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## *Geoculture – a Cultural Perspective on Geopolitics*

**Abstract:** The article presents a theoretical discussion on the relations between geopolitics and culture, especially with respect to the concepts of Feliks Koneczny and Samuel P. Huntington. It is therefore devoted to the idea of “clash of civilisations”, which is both a cultural and geostrategic phenomenon. The clash of civilisations concept has also a religious or ideological references, at least in relation to many geopolitical divisions. The research aim of the article is to transfer the theories of Huntington and Koneczny to the analysis of geocultural divisions in contemporary Europe. According to Huntington, the European Union is quite uniform, i.e. it represents Western culture. Nevertheless, the article presents cultural trends, which determine internal political cracks in the EU. There are even more geocultural divisions throughout the continent.

**Keywords:** geoculture, clash of civilisations, religions and ideologies, the European Union, Huntington, Koneczny, Islam, Orthodox Christianity

### **Introduction**

Considerations on geoculture should begin with a theoretical discussion on the relations between geopolitics and culture, especially with respect to the concepts of Feliks Koneczny and Samuel P. Huntington. They refer to the ideas of chasms between civilisations and “the clash of civilisations”, which are both a cultural and geostrategic phenomena. They also indicate a religious or ideological basis, at least in relation to many geopolitical divisions. The research aim is to transfer the theories of Huntington and Koneczny to an analysis of geocultural divisions in contemporary Europe.

According to Huntington, the European Union (EU) is quite uniform, i.e. it represents Western culture. Nevertheless, we can notice other cultural trends causing internal political cracks. In the EU’s internal „clash of civilisations,” there

are at least two dividing lines: Europeans versus immigrants, mostly Muslims, and supporters of left-wing liberalism versus conservatives, who often refer to Christian values. On the continent as a whole, it seems that there are four main political and cultural centres. These include the Russians, who represent the idea of imperial conquest and refer to Orthodox values; Radical Muslims who strive to Islamise life in Europe; European federalists who try to build the EU in relation to secularisation and cosmopolitanism; and finally European conservatives, often Christian Democrats, who defend the subjectivity and tradition of their nations. Based on theoretical considerations, a new category in international studies, i.e. geoculture, is proposed.

Geoculture can be defined as a combination of geopolitics with culture, i.e. with ideological factors, identity, ideology, religion, and even civilisation [Grosse 2023]. In many theoretical approaches to international relations, there are strong references to cultural phenomena. This is especially the case in the constructivist understanding of geopolitics, but also in the liberal, critical, and Marxist approaches. Even realistic assumptions in international relations or traditional geopolitics attached great importance to cultural factors. One could even go so far as to claim that an inseparable element of geopolitics is culture and its numerous manifestations of influence. In other words, every geopolitics is simultaneously geoculture, or to put it differently – for strategy in international relations, the cultural dimension is an indispensable component.

## 1. Theoretical considerations on geoculture

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines geopolitics as the use of geography for the sake of “power politics” in international relations [Deudney 2024]. This definition emphasises the external aspect of the policies implemented by states. It therefore reduces policies to the dimension of foreign policy. However, geopolitics can be defined more broadly, namely as actions directed both “outward” and “inward” of a given state or international organisation. The internal aspect primarily concerns the mobilisation of factors that can be a significant resource for external activity. This is the case with the development of national economic, technological and military potential. In addition, the internal geopolitical dimension includes the organisation of the state, its ability to manage in a crisis situation, susceptibility to external influences that can destabilise management capabilities or demotivate society, etc. An important internal aspect is human capital, i.e. the quality and size of the population. Another dimension is social capital, i.e. social cohesion, the ability to cooperate and mobilise the population for geopolitical goals, etc.

Many of the internal factors listed above have important cultural aspects [Grosse 2023: 82-93].

Geopolitics results to a large extent from local culture, including values, identity, historical perception of greatest friends or enemies, etc. It is not only about creating internal potential for greater effectiveness in achieving goals externally, in international competition, but also about culturally defining these goals, and thus making basic strategic decisions.

In its simplest definition, geopolitics includes two main components: geography and politics [Robert 2024; Larousse 2024]. Since politics is a product of political decision-makers, it must include various cultural aspects. These are, for example, the psychological aspects of decision-makers, their perception of international reality, but also historical experiences, their ways of thinking about geography, their axiological foundations, priorities and principles of how to conduct foreign policy, etc. Another cultural dimension concerns geopolitical views and ideas functioning in the social environment of decision-makers. This involves, among others, the political legitimacy of the strategy undertaken, as well as the possibility of mobilising society for its implementation.

For classical geopolitical thinkers, the connection between culture and geopolitics was obvious. The creator of the concept of „geopolitics” itself, Rudolf Kjellén, defined it as a connection between geography and politics, and thus as a connection between nature and culture. He also considered it to be, on the one hand, the cause of constant tension between both components, but on the other – an area of mutual symbiosis. This is evidenced by the geopolitical concept of regional identification of the Baltic area. It was to be the basis for allied relations in the region, conducted under the auspices of Germany. Kjellén appreciated the role of geographical conditions, which included the features and resources of a given territory, its international environment. Nevertheless, how neighbours were perceived, whether as allies, enemies, or potential zones of influence or areas to be dominated and dependent – this depended on cultural factors, i.e. the perception of geopolitics by decision-makers, intellectuals and the rest of society [Marklund 2015].

Kjellén saw the state as a „geographical organism”, in line with the concept of Fredrich Ratzel [2019]. States, or more precisely the nations living in them, were treated as living organisms. In accordance with the laws of nature, they were

born, developed, but could also be destroyed. The stronger gained an advantage over the weaker. An extremely important element of this concept was national culture, because it determined the strength, vitality, will to expand, and survival of a given organism. It also determined the organisation of the state, including the ability to develop its geopolitical potentials enabling expansion. Territory and borders were treated by Ratzel in a fluid manner. German space was occupied by the German nation, and strong nations had a natural right to expand their living space (so-called German *Lebensraum*). In other words, it was not geographical conditions that determined the space inhabited by Germans, but the vitality of the nation and the way borders were perceived by political elites. In this way, cultural factors were even more important than geographical limitations.

Kjellén treated borders in a similar way to Ratzel: flexible and dependent on social perception. The nation was at the centre of his geopolitical considerations, and geopolitics was complemented by ethnopolitics, which supported the development and cohesion of the political community. At the same time, it is difficult to consider Kjellén a racist, because he did not limit the national community to narrow ethnic frameworks [Tunander 2005]. The aim of the state was to cultivate national identification and tradition, as well as social cohesion, which in the cultural dimension referred to the legacy of the dominant ethnic group. It was therefore about the primacy of the native culture (also in the religious dimension), its durability and vitality, and not the selection of citizens based on racial criteria.

In his considerations, considerable space was occupied by the issue of the political will to shape one's own fate, including the determination of borders by individual nations. It was linked to historical experiences and the cultural capital of a given society. The aforementioned capital, also referred to as the heritage of a given culture, was of great importance, especially for smaller or weaker states in terms of material and geographical resources [Tunander 2008]. It can also be treated as moral capital, because for Kjellén it mainly concerned the unity and mobilisation of the national community in the face of a threat or in order to implement other geopolitical actions.

The moral capital of a given society can be compared to patriotism, that is, a sense of responsibility for the fate of the homeland and the ability to make sacrifices for it. It is hard not to notice that most geopolitical thinkers over the centuries have been patriotically minded, and the starting point for their deliberations was the good of the national community with which they identified. In Kjellén's case, it

was the Swedish nation, although at the same time he saw geopolitical benefits in close cooperation with Germany and subordination to Berlin's leadership. He also advocated broader cooperation with other nations of the Baltic region. This was primarily about protection against the threat of Russian imperialism, but also cultural closeness with Germany and other countries of the Baltic basin. It is therefore not surprising that Kjellén's ideas were quickly picked up in Germany, where his works enjoyed great popularity.

It is worth emphasising that the Swedish scholar's concepts resulted mainly from the analysis of geopolitical threats, but the choice of allies was determined by the cultural category, or more precisely, the convergence of declared values, ideas and social practice, linguistic proximity and historical experiences between individual nations [Haggman 1998]. This approach is shared by the liberal school in international relations, one of the assumptions of which is that liberal democracies convinced of the same political values do not wage war on each other, but instead defend themselves against authoritarian powers and their imperialism [Hegre 2014; Imai and Lo 2021]. Nevertheless, Kjellén himself rejected liberalism, and especially the principle of the supremacy of individual rights over the common good of the entire nation and its state. The goal of geopolitics was primarily to protect the rights of the state, and especially its existence. In his concept, the weaker Sweden had to protect its statehood in a regional alliance under the aegis of Berlin. Nevertheless, Kjellén stressed that German leadership should not lead to the weakening of national identity or tradition in smaller states and thus threaten their cultural cohesion [Tunander 2005: 549].

In this context, it is worth mentioning two traditions of regional integration that were shaped in the broadly understood sphere of German culture. The first is the Prussian experience, which consisted in striving for cultural homogenisation of national and ethnic minorities by administrative methods, including enforcing coherence in the sphere of values and dominant ideology. The second was the Austro-Hungarian tradition, which based the integration of diverse nations on greater tolerance for their identification and ethnic differences (although a break in this tradition was the policy of Magyarisation applied by the Hungarian authorities within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy) [Wereszycki 1975: 201-219]. The concepts of Kjellén, a Swede striving for regional integration under German aegis, were closer to the experience of Austria-Hungary. Meanwhile, Karl Haushofer, a German geopolitician of the interwar period, focused on stronger cultural homogenisation and its administrative enforcement. Minorities that did not want

to assimilate posed a threat to national cohesion, which primarily concerned Jews. For the same reasons, Haushofer rejected universalism in the normative sphere, promoted by liberals or Marxists, because it weakened national culture.

Haushofer's concepts are assessed as a manifestation of German materialist ideology [Diner 1999: 161]. The German scholar argued that geographical (i.e. material) conditions determine the direction of cultural development. This was manifested in the differences in this sphere between land and sea powers, for example between Germany and the USA. In turn, culture, in Haushofer's opinion, was to shape geopolitics, and thus was an important area of international divisions. He approached the issue of borders in a similar way to Ratzel and Kjellén. At the centre of geopolitics was the nation, i.e. a political community inhabiting a specific territory. Nevertheless, it could expand the boundaries of the space it inhabited. Such a fluid approach to the occupied territory concerned especially Central and Eastern Europe. Cultural conditions resulted in the perception of geopolitical „friends” and „enemies”, including internal ones who disrupted the cultural cohesion of the nation.

The above examples of the traditional approach to geopolitics essentially relate it not only to geography, but even more to culture. A similar approach was also visible in later theoreticians. For example, the representative of the French strategic school, Yves Lacoste, the founder of the *Hérodote* journal, attached great importance to historical experiences and the perception of geopolitical phenomena. He even believed that geopolitics is based on the perception of scientists and political elites, and that not only the intellectual tradition of interpreting geopolitical phenomena is of great importance here, but also something he called the „symbolism of territory”, i.e. assigning cultural meanings to elements of geography. An example of such a tendency in the symbolic sphere was the Serbs treating Kosovo as their homeland, and the Russians considering Kievan Rus in a similar way. Such references shaped the social imagination and goals for the elites. They were therefore symbols on the one hand shaping strategic decisions and, on the other, legitimising a specific policy.

Lacoste attached great importance to the geopolitical discourse conducted in the media, especially in shaping opinions on potential allies and hostile nations, as well as the long-term strategic goals of the state. Social identifications and cultural differences, including values and religion, were of great importance for this discussion. Thus, ideas or even ideologies were of fundamental importance for shaping

geopolitical practice. Geography was treated in an instrumental way or was only a starting point for constructing specific geopolitical narratives and beliefs. They then set tasks for political elites from a historical perspective, as a historical mission, an obligation towards past and future generations, and not only towards the current political community. In this way, ideas, even those that could be wrong, are of fundamental importance, because they, and not geographical factors, determine strategic choices to the greatest extent [Lacoste 2000: 122]. Lacoste perceived geopolitical divisions in a cultural, even civilisational, dimension. That is why he saw radical Islam as a threat to the West. For him, it was also a potentially destabilising factor for France internally, because it created a permanent minority that not only was not subject to assimilation, but was downright hostile to secular France and its political culture.

In the second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, many other scholars dealing with geopolitics had already noticed that various important cultural aspects were involved. This was the case with the German intellectual tradition, which considered geopolitics as a conflict of different discourses [Lyotard 1987; Wolkersdorfer 1999]. After the unification of this country [1990], researchers of German geopolitics interpreted it as a „political worldview”, i.e. a primarily ideological, or even normative perspective. It was based on the perception of one’s own state in international politics, but it essentially served the „projection of power”, i.e. international expansion [Bach and Peters 2002: 1].

In turn, critical geopolitics considered space to be a product of language, i.e. scientific, journalistic or political narratives that create “geographical imaginaries” [Gregory 1994]. Geopolitics is constructed, so geographical categories are primarily the result of debate, and less a reflection of spatial reality. In reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s [1991] idea of symbolic power (or violence), it was assumed that the sphere of concepts and perception of specific phenomena is linked to power over a given territory. Thus, discourse imposes an interpretation of space, but also determines who and how is to control it [Dodds and Sidaway 1994]. The culmination of the constructivist view of geopolitics was its perception as an ideology. In practice, this meant that mental constructions not only dictated the way space was interpreted, but even subordinated it to ideological paradigms.

Combining geopolitics with ideology is common and strongly refers to cultural phenomena. Ideology is defined as a dogmatic approach, often detached from reality, although it may have scientific foundations and be based on rational

justifications. It usually has a strong normative basis, i.e. specific assumptions and a set of basic values, which is why it is sometimes compared to religion [Pizzolo 2020: 21]. At the same time, it often advocates radical change and reconstruction of the social and political order. Ideologies are usually expansionist, even total, especially because they try to encompass all spheres of human activity and all state policies. This was the case with Marxist ideology, Nazism and fascism. Some researchers even consider ideology to be inextricably linked to politics [Pizzolo 2020: 24], which is why it can be so close to geopolitics. Others point to a specific type of ideological policy that has been practiced frequently in human history, at least since the first millennium BCE [Eisenstadt 1981]. Its prevalence resulted mainly from the principles of social psychology, and more precisely from reaching for deeply embedded cultural motivations, including ethnic, religious, civilisational, etc.

In this way, ideology is also linked to politics in the sense of Carl Schmitt, and thus treated as an area of struggle between allies and enemies [Schmitt 2007]. Ideology sets political goals and has tools to achieve them. First of all, it serves to mobilise society and morally legitimise chosen directions of action. Ideologies are based on the belief in truth, justice and the rightness of one's own goals. However, they often pursue particular interests – group or individual [Morgenthau 1971: 624]. This is an example of a certain ambivalence of ideologised thinking, which, on the one hand, wants to satisfy specific interests in the real world, while on the other, the methodology of its operation often leads to ineffectiveness. Hans Morgenthau argued that the tendency to place ideological goals and assumptions above actual processes and conditions causes decision-makers to have difficulty responding to crises and to be deprived of the necessary creativity [Morgenthau 1971: 626].

The concepts of Karl Haushofer, who was one of the main sources of inspiration for Adolf Hitler and German imperialism, were treated as close to ideology [Diner 1999: 161]. In a broader sense, the entire German geopolitical tradition and political geography were considered to be very strongly ideologised [Schöller 1957]. The geopolitical concepts that were the basis of the strategy of the Russian Federation in the times of Vladimir Putin were treated in a similar way [Pizzolo 2020: 19-42].

One of the most important disputes about geopolitics is whether it is primarily determined by geography or cultural conditions. An advocate of the former seemed to be Halford John Mackinder. In his opinion, the historical continuity of geopolitical phenomena was to be determined by spatial conditions. In accordance

with this approach, various scientists have repeatedly pointed to the continuity of imperial tendencies in Russia, regardless of the political regime and systemic formula of this country, starting with tsarist Russia, through the communist Soviet Union, and ending with the Russian Federation, which at least initially maintained the appearance of a democratic system. In other words, the rules of geography were universal, and the social, systemic and cultural conditions were subordinate to them.

Nevertheless, it is hard not to notice important cultural aspects in geopolitics. Culture is important in the individual dimension or in the short term, where strategic decisions can be influenced by psychological factors, such as the ambitions of leaders, their sense of pride or frustration and complexes. At the level of social psychology, short-term fashions or other sociological trends can be a factor of influence. An example is the fact that geopolitical thinkers inevitably gained popularity at the time of national catastrophe. Their ideas were treated as an element of group therapy – they gave hope because they led to rebirth. This was the case in Germany after the defeat of World War I, and in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union [Bassin and Aksenov 2006].

The impact of culture also has a long-term dimension. Geopolitics creates catchy ideas, and even ideologies, which define the vision of the development of a political community inhabiting a given territory. Sometimes, strategic thought is fuelled by cultural categories, such as religion or civilisation, which are binding along a long historical horizon. Geopolitics is rooted in tradition and culture, and attachment to basic geopolitical categories, such as the perception of allies and rivals, the most important goals of action etc., is most often long-term. What is more, all these main categories are linked to values and social attitudes functioning in the long term. Although there is a phenomenon of adaptation to the changes taking place, the main categories of geopolitical thinking are fundamentally maintained [Grosse 2023: 82-93].

## 2. The clash of civilisations

According to Samuel P. Huntington, a civilisation is a broadly defined cultural area, both in terms of customs, religion, political values and ideas, as well as material culture, mainly economic activity and all types of artistic creation [Grosse 2023: 93-103]. It functions over a long period of time. As Fernand Braudel wrote: „Civilization is in fact the longest history (...). Civilization can survive successive economic or social formations” [Braudel 1993: 34-35]. The Polish thinker of the

interwar period Feliks Koneczny could supplement this description: „civilization is the sum of everything that a certain fraction of humanity has in common; and at the same time the sum of everything in which such a fraction differs from others” [Koneczny 1935: 115]. Great civilisations in the history of humanity have usually been identified with the main religions of the world [Huntington 1997: 44]. Other scholars shared this view, and also added that civilisations were the domain of ideological politics resulting from religion or „secular religion”, or ideology [Eisenstadt 1981: 159]. Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss maintained that civilisation is the most comprehensive set of cultural traits beyond belonging to nations or regional and local communities [Durkheim and Mauss 1971]. It is therefore the highest cultural level of grouping people and the broadest plane of cultural identity [Huntington 1997: 45].

The driving force behind inter-civilisational conflicts is the very strong polarisation of social perception into “our own” and “outsiders”, i.e. “civilised nations” and “barbarians.” Felipe Fernández-Armesto emphasised that in many cultures, civilisational affiliation was determined by a common religion, ideology, or sense of belonging to a specific “world order”. All definitions of civilisation take the form of a conjunction: “I am civilized – you belong to some culture – he is a barbarian” [Fernández-Armesto 2001: 12-13]. The aforementioned dichotomy is also a feature of ideology and politics in the understanding of Carl Schmitt, i.e. a special type of politics that touches on the most important issues, such as sovereignty and security, which are revealed in critical situations. All these parameters can also be found in geopolitics.

There are many typologies of civilisations. Adda Bozeman lists only five: the West, India, China, Byzantium, and Islam [Bozeman 1994]. Matthew Melko counted twelve: seven of them have disappeared (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Cretan, ancient, Byzantine, Central American, Andean), and five still exist (Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Islamic, Western) [Melko 1969]. Other scholars have also presented their own typologies, including the Polish scholar Feliks Koneczny.

Konieczny can be called Huntington’s forerunner. He dealt with civilisations in a similar way to the American scholar. For example, he believed that every civilisation strives for expansion, and so we could say that it has universalist tendencies. He claimed, like Huntington many years later, that civilisations compete with each other and even have to fight each other. Therefore, geopolitical disputes must occur between them. Finally, he was critical of the possibility of synthesis between

civilisations, a phenomenon referred to in the 21st century as multiculturalism. What is more, such tendencies were evidence of the weakness and regression of a specific political community for him. „Civilisational mixtures” usually perish because they lack coherence. This is what he wrote on the subject in 1937: „We are currently witnessing just such a civilizational mixture throughout Europe, and most of all in Poland. This mixture is the cause of all crises and the source of that destruction that is complained about throughout Europe, but which is most emphatic in Poland” [Koneczny 1937: 177-196]. It should be added that despite these bitter words, it was in Poland and Central Europe that he saw hope for Europe and for the survival of what he considered to be the most mature Latin civilisation. The aforementioned Central European region was not only an area of geopolitical pressure from Russia and Germany, but also of cultural pressure from the Turanian civilisation on one side and the Byzantine civilisation on the other. The scholar clearly noticed that different civilisational trends could occur in the same area, and even within the same community; for example, Germany was torn between Latin and Byzantine cultures.

Koneczny pointed to five basic categories of existence that define differences between civilisations. These were attitudes towards health, material well-being, morality (or understanding the category of good), art (beauty) and science (approach to the category of truth) [Koneczny 1935: 179]. According to the Polish scholar, civilisation is a method of organising collective life, including giving a political community a structure [Koneczny 1935: 115]. Although Koneczny approached civilisations in many aspects, he was very interested in the issue of the system of power and politics. He emphasised the existence of many civilisations, but indicated the seven most important ones, i.e. the Arab, Byzantine, Brahmin, Chinese, Latin, Turanian and Jewish. In his opinion, four of them existed in Europe, i.e. the Byzantine, Latin, Jewish and Turanian. We can add that with the mass immigration in the second half of the 20th century, another one appeared, namely Arab.

Latin civilisation was based on Christian ethics, and the moral sphere was of paramount importance for law, politics, and the assessment of government actions. Law or governments that were not moral therefore had to be changed. An important feature of this civilisation was the great importance attached to the dignity of the human person, in accordance with the personalism of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the culture in question best served human development. An important protection of human rights here was the tendency to separate the public from the

private sphere and the dualism of private and public law. In this way, temptations were limited, which in the 21st century we could call totalitarian. However, this does not mean that the public sphere and politics abstracted from the imperative of morality, on the contrary, they were subordinated to it and assessed mainly in relation to morality (and not, for example, in relation to the effectiveness of actions). An important feature of Latin civilisation was the tendency for political authorities to realise the common good. Another was the decentralisation and republican leaning of the political system. In this way, within this tradition, the sense of national identity developed the strongest and nations themselves emerged, i.e. political communities functioning below the level of the entire civilisation. Therefore, it respected national differences to the greatest extent, and also showed a limited tendency to centralise power. Although it occurred in many areas of Europe and in both Americas, as I mentioned earlier, Central Europe was most strongly associated with it [Kiereś-Łach 2020: 109-119].

In turn, the Byzantine civilisation originated in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, but over time it penetrated Germany and other Western European countries. It was strengthened first by the Reformation and then by the Western European Enlightenment referring to secularism, atheism and secularism. Its characteristic feature was the domination of secular authority over religious authority, and thus also over the spiritual and private sphere of society. This led to a limitation of the scope of freedom of individuals and society, as well as the depersonalisation of man. There was therefore a tendency within it that, after the experiences of the second half of the 20th century, we can safely describe as totalitarian. Another feature of the civilisation in question was the domination of politics over morality. Power and law were therefore not subordinate to moral assessment, as in Latin culture, but dominated it, and both were also independent of morality. Power was therefore assessed by the criterion of efficiency of action, but did not have to be limited by ethical criteria. This had yet another effect, namely that in Byzantine civilisation there was a tendency to create ideologies and utopias or what can also be called the creation of a „secular religion”. It was supposed to be strictly subordinated to politics and public power, and also used quite instrumentally to mobilise society.

In the political system, the state and its extensive bureaucracy were of paramount importance, as well as respect for law and the rule of law. The state was more sovereign in Byzantine civilisation than society. Another effect was a greater concern for the interests of the state than for a given political community. In contrast to

Latin civilisation, there were no democratic or republican traditions here, but strong centralisation tendencies were present [Kiereś-Łach 2020: 111]. It is hard not to notice at least some of the Byzantine features described by Koneczny in the behaviour of the institutions of the European Union. I mean here, for example, the tendencies to reform the Union by increasing the centralisation of management [Dunleavy and Kirchgässner 2000], as well as attaching great importance to bureaucratic structures in the EU and to the category of law [Garrett 1995] and the rule of law [Antoniolli, Ruzza 2024].

Other features of the political culture present in Brussels can be associated with the features of the Jewish civilisation described by Koneczny. Among them, perhaps the most important was the foundation of this civilisation on law, which was assumed to be unchangeable but in fact subject to constant interpretation [Kiereś-Łach 2020: 114]. This created a tendency for chronic change of law in political practice, and also introduced strong legal and moral relativism. In Jewish culture, law was linked to morality and was even a source of ethics. In this way, interpretations of law created a tendency for moral relativism. It is hard not to find here a similarity to the integration processes in Europe. Not only were they largely based on law, but they also treated it as the foundation of the European Union and the object of constant political reinterpretation, which to a large extent fuelled the integration processes. Even when there was no formal revision of the treaties, in practice integration could proceed as a result of legal interpretation made by EU judges [Grosse 2022b: chp. 3]. This created conditions for arbitrariness of judges, which is close to the legal and moral relativism indicated by Koneczny. European law was often a source of moral assessments, just like in the Jewish tradition. The best proof of this were disputes over the rule of law in the EU [Grosse 2022b]. The description of Jewish civilisation can be supplemented with one more remark. Namely, the Jewish community lived in diaspora for many centuries. Therefore, another important feature of this civilisation was a certain a-territoriality, i.e. a tendency to easily circumvent national borders in Europe. We can also find this feature in the processes of European integration at the turn of the 21st century.

Koneczny devoted considerable space in his work to the Turanian civilisation, which was most present in Russia and characterised by the cult of state power personified in a single-person leadership. The leader – in accordance with the tradition of the steppe horde – was the lord of everyone and everything, i.e. both people and all property. He was the source of unquestioned and unrestricted power, neither by law nor morality. Religion and the Orthodox Church were

strongly instrumentalised in this tradition, becoming the support for single rule, for the state, but also for the military goals set by the leader. The political system was strictly military in nature. Its *raison d'être* was successive conquests, and thus the primacy of the constantly expanding empire. It is difficult not to find Turanian motives in the behaviour of the Russian Federation at the beginning of the 21st century. According to Koneczny, it was a civilisation that ensured the development of society and man to the least extent, including respect for his inherent rights [Kiereś-Łach 2020: 113-114].

The catalogue of civilisations present and even competing with each other in Europe in the 21st century should be supplemented by the description of Arab culture, largely linked to Islam. According to Koneczny, it was in some respects similar to the Jewish tradition. For example, at the centre of the political and social system lay religious law, which was the source of morality. However, Arab civilisation much more strongly subordinated all spheres of public and private life to religious law. The political system and the person of the ruler were even sacralised to a certain extent. They drew from the moral authority of religion, but also became the executor of God's will. Another feature similar to the Jewish tradition was the nomadic nature of Arabs [Kiereś-Łach 2020: 110], i.e. their a-territoriality. They were therefore not attached to national territory and borders, which meant that they tended to occupy new areas and subordinate them politically. It was a civilisation with a strong despotic tendency, implemented and justified in the name of religion and moral precepts.

Perhaps the most famous concept concerning cultural issues in international relations was presented by Samuel P. Huntington. As I mentioned earlier, it was heading in a similar direction to the considerations of Feliks Koneczny, more than half a century earlier. Huntington, however, placed greater emphasis on the role of civilisational differences in geopolitical conflicts. That is why his theory was referred to as a realistic model of civilisations and civilisational interactions [Bassin 2007: 356]. In Huntington's opinion, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar order, an era of conflicts began between the seven or eight largest civilisations. Although the American scholar did not rule out clashes within these civilisations, he also considered that the most dangerous would be those that would take place on the borderlines between the Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Islamic, Western, Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilisations. Alliances based on agreements between great powers would give way to alliances defined by culture and civilisation [Huntington 1997: 174].

Huntington predicted that the Western cultural circle would systematically weaken, similarly to the Orthodox one. Although Islamic civilisation would experience a demographic boom, it would regress after 2030, and at the same time Chinese civilisation would gain importance. The growing role of the People's Republic of China resulted from dynamic economic and technological development, as well as the huge emigration of Chinese people in Asia and around the world. Both sources of development were deeply rooted in attachment to Chinese culture, based on social capital, i.e. dense networks of cooperation and a sense of trust within the Chinese community, including between the diaspora and the native country. Huntington pointed out that Chinese identity was related to race (the famous so-called mirror test) and at the same time to one's own civilisation [ibid.: 249-251].

In agreement with Huntington's predictions regarding geopolitical trends [Grosse 2017], it should be noted that Western civilisation – previously based on Latin Christianity – will probably further weaken its attachment to its own axiological foundations, i.e. Christian values. Such a phenomenon has been visible for several decades in Western Europe. This was compounded by intensive demographic processes that heralded the regression of this civilisation. These concerned large-scale non-European immigration, mainly from Muslim countries. In this way, the cultural foundation and social cohesion were subject to additional erosion. In the case of the USA, the traditional social base was similarly deconstructed by mass immigration from Latin America and other parts of the globe. At the same time, in both cases – the United States of America and Western Europe – supporters of left-wing ideology with an extreme, "progressive" inclination were gaining ground, which further weakened the Christian tradition and led to internal cultural conflicts. Among other factors of social decomposition in the West, Huntington mentioned the growth of selfish and antisocial attitudes, the breakdown of the family, the decline of social capital and the cult of self-indulgence [Huntington 1997: 467].

According to Huntington, the West will weaken in the cultural dimension – mainly due to fragmentation and decreasing social cohesion resulting from the functioning of opposing values and moral axioms. This was a derivative of secularisation and the increasingly strong "secular religions", i.e. political ideologies, the weakening of traditional Christian values, as well as the mass influx of immigrants from different cultures. At the same time, criticism and contestation of the West were growing – anti-secular, anti-universalist, rejecting moral relativism, egotism and

consumerism [ibid.: 138]. It can be added that all these phenomena have been intensifying – at least since the beginning of the 21st century – within the EU. This resulted from growing internal cultural divisions, as well as the excessive influx of immigrants. Huntington also predicted that the decline of Western civilisation would be accompanied by a religious revival, especially among the Muslim population [ibid.: 134].

This American scholar pointed out that the problem of Western civilisation was that it was mainly occupied with its own problems [ibid.: 107]. It can be added that it did so in an exceptionally ineffective way, which caused it to get even more bogged down in problems [Jones et al. 2021]. In the case of the European Union – the ineffectiveness of solving subsequent crises, such as Brexit, the eurozone, migration, etc. – was accompanied by the desire to increase political control over the emancipating Central Europe. This led to another crisis, that of the so-called European values and the rule of law. It had geocultural significance. It concerned values fundamental to the EU, and at the same time had a geopolitical context, as it referred to the scope of subjectivity (or sovereignty) of the Central European states.

Some civilisations coincide with national borders, as in the case of the People's Republic of China, Japan, and India. Others are multi-state, although with a clearly defined centre (being the centre of civilisation) and subordinate states [Huntington 1997: 226-239]. In the case of Orthodox civilisation, the centre was Russia, while Belarus and Ukraine were in the cultural orbit of Moscow's influence. According to Huntington, the problem of Ukraine was its internal division, split between west of the Dnieper, which gravitated toward Western civilisation, and east, which was more Russified [ibid.: 36, 243]. In this context, it is worth noting the Orthodox countries of the EU, including Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. On the one hand, they are under the geopolitical and cultural influence of Western Europe, and on the other, Russia.

In the case of Western civilisation, the central state after World War II was the United States. According to Huntington, the geopolitical challenge for this civilisation was the emancipation of the largest Western European countries – Germany and France – which, under the slogan of strategic autonomy, sought independence from Washington. In doing so, they wanted to reduce the primacy of the USA and their own limitations resulting from this leadership. Additionally, in the 21st century, both the position of America on a global scale, as well as that of Germany

and France in the supra-regional system, were weakening. The United States was exhausted by wars sometimes referred to as imperial [Hopkins 2018], while the two largest Western European countries were weakening as a consequence of successive crises in the EU. European integration – intended to be a vehicle for the geopolitical elevation of both countries internationally, as well as for increasing their control over Europe – experienced serious problems along with crises. Additionally, at that time, a group of countries from Central and Eastern Europe emerged, which gradually gained geopolitical importance and escaped the geopolitical influence of Berlin.

According to Huntington, in the 21st century the West's most confrontational relations would be with the Islamic and Chinese civilisations. The following years proved that this prediction primarily concerned the USA. The European Union tried to maintain the best possible relations with Muslim countries and the People's Republic of China. Nevertheless, the growing cultural conflict within the EU with the Islamic minority was a fact. Moreover, with the resumption of the war in Ukraine in 2022, relations between the West and Russia significantly deteriorated. Huntington was right that conflicts between civilisations increased in the 21st century.

The Balkan crisis at the end of the 20th century is a prime example of cultural differences after the end of the Cold War in the book „Clash of Civilizations”. According to the author, three groups of people „clashed” here – Bosnian Muslims, Serbian Orthodox Christians and Croatian Catholics, and thus it was a war between three civilisations [Huntington 1997: 414, 444]. It took place on the periphery of Europe, but similar lines of division were visible in the central part of the continent. Huntington points out that Western culture faced challenges from foreign groups living among Western societies. These included immigrants from other cultural circles who had difficulty assimilating, maintaining and promoting the values, customs and religion of their native countries [ibid.: 468]. In this way, the EU, the USA and other countries of the broadly defined West adopted a model described by scholars as „cleft countries” [Bassin 2007: 358].

### **3. Geocultural Divisions in Contemporary Europe**

#### **3.1. Islam in the European Union**

Within the European Union, at least two major cultural conflicts were growing, which at the same time had the potential for geopolitical disputes [Grosse 2023: 105-113]. The first concerned the growing divisions between the indigenous

population and the newcomers from other cultural circles, especially Islamic countries. The main tension between the two groups had economic and class subtexts, as the immigrants and their descendants belonged to groups that were less well-situated in terms of wealth, education and earnings, and at the same time were often socially and politically marginalised. Their return to religiosity was associated with the desire to find their own identity and sense of dignity, and at the same time resulted in the rejection of the values declared by the indigenous community. The cultural, economic and class conflict could easily turn into a geopolitical dispute if this growing social unrest were to be exploited by external forces hostile to the EU or the largest countries of Western Europe [Kayali et al. 2024].

If we look at Islamic culture through a geopolitical prism, the first thing that comes to mind is that for Muslims their territory does not have strictly defined borders, nor is it exclusively connected with the centre of civilisation in the Middle East. It is perceived as any area inhabited by an Islamic population [Stump 2005]. Nevertheless, such an attitude is extremely relevant in the light of the mass immigration of Muslims to Western Europe. The emigration itself was caused by a demographic factor, as well as by the attractiveness of earnings and the absorbent labour market in the European Communities, and later in the EU. The demographic boom in Muslim countries, combined with the decline in the population in Europe, and in addition with the liberal immigration policy in Western Europe, resulted in a multi-million wave of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. However, this increased immigration entailed political and even geopolitical consequences that resulted directly from the „clash” of both civilisations.

Muslims largely did not assimilate, but rejected the values and law of Western European and European Union countries. This was in line with the Muslim tradition of rejecting Western culture dating back to at least the 19th century [Rida 2024]. A number of studies on immigrant youth, even generations after settling in Europe, indicated a low level of identification with the local national culture. This was especially the case when non-European ethnic groups constituted a significant percentage of students in a school or class [Jugert et al. 2019: 444, 452]. Moreover, the aversion to the local national culture caused the descendants of immigrants to be repelled by European civilisation and values, which were often identified with the national tradition [ibid.: 447, 449; Faas 2007; Verkuyten and Martinovic 2012; Verhaegen et al. 2013]. The aforementioned studies proved the national education

systems to be relatively ineffective in integrating ethnic minorities with the native culture.

All these phenomena were largely due to the culture of Islam. Its uncompromising nature was fuelled by a religious revival ongoing since at least the 1970s. In Europe, its radicalism was additionally intensified by feelings of alienation among immigrants and their lower economic and social status. According to sociological studies conducted in six Western European countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Sweden), the level of religious fundamentalism among Muslims was always significantly higher than among Christians and exceeded half of this population [Koopmans 2015]. It was also visible to a comparable extent among immigrants, as well as citizens of immigrant origin in subsequent generations.

Many immigrants and their offspring questioned the principles of the secular state or other values of largely liberal and leftist Western Europe. They were attached to the superiority of the principles of the Koran over the law of the EU or the Member States, to religious education as the preferred form of education for the younger generation, etc. According to the tradition of Islam, a democratic community cannot create law at will, because the most important principles were given by the Creator [Amin 1989: 75]. Moreover, Islamic theology is the opposite of liberal values. It emphasises the subordination of society to religious and political authority, not individual freedom [ibid.: 85]. This undermined the basic principle of liberal democracy and thus posed a serious challenge to the political order functioning in the EU. All the more so because many Muslims not only expected religious tolerance and legal autonomy for themselves from the authorities of European countries, but also gradually sought to extend their own culture and the laws of the Koran to the indigenous inhabitants of Europe [Esposito 1992: 12; Hillal Dessouki 1982: 9-13].

Huntington observed that along with the religious revival, Muslim militancy and a tendency of aggression towards other civilisations grew worse. This was manifested in immigrant environments in Europe by a move towards crime and terrorism. This was consistent with the legacy of this culture, which glorified military virtues and war against infidels, and thus imposed one's own religious values and beliefs by force [Huntington 1997: 402]. The obligation to wage holy war against infidels, or jihad (Arabic: جهاد), was traditionally one of the basic duties of the faithful [Amin 1989, p. 69]. This was a historical drive to subjugate

new territories and use violence in geopolitical relations [Stump 2005: 154, 159, 169]. In this context, a report prepared by one of the United Nations agencies in 2021 brought interesting results. It argued that terrorist threats in Europe were increasing as a result of the influx of mass and largely uncontrolled migration from Muslim countries. The report pointed to the particular risk associated with immigration from Afghanistan, especially that inspired by the radical Islamic organisation Al-Qaeda [Movements of people... 2021: 50-51].

The characteristic feature of Islam, also within the EU, was territorial expansionism, as well as intolerance towards competing religions or ideologies. Therefore, the inevitable consequence was the emergence of „parallel societies” or „split states” in Western Europe [Huntington 1997: 304], and then increasing pressure on Europeans to accept Islamic rules of social and political life. „When the Islamic movement is strong enough, it must seize power and create an Islamic state, and also place the education system and the army under the rule of persons with appropriate moral authority” [ibid.: 411]. An example of such a tendency for Huntington was the radicalisation of Muslim Bosnians, who, although almost completely secularised in the time of Yugoslavia, later introduced the principles of the Islamic state as soon as they took political power [ibid.: 412-413]. Sociological studies have shown that in many Western European cities, including Antwerp, Paris, Rotterdam, and London, ethnic minorities, including those largely from Muslim countries, were becoming a majority that increasingly aspired to take over power at the local government level [Clycq 2021]. Scholars have also indicated that the moment is approaching when native Europeans will become minorities in their own countries [Crul, Mollenkopf 2012; Clycq 2011; Catney 2016].

In many Western European societies, there was a sense of anxiety about national identity [Huntington 1997: 296-297]. This was confirmed by sociological research conducted in 2021 in ten EU member states [Survey in 10 European countries 2021]. The vast majority of respondents in all countries rejected the opinion of the European Commission, which in 2015 suggested that the Union should accept 70 million economic migrants in the next two decades. The vast majority supported more rigorous border protection against immigration, as well as a reduction in the number of immigrants residing in their countries. In the opinion of the respondents, refugees should be helped primarily outside the borders of the Union [Grosse 2023: 105-113].

### 3.2. The Geocultural Strategy of the Liberal Left

The second line of geocultural conflict in the European Union concerned the conduct of the liberal left, which tried to impose its own values on other political groups [Grosse 2022a]. It was a nice axiological basis for further European integration processes, which to a large extent aimed at centralising power in the EU and federalising the political system. Therefore, it was a geocultural project, as it combined the promotion of political values with geopolitical goals. This was compounded by an increasingly strong dispute between the largest member states from the western part of the EU and some countries from its eastern part. It already directly concerned the issue of mutual political relations and economic dependencies, which had geopolitical implications.

In the EU institutions, there has been a rapprochement between left-wing and liberal circles in relation to many public policies for many years. Some scientists even spoke of “left-wing liberalism” in the European Union, i.e. the actual fusion of both political directions [Nowak 2020]. The cooperation of both formations resulted from the cartelisation of the mainstream political trend that politically dominated the EU. This was the case in the European Parliament and elsewhere [Mair 2007]. At the same time, the liberalism of the representatives of this institution was undergoing a transformation, slightly softening its free-market doctrine, which was largely influenced by politicians originating from France and the Benelux countries. The natural tendency was therefore to emphasise universal human rights. In this way, liberals and left-wing politicians met on the basis of values. This concerned many issues, but primarily moral ones, e.g. an individual approach to sexual orientation or to the family model, the free choice of abortion and euthanasia, maximising the rights of minorities, especially sexual and ethnic.

John Gray [2000] argued that liberal thought has always contained two incompatible tendencies. In one, liberalism is a theory of a universal consensus that enables the best way of life for all of humanity. In the other, liberalism is a project of seeking conditions for the peaceful coexistence of different regimes and ways of life, and is therefore based on pluralism and tolerance. It seems that in the context of European integration, this universal, missionary approach within liberalism has won. This has happened at the cost of the liberal tendency to respect different cultural and constitutional traditions, as well as other political views. At the same time, the universal consensus has been largely built around left-wing ideas, and liberal thought has been partly dominated by left-wing values, and partly it has

given way, as it were, of its own accord, renouncing its own pluralistic tradition in the name of the rather illusory good of European integration.

The creation of leftist values as European, and thus recognised by all groups supporting integration, was of fundamental importance. For example, the issue of women's right to abortion, or expanding the rights of sexual or ethnic minorities became a touchstone of pro-Europeanism. Transferring the discussion about the future of the EU to the plane of values was a success for the left, as it promoted leftist axiology and equated it with support for integration.

The European Parliament played a special role in promoting leftist values under the banner of Europeanism. It adopted successive resolutions defending the rights of women or sexual minorities, treated as universal human rights, and therefore not subject to political or ideological discussion. For example, same-sex couples being allowed to marry, and adopt children, was considered a fundamental right. The governments of the Member States were also criticised for limiting this type of „freedom” [European Parliament... 2021]. Another resolution defined the possibility of performing unlimited abortion as a human right [European Parliament... 2020]. Attempts were also made to extend the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to include women's right to abortion, thus seeking to regulate at the EU level an issue that had previously been the exclusive jurisdiction of the Member States [Sánchez Nicolás 2020]. In one of the resolutions, the European Parliament, which is committed to the rule of law, demanded the annulment of the ruling of the (supposedly independent) Supreme Court in a non-European country, i.e. the USA, and also called for the recognition of abortion as a fundamental right both in the EU and internationally [European Parliament... 2022].

An important means by which the left-liberal political mainstream promoted so-called European values was the method of polarisation, i.e. antagonism between supporters of integration referring to left-wing political values and people referring to other norms, primarily conservative or Christian democratic. The latter were hailed as enemies of Europe. Polarisation served to indicate an opponent of integration who should be excluded from democratic processes, thrown outside the pale of legitimised views and attitudes. Such a procedure gathered most of the Brussels elites around the left, as well as the previous political mainstream. Even for liberal or centre-right politicians, weakening the forces described as Eurosceptic seemed a tempting idea. This is precisely why the liberal faction in the European Parliament proposed that politicians from Eurosceptic parties should

not be allowed to hold any positions in EU institutions, including parliamentary ones [Saryusz-Wolski 2021]. Decision-makers with a more cosmopolitan approach saw a threat in nationalism, as an obstacle to building a European identity or implementing federal ideas. The way to stir up European identifications was to seek an internal enemy, which resulted in political polarisation and the exclusion of opponents from the debate.

The dispute over values was not only a sharp conflict in terms of political culture, but also had a largely geopolitical dimension. It was a competition between two fundamentally different visions of the future of integration. On the one hand, the liberal-left mainstream proposed a centralised system, in which more and more national jurisdiction was transferred to the EU, strengthening Brussels' technocracy and judiciary, while at the same time systematically limiting democracies in the member states. On the other hand, conservative and nationalist circles proposed a vision of decentralised integration and subsidiary to national democracies. An additional factor in the described differentiation was the growing asymmetry of the European Union between the largest countries of Western Europe, which had a political and economic advantage in the integration processes, and smaller countries, referred to as peripheral [Mertens, Thiemann 2022; Bohle, Greskovits 2012; Magone et al. 2016]. For example, conservative elites from Central Europe contested not only the dominance of left-wing values and centralisation tendencies in the EU, but also the economic and geopolitical advantage of integrating with the largest Western European countries. In this way, the dispute over values had an important geopolitical context in the EU.

### **3.3. The Imperialism of Orthodox Moscow**

The most striking geopolitical division in Europe was brought about by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Using Huntington's terminology, it can be considered a geocultural confrontation between Western and Orthodox civilisations. Interestingly, in this dispute, Orthodox Ukraine, defending its own sovereignty, allied itself with the West, which was already mostly secular and culturally divided [Grosse 2023: 113-123].

For a long time after 1990, Western Europe downplayed the geopolitical threat from Russia, trying to establish economic and political cooperation with this country and hoping to stabilise the situation in the region. Meanwhile, Moscow perceived the EU and NATO as hostile and largely dominated by Washington's geopolitical interests. Russian elites treated the collective West as culturally

different. They also became convinced that although Western civilisation was in the throes of decadence and degradation, it nevertheless usurped the right to moral superiority over other cultural circles. It tried to impose its own values, mainly leftist and liberal, as universal for all humanity, and also criticised all states that did not adopt them. For example, promoting EU values was perceived as an instrument of geopolitics, or more precisely, a factor intended to force concessions from other cultures, not only in the normative and regulatory sphere, but also in economic and political relations. In this way, the perception of differences in terms of civilisation was closely linked to Russia's competitive approach to the West.

Russian intellectual elites followed the ideas of Halford Mackinder on the one hand, and Samuel Huntington on the other. From the former, they borrowed the concept of Russia as a land power that, by controlling Eurasia, could become the greatest power on a global scale. It can also be added that Mackinder's ideas somehow „imprinted” Russians with an aversion to the USA as a hostile maritime power. In turn, they borrowed from Huntington the view of the fundamental importance of cultural foundations for the potential of individual powers, as well as for divisions between civilisations and geopolitical conflicts between them. Geopolitics was therefore strongly linked to culture, and the strategic vision shaped among state elites after 2000 – during the rule of Vladimir Putin – was the ideology of Russian civilisation, different from the West in terms of tradition, religion and political values. Therefore, the hostility between both sides was the result of strategic interests and cultural differences that could not be overcome. This naturally led to conflict. At first, the goal was to break up the unity of the West, specifically to separate the US and the EU countries. Then, Russia's gradual absorption of Central and Western Europe was planned [Tsygankov, Tsygankov 2010].

The state authorities supported the so-called imperial identity, emphasising the uniqueness of the native culture and its advantage over Western universalism. The aforementioned identity obviously referred to the legacy of the Russian Empire (1721–1917) and its geopolitical power. It was based on the so-called Russian civilisation, the guarantor and foundation of which was the state [Mankoff 2022: 25–30, 42]. It was essentially a state ideology, referring to Orthodoxy and the imperial tradition. It emphasised patriotism, pride in the native culture and the need to strive to realise Russian interests [Pizzolo 2020: 37–42]. The Orthodox Church – its moral principles and religious values - were treated as the core of Eurasian culture, and also gave a sense of superiority over Western civilisation. They were supposed

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to culturally unify the areas governed by the Kremlin and, in the future, lead to the moral renewal of the western part of the Old Continent [Morozova 2009: 672].

The leading ideology of the Putin era was Eurasianism. The idea itself was invented in the 1920s and 1930s by Russian emigrants hostile to Bolshevik Russia. It was supposed to build a new nationalism based on Orthodox tradition and conservative values. An important goal for emigrants was to cooperate with Western European countries, which were supposed to help remove the Bolsheviks from power. After 1991, Eurasianism gained popularity in the Russian Federation. The main advocate of this idea in Putin's era was Aleksandr Dugin [ibid.: 672]. He was perceived as not only designing a strategy for the Kremlin but also ideological basis for the country's foreign and domestic policy [Pizzolo 2020: 29]. Academics have considered Dugin to be a promoter of an expansionist and imperial geopolitical vision [Bassin and Aksenov 2006: 105-110]. He identified Russia's security and sovereignty with the security and sovereignty of all of Eurasia [Dugin 1999: 166]. In his ideas of Eurasianism, he referred to the views of Mackinder, Haushofer, and Huntington.

Dugin combined geostrategic thought with references to culture. In terms of civilisation, Dugin saw a fundamental conflict that coincided with the geopolitical dividing line between land and sea powers. It was a rivalry between Russia and the United States, supported by the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, some EU member states. Russia represented an ideocracy, a sphere of religiosity, traditional morality, conservatism and community. It was not focused primarily on commercial activity, like the West, but it had authoritarian and hierarchical tendencies [Bassin and Aksenov 2006: 107]. The views of the Russian geopolitician largely coincided with the considerations of Huntington, who emphasised the historical differences between the formation of Western and Orthodox civilisations [Huntington 1997: 199-200]. Other American scientists also considered Russia to be a separate civilisation [Kroeber 2011: 42].

Other Russian scholars also argued about Russia's civilisational distinctiveness. As late as the 19th century, Nikolay Danilevsky proclaimed that Russia was not Europe, but something higher and better in terms of civilisation than the "rotten West" [Danilevsky 1895]. Andrei Pelipenko also considered Russian culture to be unique, to some extent archaic and infantile, as it was based more on myths than rationality and empirical experience [Pelipenko 2007: 48-72]. In his opinion, both the Russian government and the state played a sacral role in the civilisational

approach, and were even deified. This largely explained the strong tendency in Russia to centralise power in the hands of a single leader. Moreover, imperial policy was supposed to have a moral justification according to Pelipenko, as it was a fight against anti-culture and the forces of chaos, especially in the 21st century era of globalisation and liberalisation. In this way, Russian expansionism was justified on a messianic or quasi-religious level, as the promotion of civilised values and the fight against decadence. Pelipenko's considerations prove once again the intertwining of Russian geopolitical thought with a civilisational approach, moreover, treating the imperialism of one's own country as morally legitimized [Grosse 2023: 113-123].

### 3.4. Four geocultural centres in Europe

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), one of the founders of the modern international law, exercised considerable influence on the peace process in the last years of the 30-year war. He also played an important role in the European history of enlightenment and secularisation. His formula “etsi Deus non daretur” (as if God did not exist) marks the advent of a new secular worldview, according to which the world and man are autonomous and independent from the transcendental God [Appolonov 2018]. This formula was also an inspiration for separating the sphere of religiosity from international relations, i.e. from geopolitics, as well as for the primacy of religious tolerance in these relations [Simmonds 1959]. Grotius's thought paved the way for the secularisation of the public sphere. The centre of gravity of religion was shifted from the public to the private life and at the same time the centre of gravity of public law moved from divine law to natural law based on reason [Ferrari 2014: 364-365]. This led to a gradual departure from natural law referring to Christian principles towards law established by the sovereign, first a prince or king, and then by democratic communities. Moreover, a universal, secular humanitarian thought gradually took shape, for which the object of reference became all of humanity, and not just a specific political community [Larrière 2008: 314]. In this way, Grotius' thought paved the way for the liberal order taking shape in Western Europe, the culmination of which was European integration after World War II.

Within the liberal order prevailing in the EU, secularisation, or the separation of the religious sphere from the political, dominates. During this process, religion has been largely relegated to the private domain, and thus has ceased to be a factor in geopolitical mobilisation. At the same time, in accordance with liberal values, the EU declares freedom of religion and religious tolerance, including towards non-Christian or non-European denominations, such as Islam. Nevertheless, in

21st-century Europe, religion – contrary to the assumptions of the liberal order prevailing in the EU – has not ceased to mobilise politically or even be relevant to geopolitical divisions. This is especially the case with Russia, which uses Orthodoxy in its official state ideology and contrasts its own values derived from Orthodoxy with the liberal and leftist ones functioning in Western Europe. As it turned out, Islam also plays an important role in the political divisions functioning in Europe, including in the secular and liberal EU. Therefore, the analysis of geocultural divisions in contemporary Europe is a useful tool for theoretical considerations on international relations.

To sum up the considerations presented so far, it is worth paying attention to four social groups present in Europe in the first decades of the 21st century, for which cultural differences, including religious ones, have been a motive for fuelling geopolitical rivalry [Grosse 2023: 104-105].

- The Muscovites had clear geopolitical goals related to the reconstruction of the former empire, primarily in the former Soviet republics, as well as the weakening of the EU and NATO [Morozova 2009]. At the same time, their ideological basis was a reference to the idea of Eurasianism and criticism of the liberal values of the EU [Dugin 2016; Dugin 2012; Pizzolo 2020]. They confronted the liberal and secular West on the basis of references to Orthodox civilisation, as a political ideology legitimising Moscow's right to expansionism and imperialism [Morozova 2009: 672].
- Radical Muslims sought to gain territorial footholds in Western Europe, first trying to build the greatest possible autonomy for themselves, and then possibly taking over political power in some local governments and even states. On ideological grounds, they promoted the religious principles of Islam and condemned the values of the EU. These were therefore anti-Western, anti-Enlightenment ideas, including those negating the secular nature of the state and the principle of the superiority of laws established by democracy over religious law.
- Another group consisted of a large swathe of the political elites and societies in Western Europe. They sought to implement their own geopolitical vision in the EU, i.e. to build a centralised and federal „super-structure” that would also be strategically autonomous from the USA. Another goal was to convince countries in Central Europe to accept the aforementioned vision, and in fact to

dominate this region in economic and political terms. The ideological support for the discussed group came from left-wing and liberal ideas, as well as the secularisation of the public sphere. The main enemy for this group were conservatives, nationalists and Christian Democrats, perceived as the greatest threat to European integration and to the dissemination of left-wing and liberal values in social and political life.

In relation to Feliks Koneczny's typology, it can be assumed that the aforementioned group was a mixture of features of Byzantine and Jewish civilisations. The former was manifested by a strong susceptibility to utopian and ideological thinking that subordinated morality to political effectiveness. The Byzantine trend was the centralisation of management and the growth of bureaucracy. In reference to both types of civilisations, the Western European elites treated EU law and the rule of law as paramount, although in accordance with the features of Jewish culture, they were subject to strong interpretation. As a consequence, arbitrariness in legal adjudication and political decisions emerged [Garben 2019: 215], as well as legal and moral relativism in the European Union.

- Finally, the fourth group, mostly originating from Central Europe, sought to maintain national subjectivity in the processes of European integration, as well as more balanced relations between the Western and Eastern parts of the EU. They supported the strengthening of the North Atlantic Alliance and feared Russian expansionism. On ideological grounds, they defended fidelity to cultural tradition, including the preservation of Christian values in public life. They proposed a decentralised and subsidiary approach to integration within the model of a „Europe of homelands”, and also advocated a republican attitude to national democracy and the responsibility of citizens for the course of public affairs. Using Koneczny's terminology, this was the group closest to the ideals of Latin civilisation, which, on the one hand, resisted the expansion of the Turanian civilisation as well as the Byzantine, on the other.

The presented cultural, religious and geocultural divisions in Europe may be controversial and should even be the subject of a broad academic discussion. They refer to Samuel P. Huntington's theory and Feliks Koneczny's typology, as well as to the concept of geoculture. However, like any theory, they are subject to a certain generalisation, from which there may be many exceptions. For example, among the Muslim population in Europe, there are many moderates, who have even succumbed to liberalism and secularisation. The group of conservatives

with Christian values – including those originating from Central Europe – has many geopolitical differences, concerning Moscow, the war in Ukraine, relations with Germany and the future of European integration. This is why the theory of geoculture itself should be discussed, as well as the typology of geocultural divisions in Europe proposed in this article.

### Conclusion

The article presents the concept of geoculture, which bases geopolitics (or international relations) on cultural phenomena. Among them, social identity, political culture, its values and principles are of fundamental importance. They shape the ways of thinking about one's own political community and state, as well as about the most important international challenges, rivals and threats in the historical process. Political ideas, as well as ideologies that resemble „secular religions”, are hugely relevant to shaping geopolitical thought. Religions themselves can also play an important geopolitical role, as a tool for constructing political identities and mobilising society to achieve geopolitical goals.

The article presents a broad theoretical context that shows the strong influence of culture on traditional geopolitical thought, as well as on contemporary geopolitical theories or in international relations. The article analyses two theoretical concepts in particular: the contemporary American researcher of international relations Samuel P. Huntington and the Polish scientist of the interwar period Feliks Koneczny. Both attached importance to the category of culture, or more precisely civilisation, in international relations, including as a potential source of explanation of political divisions and international conflicts.

The research section of the article attempts to apply the concepts of Huntington and Koneczny to Europe at the beginning of the 21st century. It turns out that it is possible to notice divisions that are both cultural and political. These concern civilisational differences, i.e. those concerning professed values, political ideologies or religions, and therefore views on shaping the political order in Europe too. The aforementioned concepts may seem controversial to academic researchers, or even inconsistent with the political correctness in force in the EU, but they help draw the lines of political conflicts that may lead to armed conflicts or terrorism. They may therefore have very serious consequences for the future of the European Union and for the geopolitical order in Europe, which has been undergoing rapid change since the end of the 20th century.

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