# The Ideas of Europe in CEE

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The central aim of this work is to present some ideas of Europe in Central and Eastern Europe through three phases, the Soviet period, the pre-accession (the the EU) period and, finally, the post-accession period. Throughout those periods, Central and Eastern European states faced different conditions and challenges however Europe consistently remained a point of reference in the states' intellectual and political reflections. This work is meant to contribute to understanding the rationale and reason behind the policy directions chosen in CEE in the later half of the 20th and formative part of the 21st centuries.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Central and Eastern European (CEE) states have historically regarded themselves as "European." However, the political climate which, in many ways, subdued CEE in for the most part of the 20th century severely undermined their capacity to construct policies that reflect their self-identification. Indeed, following WWII the CEE states found themselves in an ideological and military position which sharply contrasted to the post-war, emerging conceptualisation of "Western Europe." However, despite belonging to the new-found Communist political pole, the so-called "East," the CEE states did not entirely turn away from their "Europeanness," although such sentiment could not be explicitly demonstrated for fear of intervention by the USSR. Forty-five years later and the end of Cold War provided a window of opportunity for the CEE states to openly pursue their European identities, and have such self-perceptions reflected in formal policy directives, while the process of unravelling the socio-political and economic retardation the Soviet Union had delivered was underway. The entry of CEE states to the European Union (EU) must therefore be regarded as the punctuation mark to reconceiving the Europeanness of CEE states and the region as a whole.

Within each of these stages, the Idea of Europe had been a reference-point for a significant number of intellectual and political reflections and it is important to explore the uniquely CEE view of Europe to gauge the larger implications – including evolutions – and account for CEE changes in grasping, and approaching Europe.

This work examines three specific evolutionary steps that occurred among CEE states, vis-a-vis the general understanding of the Idea of

Europe. Indeed, this work is broken down into three, chronologically flowing, segments: firstly, the so-called Eastern Phase; secondly, the Transformation Phase (which includes pre-EU-accession processes); and thirdly, the post-Accession Phase. Each of these phases produced different conceptualisations of Europe among intellectuals and publics in CEE, yet some perceptions of Europe proved to be more enduring than others such as the belief that Europe remained the final socio-political and economic destination for the states and peoples of CEE.

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## 2. THE EASTERN PHASE

Despite early, mixed, and short-lived enthusiasm at the post-WWII arrival of the Soviet Union – with its politically and economically stifling order – most CEE peoples arrived at a common, if idealised, utopia; Europe, which was popularly captured as the mystical "West." Such a utopia was not painted in black and white, but was rather more vivid, exposing a dynamic character which reverberated beyond simple political premonitions. However, political considerations were central since Europe represented all that CEE lacked such as real, functioning democratic institutions and public ownership of the state.

Additionally, the mythology surrounding Western Europe was fuelled by a firey brand of intellectualism which contrasted the West (as a biblical "promised land") to the East (often regarded as "waste-lands") and insisted that the Soviet subjection of CEE had artificially, and forcefully bound the latter to the former at the expense of the political freedoms required to pursue European ambitions. Indeed, the Jaltan Order was intellectually and popularly (though subtly) regarded as a foreign implant which denied cohabitation of the two parts of the same body-politik, Europe. Indeed, CEE intellectuals often deployed the parable of Europe as a living organism broken in pieces with the brain (the so-called West) separated from the heart (the so-called East). Such intellectuals honestly believed that differences between Western and CEE states were superficial; only together could Europe truly exist as a complete region. As Havel once remarked

> by virtue of their entire history, spiritual and intellectual traditions, culture, atmosphere and geopolitical position belong to the classical European West, and any separation of them from that West would be suicidal for the whole of Europe (something anyone with even rudimentary knowledge of European history should understand).[2]

Political realities – or power politics – it seems, forced the suicide of Eu-

rope; ripping head from heart while CEE intellectuals struggled to find ways to maintain linkages between the two parts. The solution was to literally reconstruct and recast the concept of Central Europe, which had until then been associated to the German Mitteleuropa (Naumann's conception), or Middle Europe, which sought to Germanise the flailing parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during and immediately following WWI. The ideological and physical shift of the concept of Central Europe, embracing Czechoslovakia (later the Czech and Slovak Republics), Hungry and Poland, gained prominence in the early 1980's primarily to encourage CEE states to redouble their resistance to communism[3] and support the conviction that CEE had its all roots in the West, despite its acquisition of so-called "Eastern features;" the consequence of political circumstances and which were (as taken for granted) considered temporary and unable to affect the genuine "Europeanness" of CEE. Symbolically placing the word "Eastern" between "Central" and "Europe" in the CEE formula was meant as a deliberate tactic: to demonstrate the truth behind Kundera's claim that CEE was 'the West in the East' of Europe.[4] From such reasoning, Europe consisted of three main blocs constructed around political, economic, social and cultural structures: Western Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe; of which the latter included Russia.[5]

Within this initial "lauching" period of CEE, a paradox emerged where the sense of belonging to the West coexisted with a ephemera of culture and civilisation in the region.[6] This implied that the sense of a lack of endurance and stablility, which resulted from fractured sovereignty in and after WWII, generated social-level depressive sentiments which, wittingly or unwittingly, undermined a wide spectrum of specific features and values inherent to CEE while clearly over-estimatiing those of Western Europe.

3. THE TRANSFORMATION PHASE

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called "Eastern bloc," CEE states immediately entered a phase of reconstruction (socio-politically and economically) and began to shape their renewed polities; defining directions of foreign and domestic policies that reflected the demands of their publics. Consequently, the "European dream" that had taken root towards the latter years of the USSR played an important guiding-light for the newly independant CEE states and as Western Europe moved closer together (i.e. with the 1992 signing of the Maastricht Treaty), CEE states prioritised their membership in the EU and NATO seeking recognition of their "Europeanness" through the former, and security for such "Euro-

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peanness" through the latter. Or, as Hughes, Sasse and Gordon explain:

> The high degree of consensus among the national elites of the CEECs on the desirability of speedy membership of the EU may be explained by a triple functional logic consisting of symbolic, legitimizing and directional factors. First, it symbolizes distance from the old communist regime and a reorientation from East to West. Second, it helps to legitimize transition policies by linking them with the future political and economic benefits of membership. Third, EU membership has been directional in that it has become the post-communist grand project for the national elites in CEECs ...[7]

In short, the idea of Europe, among CEE states, was an instrumental point of departure for the construction and shaping of new CEE polities and the direction their international and internal policies would venture.

Once EU membership was publically lauded as an internal CEE preference, CEE states embarked on an ambitious, if unnecessary, project to demonstrate that they were indeed a part of Europe and that their claims for EU membership were justified. This comes against the backdrop of the previous, "Eastern Phase," where CEE states tended to take their European identity for granted.

With the subsequent transformation of the international relations environment, the term Central Europe gained new significance and came to symbolise three notions. Firstly, Central Europe reflected the states of the Visegrád Group (V4), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, which perceived themselves as the vanguard engines of regional transformation. This position was routinely emphasised by CEE states as a means of gaining preferential economic and political relations to Western states in Europe and North America. Secondly, Central Europe was seen as composing a wider community of states including: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia (to the north), Romania and Bulgaria (to the south). Dispite this broad state community, most Western states and the V4 challenged such an understanding of Central Europe. Thirdly, the connotations of the term were associated with the more traditional implications of Central Europe; a sphere of German interests – Mitteleuropa. Following German reunification it was widely anticipated that Germany, supported by CEE states, might become a regional superpower again.[8]

Indeed, while each of the above toyed with the sentimentality of one group or another, the post-Cold War revival of Central Europe had its own set of political purposes. Whereas during the communist period the term was primarily cultural, expressing an emancipatory idea or, as Magris explained 'a metaphor of protest,' after the retreat of the Soviet Un-

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ion, the term meant to serve as a 'region-building' mechanism.[9]

Additionally, Central Europe was frequently deployed as a political instrument by the CEE states and EU members. For the CEE states themselves, becoming Central European meant not only renouncing the Soviet heritage, but becoming more "European." This was a particularly desired label by CEE states because the traditional Western understanding of being "Eastern European" was, according to Newsome, equated to being 'semi-Orientalised, backward and degenerate.'[10] In other words, Central Europeanness was meant to arrest Western biases regarding CEE and produced a new association which likened Central Europe to concepts such as democracy and socio-economic progress. In this way, the post-Soviet identity of CEE states was forged with reference to "Europeanness" which implied "Western Europe" and membership in the EU. Such identification resulted in a peculiar form of competition as some CEE states did not recognise representation by other CEE states.[11] Rivalry was fuelled by declarations and counter-declarations. For instance, Brzeziński (1992) claimed that

> As a result of the 1989-1991 revolutions there appeared three Europes. Europe number one consists of the old democracies of Western Europe. Europe number two lies within the borders of the Visegrád Group, embracing Poland, Hungry, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. These post-communist states have hopes of joining the European Communities. Europe number three is composed of the rest of the states of the former Soviet bloc which are not likely to become part of EU until the 21st century.[12]

As it turned out, no post-communist states joined the EU prior to the 21st century. However, it is important to gauge how intra-CEE competition evolved. Indeed, the EU itself also fuelled competition by recognising the Central Europeanness of some and not others. This typically occurred when the EU was encouraging CEE states towards further democratisation or punishing them for arrested democratic developments. For example, Slovenia was rewarded a place in "Central Europe," and invited to begin EU accession negotiations in the first round (1998) while Slovakia "lost" its position as a signal of the EU's disapproval in of Mečiar's policies.[13]

Critically, some did not share in the overly positive implications of constructing an identity based on "Central Europenaisation." Gerner, for example, argued that 'the liberation from Pax Sovietica revealed that there did not exist any Central Europe.'[14] Consequently, the intellectual concept of "Central Europe" that was so appealing in the 1980's was hard-

ly a region-building attempt in the 1990's – as Todorova had diagnosed – despite common interests on the road to the EU. Of "Central Europe" she wrote that

> It never came up with a particular concrete political project for the region qua region, outside of the general urge for liberation from the Soviets.[15]

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Although some regional co-operation initiatives were capitalised on, notaly the V4, they typically did not amount to much in practical terms and rather became a euphemism.[16] In fact, initiatives were mainly designed to assist with integration in the EU and the CEE states opted for 'being together in the waiting room' rather than producing a working alliance which would act as a mutually reinforcing mechanism.[17] The consequences of such a hapazard and dysfunctional regional approach to post-Cold War politics was made abundantly clear during this pre-accession period, particularly as CEE accession negotiations were underway and the CEE states vied with each other in a game of political tit-for-tat. Inotai highlights several streams of argumentation frequently used to rationalise the position that the EU embrace only a small group of well-prepared countries. He notes that

> This group will not burden the EU's decision-making structures, institutions, or budget. Their easy adjustment to EU structures will mitigate or even break the growing opposition to 'Eastern' enlargement among Western European politicians and the broader public. This is the way to generate support for further (and more difficult) enlargements and keep the EU door open to other candidates.[18]

On their way to the EU, CEE states regarded each other as imepediments to their own EU ambitions and consequently each opposed the EU's 'big bang' approach which argued for one huge enlargement.

Inotai, for instance, was convinced that a 'big bang'

> would threaten to destroy the enlargement process, because it would bring, into the EU, differently prepared countries, with substantial financial needs and slower adjustment capacities ... A 'big bang' enlargement that involved differential treatment of differently prepared countries (...) would make the adjustment process non-transparent, unmanageable, chaotic, and even more bureaucratic. However, the main argument against the 'big bang' approach is that it would enhance political and public opposition or even hostility to any further enlargement.[19]

Another important reason for opposing a 'big bang' was that any delay of

enlargement due to those less-prepared candidates would frustrate those better prepared and thus expose serious gaps in the EU's credibility.[20] Such circumstances did not favour the process of forming a CEE region with its own identity. This prodded Szarota to pose a significant question of whether CEE was 'a democratising version of Western Europe' or 'a thousand years old cultural community with specific norms and commonly shared cultural closeness?'[21]

The integration aspirations of CEE states were not followed by distinct answers to key questions such as: what Europe was in the new international order, and what could be offered to that Europe by CEE states. Instead, CEE leaders focused on actions designed to provide quick membership to the existing structures rather than making intellectual or political contributions on their own. Such an approach was visible when the EU decided on reforming its institutional system prior to enlargement. Naturally, connecting the process of enlargment to the process of reforming was not enthusiastically welcomed by the CEE candidates because they feared, as (former) Foreign Minister of Poland Geremek stated (1999) that 'the enlargement might become a hostage of the reforming process.'[22]

Nevertheless, having to face the debate on EU institutional reform candidates found themselves in perplexing situation. In Poland, ofr instance, that situation was described as:

> In the late 1990s, there were two contradictory strategies when it came to the possible attitude Poland should adopt in relation to EU institutional reform. The first was that Poland should not pronounce its view on the EU because that could only be counterproductive, causing unnecessary controversy, both internally and externally. According to the second, in order to prove its credentials as a good European Poland should become actively engaged in the debate on the future of European integration.[23]

Poland, together with other CEE states, wishing to choose the second option did not have a decisive voice in the debate. However, the reforming process produced adequate space for presenting CEE ideas of Europe.

In analysing CEE attitudes during the debate on the EU's future during the pre-accession period, several conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, the CEE states tread cautiously in relation to particular proposals coming from the EU's members and the European Commission. The only exception was the reaction to the idea of "vanguard of integration," which was highly criticised by CEE states and understood as Western Europe's attempt to shy away from so-called "Eastern barbarians."[24] Secondly, the process of reforming the EU was often regarded, by CEE states, as a project deliberately designed to postpone enlargement.[25] Thirdly, in dis-

cussions on finalité politique of the EU it seemed that, to most CEE states, the finalité was membership in the EU.[26]

It must be emphasised that CEE states attempted to work out the ideas of Europe during the exhausting process of transformation which often resulted in the surfacing of many paradoxes in understanding Europe. Problems associated with simultaneous democratisation and Europeanisation were commonly experienced by most CEE states despite differences in geopolitics, economics (including the structure of economy and level of modernisation), political and social history (i.e. previous democratic and independence experiences) and culture (i.e. individualistic or paternalistic culture, religious or secular approaches).[27]

In CEE, transformation processes were closely connected with history, due to that fact that CEE states regarded history as an unfinished process. Soviet subjugation and the all-to-frequent interruptions of independence (in the past) produced a certain gap in political and social developments when compared to West European states. That gap produced consequences by underscoring the variation between the two parts of Europe (and pressures to overcoming it) and the way states understood their own politics. Being part of "unfinished history" became a constant referral for each and every matter, substantiated or not, producing public discourses that resembled political vendettas rather than constructive lessons learned from the more turbulent past.[28]

Additionally, political rhetoric continued to contain dogmatic attachments to sovereignity and the supremacy of tradition rather than the values inherent in civil societies. As a result, CEE states turned towards more ethnic and even, at times, nationalistic sentiments as tools for engaging with other parts of the region. The collapse of the "Eastern bloc" defrosted old, nationalistic, antagonisms and animosities concerning minorities which resulted in challenges not be easlily overcome solely by processes of democratisation, as was previously presumed.[29]

In the case of transformation, CEE reformers repreatedly followed the fallacy that the introduction of a new system could be simply based on Western patterns. The consequences of constructing a democratic order without considering the specific features of CEE meant that CEE states did not fully manage to escape the pit-falls typical of young democracies such as the fragility of civil society and the incoherence of democratic institutions. It was soon realised that CEE states were trapped in vicious circles bound by the necessity of completing the process which had been begun and the struggle to overcome the numerous paradoxes produced by the process such as: capitalism with a human face, the revival of old communist habits and the return of post-communist elites, revisionist and populist voices, (etc).[30]

The pre-accession period, for CEE states, mainly concerned the adoption of European standards and preparations for integration, which was initially treated with uncritical, mutual enthusiasm (between the EU and CEE states). However, as the process of became more complex and problematic, the enthusiasm gradually waned. In the wake of growing indifference to crucial points of European ideas, CEE states were focused on convincing the EU on the necessity and inevitability of enlarging the Union to the East; substantiating it not as just another enlargement but as an unprecedented event in the history of Europe.

Europe, as an idea, invariably remained a dream, and CEE intellectuals, political leaders and publics expected determined engagement of Western circles in defining a united Europe's future. Havel confirmed such expectations by noting that:

> It seems to me that the fate of so-called West is today being decided in the so-called East. If the West does not find a key to us, who were once so violently separated from the West (with no great resistance on its part) (…), it will ultimately lose the key to itself.[31]

At the same time, due to "unfinished history" CEE suffered from a malady of distrust of Europe, which became perceived as an area where stronger states tend to impose their will on weaker ones.[32] That specific paradox in understanding Europe generated a chain reaction where Europe came to be regarded as a cartel of the richest countries which either allowed poorer ones to approach – after bearing unbearable conditions – or simply refused their appoach altogether. This resulted in the rhetoric of a second-hand membership, raising serious frustrations combined with a psychological syndrome called "complex," which meant that due to the traumatic histories or contradictory transformation processes, CEE states needed to find some sort of outlet, which eventually took form of euroscepticism or europhobia. However, the frustrations of CEE candidates stemmed from historic experiences and several factors directly related to the enlargement process.[33]

CEE states had to deal with the budgetary costs of adjustment, which were particularly difficult to bear during domestic transitions and the political consolidation process. Euroscepticism grew as CEE states' politicians and public opinion articulated the immediate costs and future benefits. Also, growing euroscepticism was rooted in the asymmetric power relationship between the EU and the CEE states. Naturally, accession negotiations are of an asymmetrical character, however in the case of CEE states and their historic experiences and struggles with democratisation, the asymmetry produced serious tensions, especially when the EU hesi-

tated to specify a concrete date for accession. As a result, in general, the governments and publics of the CEE states commenced on their path to the EU euroenthusiastically though became increasingly eurosceptic when calculating the costs and benefits.[34]

After 1989, narratives on national identity of CEE states were strongly influenced by concerns about losing their own unique identities to larger and more powerful European processes. This was particularly apparent in smaller CEE states:

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> In Slovenia and Estonia, for example, negative, earlier experiences in multinational federations, combined with economic and political concerns about joining the EU, are reflected in decreased public support for EU membership.[35]

Alternatively, some were convinced that European integration may serve to strengthen national identity.[36] This dualism was the result of what Made called 'periphery syndrome,' which was

> a phenomenon that derived from the historically rooted East-West division of Europe. According to the traditional understanding, Western Europe constitutes the centre, the European core, whereas Eastern Europe id the side-player or European periphery.[37]

This strengthened efforts to join the EU and to move to the centre. At the same time it portrayed Europe as a distant, unreachable idea. Consequently, debate in many CEE states on Europe was 'characterised by a vacillation between, on the one hand, isolationist and nationalist narratives and, on the other, more pro-European and cosmopolitan approaches.'[38]

Aside from the specific combination of Europeanisation and isolationism, the CEE states, more or less, recognised Atlanticism as important element of their newly reformed polities and ideas of Europe widely included it. Asmus and Vondra noted the sources of Atlanticism in CEE states to:

> include the Central and East European encounter with both Nazi and communist totalitarian regimes; a recognition of the leading role the US played in toppling communism and in facilitating the integration of these countries into Euro-Atlantic institutions; and the strategic calculation of many countries in the region that their national interests in Europe are better preserved via active American engagement that balances the influence of other major European powers.[39]

In these areas Europe seemed to be a passive actor compared to the US.

Moreover, the US remained a symbol of democracy and liberty; values which inspired the transition processes in CEE states. In the context of relations with Europe and ideas of Europe during the pre-accession period, there seemed to appear a tendency of growing Atlanticism whenever the EU questioned the chances of successful transition processes and delayed the perspectives of enlargement.

Taken together, the aforementioned produced a pre-accession period that did not favour a constructive environment for clearly defining the ideas of Europe for CEE and the risk that CEE would not develop an alternative, new vision of Europe, but rather rest on something unspecific which could be defined as a "Europeanness myth."[40] Indeed, to define "Europeanness," CEE states did not follow the patterns of an existing system but based their knowlegde on Europe on preferences, expectations, frustrations and, many times, the demands of politics. As Hughes, Sasse and Gordon summarised, Europe was seen as 'a non-cleavage issue in the CEECs' and the ideas of Europe were 'associated with high expectations and vague notions of the EU as an institution.'[41]

## 4. CONCLUSION: POST-ACCESSION

Irrespective of the trials and tribulations discussed above, 01 May 2004 has been recorded as a key date in the post-communist history of CEE as it marks arrival at the "mythical destination" of Europe. Accession meant the crowning of crucial gems in CEE foreign policies and the enhancement of their international positions. At the same it meant a clear end of a particular era of the commitment to gain membership. Yet membership did not only imply unconditional benefits. As Ágh diagnosed:

> After the entry the new member states have recently been in a post-accession crisis due to the dual pressure from inside and outside. The inside pressure from their populations has pushed for completing the social consolidation after the economic and political transformations (...). The external pressure has come from the EU for further socio-economic and institutional adjustments, which has demanded deep cut in state budgets (...). EU has demanded further adjustment from the new member states but the new demands have deteriorated their social situation.[42]

This partly explains why EU membership did not meet with massive enthusiasm among the publics of new members. A second reason was the lack of a vision for Europe, which resulted in generating more threats than hopes and which originated (i.e. in Poland), from the lack of ideas of Europe in the pre-accession period.[43]

The formative years of membership forced all CEE states to deal with internal and external tensions, demands and expectations while carving out their own niches in the European order. At the same time, the CEE states followed the pre-accession pattern of not collaborating with each other, identified in the works of the Council which suggested that:

> Small Baltic countries, i.e. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia usually backed positions taken by their Scandinavian partners. Czech Republic, Hungry, Slovakia and Slovenia, on the other hand, tended towards solutions put forth by Germany, Austria or Italy. Poland, despite its significant number of votes, played no major role among the group of countries from its region.[44]

These factors made discussion on the ideas of Europe in CEE rather incidental, unproductive and limited only to responding to the proposals coming from the "old 15."

However, one intellectual additive worth presenting did appear; the idea of a second European Union.[45] The point of the concept is that the post-enlargement EU should no longer strive to deal with its inherent paradoxes but rather draw lessons and utilise them as a background for future intellectual, political and institutional arrangements.

One of the most significant paradoxes was the ability to conjoin the divergence of particular states' interests and convergence of basic values, to combine heteregeneity and rivarly between states with an equally strong desire to establish European power and a coherent internal European order.[46] In this concept, the First European Union (1952-2004) is regarded as a faulty community depriving Europe of its logical development in accordance with its pluralistic nature what was dictated by the demands of international strategic games.

The division of a Europe "to the West" and "to the East" caused irremediable losses because it arrested historically balanced development, mutual cooperation, and exchanges of ideas. However, undeniably the most crucial loss is that Western Europe lost its perception of CEE and acted as if there was no CEE, became afraid of CEE "barbarians"[47] and it is CEE itself that reminds Europe of its exceptionality and identity which was squandered during the Cold War's artificial division.

As claimed, such reflections should be confirmed in the institutional system of the Second European Union. The fundamental assumption is that the European political system should be determined by openness and the capability of self-regulation. Such a system should not aim to expand its structures but generate and support European politics that would contain two basic presumptions: First, the European system and

politics would guarantee the independence of the objects that are not part of the integration process such as: culture, identity and social structures. Second, the same European system and politics would work out some sort of "communication code" to allow the integration of the rest. As a consequence, the Second European Union would consist of several functional subsystems which would participate in decision-making.[48]

In the institutional model of the Second European Union the principle of decentralisation of adiminstrative, economic and culture would be accompanied by the principle of centralisation in the political and military spheres.[49] The head of the Union would be a president, elected by the European Council and responsible for European foreign and security policy. Additionally, the president would appoint the president of the European Commission and the latter would appoint commissioners. Such a presidential arrangement would allow the Union to act decisively and quickly in the international arena and, among others, to sit in the Security Council of the United Nations.[50] The institutional system of the Second European Union would furthermore be strenghtened by European Parliament in politics and some institutions in cultural dimensions, like the Institute of European Memory and the Museum of European History.[51] Although the Second European Union has no wish to interfere with the culture and identity of particular states, it is considered important to lay the foundations for a commonly shared sense and pride of "Europeanness."

The establishment of the Second European Union would require some essential changes including the change of the capital. Brussels was well situated as the practical capital of Western Europe during the Cold War, but it can no longer remain so because the Eastern Enlargements have moved the geopolitical gravity to Europe's south-east. The change of capital would also present a significant symbolic transformation, announcing the emergence of a new European quality that looks ahead but draws conclusions from the past. Among many European cities pretending to become a central point, the capital of Slovakia – Bratislava – is frequently mentioned because of its geopolitical and symbolic advantages. First of all, due to its central position on the map of Europe Bratislava seems to be predestined to radiate in all directions in respect to politics, economics and culture. Secondly, it would open and broaden the space for new strategic alignments, not only traditional Franco-German, but for many others that would appear if the occasion arises. Thirdly, Bratislava would offer the perspective of further enlargements to the south and to east, including the Balkan states, Turkey, and Ukraine (etc). Finally Bratislava, as the capital of a small state, would guarantee that there would be no room for imperial longings of big nations.[52]

The concept of the Second European Union is an idea of a primarily intellectual character and leaves open space for contemplation concerning political and structural points of reference. It does however confirm some conclusions which can be drawn from the first years of CEE states' membership in the EU such as that the current EU had nothing to do with the European dream they envisioned since the construction of the "Iron Curtain." Painfully (for CEE), it turned out that the EU was a club of contradictory interests and hard compromises in the first place, and a community of common ideas in the second. Even more painfully, CEE states realised that nothing could be taken for granted and they could not expect special treatment simply because of difficult histories.

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The concept of the Second European Union is a sort of trial of drawing the analogy to the "European dream" as well as an alternative to the ideas of "Europe of a few speeds" that occasionally some Western European politicians come up with to escape from the CEE barbarians.

Regardless of political circumstances, Europe has been perceived, in CEE, as a "promised land;" an answer to all vital questions. Considering the intellectual essence of European ideas one cannot resist the impression that CEE has continuously shared the convictions of Bauman who wrote that

> never before has this very planet needed a willing-to-have-adventures Europe; a Europe that is capable of looking beyond its own borders; a Europe that is critical about its narrow-mindedness; a Europe that is dreaming of overcoming its own condition as well as the condition of the rest of the world; a Europe that is enriched by the sense of duty of a global mission.[53]

Undoubtedly, CEE has always wanted to be a part of Bauman's 'adventure.' However, if it comes to concrete ideas and solutions, the ideas of Europe in CEE remain vague and limited to slogans. During Soviet times the CEE states lacked the opportunity to act "European," they could only dream "European." When the opportunity finally came after 1989, the CEE states struggled for membership. After entry to the EU it seems that the leaders of CEE states are dedicated to dealing with everyday politics, leaving no space for serious consideration of what Europe is and must become.

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NOTES

1 Some of the ideas included in this article originate from a paper presented at

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