Introduction to the concept and history of Central Europe

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Central Europe

• What is Central Europe?
• Where is Central Europe?
• What are the defining characteristics of Central Europe?
West v. East

[World map showing regions colored by economic status: First World (green), Second World (red), Third World (yellow).]
Region as a concept

• What makes region a region?

• Geography
• History
• Culture
• Religion
• Identity
• Politics

• Region = theoretical concept

• Where is Central Europe?
Where is Central Europe?

- Between West and East, North and South
- 1948 – 1989: “Culturally part of the West, politically part of the East” (Milan Kundera)
- The borderland of the Western Christian civilization
- Small countries, never played a significant role outside of the region, always at the receiving end of conflicts, always behind the West, yet ahead of the East.
- More developed than the (Russian) East, less developed than the Western Europe
- Internally very heterogeneous – major dividing lines in Europe

- A cultural and historical regional concept
PL + CZ + HU + SK = Visegrad Group (V4)

- Population: 64 million (~ UK)
- Area: 533 thousands sq. km (~ France)
- GDP (PPP): 1.6 trillion USD (~ Spain)
- GDP per capita: 25 thousands USD (~ Portugal or Greece)
- Membership in international organizations: UN, IMF, WB, WTO, OECD, EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, NATO, V4
- Voting in the Council of the EU
  - 4 countries out of 16/28
  - 13 % of the EU population (need to be 65 %)
- Seats in European Parliament: 107 (more than Germany)
Political freedom

• Before 1989:
  – Partly Free (Poland and Hungary in 1980s)
  – Not Free (Czechoslovakia)

• After 1990
  – Free
  – (Slovakia Partly Free in 1994-1998)

• Today
  – Free 1-1
  – (Hungary 2-1)
Why has Central Europe always lagged behind?

- Loss of national sovereignty at the end of Middle Age
- Parts of autocratic empires – Habsburg Austrian Empire, Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Prussian Empire
- Military conflicts – ... Tatars, Mongols, Ottomans, Thirty years war, Napoleon wars, WW I and WW II, possibly WW III, Balkan wars
- Limited/belated reach of colonialism, reformation, enlightenment, liberalization and industrialism
- Part of the Soviet Eastern Europe in 1948-1989
Current issues in the region

• Economy
  – Growth slowed down after 2008
  – Investments from the Western Europe and the US were withdrawn

• Politics
  – Rise of populism
  – Corruption

• Security
  – Ukraine crisis and relations with Russia
  – Energy security
Historic memory I.

- PL: Lech, Mieszko I., Boleslaw I., Casimir III., Jadwiga, Wladislaw I. Jagiello, Sobieski, Czarniecki, Dabrowski, Bonaparte, Constitution of 1791
- CZ: Grandfather Czech, C+M, Saint Wenceslaus, Premysl Ottokar, Saint Agnes of Bohemia, Charles IV., Jan Hus, Jan Amos Comenius
- HU: Turul, Hun, Arpad, Stephen I., Mongols, Charles Robert, Matthias Corvinus, Turks, Gabor Bethlen, Francis II. Rakoczy,
- SK: Pribina, Svatopluk, C+M
Loss of sovereignty

• 1. Slovakia – Nitra Princedom, Great Moravia, 10th century
• 2. Czech Republic – loss to catholics at White Mountain in 1620, Habsburgs ownership of the crown until 1918
• 3. Hungary- loss to Turks at Mohacs in 1526, Habsburgs on the trone until 1918
• 4. Poland – partition at the end of 18th century, regained sovereignty after WWI

• Who suffered the most?
Nation and nationalism

• Nation: modern inventions vs. ancient group?
• Enlightenment (France v. UK v. Poland v. Austria v. Russia)
• French revolution
• Romanticism (Herder)
• Imagined community (Anderson)
• Economic and political development

• Def: a group of people sharing language, culture, history, religion, ethnicity etc – different to other groups

• -- Central Europe v. Western Europe (v Asia?)
Revision: questions

• What makes region a region?
• How would you define Central Europe?
• What are the major historical influences in Central Europe?
• What are the cultural characteristics of Central Europe?
• What are the reasons for belated development of Central Europe before 19\textsuperscript{th} century?
• What was the high historical point of national histories?
• What were the biggest historical tragedies for CE nations?
Main points from the history

• Three ancient kingdoms
• Losses of sovereignty before the Modern Age
• Grand past, promise of future
• National history?
National awakening

• PL: Dabrowski, Kosciuszko, Mickiewicz, Pilsiudski
• CZ: Frantisek Palacky, T. G. Masaryk
• HU: Lajos Kossuth, Istvan Szechenyi
• SK: Jan Kollar, Ludovit Stur

• Levels of national development:
  – 1. Poland and Hungary
  – 2. Czech Republic
  – 3. Slovakia

• Three periods of national revivals
  – Intellectual movement
  – Higher middle classes
  – Mass movements

• 1848 and 1867
History of the long 19th century

• 1772 – 1795: Partition of Poland
• 1815: Congress of Vienna
• 1848: Spring of nations
• 1867: Austro-Hungarian compromise
• 1871: German “Second” Reich
• 1914-1918: WWI

• Three periods of national revivals
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Questions

• What were the most important processes in Central Europe in 19th century?
• Who are the national heroes of CE countries from the 19th century and why?
• What are the gaps between the ‘real’ history and the historical memory of the Middle Age?
Interwar period

• The end of WWI - Versailles system, Trianon Treaty
  – Collapse of Austria-Hungary
  – Partial collapse of Germany, Russia, territorial losses of Hungary
  – New states: Czechoslovakia, Poland, (and many others)

• Ideas and realities
  – Self-determination
  – Cordon sanitaire and Central Europe cooperation

• Masaryk, Pilsudski
On the eve of the WW II
World War II

- 1933: Hitler becomes German Chancellor
- March 1938: Austrian Anschluss
- **September 1938:** Munich Agreement (Dictate)
- March 1939: Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, independent Slovak state
- **August 1939:** Molotov-Ribentrop Pact
- September 1939: Germany (+ SK) and USSR attacks Poland
- **April 1940:** Katyn massacre
- 1940: Germany invades Denmark, Norway, Benelux and France
- 1941: Germany (+ SK and HU) invades USSR
- 1942: Operation Anthropoid (killing of Rainhard Heydrich)
- 1944: Warsaw Uprising, Slovak National Uprising, German occupation of Hungary and Arrow Cross party rule
- **February 1945:** Yalta conference
- May 1945: Germany surrenders

- Holocaust and Jewish question
- The end of multicultural and multinational states in Central Europe
Central Europe under communism

• 1945-1948: bases for the communist regimes
• 1956: uprisings in Poland and Hungary
• 1968: Prague spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia
• 1980: Solidarity general strike in Poland
• 1989: the end of communist regimes in CE

• Three ideas of Central Europe
  – In West Germany
  – In Austria
  – Among dissidents and emigrating from Eastern bloc
1989 revolutions in Central Europe

- 1980 Solidarity movement
- 1981-1983 Martial Law in Poland
- 1988 Easing of travel restriction in Hungary
- 1988 (December) Hungarian PM declares market economy the only way forward
- 1989 (May) destruction of wired border fence in Hungary
- 1989 (June 4) First semi-democratic elections in Poland
- 1989 (October) Hungarian Communist party renamed and reformed itself, allowed for multi-party system
- 1989 (November 9) Fall of Berlin Wall
- 1989 (November 17) Beginning of Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia
  - Nov 24: Leadership stepped down
  - Nov 27: General strike for two hours
  - Nov 28: dismantle of one-party state
  - Dec 29: Havel elected the president by the parliament
- 1990 (May) Elections in Hungary
- 1990 (June) Elections in Czechoslovakia
- 1991 Elections in Poland
Revision: questions

• What are the reasons for belated development of Central Europe?
• What was the high historical point of national histories?
• What were the biggest historical tragedies for CE nations?
• How communist regimes started in Central Europe?
• How communism was and is perceived in Central Europe?
• Why communism in Central Europe fell? Why it did not fall in China, North Korea, Cuba?