1
Introduction to 'Central Europe'

Zlatko Šabič and Petr Drulák

The purpose of the book is to revisit the role and place of Central Europe in contemporary regional and international politics. Since the end of the Cold War and up until the end of the 1990s, the almost forgotten concept of Central Europe received enormous attention in the literature. Analyses that have focused on the transition of former Communist states and their rediscovery of their 'Central European identity' were abundant, and examples of such analyses will often be referred to in this volume as well. However, the present-day Central Europe and its neighbourhood are very different from the Central Europe and its neighbourhood that were discussed more than a decade ago. During the last 20 years, the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) enlargement has touched the Balkans and stretched all the way to the Baltic borders of the former Soviet Union. The 'Big Bang' enlargement of the European Union (EU) happened in 2004, and it was soon followed by Romania and Bulgaria gaining their membership as well. For these reasons alone it is important to return to the debate about Central Europe and check the relevance of the notion in light of these changed circumstances. But there is more to it, as some Central European institutions, such as the Visegrad Group (V4), which was pronounced more or less dead as late as 2005 (The Economist 2005), have recently seen a notable revival.

In the world of the Central European academia, scholars of international relations (IR) grew stronger in numbers. Long neglected (if not ignored) by traditional professional organizations, the young generation of Central European scholars has made an effort to develop its own institutional infrastructure, and this infrastructure is currently embodied in the Central and East European International Studies Association (CEEISA). Today, the CEEISA is an established international organization. It holds regular conferences. It has its own globally recognized and acclaimed official journal, which is called the *Journal of International Relations and Development*. In other words, things do happen in the region. However, we are not aware of any book that has revisited Central Europe by taking into account all these developments.

The main motivation of this book is a desire to contribute towards teaching about Central Europe from an IR perspective. In this respect, the book cannot escape from addressing some traditional questions of interest to researchers and students, especially those concerning the definition of Central Europe. While we recognize the difficulties with defining a Central European region – the contributors in this volume have been quite critical of such efforts – we also realize that the region has earned an important place in contemporary history. One cannot study Central Europe without understanding its history. Nevertheless, the focus of this book is on the present and the future. We have decided to collect knowledge about Central Europe and the 'world outside it' by asking questions of academic and political relevance. We wanted to know, for example, the answers to the following questions: How is Central Europe recognized by its neighbours, or actors outside the region? Can Central Europe really be a player in global politics? Is there a special role for Central Europe in Europe? These are just some of the questions that will be entertained in the following chapters.

Our approach – methodological agnosticism[1] – is closely connected with the rationale of this book, which is to keep the Central European scholarship in IR open to academia, students, and practitioners from both the region and beyond who are interested in Central Europe. Most of the authors who contribute to this volume are members of the CEEISA and/or teach at regional institutions. They are historians, IR specialists, and economists. The variety of perspectives on Central Europe that they bring with their analyses will help us achieve several goals that we have set for this book: (i) to take stock of, and contribute to, knowledge about Central Europe; (ii) to point at what we believe are the main issues that Central Europe faces in the regional and global political arena today; and (iii) to encourage further research in this field as well as to stimulate teaching at universities where Central Europe is being or may be taught. But before we give the floor to the contributors to this book, some preliminary thoughts about its central topic may be in order.

1.1 About the name

The term 'Central Europe' is anything but a stranger to academic literature, be it in natural or social sciences. The phrase has almost 30 million hits on Google, but a quick glance over the hits shows that it is anything but clear what territory can be clearly associated with 'Central Europe'. In the international politics and IR literature, the confusion about what represents a certain region is significant, but as far as Central Europe is concerned, scholars seem to agree on one thing, namely, that Central Europe does not exist only as a geographic term. It is an area with a long history; it is a group of countries which have been subjected to political, economic, cultural, and social influences through the centuries. But this is the point where the agreement stops. 'Acknowledging that central Europe exists,' writes Peter Katzenstein, 'there is no agreement where it starts precisely, and where it ends. Is its centre in Berlin, Prague, Vienna, or further east? Are the Baltic states part of central Europe? What about Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria? There are no precise or uncontestable answers to these questions' (Katzenstein 1997: 4).

In the past, there have been some theoretical and practical attempts to define Central Europe. Halford J. Mackinder had little doubt about whether Central Europe was a region in its own right. In a book series on 'The Regions of the World', which Mackinder edited, his colleague Joseph Partsch (1915) contributed a book called simply 'Central Europe', and in the view of this book, Central Europe was composed of Germany, Austria–Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. But with the changes that took place in and between the two world wars, the perception of Central Europe changed somewhat. Thus, Alan Palmer (1970) talked about Central Europe as a 'belt' between Russia and Germany consisting of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Also, in the military language used during the Cold War, the term 'Central Europe' was synonymous with the term 'Central Front'. The latter was generally understood as the area that would be the major battlefield between NATO and the Soviet bloc should the tensions between the East and the West escalate into an armed conflict. Besides East Germany, the 'Central Front' included two other countries that were then considered to be in the Central European 'region': Czechoslovakia and Poland (Mearsheimer 1982; Congressional Budget Office 1977). But more recently, in the EU, 'Central Europe' has acquired yet another meaning, as the EU has launched the programme called 'Central Europe', which promotes cooperation between Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.[2] The list of definitions could go on indefinitely.

The vast array of representations about what is and what is not Central Europe begs the following question: How come that there is so much of Central Europe in the literature yet there is no consensus about the definition of its territory? To address the ensuing puzzle, we posit that there are two interconnected explanations of both the confusion and the persistence of the term in the literature. The first explanation relates to the geostrategic importance of Central Europe in world affairs; the second involves the pragmatic perception of Central Europe which originates from geostrategic concerns, and which gives Central Europe a particular meaning in a given context and time.

1.2 Geostrategic importance

Some authors try to explain Central Europe as an area that was an eternal theatre of conquests, clashes, and indescribable violence from the era of the

Byzantine Empire to the Second World War (Kirschbaum 2007: 2; Leoncini 2007: 25). One observer has termed this state of affairs as the 'Melian predicament' (Mitchell 2009).[3] The notion of Central Europe as a key battleground for the dominance of the Continent has remained unchanged until today. 'It evokes powerful memories of some of the major disasters of the twentieth century; fascism, two world wars, and the holocaust' (Katzenstein 1997: 4). In the first half of the twentieth century, Germany was considered a particularly dangerous player in the Central European theatre. Nothing symbolizes that sentiment more than Friedrich Naumann's book about *Mitteleuropa* (Naumann 1916), in which he called for a Central European economic union under German domination. The idea has never been accepted by the Central European nations, and it became a synonym for German imperialism. So, according to Johnson, 'when Germans start talking about Central Europe, *Mitteleuropa*, or their historical relations with "the East" everyone starts getting nervous, because this inevitably conjures up negative historical associations' (Johnson 1996: 6).

However, the First World War gave rise to a variety of plans for Central European cooperation. Their goal was to overcome the geopolitical weakness of small states which came into being in the region after the war. For example, Ivan Šušteršič from Slovenia believed in economic integration as a pillar of the European order in which Central Europe, as he saw it, would play an important role. He proposed a Central European (he called it 'Danubian') confederation, which would be composed of Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. The confederation would be an economic and monetary union. The confederation, he believed, would effectively remove military threats and allow for young small nations to develop (Rahten 2006: 63). Similar plans for a broad Central Europe were promoted by such Czechoslovak leaders as Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk or Milan Hodža. However, the only such plan which turned into a political reality at that time was the so-called Little Entente, an alliance of Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia that was organized to counter Austrian and Hungarian revisionist aspirations (Crane 1931).

After the Second World War, Central Europe remained a theatre in which the interests of two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, have repeatedly clashed. The threat of a military confrontation in this conflict was deemed realistic practically until the end of the 1980s. It was as late as 1985 that a report on the NATO strategy in Central Europe, noting that the Soviet military forces were concentrated in Central Europe, stated that NATO forces 'need to be stronger in the center [...] if the Alliance could meet this greatest threat, it could counter lesser threats' (CSC 1985).[4] After 1989, when the Communist governments began to collapse, the three Central European states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary saw the presence of the Soviet troops on their territories as a continuing threat to their newly gained sovereignty. This common threat perception brought

about their close informal cooperation which later became formalized as the Visegrad cooperation. However, somewhat later it was NATO that became perceived as being *the* key for the stability for Central Europe because it provided 'additional psychological security' to the countries in the region (Simon 1996).

Yet, the demise of an ideology does not necessarily lead to a change of strategy. Should there ever be a military threat from the East, Central Europe would likely serve as the main battlefield. As one analyst (Mitchell 2009) has stressed:

> Without Central Europe, Russia lacks the transit routes to realize its plans of increased political influence in Western Europe. Without Central Europe, the United States lacks a mainland European site for a missile defence system needed to protect the American East Coast from nuclear attack. And without Central Europe, the European Union cannot consolidate its eastern flank and become a first-tier geopolitical player. Location – for centuries the region's chief liability – is becoming an asset.

For this reason, Central European countries need to walk a fine line between the interests of the great powers to avoid risks. Going back to NATO, Katzenstein (1997: 4) rightly noted that the 'controversies about NATO enlargement in the 1990s illustrate the importance of geographical space in central Europe'. Another telling case in point was the support by some Central European governments as well as other Eastern European states to the US resolve to enter Iraq in 2003, which was strongly opposed by Russia, France, and Germany. That prompted the then US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, to introduce into the public discourse the infamous distinction between Old and New Europe (Roter and Šabič 2004). The phrase has gradually lost its weight, but it continues to serve as a reminder of old divisions and the role of Central Europe in the post-Cold War international political arena.

1.3 Constructing of the region the Central European way

A pragmatic approach towards defining Central Europe can be informed on the basis of the thesis that regions are subject to political contestations because they are socially constructed (Hettne 2005: 544). Indeed, looking back one can argue that the idea of Central Europe, the creation of a 'mental map' (Le Rider 2008), was an effort that served a particular purpose. Iver Neumann has had little doubts about that. He has pointed out that the Central European project cannot be attributed to nostalgic memories of the past; the idea of Central Europe is essentially a political idea whose purpose

was to introduce the distinction between the 'Central European' countries and Eastern Europe, which in international political discourse was equated with the Soviet empire (Neumann 1999: 144, 146).

Maria Todorova (2009: 141) talks about Central Europe as a term that was brought into fashion: 'The great vogue over Central Europe began in the early 1980s with the almost simultaneous publication of three works by well-known authors representing the voices of the three countries claiming partnership in the idea: Jenö Szücs, Czeslaw Milosz, and Milan Kundera.' These and other intellectuals did not make any secret of their conscious intellectual othering of the East. As neatly described by Danilo Kiš, 'Writers like Czeslaw Milosz [...] established individual identities and became recognized. [...] But even when people knew our names, they really didn't know where to place us [...] Now, with this strategy of belonging to *Mitteleuropa* [...] we have succeeded in differentiating ourselves' (quoted in Labov 2002: 5). Milosz himself has been even more specific: 'The concept of Central Europe [...] is an anti-Soviet concept provoked by the occupation of those countries' (Charrier 2001: 8).

A conscious construction of regions is nothing new. The emergence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can be offered as a case in point. As argued by Charrier, the regional identity of Southeast Asia has not been developed from inside, but rather from 'the regionalizing activities of the "outsiders"' (Charrier 2001: 315). The reason for this conscious effort was the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in the emerging Cold War era, whereby the region and later the ASEAN were 'created' as a 'balancing tool [...] against both internal and external security threats' (He 2006: 189). The process of 'creating the region' began in 1941 with a monograph referring to Southeast Asia. What happened afterwards was fascinating. 'Within the next two decades, during which time the strategic importance of Southeast Asia was highlighted in both the Pacific War and the Cold War, more than one hundred books and articles were published on Southeast Asia, *the region* [...] virtually all were written by Western scholars' (*ibid.*: 317).

While the Central European project served as a means of emancipating Central Europeans from the Soviet shadow in the 1980s, it changed its meaning and motivation in the 1990s. The label of Central Europe was supposed to facilitate the reaching of two principal goals in the post-Cold war period: the countries' membership in the NATO and their membership in the EU. The 'othering of the East' was no longer directed against Moscow, as was the case previously, but against countries in the post-Soviet space and in the Balkans, which the Central Europeans perceived as underdeveloped and with which they did not want to be linked in the eyes of the West. In a similar fashion, smaller nations that were part of Yugoslavia, in particular Slovenia and Croatia, had an 'empire' of their own to deal with. In seeking their emancipation from Belgrade, they flirted with the idea of Central Europe. They did so with the same ambition as their colleagues

from behind the Iron Curtain: to join NATO and the EU. Drago Jančar, a Slovenian novelist, called Central Europe a 'historical and cultural reality' (Rahten 2006: 66), but he also said, already in 1991, that the idea of a Central European space was more about reacting to ideological divisions than about cultural issues shared by the peoples living in that space (Kralj 2005).

Be that as it may, for the Central European countries the end of the Cold War was, in Vaclav Havel's words, a 'return to Europe',[5] a restoration of all the links with the West that previously existed before they had been 'artificially severed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War' (Hyde-Price 1996: 188; Berend 2005). With their membership in NATO and that in the EU, which was completed by 2004, the main goal of the Central European project has been accomplished.

Yet, the story of Central Europe does not end there. If we subscribe to the thesis that the idea of Central Europe was instrumental in pursuing specific goals within a specific time, it would seem logical that after these two goals were reached there would not be any need for keeping the idea of Central Europe alive. Yet, even after 2004 the 'myth' seems to persist, and it is currently more a reality than one might have anticipated only a decade ago. The reason for such persistence is actually quite obvious: it is all about the location. In spite of the major changes on the political map of the world since 1989, the geostrategic, economic, and other considerations of Central Europe remain as relevant today as they have always been in the past. Consequently, the question about how the Central European states respond to such considerations is highly relevant as well.

1.4 What is 'Central Europe' today?

Although it is impossible to come to a consensual designation of 'Central Europe', the region remains politically important because 'central Europe was the staging area of the Cold War and the most likely flashpoint where that war might have turned hot', said Katzenstein (1997: 4). He is not alone, of course, in stressing the history as a factor that played an important role in the development of an awareness about Central Europe (Johnson 1996). The tale about the emergence of the so-called Visegrad Group (discussed by Kořan in this book) is a good case to prove the point. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, which are often perceived as *the* Central Europe, met in Visegrad in 1991, which at the time had a significant symbolic meaning. In 1335, the king of Bohemia, the king of Hungary, and the king of Poland met in the same town to discuss cooperation in the region.[6]

The external pressure is also used as an argument to explain the 'existence' of the Central European region. It is argued that the Western European states hoped to stave off the strong initial pressure that the former Communist states placed on them in their efforts to join Western international organizations by encouraging formal cooperation among the post-Communist

states. Thus besides the V4, the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA), the Central European Initiative, the Council of Baltic States, and so on were also created, and they all had a similar purpose (Ekengren and Engelbrekt 2006: 27; Pridham 1997: 21).

Economy is another important factor to be taken into account in any conceptualization of Central Europe. The countries' commonalities and discrepancies in terms of international trade and trade patterns – the transition to market economy, the determinants of their economic systems, and the trade relations among the countries – can provide some valuable information about the existence and cohesion of the Central European region (Hancké and Kurekova 2008).

There may be other (subjective) factors that could include or exclude a country from the Central European space (Ágh 1998: 2).[7] That Central Europe is more an idea than a geographical fact is often implied in the literature. Jacques Rupnik's 'Tell me where Central Europe is, and I can tell who you are' is one of the most popular quotations in the literature on Central Europe, indicating that there are almost as many definitions as there are scholars of the region (Johnson 1996: 6; Okey 1992). Le Rider (2008) argues that Central Europe does not correspond to any geographical reality – it is just a 'mental map'. On the other hand, though, the literature on Central Europe finds quite a few commonalities among the Central European states that provide a broader framework within which we could look for a more precise definition. Ágh's elaboration of Central Europe (Ágh 1998: 3–7) describes Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia as Central European states. Our definition differs only slightly[8] in that it focuses primarily on the following:

1. the states that have always been at the receiving end of various conflicts that battered Europe in the past centuries, and that may well find themselves 'in the line of fire' should Europe become a battlefield of interests of competing superpowers ever again;[9]
2. the states that emerged from the ruins of the Central European empire of Austria–Hungary in 1918 and which tried to develop a Communist model of society during the Cold War period;[10]
3. the states that have always belonged to the 'first wave of Europeanization, directly following the West European models' (Ágh 1998: 4) – they have developed quicker than any other region outside Western Europe, and they were also the first countries which benefited from the eastern expansion of the EU.

The countries that fulfil these criteria are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, which corresponds to the definition of the region by Jacques Rupnik (Rupnik 1999: 235). However, as the book will show, we remain open to alternative descriptions and contextualizations

of Central Europe. But we reaffirm our belief that Central Europe is by far not just a geographical term – if it ever has been. It is a region with distinct historical, political, and economic dimensions, which have been, are, and will be studied. This book contributes to the literature of IR and related disciplines by offering its own perspectives on the topic and some hints about where future studies on Central Europe may go.

1.5 The structure of the book

The opening chapter discusses the development of Central European reflections about international politics. This analysis is a novel one in several respects. First, it points to certain specifics of the contributions of intellectuals to the politics inside and outside of Central Europe, for example, the involvement of intellectuals in the political life in the Central European countries. Second, the chapter demonstrates that one can talk about a 'Central European tradition' in the literature on international politics, albeit more in terms of individual thinkers than in terms of great numbers of scholars. But the real blossoming of reflections on international politics coming out of Central Europe began after the end of the Cold War, particularly after the end of the 1990s, when younger scholars who were less burdened with the Cold War experience than the older generations became more visible. Third, the chapter raises confidence in the ability of Central European scholars, who have so far remained on the margins of the traditional Anglo-Saxon academic networks. While the growth of the literature on international politics/IR in Central Europe is impressive,[11] there are problems that still need to be dealt with there, such as the intellectual underdevelopment[12] and the lack of autonomy. Yet, as is argued by Petr Drulák, the author of the first chapter, when looking into the future of the 'Central European scholarship', one can be a cautious optimist.

The next segment of the book is devoted to the problem of definition. In order to keep consistency in discussing the problems with the term 'Central Europe', we have opened our own working definition to criticism. Using different approaches, Constantin Iordachi, Thomas Volgy, Patrick Rhamey and Elizabeth Fausett show the complexity of the usage of the term in the past, the present, and the future. Volgy *et al.* argue that there is evidence to show that Austria is much more integrated into the Central European space than Poland. Meanwhile, Iordachi takes issue with the usefulness of the term Central Europe for historical research. His contribution is based on the argument that 'various conceptualizations of Central Europe' do not reflect historical reality *per se*, but are (ever-changing) attempts at endowing geography with historical and cultural meaning, reflecting 'essentially contested' geopolitical conventions prevalent at a certain point in time. In this respect, it can be said that the concept of 'Central Europe' helped intellectuals from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and so on to dissociate

from the Soviet Union. But, as already mentioned, the very same concept of Central Europe was used by the West to prevent the 'Central Europeans' from becoming members of Western-built international institutions overnight. This was not well accepted by the 'Central Europeans' themselves, who, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, quickly forgot about 'Central European Identity' and sought contacts only with the West.[13]

Whether or not one includes Austria among the Central European states, there can be no doubt about Austria's role in the history of the region – or about Germany's role in this regard. It is impossible to discuss Central Europe without these two countries that have been deciding the fate of smaller Central European nations for centuries. But in the past century, everything has changed. As writes Paul Luif, Austria's empire has been shrunk to a country with a population of seven million. During the Cold War, Austria essentially lost contact with Central Europe and 'moved West'. As the Central European countries freed themselves from the Soviet yoke, Austria successfully established strong economic ties with the region. It also sought to present itself as a bridge between the East and the West. That, however, lost its meaning after the Central European states became EU members. On the other hand, as writes Vladimír Handl, Germany's ambition to dominate Europe has gone away after its heavy defeats in the two world wars. However, Germany profited immensely from the end of the Cold War. Reunited, with a strong economy and political clout, Germany has become a vital partner for the Central European states. The emphasis is on the word 'partner'. Namely, for historical but also other reasons (see Luif's analysis of the public attitude towards the neighbouring countries as an example), Austria and Germany have developed a rather pragmatic approach towards identifying themselves as Central European. They define themselves as such only 'if this means that they are the easternmost representatives of Western Europe (or the EU) or that they have special historical relationships with their eastern neighbours and obligations to help them' (Johnson 1996: 11). In other words, a map of Central Europe without Austria and Germany would not only make sense to many in Central Europe; it would seem that such a map could make a lot of sense to many Austrians and possibly Germans as well.

The other two countries that have played a huge role in the history of Central Europe are, of course, Russia and the United States. More than two decades after the end of the Cold War, it is still quite clear who the 'good guy' and who the 'bad guy' are from the Central European perspective. Nevertheless, our emphasis is different. We are not so much interested in what the Central European countries think of the two former superpowers, but rather in how Central Europe is seen from Moscow and Washington. Two of the contributors, Maria Raquel Freire and Tamara Resler, show that the view on the region from the two capitals is not always a nice one. The Central Europeans like to see themselves as safe in the 'hands' of the United States and its military might that shields their Eastern borders. But guaranteeing safety comes at a price. For Resler, Central Europe is seen by Washington primarily as an instrument of US foreign policy – 'the importance of the region is related to its support of key US priorities'. Freire states that the Cold War may be over, but any pursuit of particular US interests in Central Europe is likely to provoke an angry reaction from Moscow. The US proposal for a missile-defence shield involving two Central European countries, Poland and the Czech Republic, is the most recent example that can be used to show that Central Europe continues to represent a space where Russian and American interests can clash.

In such clashes of interest, the position of the Central European states has been the same since the end of the Cold War and it is not going to change in the foreseeable future. As writes Vít Střítecký, 'Trans-Atlantic co-operation was preferred as it was seen as a way to balance the potential Russian influence but also secure the countries' development at least partially independently of European powers.' But, as Střítecký adds, there are many more challenges that could have a negative impact on the security in Central Europe. Energy security seems like an obvious example, but as Petra Roter warns, we should not forget another security issue about which Central Europe has to be particularly careful: the ethnic diversity in Central Europe. Over the centuries, issues concerning minority–majority relations have been a permanent feature in relations within and around Central Europe. Taught by their historical experience, European countries have extensively cooperated to create a regime aimed at safeguarding minority identities and, consequently, managing minority–majority relations peacefully. Academics and policymakers hoped that the Central European countries' EU membership would facilitate their internalization of European and global norms on minority protection. But as recent events in Central Europe demonstrate, tensions among majorities and minorities in the region are as manifest as they ever were in the (Central) European history (e.g., the most recent tensions between Slovakia and Hungary over the issuing of Hungarian passports to members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia).

The painful history of various competing interests that claimed so many lives in Central Europe raises the question about the region's cohesion in terms of a common identity and common institutions as a way of defence against such threats. An answer to the question whether the region has been able to develop its own identity and its own set of institutions cannot be a straightforward one. In the eyes of the West, the international institutions created in Central Europe had an important role to play: the 'return to Europe' meant that the Central European countries would have to go through an extensive process of socialization in order to rejoin Europe. This process was not to be limited only to the institutions inside the region, but it would be further facilitated by other international organizations,

from the Council of Europe to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Hyde-Price 1996: 189–94). It was reasonable to expect that the existing Western institutions, notably NATO and the EU, would gradually 'take over', that is, embrace the former Communist countries as new member states, and the Central European institutions would fade away. However, that did not happen. One of them, the so-called Visegrad Group (V4), has proven to be particularly resilient. As argued here by Michal Kořan, not only has the V4 survived, but it has become an established institution whose members' foreign policy positions and identities tend to be more closely coordinated. Jozef Bátora, who contributes a chapter on the profile of the Central European states in EU foreign policymaking, warns against making hasty conclusions in this matter. His analysis suggests that one can talk about the 'Europeanized' foreign policy of Central European states as far as the organizational structures of their ministries are concerned. However, he argues there is much more divergence between the Central European countries in terms of how their Europeanized foreign policy substance is being formed.

Central Europe is also a long way from becoming a cohesive economic space. At first sight, one might argue that the issue of cohesiveness within a space composed of members of the EU, which is an economic and monetary union, is less relevant. However, as Volgy and his team have shown, some of the subregions inside the EU, notably the Nordic countries, generally display a high level of cohesion. But what about Central Europe? Aljaž Kunčič and Janez Šušteršič have contributed an original empirical analysis of the cohesiveness of the Central European states as economic partners. Their findings are not too optimistic. Their analysis of the existing institutional commonalities and trade and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) linkages shows that Central Europe does not function as a 'group' of its own, although there is some evidence to suggest the contrary. That said, the authors express the caveat that the two decades of the new world order are a rather short period for drawing definite conclusions.

That the Central European states cooperate with each other politically and economically seems clear. But whether they will move towards a more sustained economic or political cooperation among themselves in the future remains an open question at this point. The analysis of the relations between Central Europe and its neighbourhood, notably the Balkans and the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood (Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova), underlines this conclusion. The Balkans is, arguably, significant for Central Europe. Memories of the brutal wars in the Western Balkans are still fresh, and this (sub)region has not yet fully recovered from them. Also, some unresolved issues, for example, the relationship between the Hungarian minority and the central government in Romania, continue to simmer. Yet, in spite of these legitimate concerns and the strategic importance of the Balkans for regional stability, the Central European countries

are still on the way to developing a coordinated approach towards the Balkan region. But as Zlatko Šabič and Annette Freyberg-Inan write, this may change in the near future, particularly in the field of energy security. However, there is still ample room for a more proactive approach. If the political and the economic integration of the Balkans are the key to the success of the European integration process, then the Central European countries must play their part. The call for action is all the more relevant because the Balkans is not the only potentially unstable neighbouring region where Central Europe does not seem to be acting in unison. As shown by Szymon Ananicz and Rafał Sadowski differences among the Central European states have undermined their attempts to team up and design a common approach towards the strategically important and sensitive countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood.

1.6 In summary

This book is about Central Europe and its place in international politics – a subject that scholars have more or less shelved after all the attention it had been given in the 1990s. Based on theoretical and methodological pluralism all the studies converge on several themes that help us explain the meaning and the role of Central Europe in the regional and global arena. The first theme is the historical importance of the Central European space, which we believe is the main determinant that can help explain why there are so many difficulties with defining what Central Europe is. Second, we wish to explore the perception of Central Europe from inside and outside the region. We wish to know whether Central European states see themselves as Central European, and whether 'Central Europe' is featured in foreign policy strategies of countries with a long-term interest in European affairs. Third, we look at the commonalities and divergences among the Central European countries, which will help us to interpret the successes and failures of the Central European countries in recognizing as well as addressing issues of common concern.

We believe that Central Europe is a region, but with qualifications. Following Hettne's terminology of stages that describe the rise or decline of a region ('the regionness'), we cannot see the signs of the development of a region in the strict sense of the term.[14] Nevertheless, let us reiterate that Central Europe has a long history. It is attractive geostrategically. It has gone through various political, cultural, economic, and social influences. It shows signs of cohesiveness. The findings in this book do not arm us with enough knowledge to predict whether Central Europe will attract ever more attention from scholars working on regions and regionalism. But they do arm us with enough knowledge to claim that the concept of Central Europe and its realization in practice has kept and will continue to keep its place in the literature on IR.

Notes

1. We have borrowed the term from the American scholar of religions Russell McCutcheon. He defines methodological agnosticism in the following way: 'Not knowing how the universe really is organized – not knowing if it is organized at all – the scholar of religion seeks not to establish a position in response to this question but to describe, analyse, and compare the positions taken by others' (quoted in Cox 2003: 2). *Mutatis mutandis*, even though we have opted for a working definition of Central Europe (discussed below) and have set out to describe the subject, analyse it, and compare the existing scholarship on it, we do not claim to know the definitive answer to the question of what is Central Europe. Or, to paraphrase Danilo Kiš, we do believe we see Central Europe but would refrain from claiming what exactly it looks like (quoted in Neumann 1999: 144).
2. http://www.central2013.eu/.
3. The term has been inspired by Thucydides' famous Melian Dialogue in Book Five (89), in which the Athenians advised the Melians on the realities of relations between big powers and small powers. 'When we are talking on the human plane questions of justice only arise when there is equal power to compel: in terms of practicality the dominant exact what they can and the weak concede what they must' (Thucydides 2009).
4. See also Mearsheimer (1982).
5. 'From our joint ideals and joint experiences', said Havel at a joint session of the Polish National Assembly in January 1990, 'should come what you and I call the "return to Europe"' (quoted in Powers 1990).
6. History of the Visegrad Group, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/history (accessed 18 March 2012).
7. As we have demonstrated above with the case of the ASEAN, a definition can be consciously politically motivated. Ágh reminds us that we may have a similar case with Greece. As it was a country of immense geostrategic importance during the Cold War, and an early member of NATO, the Council of Europe, and the EU, Greece is considered to be part of Western Europe although geographically it is very much a Southeastern European country (Ágh 1998: 3).
8. Ágh has noted that Austria had a different path of development since the Second World War; to take this into account, he uses the term East Central Europe for all the other countries (i.e., those who were under the Communist rule) minus Austria (Ágh 1998: 7).
9. As one military strategist said, commenting on the dilemmas about NATO enlargement in the early 1990s, it would be Poland, not Austria, that would represent a 'buffer zone' in case 'Russia responds militarily to NATO enlargement' (Interview, Ljubljana, October 2000).
10. After the First World War, the Central European peoples followed different paths; Poland secured its own statehood on the basis of Wilson's 'Fourteen Points'. The Czechs and the Slovaks formed a common state, whereas the Slovenians and the Croats set up a country together with the Serbs. It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall that threats to the existence and the development of these nations had been removed.
11. A special issue of the *Journal of International Relations and Development* was devoted to this topic. For the introductory remarks to the issue see Drulák (2009).

12. A persistent symptom of this condition, namely, the satisfaction with the comfort zone of 'case study' research, has been described by Guzzini (2001: 107–8).
13. Ágh (1998: 218) has noted that there 'was also a naive hope of being embraced by the West individually, as when competing with each other for the title of "best pupil" or engaging in a "beauty contest"'. He mentions the Czech Republic as a case in point, but another Central European country, Slovenia, was not an exception either. Slovenia was not part of the Soviet Bloc, but as it moved away from Communist Yugoslavia, Slovenia immediately began to work on its image by communicating to the world that it was not a Balkan state (Patterson 2003). The idea of being a 'star pupil' was not unknown to it either (Klemenčič 2007: 12).
14. 'Regionness defines the position of a particular region in terms of its cohesion. The political ambition of establishing regional cohesion, a sense of community and identity has been of primary importance in the ideology of the regionalist project' (Hettne 2005: 556).

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