sat on the Czech throne without interruption, although formally they did not possess the right to inherit the throne, as each candidate for king had to be first approved by the assembly of the Czech states. This situation changed after the Czechs lost the battle of White Mountain (1620) between Czech Protestant forces and the coalition troops of the Catholic Habsburgs.
11) Between 1918 and 1939, Czechia (Bohemia, Moravia, part of Silesia) was part of the Czechoslovak Republic, in which the Czechoslovak people were the state nation. In the opinion of most Czechs, Czechoslovakia constituted the Czech national state. In 1969, Czechoslovakia was transformed into a federation, as a result of which the Czech Socialist Republic was created from the lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia.
12) Because of the division of Czechoslovakia, on 1.1.1993, the Czech Republic was created as a new entity in international law.
13) Incorporation into the USSR under the status of a union republic.

14) Hungary's might collapsed after 1526 as a result of the defeat in the battle against the Ottoman Empire at Mohács. After a civil war between Ferdinand Habsburg, the pretender to the throne, and John Zapolya, the King of Hungary elected by the Hungarian nobility, the entire area of present-day Hungary was captured by Turkey. Part of the territory of the previous kingdom was granted to the Habsburg dynasty as an ancestral domain in consequence of the Vienna Agreement (1515) between the Jagiellonians and the Habsburgs. The Duchy of Transylvania was formed from part of it, whose first ruler was John Sigismund Zapolya, grandson of the Polish King Sigismund the Old (Zygmunt Stary); while the central part with Buda was ruled directly (as a Turkish province) by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. These provisions were included in the 1541 peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Empire.
15) Hungary was a nation-state (within the Austro-Hungarian Empire) from 1867.
16) Kosovo remained formally under Serbian rule until 1455; subsequently, the Turks took control of this territory. As a result of the May 1913 Treaty of London, Kosovo, and southern Metohija became part of Serbia, and northern Metohija became part of Montenegro.
17) Despite the declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, some countries consider that, from a legal standpoint, Kosovo is still part of Serbia.
18) In the 6th century, Slavs – the Dukljans – settled in Montenegro, creating an independent country, first called Duklja, then the Kingdom of Zeta, and then the Principality of Zeta dependent on Byzantium; from 1170, the lands of Montenegro were incorporated into the Serbian state.
19) Montenegro, politically dependent on Turkey since the end of the 15th century, in 1796 gained *de facto* independence, confirmed at the Congress of Berlin almost a century later (1878). After the First World War, Montenegro became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS). During the Second World War, an attempt was made on Montenegrin territory in 1941 to create an Independent Montenegrin State modelled on Croatia, but its creation and functioning was quite successfully paralysed by partisans and the Chetniks. After World War II, Montenegro became one of the union republics of communist Yugoslavia. In consequence of the secession of Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia (1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992) from Yugoslavia, Serbia, and Montenegro formed a new federation, which initially also operated under the name Yugoslavia and since 2003 as Serbia and Montenegro. Over time, the federation became increasingly weak, and Montenegro began to pursue a wholly independent policy. In 2006, Montenegro became a fully independent state.
20) Following the loss of the Commonwealth of Poland's independence as a result of the partitions, and the subsequent collapse of the Principality of Warsaw (1807-1815), politically and militarily dependent on France, pursuant to the provisions of the Congress of Vienna, the Kingdom of Poland was established, bound by a union with the Russian Empire. Its autonomy was gradually reduced and, in the wake of the January Uprising (1863-1864), abolished. Formally, however, the Kingdom of Poland existed until 1918 – until 1916 as part of the Russian Empire, and subsequently, between 1916 and 1918, as a protectorate of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (despite a certain degree of autonomy, the Kingdom was an occupied land).

21) The Wallachian and Moldavian Hospodaries had been fief lands of Hungary, Poland and eventually Turkey since the Middle Ages, although prominent *voivodes*, or *hospodars* (such as Stefan the Great or Vlad the Impaler) remained *de facto* independent rulers. What is notable is that the Hospodaries, despite being dependent states, continuously constituted a limited form of Romanian statehood. In 1856, the Treaty of Paris, while preserving Turkey's formal authority, placed the Hospodaries under the protectorate of the great powers. In 1859, the Hospodaries were united by a personal union as the United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, and in 1861 – by a genuine union as the United Principalities of Romania Thus, Romania evolved from a union of two states into a unitary state. It gained formal independence in 1878 and became a kingdom in 1881.
22) In 1389, at the Battle of Kosovo Polje, the Turks defeated the Serbian-Bosnian coalition. Serbia fell under Turkish authority and part of the population moved to Hungary. The defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Ankara in 1401 briefly allowed Serbia's reconstruction, but it fell again during the successive Ottoman campaigns between 1454 and 1459.
23) From 1815, a Turkish-dependent Principality of Serbia existed, which gained formal independence in 1878, while from 1881 Serbia was already a kingdom. Separate Serbian statehood ceased to exist with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS, 1918) and, from 1929, Yugoslavia, a *de facto* emanation of Greater Serbia. In communist Yugoslavia, Serbia had the status of a union republic. Following the secession of Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia (1991) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992), Serbia and Montenegro formed a new federation, which initially also functioned under the name Yugoslavia, and since 2003 – as Serbia and Montenegro. Over time, the federation grew increasingly weak and Montenegro started to pursue a fully independent policy. Since 2006, following the secession of Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia has been in existence. In addition, a constituent part of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the *Republika Srpska* (which proclaimed independence in 1992, and subsequently became the union republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, by virtue of the provisions of the Dayton Agreement) that pursues, often in defiance of the central government in Sarajevo, a relatively independent policy.
24) In the 8th century, the Principality of Nitra was established in the territory of present-day Slovakia. In 833, the principality was conquered by Mojmir I and, from then onwards, until 906, this area, together with Bohemia and Moravia, formed the Great Moravian state.
25) Between 1918 and 1939, Slovakia, as the former Upper Hungary (*Felvidék*), was part of the Czechoslovak Republic, with Czechoslovaks designated as the state nation. In 1969, Czechoslovakia was converted into a federation, resulting in the creation of the Slovak Socialist Republic as part of the Czechoslovak federation.
26) Between 1918 and 1939, Slovakia was part of the Czechoslovak Republic, in which Czechoslovaks were the state nation. Between 1939 and 1945, Slovakia was formally a sovereign state (the Slovak Republic); however, it was politically and militarily dependent on the Third Reich. In 1969, Czechoslovakia was transformed into a federation, resulting in the creation, from the Slovak lands, of the Slovak Socialist Republic.

27) Following the division of Czechoslovakia, as of 1.01.1993, the Slovak Republic was established as a new entity under international law.
28) The Slav ancestors of today's Slovenes arrived in the lands of what is now Slovenia in the 6th century. In the 7th century, the Slavic Principality of Karantania was formed on today's Austrian territory. In the middle of the 8th century, the Karantanians adopted Christianity, and in 822, Karantania lost its independence (it was incorporated into the Frankish Empire).
29) In Ukrainian historiography, the medieval feudal state in Eastern Europe, ruled by the Rurikovich dynasty of Varangian origin – the Kyivan Rus – is considered a manifestation of Ukrainian statehood. Russian historiography, on the other hand, seeks to prove that Kyivan Rus represents the beginning of Russian statehood. Therefore, it is emphasized that the origins of this state should be sought in Great Novgorod.

(n-XX) – nations that gained their statehood only in the 20th century.

* Mention should be made of the existence of ephemeral states under the names: the Moldavian Democratic Republic (1917-1918) (which, however, existed more as a transitional form before the unification of Bessarabia with Romania), the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917-1920), the West Ukrainian People's Republic (1918-1919), the Kuban People's Republic (1918-1919) (Ukrainians also refer to the tradition of Kyivan Rus IX-1240, but a direct link between Kyivan Rus and present day Ukraine is rather difficult to prove) and the Belarusian People's Republic (1918-1919). The status, as subjects, of the Belarusian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics, which, although they had separate membership within the framework of the UN, were dependent on the Kremlin to the same extent as the other Soviet republics, is problematic.

** In 1991, some Yugoslav republics proclaimed independence: Slovenia (25 June), Croatia (25 June) and Macedonia (17 September). On 1 March 1992, following a referendum, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence as the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the case of Central European nations, the long periods (sometimes spanning several centuries) of not possessing their own statehood raises the question of how the individual nations of Central Europe managed to survive. There are, it would appear, two answers to this question.

Firstly, unlike Western Europe, especially France as an important point of reference, the empires ruling over respective swathes of Central Europe (Ottoman, Russian, Austrian) did not pursue any consistent assimilation policy, remaining satisfied with the relative obedience of their subjects, who were left quite broad autonomy in the spheres of culture, religion, and language. The empires did not strive to create, based on the conquered ethnoses, modern nations based on a single language, a unified culture and, finally, a whole set of political symbols

requiring the renunciation of one's own cultural identity and the memory of lost independence.

Secondly, religious communities, especially the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, played a particular role in the preservation of the memory of the lost state and in the cultivation of national culture and a sense of distinctiveness vis-à-vis other ethnoses. Both became a depository of sorts for the national spirit, not only by sacralizing, in their own way, individual national communities, but by fulfilling "down-to-earth" social, economic and, finally, also political functions that normally constitute the domain of the state.

In numerous cases, a feeling of trauma, "celebrated" in a certain manner, is associated with the loss of statehood. Across the region, this takes the form of widespread **victimhood**. Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić writes that:

"What made the people of the East (in their own mind) better was the experience of humiliation. Only on humiliation could they put their copyright, it was their internal legitimacy, a unique product of Made in Eastern Europe... The unhappiness resulting from humiliation is an enormous space for manipulation, so Eastern people made their unhappiness an institution" [Ugrešić 2006: 376-377].

The quoted author uses the term the "East" in the sense of the Cold War paradigm, in which there was no room for any "middle ground", as the "Iron Curtain" prevented the existence of any zone "in between". Victimhood, writes the American psychologist Peter Wolson, is about a particular kind of compensation for lost self-respect, resulting from some spectacular national calamity [Wolson 1999]. In Central Europe, "fantasies of salvation" are being created, as Vladimir Tismaneanu has termed them [Tismaneanu 2000]. The prerequisite for salvation is, *inter alia*, the demonstration of one's moral superiority, which, in contrast to the aggressor, the victim possesses by definition. It is therefore important not only to demonstrate one's own suffering in the most heart-wrenching way possible, but also, and perhaps above all, the wickedness of the aggressors and their moral deprivation. The greater the gap between the victim's innocence and the aggressor's barbarity, the greater the chance of victory in the subconsciously imagined "race". Daniel B. MacDonald puts forward a very interesting thesis that since the Holocaust, the icon of the Golden Age has lost its pre-eminent position in the construction of national identities [MacDonald 2006: 99]. It has been replaced by the icon of the national hecatomb, something Dubravka Ugrešić aptly, albeit

perhaps too bluntly, describes as the "pornography of misfortune" [Ugrešić 2006: 269]. Central Europe appears to be a special place on the Old Continent where grievances and bitterness, claims and resentments culminate. We are dealing here with many still unresolved ethnic issues, long-standing disputes: over land, over property, over cultural assets, over compensation, and finally: the most difficult ones – over memory, over honour, and over prestige. From the perspective of the discourses held in the individual states of the region, Central Europe may appear to an external observer solely as a civilization of victims and persecuted nations. This can be seen, for example, in the texts of national anthems, which emphasize the difficult and sorrowful fate, as well as the spectre of death of an entire nation: "Poland has not yet perished, so long as we still live" (Poland); "Ukraine has not yet perished" (Ukraine); "Long torn by ill fate, bring upon [Hungarians] a time of relief, they who have suffered for all sins of the past and of the future" (Hungary); "God of Justice; Thou who saved us when in the deepest bondage cast, hear Thy Serbian children's voices, be our help (…) On our sepulchre of ages breaks the resurrection morn, from the slough of direst slavery Serbia anew is born" (Serbia); "There is lightning over the Tatras, thunderclaps wildly beat. Let us stop them, brothers, for all that, they will disappear, the Slovaks will revive" (Slovakia); "Wake up, Romanian, from your sleep of death into which you have been sunk by barbaric tyrants (…) Priests, lead with your crucifixes, for our army is Christian, the motto is Liberty and its goal is holy, better to die in battle, in full glory, than to once again be slaves upon our ancient ground" (Romania). Most nations also nurture the idea of a "greater homeland" extended to include the parts of their neighbours' territories that they "lost" or that were "seized".

3a. *Antemurale christianitatis* as a constitutive element of Central Europe's identity

Another important element constituting the identity of Central European nations, alongside the experience of the trauma of losing one's own state, the experience of the prospect of death of a nation as a result of some traumatic event, and a permanent sense of threat to its existence, is the widespread **awareness of remaining on the fringes and borderlines of European and Christian civilization**. This experience of being *antemurale christianitatis*, moreover, meant far more than the defence of the interests of one's own nation. The motif of the "Christian bulwark" [Cywiński 1994: 65] in the culture and identity of individual Central European nations appears in two variants: **(a)** a literal one – illustrating the **struggle between the Christian world and Islam** over the course of several centuries (from the 14th century onwards), and **(b)** a modified one

– illustrating the **strife between the two Christian denominations dominant in Europe: Catholicism and Orthodoxy**. The idea of *antemurale christianitatis* is particularly pronounced in the national identity of Catholic Poles, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Croats, but also Orthodox Romanians, Cossacks (*ex post* identified with Ukrainians), or Serbs. The idea of *antemurale christianitatis* manifests itself in a much weaker manner in the national identities of Bulgarians and Slovaks [Krakovska 2005: 40; Vambery 1944: 82; Erdősi 2006: 141-158; Ceh, Harder 2005: 409-417; Rapacka 1995: 18; Dąbrowska-Partyka 1998: 74; Boia 2003: 198-200; Zenderowski 2007: 501; 555-558]. Given the as yet unfinished process of nation-building, it is difficult to explicitly define the position of the Macedonians. However, there is much to suggest that the motif of the Christian bulwark could become an important element of national identity. Suffice it to juxtapose the high percentage of those declaring attachment to religion with the smouldering Macedonian-Albanian conflict, oft interpreted in terms of an Orthodox-Muslim conflict. Among Albanians, the germ of such thinking about the role of their nation in European history may be the legend of Skanderbeg (Gjergj Kastrioti), first designated as *Athleta Christi* by Pope Paul II in 1457. Having returned to the Christian faith in 1443 (and having gained, in 1444, the support of local Albanian leaders who, like him, had re-embraced Christianity as their religion), Skanderbeg fought for twenty-four years against the Muslim Turks, defending, according to the well-known Albanian poet Naim Frashëri, the whole of Europe [Ramet 1998: 209; Berend 2003: 71; Szczepański 2007: 76-80; Lubonja 2005: 71]. The myth of the *antemurale* failed to find fertile ground in principle only in the case of the Slovenes and Czechs, who are rightly regarded as the Slavic nations most imbued with Western culture. Instead of the myth of the "bulwark of Christianity", the myth of the "vanguard of European culture" against "Balkanism", "Orientalism" and "Byzantinism" has been present in Slovenia. However, it is not as pronounced as in the case of Croatia [Velikonja 2003: 247]. For obvious reasons, it is almost absent among Latvians and Estonians (at least in the sense of defending Christian civilization against Islam).

In the case of the Polish *antemurale christianitatis*, it was initially about defending Europe and Christianity against the Tartars and Ottoman Turks (the Battle of Legnica in 1241, the Victory of Vienna in 1683), while, in the 20th century, it was against the godless Bolsheviks (the Battle of Warsaw in 1920 as one of the chords of this tradition) and the home-grown communists. It should be remembered that in Polish tradition, the motif of the "bulwark" also appears in another, "small" variant – the "bulwark of the Latin and Catholic world". After all, in the struggle against

the Protestant Swedes and Prussians (unhappily identified with the Germans in general), and finally against the Orthodox Muscovytes, the Poles see themselves, and thus present themselves to Catholic Europe, as the invincible defenders of Catholicism. Already in post-communist, free Poland, one can sometimes hear calls for the defence of Christian civilization against the secular and anti-Christian West. This implies a fundamental geo-political and geo-cultural reorientation of the "bulwark" [Dabrowski 2003: 397-416; Zarycki 2004: 610-614; Davies 2001: 163-198]. For centuries, the Christian religion was understood in Poland, first and foremost, as the most obvious sign of membership in the family of European nations, in the West [Terlecki 1947: 46-47].

In Central Europe, Christian faith, however superficial or demonstrative, had long been regarded as the surest legitimation of belonging to Europe. The respective nations recognized their being European not through political or economic institutions, but through culture, and notably through religion [Gacesa 2006: 403]. And through a ceaseless willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of European civilization. At the same time, it should be noted that this perception of their role in the history of Europe was (and still is) accompanied by a sense of ingratitude on the part of the West, which was enriching itself through the expansion of its colonies, while the East was defending European borders with great sacrifice [more: Zenderowski 2011: 100-111]. Bohdan Cywiński observes that "this experience brought into the European consciousness a theme unknown in the West since the Spanish *Reconquista*: the real familiarity with the threat posed to Europe – by non-Europe", adding, however, that ultimately "the issue of the bulwark" turned out to be "an element of Europe's disintegration: the nations carrying out their rescue mission felt let down and betrayed when the West treated the non-Europe that was oppressing them as a political partner contributing to the continental balance of power" [Cywiński 1985: 11-12].

3b. Religion as the "golden thread" of European identity

One can speak of at least **four important reasons for the significant influence of religion upon the formation of the respective national identities** in Central Europe. These are namely: **(a)** the substitutive role of the Churches with regard to the statehood, non-existent for a long period, **(b)** the competition of the Churches with the communist authorities for the "reign over the souls" (and/or their competition with parts of the political elite to fill the "ideological vacuum" after the fall of communism), **(c)** the role of the Churches in the life of national minorities (sustaining identity) and **(d)** the fact that, in principle, religion plays a greater

role in denominational borderlands, which is Central Europe as a whole [more: Zenderowski 2011: 61-111].

(a) The substitutive role of the Churches with regard to the non-existent statehood. The individual nations of Central Europe had long been deprived of their respective states. In this situation, the lack of national state (political) institutions often resulted in the integration of the *ethnos* around a single Church (less frequently two Churches) as an institution that organized social life to a degree that went beyond the standard priestly service. As a result, the Churches, not infrequently *nolens volens*, were becoming institutions of, simultaneously, religious and national life, which, especially in the case of the universalist Catholic Church, gave rise to important identity dilemmas (between religious universalism and national particularism). This resulted, *inter alia*, in various attempts to legitimize and justify nationalism, e.g., through the ideology of "Christian nationalism" [Gołembski 2001: 72-73; Grott 2006: 79-83]. Grzegorz Babiński draws attention to the fact that, in Central Europe, religious territorial structures proved to be generally more durable than political structures. The author notes, for example, that:

"the political history of the Hungarians or the Czechs is replete with periods of the breakdown of statehood, while the reference to the lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen or the Crown of Saint Wenceslas was enduring throughout history and had a significant impact on the formation of Hungarian and Czech national consciousness" [Babiński 2003: 13; Vrnt 2003: 1,4].

It is no coincidence that the ideologues of Greater Bulgaria and Greater Serbia draw maps in which the borders of their "greater homelands" largely coincide with those of the medieval Bulgarian and Serbian ecclesiastical administrations in the Balkans. In general, the issue of ecclesiastical territorial organization, in practically every corner of Central Europe, was primarily a political one, and the aspirations to establish a specific ecclesiastical administrative order were one of the most important objectives of the national-emancipation movements. An excellent example of this can be seen in the contemporary Balkan countries of Macedonia and Montenegro, countries in which the establishment or attempts to establish an autocephalous Orthodox Church are treated as a condition *sine qua non* of political independence. Numerous controversies among autocephalous Orthodox Churches were stirred up by the demand to recognize the Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. At the end of 2018, the Synod of Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople affirmed the canonicity of the

Ukrainian Orthodoxy, denied Moscow's supremacy over Kyiv, and conclusively confirmed that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would soon gain Autocephaly (full autonomy) [Olszański 2018]. The official act of recognition (*tomos*) was issued in January 2019 by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This recognition was subsequently adhered to by the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Cypriot Orthodox Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church [Kałużny 2020].

(b) Competition of the church with the communist state for the "reign over the souls". In the second half of the twentieth century, communist oppression and the increasingly widely felt national enslavement through communism and the hegemony of the Soviet Union proved to be a significant political, cultural, and moral problem. In some countries, and notably in Poland, the church was at that time virtually the only space within which it was possible to manifest freely national identity and the will to regain lost sovereignty. Hence, all the communist regimes, without exception, sought to expunge the Churches from public life and even, as in the case of Albania, to annihilate them utterly and outlaw them unconditionally. In this context, it should be mentioned that the communists' hostility towards the Church had a twofold justification. Firstly, it was a doctrinal, ideological hostility, towards religion understood, in Marxist terms, as "opium for the masses". Secondly, the hostility towards religion and the Church had its pragmatic dimension – for the Church was seen in terms of a quasi-political power competitive in respect of the official, state centre of authority. The Church's existence effectively prevented the monopolization and centralization of power by the communists.

Whereas in the case of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, we were dealing with a more or less open confrontation with communist ideology (it is probably no coincidence that the most significant centres of anti-communist resistance appeared in countries with a Catholic or Protestant tradition: in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and in Romania – among Hungarian and German Protestants and Catholics of both rites) [Flora, Szilagyi, Roudometof 2005: 41; Elliott 2009; Pope 2009; Karpat 1992: 7-12; Czyżewski 2008: 183-192]), the Orthodox Churches adopted the tactic of "waiting out" or cooperating with the communist authorities. Lucian N. Leustean notes that what distinguishes Orthodoxy from Catholicism and Protestantism in terms of the nation–religion (church)–state relation is the concept of "symphony" (*symphonia*), which dates back to the Byzantine period. It is based on the conviction that religious and secular authority are equal and, moreover, have many common goals and tasks to fulfil (including the preservation

of the unity of the nation). The church is a structure parallel to the state, but there is no clear separation between the two [Leustean 2007: 717].

(c) The importance of churches for the identities of national minorities. Individual churches in Central Europe have played and continue to play a momentous role in consolidating and sustaining the ethnic identity of national minorities.

"For numerous ethnic or national minorities, religion often forms the foundation of national identification, distinguishes these groups from other groups, separates them from 'strangers' and integrates them with 'their own'.

Frequently, religious and national or ethnic identification are based on a set of the same values" – writes Halina Rusek [Rusek 2002: 24]. A key role in the process of forming and sustaining a national identity falls in the present case to parishes as territorial units. Elżbieta Pałka states that:

"[a]n ethnic parish is characterized, *inter alia*, by the awareness of its members' common ethnic origin and language, and by the fact that it satisfies all the same religious and non-religious needs that a 'normal' territorial parish attends to, in addition to meeting a broad range of needs resulting from this ethnic awareness and from the fact that its members live in an ethnically dissimilar environment" [Pałka 2007: 34].

Parishes very often became not only centres of religious life, but also centres of national life, of national culture. They are the places where:

"activities and initiatives may spring up that not only motivate parish members to intensify their own religiousness and practices, but also integrate the community, offer an asylum of sorts, and facilitate adaptation in the environment, something that members of minority communities at times find difficult to cope with. A parish operating in a minority community frequently constitutes a centre of conviviality, provides an opportunity to speak the native language, gathers members around specific ceremonies and traditions, and is often an organizer of participation in culture, of leisure activities and entertainment", notes Halina Rusek [Rusek 2002: 26].

(d) Religion in denominational borderlands. Religion plays a greater role in a denominational borderland, which is, it should be clearly noted, Central Europe

in its entirety. We are referring to two types of borderlands: Catholic-Orthodox (to a much smaller extent Catholic-Protestant and Protestant-Orthodox) and Christian-Islamic (mainly Orthodox-Islamic) [Huntington 2005: 54-60; 454-463]. This topic has already been discussed in principle in the previous section. It is only worth adding that professing a particular religion in a borderland, in a situation of permanent threat (be it real or imaginary) from members of other faiths, tends to constitute more than mere honouring of a certain tradition or prayerful contemplation. In the borderlands, religion signifies not only a belief in God, but also a belief in the integrity of one's own ethnic community, and often even more, a community of civilization. Furthermore, it should be remembered, religion allowed its adherents to "swallow" many a political defeat, serving a significant consoling function. It enabled the preservation of "psychological equilibrium" in the face of the numerous national calamities regularly experienced by the nations of the borderlands. Closely linked to national identity, writes Ina Merdjanova, religion constituted an emotional "catalyst" of sorts [Merdjanova 2000: 234]. By any measure, in Central Europe, religion is (was) neither a private matter (it is, after all, about the nation and its existence) nor, still less, one of indifference. It should also be remembered that professing the Christian religion in the religious borderland, on the fringes of the Christian world, entailed a far greater "cost" compared to the West of the continent. Often, the cost of life or the loss of all property. Bohdan Cywiński, writing about a particular kind of religiousness of borderland people, states that life on the frontier of the Christian world teaches:

"a life wisdom typical of every borderland, proclaiming that material and civilization accomplishments never last, that what we build will one day burn down, but – that it is necessary to keep on building. They teach that at the time of trials, the institutions vanish, and from amongst people – some perish, others disperse, yet others betray, while the rest remain in poverty and humiliation, but endure and can preserve what is most important" [Cywiński 1994: 67].

4. Central Europe *versus* Western Europe: an axiological perspective

It is worthwhile to conclude with a reference to selected results of empirical social research, to show those dimensions of the identity of Central European nations that clearly distinguish them from the majority of nations in Western Europe, notably its Northern part. Particular attention should be paid to: **(a)** the attitude towards history and collective memory; **(b)** culture as a relevant component of European identity; **(c)** the already mentioned religion, manifested in the intensity

of spiritual experiences and religion as an integral part of a given national identity; **(d)** the attitude towards the issue of the legality of abortion.

(a) History, or more specifically **collective memory**, seems to be of crucial importance for understanding the specific respective national and regional identities in Central Europe. In the 2007 Eurobarometer research, carried out within the framework of the project entitled *European Cultural Values* [European Cultural Values, Special Eurobarometer 278], respondents from EU countries were asked to identify up to three key values (from among nine[3]), that need to be "preserved and reinforced" in society. "Respect for history and its lessons" ranked sixth on the EU-wide scale.[4] This value was indicated by 17% of EU citizens. However, it is important to note a major difference in the perception of the historical factor among citizens of the so-called "old" and "new" EU. In the so-called old EU (excluding Greece, which in civilization terms is part of Central Europe), the conviction that history and collective memory should be nurtured is shared by 13% of the population, while in Central Europe it is nearly twice as high, at 23%. Among Western societies, the United Kingdom leads in this respect (26%), while in the central part of the European continent, Estonia (29%), Poland and the Czech Republic (27% each), and Latvia (26%) stand out. At the other end of the scale, there are respectively: Finland (7%) and Spain (9%), and Slovakia (15%), Slovenia and Romania (16% each).

[3] Respect for nature and the environment; social equality and solidarity; entrepreneurship; cultural diversity; peace; progress and innovation; freedom of opinion; tolerance and openness to others; respect for history and its lessons.

[4] *Peace* – 61%, *Respect for nature and the environment* – 50%, *Social equality and solidarity*, *Freedom of opinion*, *Tolerance and openness to others* – 37% each, *Respect for history and its lessons* – 17%, *Progress and innovation* – 14%, *Cultural diversity* – 12%, *Entrepreneurship* – 10%.

Table 2. Percentage of inhabitants of the countries of the European Union who declare "respect for history and its lessons"

EU 27	17%			
Czech Republic	27%		**Belgium**	12%
Estonia	29%		**Denmark**	12%
Hungary	23%		**France**	14%
Latvia	26%		**Germany**	14%
Lithuania	25%		**Ireland**	13%
Poland	27%		**Italy**	16%
Romania	16%		**Luxemburg**	14%
Slovakia	15%		**Netherlands**	14%
Slovenia	16%		**Spain**	9%
			Austria	10%
Average	**23%**		**Portugal**	12%
			Finland	7%
			Sweden	12%
			United Kingdom	26%
			Average	**13%**

Source: Special Eurobarometer 278 (2007), Annex.

(b) Culture. The statement that "Europe is clearly the continent of culture" (not merely a geographic concept) was an element of the 2007 EU-wide survey carried out as part of the previously mentioned project on *European Cultural Values*. At the time, this belief was shared by 67% of the European Union population. In the so-called "old" European Union countries, the figure was 64%; in the so-called "new" EU countries, it was as high as 85%! The opposite view was held by respectively: 27% and 7% of the inhabitants of each of the two informal parts of the Union. In the former group, the inhabitants of the Netherlands (39%), Denmark (41%) and Sweden (46%) attach the least importance to culture as a constitutive element of Europe, while the greatest importance is attached to culture in Finland (84%) and Italy (82%). In the case of Central Europe, the two groupings include respectively Romania (74%) and Lithuania (80%) for the lowest scores, and Slovakia (92%), the Czech Republic (89%), Poland and Slovenia (88% each) for the highest percentages. It is worth noting at this point that, while the belief that culture is crucial to Europe's identity is shared by Central Europeans at a similarly high level (the difference between the extremes in this case stands at 18 percentage points), a significant divergence of opinion can be observed in the case of Western European

nations (the difference between the extremes in this case is 45 percentage points) [European Cultural Values, Special Eurobarometer 278].

Table 3. Percentage of inhabitants of European Union countries answering 'yes' or 'no' to the statement: "Europe is clearly the continent of culture"

	YES	NO			YES	NO
EU 27	67%	24%		**EU 27**	67%	24%
Czech Republic	89%	8%		**Belgium**	68%	29%
Estonia	85%	7%		**Denmark**	41%	52%
Hungary	83%	13%		**France**	63%	28%
Latvia	87%	8%		**Germany**	52%	44%
Lithuania	80%	6%		**Ireland**	66%	10%
Poland	88%	5%		**Italy**	82%	12%
Romania	74%	8%		**Luxembourg**	70%	22%
Slovakia	92%	5%		**Netherlands**	39%	56%
Slovenia	88%	7%		**Spain**	70%	14%
Average	85%	7%		**Austria**	73%	17%
				Portugal	82%	8%
				Finland	84%	13%
				Sweden	46%	43%
				United Kingdom	54%	33%
				Average	64%	27%

Source: Special Eurobarometer 278 (2007), Annex.

(c) Religion is by far the most distinctive value that differentiates Central Europe (as a whole) from Western Europe, although it cannot be overlooked that some of the Central European peoples, in terms of their attitude towards religion, fit more closely with Western Europe. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center between 2015 and 2017, on a sample of 56,000 adults (18 and over) in 34 European countries, shows that almost one-third of Central Europeans (29.1%) and fewer than one-fifth of Western Europeans (16.4%) consider themselves to be deeply religious. For the Central European region, four countries with a markedly dominant position of Orthodoxy and two countries with an equally markedly dominant position of Catholicism ranked above the average. In the case of Western Europe, these included four countries with a dominant position of Catholicism and one with a clear predominance of Protestantism.

Table 4. Percentage of persons in Central and Western European countries who consider themselves to be deeply religious

Central Europe	
Romania	55%
Mołdova	47%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	46%
Croatia	44%
Poland	40%
Serbia (without Kosovo)	32%
Ukraine	31%
Slovakia	29%
Belarus	27%
Lithuania	21%
Bulgaria	18%
Hungary	17%
Latvia	15%
Czech Republic	8%
Estonia	7%
Slovenia	n.a.
Average	**29.1%**

Western Europe	
Portugal	37%
Italy	27%
Ireland	24%
Spain	21%
Netherlands	18%
Norway	17%
Austria	14%
Finland	13%
Germany	12%
Switzerland	12%
France	12%
United Kingdom	11%
Sweden	10%
Belgium	10%
Denmark	8%
Average	**16.4%**

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment (last access: 18.04.2022)

As part of the same survey, respondents were also asked about the importance of religion for a given national identity. Half of the inhabitants of Central Europe (49.3%) believed that religion rather or strongly influences the shape of a given national identity. In the case of Western Europe, this was one third of the respondents (34%). In Central Europe, five Orthodox and three Catholic countries ranked above the regional average. In Western Europe, on the other hand, five Catholic countries ranked above their respective regional average.

Table 5. Importance of religion for national identity, 2015-2017 (% of "rather yes" and "definitely yes" responses)

Central Europe	
Serbia (without Kosovo)	78%
Romania	74%
Bulgaria	66%
Poland	64%
Moldova	63%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	59%
Croatia	58%
Lithuania	56%
Ukraine	51%
Belarus	45%
Hungary	43%
Slovakia	35%
Czech Republic	21%
Estonia	15%
Latvia	11%
Slovenia	n.a.
Average	**49.3%**

Western Europe	
Portugal	62%
Italy	53%
Ireland	48%
Switzerlands	42%
Austria	39%

Western Europe	
Spain	38%
Germany	34%
United Kingdom	34%
Finland	32%
France	32%
Netherlands	22%
Norway	21%
Belgium	19%
Denmark	19%
Sweden	15%
Average	**34.0%**

https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/ (last access: 18.04.2022)

To further supplement the picture of the "religious landscape" of Central Europe, it is worth examining what proportion of the overall population of each country were believers of the four dominant religions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and Islam) at the beginning of the 1990s and in the early 20th century. Catholics constitute over half of the population in five countries, Orthodox Christians in eight, Muslims in three, while Protestants are not in the majority in any of the Central European countries. The process of secularization of Central European societies is also evident.

Table 6. The percentage of Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants and Muslims in individual Central European countries

Country	Catholicism*		Orthodoxy**		Protestantism***		Islam	
	year		year		year		year	
	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011
Albania	10,0	10,03	20,0	6,75	•	0,14	70,0	56,7
	1991	2020	1991	2020	1991	2011	1991	2020
Belarus	•	6.7	•	83.3	•	•	•	0.5
	1991	2013	1991	2013	1991	2013	1991	2013

Bosnia and Herzegovina	17.65	15.2	30.10	30.7	0.04	n. a.	42.78	50.1
	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011
Bulgaria	•	0.85	•	59.4	•	0.85	•	10.02
	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011
Croatia	76.6	86.28	11.1	4.44	•	0.34	1.2	1.47
	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011
Czech Republic	39.0	10.4	0.2	0.2	4.0	1.0	•	•
	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011	2000	2011
Estonia	0.51	0.41	13.02	16.39	14.11	16.56	•	•
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	•	2011
Hungary	54.51	38.9	0.15	0.1	18.9	13.8	•	•
	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011
Kosovo	•	2.21	•	1.49	•	•	•	95.61
	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011
Latvia	•	25.1	•	19.4	•	34.3	•	•
	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011
Lithuania	•	77.2	•	4.9	•	0.8	•	•
	•	2002	•	2002	•	2002	•	2002
Macedonia (Northern)	•	0.35	•	64.78	•	0.03	•	33.33
	•	2014	•	2014	•	2014	•	2014
Moldova	•	0.1	•	90.1	•	2.0	•	0.1
	2003	2011	2003	2011	2003	2011	2003	2011
Montenegro	4.19	3.44	69.61	72.07	•	0.16	10.98	19.11
	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011	•	2011
Poland	•	87.68	•	0.41	•	0.25	•	•
	1992	2011	1992	2011	1992	2011	1992	2011
Romania	6.07	5.08	86.81	81.0	5.65	6.04	0.25	0.32
	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011
Serbia (without Kosovo)	6.4	4.97	81.8	84.59	1.12	0.99	2.89	3.10
	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011	1991	2011
Slovakia	63.8	65.8	0.7	0.9	8.3	7.9	•	•

	1991	2002	1991	2002	1991	2002	1991	2002
Slovenia	71.6	57.8	2.4	2.3	0.9	0.8	1.5	2.4
	•	2015	•	2015	•	2015	•	2015
Ukraine	•	8.9	•	73.7	•	0.9	•	•

* Roman Catholic Church and Greek Catholic Church.
** Including the Old Believers.
*** Protestantism and neo-Protestant denominations.
Source: Own compilation based on census results from the respective countries.

(d) The last relevant variable, of the four cited in this section of the analyses, that significantly differentiates Central European and Western European societies (with some notable exceptions) is the **attitude towards legal abortion**. As many as 37.7% of Central Europeans in the Pew Research Center study discussed earlier believe that abortion should be "mostly or entirely illegal". In the case of Western Europe, this view is shared by only 19% of the region's population, half as many as in Central Europe. For Central Europe, four Orthodox and two Catholic countries ranked above the average, while in the case of Western Europe, it was four countries with a dominant position of Catholicism and none with dominant Protestantism.

Table 7. Abortion should be prohibited in all or almost all cases (percentage of positive answers in the respective countries)

Central Europe	
Moldova	79%
Ukraine	55%
Belarus	54%
Poland	52%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	47%
Lithuania	41%
Romania	40%
Croatia	37%
Latvia	37%
Serbia (without Kosovo)	31%
Hungary	25%
Slovakia	23%
Bulgaria	15%

Central Europe	
Estonia	15%
Czech Republic	14%
Slovenia	n. a.
Average	37.7%

Western Europe	
Portugal	34%
Italy	32%
Ireland	30%
Switzerland	26%
Austria	25%
Germany	22%
Spain	19%
United Kingdom	18%
Norway	17%
France	17%
Netherlands	14%
Belgium	13%
Finland	9%
Denmark	6%
Sweden	3%
Average	19.0%

https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues (last access: 18.04.2022)

Conclusion

From the analyses carried out, it emerges that Central Europe, viewed in terms of nations experiencing oppression since the twilight of the Middle Ages – both from "non-Europe", in the form of the three "Asian thrusts", and from the West with its disempowering post-colonial narrative and its treatment of Central Europe only from the perspective of a "geopolitical chessboard" – has developed its own identity, which, however, is not a transnational identity, but a "grammar" of sorts, common to the respective national cultures. For the nation, understood primarily in terms of "cultural sovereignty", is still the most important reference point in the formation of collective identities in Central Europe. What remains open is the

question of the willingness and the ability to combine individual identity narratives into a single transnational Central European discourse in response to emerging threats (both from the East and from the West) to not only the identity, but to the very existence of individual Central European nations. This distinctiveness of Central Europe has been demonstrated both in the dimension of certain historical processes – notably in the context of the relationship between national identity and religion: the sacralisation of the ethnos vs. the ethnicization of religion – and within the dimension of contemporary empirical research into the axiological attitudes of the inhabitants of Europe.

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