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Poland and Ukraine in East-Central Europe: View from Ukraine

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The concept of East-Central Europe is the construction of human consciousness in search for geopolitical and cultural diversity of neighbouring nations of the continent. The history of this term, as well as its historical and political circumstances, is widely known¹. It has at its foundation the intention to distinct some states and nations of Europe, which for centuries had been under the political, cultural influence of East and West, North and South, which led to forming a specific national consciousness, social and economic structures in this area. The process of modernization (the 19th and 20th cen-

ture) played a particularly significant role, when in the area of our interest numerous challenges of ideological, national, state and economic nature appeared. In many cases they were associated with the choice of particular social and political values or geopolitical orientations by societies inhabiting East-Central Europe.

The idea of East-Central Europe used to and still does play a significant political and scientific-cognitive role. Its political dimension is linked with the dismantling of multi-national empires and establishing independent national states in the geographic zone between Germany and Russia, based either on the historical right, or on the right for the national self-determination of nations. Scientific-cognitive aspect of this concept still allows producing, in a satisfactory way, comparative explanation concerning the specifics of the historical fates of the nations located in this part of the Old Continent.

Recently there appeared a new scientific direction in the world humanities science, which allows effective research on history of spatial objects in the consciousness of people and communities, their images and actions caused by them. What I mean here is a mental map or mental mapping. Some historians (J. Kocka) claim, that East-Central Europe is the best example for re-

¹ See for instance such works as: O. Halecki, *Historia Europy – jej granice i podziały*, translated by J.M. Kłoczowski, Lublin 1994; J. Kłoczowski, *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w przestrzeni europejskiej*, Lublin 1993; M. Кірсенко, *Східно-Центральна Європа: від геополітичних фантомів до історичної реальності і геополітичної перспективи* [in:] *Україна і Польща у Східно-Центральній Європі: спадок і майбуття*, Київ 1999; О.І. В'юницька, *Аналіз концептуально-теоретичних підходів до визначення поняття Центрально-Східна Європа* [in:] *Актуальні проблеми міжнародних відносин*, Київ 2002; Ю.О. Каганов, *Центрально-Східна Європа як історичний регіон: зміст та еволюція концепції* [in:] *Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького державного університету*, Запоріжжя 2005, 19th ed.

search by means of mind mapping². The latter one uses the output of numerous sciences, most of all geography, anthropology, and history. Mental map, as one of the known researchers of this field F. Shank points out, is,

[...] an image of a part of surrounding us space, created by a man [...] it reflects the world in a way it is imagined by a man and might not be real. A distortion is indeed very likely³.

It is known that the concept of East-Central Europe was created as a confrontation with terms “Central Europe”/“Middle Europe” and “East Europe”, which included in them most often political content, associated with Germany and its role on the continent in the first case, and in the communist system in the second one⁴. It was still in the mid-war period that Polish scientists and some other representatives of young European states were making attempts to separate from “German” West and “Russian” East, creating, for instance, the Federation of Science Associations of East Europe, which historians from numerous states joined, from Finland in the north to Greece in the south⁵. Also Ukrainian researchers from the areas belonging then to Poland or on emigration, especially M. Korduba, I. Krypjakewicz, I. Święcicki, I. Ohijenko, R. Smal-Stocki⁶, participated in its work.

In this context it is worth paying attention to the works of a well-known Polish historian Oskar Halecki. He is known to have started his scientific work as a supporter of a “new” historic school of Krakow, whose representatives tended to represent “optimistic” view on the Polish past, and in their works developed the ideas of neo-romantic historiography close to the apologetic vision of national history. Before the Great War and during it Halecki participated actively in a propaganda action for Polish case, glorified its heroic past, and excused its expansion to the East. He treated the idea of the Jagiellons and its incarnation in the Polish-Lithuanian

union as a positive variant of the unification of two various nations in one state. It was not a coincidence that he was a supporter of Piłsudski’s Legions, he would write about the legitimacy and “joy” of the presence of Ukrainian lands within the Republic of Poland⁷. At that time, when the Ukrainian national movement was struggling for its own independent state, such views in no way could have been favoured by Ukrainian political and intellectual elites. Especially due to the fact that Halecki was one of those, who fiercely objected to the concept of Ukrainian historiography of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, and criticized greatly the view of the Ukrainian historian on the collapse of Ukrainian cultural life after the Union of Lublin in 1569⁸. On the contrary, the vision of this union as an ideal option of “organizing” East-European civilization space was reflected in his two-volume work *Dzieje Unii Jagiellońskiej*⁹, and later on, more often than once, it appeared in his subsequent works.

At the same time, constant references of O. Halecki to the Jagiellonian idea and federal reconstruction of central European space as the only way of defending states and nations against eastern as well as western aggression bred the concern of Ukrainian politicians and historians involved in the national movement. They assessed in a negative way historical experience of coexistence of the Poles, Ukrainians and Lithuanians in the modern Polish Republic. In the jubilee issue of *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 1937, in his summarizing article on the output of Polish historiography in studies on the Jagiellonian idea, O. Halecki emphasized that its political objective was, “the unification of all Polish, Lithuanian, and Rus’ lands in a common state”. He also added that it was “common” and not “homogenous” state, joining the Poles, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians, and not only the Poles, as it had been perceived by numerous predecessors of his. From the perspective of his times Halecki drew attention to the fact that the Jagiellonian idea might and had to be reborn in the conditions of

² V.: Ю.О. Каганов, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

³ Ф.Б. Шенк, *Ментальные карты: консультирование географического пространства в Европе от эпохи просвещения до наших дней*, Новое литературное обозрение, Москва 2001, nr 6 (52), pp. 42–61. Compare: X. Мюллер, *Составление ментальных карт: метод генерации и структурирования*, Москва 2007.

⁴ Ю.О. Каганов, *op. cit.*, pp. 334–335; J. Kłoczowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–11 and others.

⁵ J. Kłoczowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11

⁶ М. Кордуба, *Конференція істориків у Варшаві* [in:] Україна, Кіів 1927, part 5, pp. 196–199.

⁷ Compare: О. Руда, *Українське козацтво в інтерпретації польських істориків кінця XIX — першої третини XX століття*, Lviv 2010, p. 46; J. Maternicki, *Historia i życie narodu. Poglądy i postawy historyków polskich XIX i XX w.*, Rzeszów 2009, pp. 295–296.

⁸ О. Halecki, *Przyłączenie Podlasia, Wołynia i Kijowszczyzny do Korony w roku 1569*, Kraków 1915, pp. 1–8 and others; В. Тельвак, *Творча спадщина Михайла Грушевського в оцінках сучасників (кінець XIX — 30-ті роки XX століття)*, Кіів, Drogobič 2008, pp. 168–169.

⁹ О. Halecki, *Dzieje Unii Jagiellońskiej*, Kraków 1920, vol. 1–2.

a new world war approaching¹⁰. This romantic vision of a would-be federation did not convince either the Ukrainians or the representatives of other countries of the region, due to the experience of both distant and recent past.

At the same time, when O. Halecki was presenting his suggestions, there appeared a concept in Ukrainian historiography of “Ukraine between the East and the West”. It reflected the interest of Ukrainian researchers concerning the territorial and geographical aspect of the Ukrainian nation’s revolution. This thought had already been present in works by M. Hrushevsky, and in the mid-war period it could have been seen in the works of a geographer Stepan Rudnycky, historian Vyacheslav Lypynski and other scholars. They paid attention to the variety of cultures and ethnicity, as well as their co-existence in the area of Ukraine in the olden times, thanks to which the original civilization space was created, that had its own socio-cultural specifics, different from both Western- and Eastern-European¹¹.

After the Second World War O. Halecki on emigration continued to work on the idea of a specific historic way of the east European nations, and at the beginning of the 1950s he published two significant books, which nowadays are perceived as classical works: *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (1950)¹² and *The Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe* (1952)¹³. By developing in them the idea of the specifics of historic experience of the East-Central Europe, the scientist had formulated arguments supporting his thesis in a very convincing way. He presented the constructive artificiality and conventionality of geographic and civilization visions of the Old Continent created by western historians and politicians. Halecki claimed that facing the national, state, and culture variety of peoples inhabiting the continent, the only possibility to make them reconciled is a “federation”, i.e. a free union of various parts of the continent.

After the Second World War the concept of East-Central Europe acquired scientific and political signifi-

cance due to the increasing confrontation of two world social and political systems, and the actual hegemony of the USSR over the whole region. The above-mentioned idea included a rational suggestion of the interpretation of various kinds of phenomena characteristic for all the countries of the region. The review of the discussions led by historians on the concept was most comprehensively presented by J. Kłoczowski in a number of his works and speeches, especially in 2004 at the 17th The General Assembly of Polish Historians in Krakow¹⁴. One has to agree with the thought of this scholar that the concept of East-Central Europe gained popularity among many historians of the region, and especially in the independent Ukraine after 1991.

Due to censorship any reception of Halecki’s ideas was not allowed in Soviet Ukraine. However, it attracted the attention of emigrant Ukrainian historians, even though as a majority they presented Ukraine centered attitudes. It interested especially a well-known historian and essayist Ivan Lysiak-Rudnycky. In his numerous works he pointed at particular features of the historic development of Ukraine and the Ukrainians, inhabiting the territories between the civilization influences of the East and the West. In his most significant work *Ukraine Between West and East* (1963) the historian had actually agreed with Halecki in determining the notion of “Europe” as the common cultural and social heritage, and at the same time had explicitly placed Ukraine within the “western” civilization, which as a result of geographical and historic effect had also absorbed a part of “non-western” influences. The latter ones were mainly associated with the expansion of the eastern Christianity (orthodox church) as well as cooperation with Euro-Asian nomadic tribes¹⁵. Having analyzed particular features of Ukrainian history Lysiak-Rudnycky stated, that since the times of Kiev Rus’ and further on through the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia, Lithuanian Rus’, and the Cossacks’ state, and eventually Ukrainian People’s Republic in the 20th century, the “spirit of freedom” had been clearly vivid, which was in opposition to eastern Asian tendencies aiming at suppressing freedom by authority. Therefore, the author concluded, the Ukrainians had always been craving for the synthesis of the West and the East, and Ukraine had always been “a clas-

¹⁰ O. Halecki, *Idea Jagiellońska*, Kwartalnik Historyczny, 1937, vol. LI, issue 1–2, pp. 507–510.

¹¹ Compare: Н. Яковенко, *Україна між Сходом і Заходом: проєкція однієї ідеї [in:] idem, Паралельний світ. Дослідження з історії уявлень та ідей в Україні XV–XVII ст.*, Київ 2002, pp. 333–365.

¹² O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, London, 1950.

¹³ O. Halecki, *The Borderlands of Western Civilization. A History of East Central Europe*, New York 1952.

¹⁴ J. Kłoczowski, *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w przestrzeni europejskiej*, <http://jazon.hist.uj.edu.pl/zjazd/materialy/kloczowski.pdf>.

¹⁵ І. Лисяк-Рудницький, *Україна між Сходом і Заходом [in:] idem, Історичні есе*, Київ 1994, vol. 1, pp. 1–9.

sical land of union freedom". Thus, according to Lysiak-Rudnyćky, Ukraine is a rightful heir of both cultures was making attempts to reconcile them, yet was not able to accomplish it. The reconciliation was presented by the historian as the future mission of Ukraine¹⁶. Apart from realism and pragmatism of the author's, one can find in the text messianic tendencies of the new-romantic pattern.

Generally speaking, I. Lysiak-Rudnyćky agreed with O. Halecki that Ukraine was "eastern and western" at the same time¹⁷. He was impressed with the comparative analysis of the historical development of European states presented by Halecki. In 1960 during the 11th International Congress of Historic Sciences in Stockholm, Lysiak-Rudnyćky participated in a discussion on Halecki's paper about the issue of federalism in the history of East-Central Europe. The Ukrainian historian supported the view of his colleague's concerning common features of the development of federal elements of the Polish Republic and the Habsburg monarchy. At the same time he criticized the Polish historian for the idealistic view on both former federations, and emphasized that they both had failed since they did not meet the challenges of modernization. New circumstances required transformation of feudal-state relations into "democratic federations of equal nations". Therefore, federations left behind "difficult heritage", which complicated the relations between nations¹⁸.

Original views on the role of Ukraine in East-Central Europe were presented by a known Ukrainian historian of culture, an expert of Byzantium, Harvard professor Igor Shevchenko, the author of a fundamental monographic work *Ukraine Between East and West. The Drafts on the History of Culture Since the 18th Century* (2001). From the perspective of the history of culture researcher Shevchenko described in a detailed way curiosities of western and eastern influences on forming of Ukrainian cultural tradition, and showed that the following had decisive role in uniting Ukraine and Europe: Byzantine Empire, orthodox Church, and Polish-Lithuanian state. His words, that by 1939 the West of Ukraine was wearing "Polish style robes" have become famous. However, at the same time the influence of the West along with the new times threatened Ukrainian elites with losing

their national unity. It had been saved from that by, first of all, long stay within one state organism, Polish-Lithuanian state, and secondly by a relatively short period in which Ukrainian territories belonged to several states (1772–1945), and finally the failure of imposing Roman Catholic religion on the Ukrainians¹⁹. Shevchenko had also drawn attention of researchers to the role of North-South axis, which decided on the move of European influences from the Balkans towards the Baltic Sea and Moscow, and determined the specific border of European cultures of the region.

After 1991 the conditions historians worked in had changed entirely, "iron curtain" was removed; contacts with the West became obvious. The first and long-term task of Ukrainian historiography became and, still is, the construction of new, straight and free from false influences version of Ukrainian history, based on the contemporary foundations of historic knowledge. The issue of civilization orientation referring to the past and the future of Ukraine has been present almost since the beginning: did it belong to the European civilization, and is it able to integrate with the contemporary European community. While constructing the new shape of national history, Ukrainian historians were making attempts to find common or different elements with other European nations, determine the place of Ukraine in the civilization space of Europe. Such intentions were parallel to the desire, bred in the post-communist states, for continental integration and separation from "Asian" Russia. As a result, one of the consequences of such political intentions was abandoning entirely the emphasis on eastern influences in the history of Ukraine.

A known historian from Lviv, Yaroslav Dashkevich, was one of the first researchers to refer to still forbidden at that time concept of East-Central Europe. In 1989 he published in Moscow a draft of *The Great Frontier of Ukraine (Ethnic Barrier or the Zone of Mutual Contacts)*, in which he presented that throughout centuries Ukraine had stayed in the zone of overlapping influences of western and eastern civilizations, and those influences were of great benefit for both civilizations as well as ethno-cultural exchange²⁰. In 1991 the next book by Dashkevich was published – *Ukraine on the Frontier Between East and West (XIV–XVIII Century)*. It

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁷ І. Лисяк-Рудницький, *Роля України в новітній історії* [in:] *idem, Історичні есе*, Київ 1994, vol. 2, pp. 145–167.

¹⁸ І. Лисяк-Рудницький, *Дискусійні виступи на Міжнародному історичному конгресі* [in:] *idem, Історичні есе*, Київ 1994, vol. 2, pp. 409–410.

¹⁹ J. Ševčenko, *Ukraina między Wschodem i Zachodem*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 10–11.

²⁰ Я.Р. Дашкевич, *Большая граница Украины: (Этнический барьер или этноконтактная зона)* [in:] *Этноконтактные зоны в Европейской части СССР: (География, динамика, методы изучения)*, Москва 1989, pp. 7–21.

was in this work that the above mentioned researcher, referring to the works of western historiography, including the works by O. Halecki, stated that since times immemorial there had been a “great frontier” across the territories of Ukraine, which was not of ‘sanitary’ character separating both civilizations, but the zone of cultural exchange. The West took more advantage of this exchange than the East. At the same time, this was the purposefulness of Ukraine location, which had become an element of enriching and developing of European civilization²¹.

Thanks to the works by Dashkevich the topic “Ukraine – Great frontier – Europe” had become popular and up-to-date both due to regaining scientific foundations of Ukrainian historiography, as well as more and more vivid pursuit to separate Ukrainian and Russian history. By emphasising the place of Ukraine on “The Great European frontier of two civilizations”, Dashkevich referred to the analogy with the concept of “frontier” by an American historian F.D. Turner, functioning for a long time in American historiography. Dashkevich was writing:

In political, military and democratic sense the Great Frontier in the past brought to Ukraine, placed in its zone, large and significant loss in the future. The lack of political stability contributed to slowing down the development of its own social institutions, inability to gain full independence, delay in economic development... Despite this, Ukraine has remained in the circle of European civilization as its furthest western post. On the other hand, constant and practically free absorption of eastern elements to various areas of social, political and military, and cultural life contributed to the enrichment and final distinction of specific Ukrainian civilization as a harmonious merger of the elements of the West and the East with its own, genuinely Ukrainian creative processes²².

Such an opinion reminds the opinion on the role of Poland formulated before by O. Halecki.

Active scientific and international work of the Institute of East-Central Europe in Lublin and its organizer’s Jerzy Kłoczowski’s, was undoubtedly encouraging for further studies on the concept of East-Central Europe and the place of Ukraine in it. It was Kłoczowski’s initiative to set up in Ukraine “The Society of Researchers of East-Central Europe” in 1993, which is a member of

²¹ Я.Р. Дашкевич, *Україна між Сходом і Заходом (XIV–XVIII)*, Lviv 1991, vol. 222, pp. 28–44.

²² Я.Р. Дашкевич, *Україна на Великому кордоні [in:] Давня і середньовічна історія, Кам’анець-Подільський 2000*, pp. 288–297.

the International Federation of the Institutes of East-Central Europe, established the year before.

Undetermined geopolitical standpoint of Ukraine after regaining independence, different ideas on the place of Ukraine among other European nations as well as searching for the ways and models for the further development of the state—all of these focused the attention of Ukrainian politicians and scientists. The latter ones were equally involved in general “Euro-enthusiasm” (I am referring here to the term of N. Jakovenko) or on the contrary—appealing to the Soviet-Russian heritage or even attempts of making Euro-Asian ideas current. In the 1990s numerous meetings and discussions were held devoted to the idea of “East-Central Europe” and the location of Ukraine between the East and the West. The text by N. Jakovenko *Ukraine Between East and West: Projection of the Idea* may be considered its summary. It stated that thanks to its geographical location on the crossroads of Euro-Asian steppe and two massifs of European culture (“Byzantine” and “Latin”) Ukraine, “is actually a crossroad” between Asia, orthodox Europe and “Latin” Europe. The researcher emphasized also that historical material speaks in favour of tight, cultural and social, associations between Ukraine and Poland, and requires overcoming the traditional “anti-Polish” attitudes present in the Ukrainian historiography since Russian – Soviet times. Taking into account eastern elements of cultural heritage is of great significance for this historiography too²³.

It is also worth mentioning that relatively quickly, in the 1990s, there appeared magazines, academic courses and textbooks on the history of East-Central Europe in Ukraine. There were also published first science monographs. It may be stated that regardless the differences in opinion between Ukrainian researchers, the term “East-Central Europe” has settled down in the contemporary Ukrainian historiography²⁴. Pondering upon the place of Ukraine in Central-East Europe has become a fait accompli and is present not only in the thoughts of historians, but also of representatives of other sciences. And so, a politics scientist Wiktoria Gevko, referring to works of Oskar Halecki and the other researchers, looked into the position of Ukraine in the contemporary geopolitical space and locates it in East-Central Europe, which makes it possible to talk about the European perspective of Ukrainian state after the collapse

²³ Н. Яковенко, *op. cit.*, pp. 362–366.

²⁴ Compare more thoroughly: Ю.О. Каганов, *op. cit.*, pp. 333–341.

of the USSR²⁵. Some authors of academic text books on economic and social geography distinguish the region of East-Central Europe as a specific one²⁶ (while in other ones it is traditionally referred to as the region of Eastern Europe); there function recently established “The Centre of the Urban History of East-Central Europe” in Lviv (2004) and other social organizations, science conferences and seminars on this issue are held.

What is behind this vivid interest in the idea of East-Central Europe is confirmed by tasks set by members of The Society of the Explorers of East-Central Europe. According to its statute it is:

[...] non-state, independent, non-profit society of scholars, which makes and supports science and research, publishing and educational projects, aiming at the interdisciplinary re-interpretation of historic and cultural specifics of Ukraine from the perspective of common roots and historic traditions of the central - east region of Europe. Overcoming the stereotypes of scientific thinking inherited from the totalitarian regime by broadening rational knowledge, emphasising the importance of principles of tolerance and democratic values is a general objective of the Society²⁷.

In no way can one omit the fact that, like in the past, tasks formulated in such a way contain political overtone.

In 2001 the first academic textbook *The History of East-Central Europe* was published in Ukraine. It was prepared by a group of Ukrainian historians specializing in general history with Leonid Zashkilnyak²⁸ as its editor. Its authors define the term East-Central Europe as geographical space and the zone of cultural contacts between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, where a specific situation of “frontier” came into existence, and elements of East and West overlapped, while the affiliation with European civilization was preserved. East-Central Europe comprehended as such comprises the contemporary states from the Bal-

tic republics to Greece, from the North to the South, including Ukraine. This example was followed by other Ukrainian historians, perceiving the region in the broad geographical context²⁹. Such an attitude towards the region, and including Ukraine in it, was most often presented and is represented by scholars associated with the Institute of the History of Ukraine in the National Academy of Science in Kiev, who have started to publish the year-book “Ukraine in East-Central Europe” since 2000 (by 2011 10 volumes had been published). One can easily notice that such an attitude towards the category of East -Central Europe is analogous to works of O. Halecki in many points.

At the same time, such a wide “approach” towards the region is in opposition to the attempts of limiting East-Central Europe to so called historical nations: the Republic of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, as suggested by authors of a two-volume *The History of East-Central Europe* edited by Jerzy Kłoczowski, published in 2000. According to Ukrainian historians such an attitude makes the meaning of other nations of the civilization frontier zone marginal as well as diminishes the role of eastern factor in their development³⁰.

In recent years a young Ukrainian historian, Andriy Portnov, discusses actively geopolitical position of Ukraine in historic retrospective and taking into consideration the state of historic consciousness of its nation in his books and papers. Again he returns to the sources of constructing terms “East” and “West” of Europe, and makes an attempt to explain the mental permanence of these terms, as well as their application to the analysis of historic processes across the continent. At the same time he keeps on observing the creation of term “Central Europe” as a successful metaphor and political project of the 20th century, growing out of the foundation of the concept of “East-Central Europe”, created by, amongst the others, Oskar Halecki³¹. Following Milan Kundera, the historian emphasizes that the renaissance of the term “Central Europe” was the

²⁵ В. Гевко, *Україна в контексті тенденцій сучасного світового розвитку* [in:] *Україна-Європа-Світ. Міжнародний збірник наукових праць. Серія: Історія, міжнародні відносини*, Ternopil’ 2009, 3rd ed., pp. 78–83.

²⁶ Compare: *Економічна і соціальна географія світу*, ed. С. П. Кузик, Lviv 2005; *Регіональна економічна і соціальна географія світу*, ed. В.В. Безуглий, С.В. Козинець, Київ 2007.

²⁷ <http://www.civicua.org/catalogue/view.html?q=713047>.

²⁸ *Історія центрально-Східної Європи. Посібник для студентів історичних і гуманітарних факультетів університетів*, ed. А. Зашкільняк, Lviv 2001.

²⁹ Compare for instance: С. О. Рудько, *Історія Центрально-Східної Європи (кінець XIX–початок XX ст.)*, Ostrog 2010.

³⁰ Compare the review of this work: А. Зашкільняк, *Європа єдина чи розділена?*, Український гуманітарний огляд, Київ 2002, 8th ed., pp. 55–74.

³¹ А. Портнов, *Пошуки Центральної Європи в собі й назовні*, Критика, Київ 2004, part 4; *ідет*, *Між “Центральною Європою” та “Русским миром”*: *Сучасна Україна у просторі міжнародних інтелектуальних дискусій*, Київ 2009.

projection of the protest of intellectuals against the Soviet rules in the countries east off the Elbe. At the same time, however, this category often understood as a political metaphor, had and still has a large analytical potential. In reference to this the author notices some incongruity concerning the position of Ukraine in the European civilization space and emphasises that some western researchers still include Ukraine in Eastern Europe, leaving it in geopolitical space belonging to Russia. However, in the discussion on the regional affiliation of Ukraine, the concept of East-Central Europe, in historical perspective, as it seems to the author, is more suitable for determining specific features of historic evolution of Ukraine between the East and the West. Even though this construction, like any other, simplifies real historical process, on the other hand, it helps to comprehend it³². A. Portnov criticizes the attempts of some modern researchers, including Polish authors, intending to reestablish the over idealized vision of the history of old Polish Republic, as a “prototype” of the future European community. It is worth noticing that Portnov successfully presents broadened patterns of Russian and Polish historiography concerning Ukraine: in their analysis of the Ukraine’s past Polish historians, most of all, emphasize the Russian tendencies as an obstacle on the way of Ukraine towards the European civilization; at the same time contemporary Russian researchers accentuate the decisive role of the Polish factor in shaping the Ukrainian idea per se. As a result in both versions, Polish and Russian, the Ukrainians remain in a way beyond history as an artificial creation of some or other political powers³³.

In conclusion, the idea of East-Central Europe had a lot of supporters after the Second World War, both among Ukrainian historians and politicians in emigration, as well as scholars from other countries of so called Soviet block. After its collapse and creation of independent states on its wreckage, new conditions appeared favourable for clearing the historical consciousness of dogmatic layers of the previous period and reflection on the place of Ukraine, Poland and other countries of the region in the European commonwealth of nations. Ukrainian historians put great effort to popularize the idea of East-Central region. This idea, on the one hand, connected Ukraine with the European civilization, and on the other emphasized the specifics of its

historic fate, creating throughout centuries the zone of contacts and enrichment of both European and Asian cultures, between the East and the West. The concept has never been free of political connotations associated with the choice of the development perspective of the modern Ukrainian state. This fact greatly affects its reception amongst the Ukrainian elites. It was, and still is, explaining the cultural and civilization ambivalence present in the Ukrainian society connecting their consciousness with the desire of being in the East and the West at the same time, taking advantage of European and Asian experience. Despite this, the holistic meaning of the idea of East-Central Europe is explicit. It clearly associates Ukraine with European, and not Asian circle of civilization.

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³² А. Портнов, *Між “Центральною Європою” та “Русским миром”...*, pp. 19–26.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 27–64.

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