

## **FROM THE PAST**

### **LITHUANIA AND EUROPE'S HISTORICAL REGIONS**

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#### **1. In place of an introduction: Lithuania - the geographical center of Europe**

Lithuanians are already accustomed that Europe and the world often do not know where their country is (an American has said - well, it is somewhere beyond Mexico). In better circumstances they know that it is a country which in 1990 along with the other Baltic states escaped from the USSR, but even then the common European is surprised to see Lithuania not with the cupolas of Byzantine Orthodox churches, but with church towers, and the people not speaking a Slavic but its own Baltic family language (incidentally, the most archaic of all living Indo-European languages). In the best circumstances, Lithuania is very often confused with Latvia, Riga being considered the capital of Lithuania and Vilnius that of Latvia. Thus, we can assert now: Lithuania is a country on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Even more, Lithuania is the geographic center of Europe. And this was determined not by Lithuanians themselves, but by France's National Geography Institute according to whose calculations from a height of 180 kilometers Europe's geographic center is 25 kilometers north of Lithuania's capital of Vilnius. The coordinates of Europe's center are 54 55' north, and 25 19' east. Lithuania is in the same geographic latitude as the countries to its west: Sweden, Denmark, Scotland; in the same geographical longitude as Finland to the north and Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece to the south. To be even more specific, Lithuania today has borders with Latvia, Belarus, Poland, and Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast. And most importantly - repeating one more time - Lithuania is a country on the shores of the Baltic Sea...

However, all that is only geography. But the concept of "Europe" has another meaning as a historical civilization. In surveys of historical regions, Lithuania is rarely mentioned.<sup>1</sup> For western historiography Lithuania remains a "tabula rasa." If it is remembered, then the ancient history of Lithuania, the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, is usually smothered by Poland's history while modern day Lithuania is "added on" the histories of the other Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, in this way assigning Lithuania to different historical regions.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this essay is not only to bring Lithuania into the debates about Europe's historical regions, but also on this basis to attempt to resolve the numerous contradictions not only in defining the borders of different regions, but also in the terminology in general.

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<sup>1</sup> A clear exception is the work of the noted German historian Werner Conze, which we will cite more than once : Werner Conze, *Von der Spätantik bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, (München, 1992). The work of this historian is an exception in also another way; he is one of the few who have especially studied Lithuania's history. Werner Conze, *Agrarverfassung und Bevölkerung in Litauen und Weissrussland*, Bd. 1 (1940).

<sup>2</sup> For example, K. Zernack , *Osteuropa: Eine Einführung in seine Geschichte*, (München, 1977), lists "Polen mit Alt-Litauen" as part of the "Ostmitteleuropa" region (p. 123-126) and "Baltische Lande/Baltische Staaten" as part of the "Nordosteuropa" region (p. 151-153).

## 2. The opposition of East and West Europe in contemporary political thought

Europe lived for 50 years divided into West and East Europe. Where there was democracy was the West, while where there was Communism was the East. Such was the real political situation. The Communist system crumbled, that is the political situation changed, but the concept of the opposition of East and West Europe remained: the countries that are wealthy and have deep democratic traditions are the West, and the whole post-Communist world is East Europe. In such a case East Europe is not only Berlin, Prague, Budapest, not only Vilnius and Tallinn, not only Saint Petersburg and Moscow, but also Vladivostok. Intuition whispers that something is wrong with this concept - the whole continent can not be the same. A different alternative had been suggested in the Communist times the historical and political idea of Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland remembering the concept of Central Europe,<sup>3</sup> whose ideological direction was evident - there exists a region, which unlike East Europe did not choose communism. The famous Czech dissident Milan Kundera issued the shortest formulation of this alternative - Central Europe is the torn away??? West, Vienna is suffocating on the borders of the Western world because it has lost its own region - Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland - that is Central Europe. It does not take much effort to notice that this is but a different variation of the opposition of East and West Europe. In Lithuania this conception has at least become a stereotype from which the new stereotype of "going into Europe" developed. But once again something is wrong - is there no difference between Paris and Vilnius, or should we just ignore this chain of facts: Chlodwig, the king of the Franks, was baptized in 486 while in Lithuania Christianity took root almost a thousand years later. Intuition whispers again - don't a 1000 years mean something? Can one say that Central Europe was separated from the West by only the "Iron Curtain," was there no difference in this millennium between Paris and Vilnius, Krakow, Budapest?

In any case in today's political thought Lithuania ends up in totally different regions. To the American political scientist Samuel Huntington Lithuania is part of the West,<sup>4</sup> but to the Polish historian and political scientist B. Cywinski - part of the "non-Russian" East Europe.<sup>5</sup> These examples already show (we will not discuss other ones now) that the problem of Lithuania's historical-regional dependence has to be evaluated from a new perspective.

## 3. Remarks about terminology: Central East Europe/Central and East Europe

We think that sometimes the making (or at least the synonymous usage) of "West Europe/East Europe" into "West/East" is incorrect. If along with many other investigators we agree with Oscar Halecki that the essence of Europe, allowing also to

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<sup>3</sup> About the sources of "Central Europe" definition see: Ibid, p. 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> To learn how Samuel P. Huntington defines the borders of "Western civilization" see: Samuel P. Huntington "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 3, Summer (1993), 30.

<sup>5</sup> B. Cywinski, *Moj kawalek Europy* (Warsaw, 1974).

define its contours, is antiquity and Christianity and their heritage,<sup>6</sup> we would have to admit that “East Europe” and the “East” are not the same.

The concept “Central and East Europe” is frequently used.<sup>7</sup> The conjunction “and” would suggest that we have two regions in mind. But sometimes this clarity disappears. In the German and English languages there are the concepts “Ostmitteleuropa” or “East Central Europe.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly this is the eastern part of Central Europe or in other words – “östliches Mitteleuropa”. The usage of the components of the concept (Ost and Mittel) is not accidental for at least in the German language the other concept “Südosteuropa” is always understood as southern East Europe or “südliches Osteuropa”. Thus, the essential component at least in the German language always goes in the second position. But the Poles change the positions of the components – “Europa Srodkowo-wschodnia”. In translating from Polish into French the components are not changed – “l Europe du Centre–Est”. This change of components, especially when translating from one language to another, this variety of junctures, spaces, and dashes, at times evidently forces one to change them all into “and” and one region becomes two. But logic would dictate that “Ostmitteleuropa” and “Osteuropa” are not the same, and, moreover, the first is not part of the second.

Perhaps this is only a matter for careless authors and inexperienced translators? Thus, let us turn to the mentioned work of Zernack which is devoted to this question and which we will later cite more than once. However, in this work “Ostmitteleuropa” (together with “Südosteuropa”, “Nordosteuropa”, and Russia) are also part of “Osteuropa”!

This contradiction can be explained by the traditions of “Ostforschung” (East Investigations). According to which everything east of Germany is East Europe. However, Zernack presents considerably more serious arguments - for him East Europe is all the regions, which earlier or later accepted the heritage of antiquity and Christianity, i.e. became European. All this would be fine if a) Europeanization would not have occurred in two lines - through Byzantium and through the empire of Charlemagne (something the author himself admits) and b) if the concept of “Ostmitteleuropa” was not used for this is traditionally given another content - according to pure logic the author should change this concept to “westliches Osteuropa”.

Thus, problems of terminology remain. Perhaps searches for Lithuania’s historical regions will bring some light to this problem.

#### **4. Lithuania - not East Europe**

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<sup>6</sup> Oscar Halecki, “Der Begriff der osteuropäischen Geschichte,” *Zeitschrift für osteuropäische Geschichte: Neue Folge*, Bd. 5 (1935), 5-6; Zernack, *Osteuropa*, p. 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> “Ost- und Mitteleuropa.” “East and Central Europe,” “Europa Srodkowa i Wschodnia.” In French there is a variety. Sometimes it is “l Europe de l Est et du Centre” but also “l Europe centrale et de l Est.” It is worth noting that for the French usually only East and West Europe exist.

<sup>8</sup> For the derivation of the term see: Conze, *Ostmitteleuropa*, p., 1-4.

The search for East Europe is directly dependent on the answer to the question - what is Russia. This is an “eternal theme.”<sup>9</sup> From N.Danilevski through the major speculative concepts of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee the opinion continues that Russia (or Byzantium) is an autonomous civilization. However, even an advocate of this position will have to admit and interpret the developments begun by Peter the Great, often called the Europeanization of Russia. On the other hand, there also exists an optimistic view: if Byzantium is a successor of the traditions of antiquity as the hearth of Europe and also of Christianity, then Russia and the Balkan countries have been part of Europe since the Middle Ages.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, one can reconcile these positions - in Europe there were and are two civilizations or traditions of civilization: Byzantine and Western. During the time of Peter the Great Russia did not begin to Europeanize, but to Westernize. In any case, if we say “East Europe,” we have to look for it first of all in Russia.

Where does East Europe end? Let us compare the histories of Lithuania and Russia.

The most obvious difference is that Russia is an Eastern Christian land. On the other hand, Lithuania in the first unsuccessful attempt in 1251 as in 1387 chose the Catholic baptism. Of course, in pagan Lithuania, isolated from Western Europe by the Teutonic Knights, influences and fashions from Orthodox regions spread, especially in those which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania annexed; in Vilnius there are Orthodox churches which were built as early as the 14th century; part of the ruling elite accepted Orthodox baptism; the White Russian writing used in ancient Lithuania is also derived from the traditions of Orthodox monastery writings. However, Orthodox churches in the total context of Lithuania’s culture are only an incidental matter, the Lithuanian Orthodox dukes - the periphery of the political life, the White Russian script - only a technical measure. It is impossible to deny the assertion that in the 13th-15th centuries paganism dominated Lithuania, and that Christianity later gained the status of a state religion. These are not new discoveries. The border between the “Greek” and “Latin” Christian confessions is usually considered to be the border of East Europe. Werner Conze formulated this concept in a very fundamental way, incidentally mentioning that the formation of this border ended around the year 1400<sup>11</sup> (clearly, the baptism of Lithuania in 1387 provided the basis for this claim). The borders of the “Latin world” (which is also East Europe) defined by Conze: Narva, Kronstadt (the border of ancient Hungary or Transylvania in current Romania), Spalitto (the southern boundary of Dalmatia) coincide with the borders mentioned earlier by Huntington. Thus, metaphorically speaking, the dividing line of East Europe at least according to religious criteria is drawn a little to the east of Vilnius, where ethnic and Catholic Lithuania ends. Clearly, the notable problem remains how can religious differences (and from the theological point of view the clearest difference between Catholicism and Orthodoxy is *filioque dogma*) determine differences between civilizations. Probably, not so much these differences but the opening to the West, which Catholicism provided, allowed Lithuania

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<sup>9</sup> Zermack, *Osteuropa*, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 661, Conze, *Ostmitteleuropa*, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

to live through the Western cultural eras: Gothic, Renaissance and Reformation, Baroque (incidentally, the eastern borders of these styles of architecture are sometimes considered to be regional borders), the era of Enlightenment and Classicism, Romanticism. Russia joined this chain only after Peter I.

Conze has noted that confessional criteria are not the only ones: the states and societies of Lithuania and Moscow, in his opinion, also differ in the status of cities and rights - the cities of Lithuania from the end of the 14th c. began to acquire the municipal (Magdeburg) rights, as well as the manner of peasant farms.<sup>12</sup> These assertions were not presented in a more detailed manner.

Let us start with political structures. There is the widely known truth that the Catholic Church always was like a state within a state, i.e. an independent corporation in the center of Rome. In contrast, the Orthodox Church has always been part of the state's ruling structures. Here we should discuss the manner of the state or rule. In the early Middle Ages the differences were not felt, all the more as Lithuania became a nation at a later time. The difference becomes clearer when in the 15th c. Lithuania begins to form a class society. In 1566 the noble parliamentary system or the class monarchy was finally established in Lithuania. It is difficult to find such processes in Russia's history, and thus for a long time historiographers tried to adapt to Russia a scheme of absolutism, in this way erasing the difference between the absolutism of the West in the 17th-18th c. and the Eastern despotism with a thousand year tradition. Russia moved in the direction of representative society only at the beginning of the 20th c., and that was only a historical episode - in 1917 Russia turned in the direction of a new despotism (in this respect the conception of Karl Wittfogel,<sup>13</sup> in our opinion, has not lost its scientific relevancy and worth).

In the same way, property relations also differed fundamentally. Even at the beginning of the 20th c. village societies were dominant in Russia. The Stolypin reform, begun in 1910, was halted by World War I. Only 10 percent of the peasantry had time to form private farms. On the other hand, as the investigations of Prof. Edvardas Gudavičius showed, already at the end of the 12th c. Lithuania adopted the individual peasant farm of the Middle Ages - the *alod*, first developed among the Franks and later determining the tradition of Western agriculture and peasantry. The development of peasant property rights to land is nothing different than the conversion of the *alod* to the **ub**, i.e. an individual farming property in a feudal estate. Conze has discussed the opposition of the **ub** or the individual farming to the "solid farming" and periodical redistribution of land in Eastern Europe.<sup>14</sup> The conclusions of this historian have entered the contemporary synthesis of European peasant history. The German historian *Werner Rösener*<sup>15</sup> claims that the whole history of European peasantry relies on the principles of the **ub**, includes the Baltic region in his field of analysis, in this way carefully setting the borders of Western farming.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 81

<sup>13</sup> Karl Wittfogel, *Orientalische Despotie: Eine Vergleichende Untersuchung totaler Macht* (Köln, Berlin, 1963).

<sup>14</sup> Conze, *Ostmitteleuropa*, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Werner Rösener, *Die Bauern in der europäischen Geschichte*, p. 34.

Thus, there are too great differences between Lithuanian and Russian history in culture, in rule, and in economy to allow one to assign these countries to the same historical region. If Lithuania is not East Europe, then Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia can even more not be assigned to this region.

## 5. Central Europe - not West Europe

Let us say that the West is France. Even then if we agree with Conze and Huntington that Western civilization extends from this country to Lithuania, Hungary, and Slovenia, we would still have to ponder - did all the countries of Western civilization become such at the same time? Clearly, no. Therefore, historians use the concepts of Old and New Europe.

Of course, the concepts of this New Europe differ somewhat. If we agree with the concept that Western civilization (or West Europe) was born out of the ruins of the Western Roman Empire, where the barbarians, destroying ancient civilization, took from it, according to the Lithuanian philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris, “substantial individualism.” Thus the New Europe is a post-ancient Europe which starts to the north of the limes?????????? of the Roman Empire or the Rhine and Danube Rivers.<sup>16</sup>

However, Zernack believes that the historical foundations of Western Europe lie in the empire of Charlemagne, and thus for him New Europe is post-Charlemagne Europe with its symbolic boundary of the Elbe,<sup>17</sup> We do not think that these conceptions contradict each other - they only mark the waves of Europe’s Westernization. Thus, somewhere between West and East Europe there extends a region, which has to be composed of all the latecomer countries, not assigned to Europe. Zernack calls East Europe New Europe something which as I mentioned, is not convincing, Conze calls it Central Europe, which extends from the Rhine to Lithuania. To Conze Central Europe is not uniform. He calls the region between the Rhine and Elbe as the Old (German) Central Europe or West Central Europe (westliches Mitteleuropa) and the region east of the Elbe, i.e. Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, etc., as Central East Europe or eastern Central Europe (östliches Mitteleuropa). The conception is very smooth and convincing.<sup>18</sup> If not for the mentioned confusion of terminology, arising when translating concepts from one language to another, it could be possible to stop in this place, strongly stressing that “Central East Europe” (Ostmitteleuropa) is not “Central and East Europe,” but part of East Central Europe (östliches Mitteleuropa). But maybe we should discuss the possibility of not using complicated concepts. If we were to consider the balance of Europe’s full millennium, then we might have to admit that Germany at some historical moment became an integral civilized derivative from Trier and Mainz to Marienburg, Königsberg, and Klaipėda (Memel). Then perhaps the eastern borders of German Civilization can be considered the borders of Western Europe, or perhaps call what Conze referred to as East Central Europe simply Central Europe? Contemporary usage of the concept “Central and East Europe” would support this assertion. Simply, we have in

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<sup>16</sup> Conze, *Ostmitteleuropa*, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Zernack, *Osteuropa*, p. 37, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Conze, *Ostmitteleuropa*, p. 34.

mind the region to the east of Germany. But one does not say “Central East and East Europe”! Thus, evidently in this case Central East Europe is considered to be Central Europe.

## 6. Lithuania - part of Central Europe

If Lithuania belongs neither to East nor West Europe, we could automatically say that it is part of Central Europe. But the question is not so easy. In the middle of the 20th c., Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland were part of the Communist world, but not part of the Communist citadel. Almost 200,000 persons (one of every 15) were deported from Lithuania to Siberia. In general, the heritage of the Second World War is even more cruel - one third of society (almost 1 million people) were killed, exiled, or scattered. In the 19th c. only Lithuania and part of Poland encountered the cruelest repression of Russia, in the second half of the 19th c. one-third of ethnic Lithuanians emigrated from Lithuania. Central Europe did not have to endure this. And in the Middle Ages Lithuanians formed a state three centuries later than Poland, were baptized another century later, and everything else usually took place 100-120 years later. We could say that Lithuania is an independent phenomenon, especially in the 13th and 14th c. But, nevertheless, the balance of the millennium would allow one to assert that the history of Lithuania is not so independent that one would have to begin searching for another historical region. Lithuania is the most tardy, most exhausted part of Central Europe. Prof. Edvardas Gudavičius has called Lithuania “the only member of Europe’s third echelon.” If the East in the 11th c. hindered Lithuania’s movement to Central Europe, then the newly developing Lithuania in the 13th c., unlike the other states of Central Europe, encountered a different West Europe. It was met by the West actively engaged in the Crusades, no longer recognizing the rights of pagans to be baptized independently. In this way Lithuania alone among the Central Europe states had to withstand the Crusade in the Baltic in the 13th and 14th c. The baptism of Lithuania and the victory in the Battle of Tannenberg achieved together with Poland halted the Western aggression and created the conditions for developing together with the states of Central Europe. Already the first Christian rulers of Lithuania, striving to prove that they are “*princepses christiani*,” independently began to organize crusades against the Tartars, forming an “*antemurale Christianitatis*” ideology. One of them wrote to the Pope that Lithuania is “on the border of the whole Christian world” (*in finibus totius Christianitatis*). This was only the beginning of the Europeanization of Lithuania. In the 15th c. Lithuania had to achieve a civilization leap which no other state of Central Europe had to meet. this was done during a century. In the 16th c. Lithuania’s society entered Central Europe. In matters of property the *lien* right was established, in the social-economic structure - the estate of the knight (feudal) and serfdom, in the political-social structure the boyar estate and estate monarchy, in the economy of the cities - guilds, in ideology - the only slightly tardy Reformation and Counter Reformation, in education - a system of teaching with cathedral schools as well as their *triviums?* colleges, and university. But at least among the elite of society a Christian mentality was firmly established, a nation of boyars with historical consciousness and a historical chronicle, books begin to be written in Lithuania (in 1499), they begin to be printed, the Lithuanian book appears (in 1547 in exile in Prussia, in 1595 in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania itself). All these developments allow one to

assert that Lithuania, which gave the Jagiellonian dynasty uniting Central Europe, became an equal part (next to Hungary, Czechia, and Poland) of the Jagiellonian Europe. Even more, after the Germans crushed Czech national resistance and Prague became much more a city of West Europe, after the collapse of the Hungarian state after the Mohacs tragedy in 1526, Poland remained the leader of Central Europe. Moreover, in addition to the real capital of Central Europe Krakow there was one more capital - Vilnius. Another 200 years will have to pass until Austria, Prussia, and Russia divided Central Europe. However, the heritage of Central Europe remained, flowing in the national movements of Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and Lithuanians, and led to the formation of independent states in the first half of the 20th c. A symbol of a common fate: Lithuania reacted to the powerful resistance movements of Central Europe - the revolution in Hungary of 1956, to the "Prague spring" of 1968 - with events in Kaunas in 1972 even though their scope was considerably more modest, but they were equally directed against the Communist system.

But let us return again to Conze and Huntington. Namely, their concepts most accurately defines the eastern border of Central Europe: Slovenia, Croatia, part of Romania, Transylvania, Hungary, Western Ukraine, Western White Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. With Latvia and Estonia questionable since they were always closer to North Europe. Bravely adding Poland, Slovakia, and Czech Republic, we acquire a full picture of Central Europe.

### **In place of an ending: Lithuania - the cross-road of European civilizations and historical regions**

Nevertheless, having said that Lithuania is part of Central Europe, we have to add that it is also the most eastern part of Central Europe, and at the same time a land of the interaction or even symbiosis of two European civilization traditions - Latin and Byzantine. Although the Catholic Gothic and Baroque heritage is dominant in Vilnius, nevertheless, we can also find unique, we would say, only typical for historical Lithuania - Gothic and Baroque Orthodox churches. Clearly, that is only a symbol of the symbiosis of the cultures, but it also reflects an even more important development - the national and confessional tolerance firmly established in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Only compare: the St. Bartholomew night in Paris in 1572 became a symbol of religious intolerance, while in Lithuania at the same time in 1569 the rights of all Christian confessions were made equal. This had the most influence on the Orthodox part of Lithuania's society. On the other hand, an incentive in Lithuania was given by the Reformation (50 percent of all churches were secularized). As we know, it is sometimes thought that the Reformation determined the division of Europe into South and North. Lithuania also participated in these "divisions," of course deciding in Catholicism's favor. However, if we strictly hold only the Scandinavian countries, the Protestant "derivative" of West European civilization, as North Europe then we can also declare that from the 16th c. Lithuania is a boundary of the interaction between the Central Europe and North Europe regions. For Protestant societies remain active in Lithuania even today. And if we also remember that sometimes Jewish culture is also considered an independent civilization and that Lithuania was at one time the cultural center of Jewish world, we could assert that our country is on the crossroads of almost five civilizations,



and its capital Vilnius is a city of nine religions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Greek Rite Catholic-Uniat, Old Believer, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical-Reformed, Muslim, Karaite, and Jewish). The idea of Lithuania being on the crossroads of regions can be seen in its current coastline. Its historical shore (i.e. the small strip of shoreline, which in the past the Teutonic and Livonian Orders were unable to conquer and which remained part of the grand Duchy of Lithuania) with Palanga is historical Central East Europe; Klaipėda belongs to Lithuania today, but it is part of historical Prussia, and also part of the Central West region; north of Palanga along the Šventoji River begins Latvia, in the past - Livonia and also North Europe. Three historical regions almost meeting in one point.