

4.1 The Balkans: Central Europe's Southern Zone

Up to 1989, the exclusion of the Balkans from the map of Central Europe was by no means standard.

Two recent historical atlases – a French *Atlas des peuples de l'Europe centrale*¹²² (1991), and Magocsi's already quoted *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (1993) –, make equally clear that: (a) the post-Cold War Central Europe is larger than the „contracted“ Central Europe, in any of its forms (that is, the Visegrad countries or the Western Christian Central Europe); (b) the Balkans are part and parcel of the latter.

Recognizing the lack of consensus regarding the name and extent of the territory defined by him as „East Central Europe“, Paul Robert Magocsi, the author of the American atlas, adds that „there is no agreement on how to subdivide the area into geographic zones.“¹²³ His own solution is to accept „the notion that rivers can serve as borders of geographical units.“¹²⁴ As a result, he advances a detailed picture of the natural borders that circumscribe the three zones of (East) Central Europe, called by him: the northern zone, the Alpino-Carpathian zone, and the Balkan zone.

The northern zone is bounded by the Baltic Sea in the north and the crests of the Ore, Sudeten, and Carpathian mountains and the Prut rivers in the south; it „encompasses former East Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine (west of the Dnieper River) and Moldavia“.¹²⁵

The Alpine-Carpathian zone is bounded in the north by the northwestern boundary of Austria, the mountain ranges (Bohemian, Ore, Sudeten) that surround the Bohemian Basin, the crests of the northwestern and forested Carpathians, and the Prut River. In the south, the Alpine-Carpathian zone ends at Sava-Danube river line – from the Sava's tributary, the Kupa River, in the west, to the Black Sea mouths of the Danube in the east, it includes „the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Croatia (north of the Kupa-Sava rivers), and northeast Italy“.¹²⁶

Finally, *the Balkan zone* begins south of the Sava-Danube river boundary and extends as far south as the Mediterranean and Aegean seas; the Balkans comprise „the contemporary states of Croatia (south of the Kupa-Sava rivers), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and European Turkey“.¹²⁷

As Magocsi himself puts it, his taxonomic criteria are not exclusively geographic:

Because of the historical emphasis of this atlas, the broad zones described here have been determined as much by historical as by geographic factors.¹²⁸

It can also be observed that, in Magocsi's description, the northern border of the Balkans does not coincide with the northern border of Romania, but with her southern border. Far from being singular or „new“, such a view has been quite frequently held throughout this century.

Alphonse Carpentier held, in 1910, the view that „Romania... is not a Balkan kingdom“, but a component of the pre-World War I Central Europe.¹²⁹ In 1916, Otto Freiherr von Dungern considered „the Kingdom of Romania... a link between the Balkans and the rest of Europe“.¹³⁰ In a book published in 1917, a Bulgarian scholar, Anastase Ischirkoff, presented the Danube as the geographic border between the Balkans and what is sometimes called today the „northern tier“ of (East) Central Europe.¹³¹ A Bulgarian diplomat was much more explicit than his conational in respect to the neighboring countries that should not be included within the Balkans:

With the giving [in 1878] of Dobrudja to Romania the latter state was brought into the Balkan Peninsula, to which it had never belonged, and since Dobrudja was given to Romania in exchange for Bessarabia, which was taken away from her, a temptation was created for Romania to strive for new conquests in the Balkans.¹³²

However, Romania has remained throughout this century the only neighbor of that area able to maintain good relations with all the countries there, including today the successor states of former Yugoslavia. But the fact that Romania is not a Balkan country has continued to be underscored, such as in 1918, in Jovan Cvijic's book *La Peninsule Balkanique*¹³³ and the maps attached to it. The latter (see Map 8) clearly indicate which are the countries situated „inside“, and respectively „outside“ the area as well as that the separation line is delineated by the Danube and Sava-Kupa rivers.

In 1924, the Italian geographer Riccardo Riccardi emphasized that the notion that Romania was part of the Balkans was a surprising error of many historians and geographers.¹³⁴ In 1930, Auguste Gauvin asked contemporaries to cease identifying that country as Balkan, and „get acquainted with the idea that Romania is a Central European country, that has to be treated accordingly“.¹³⁵

An Historical Geography of Europe, published in 1939 by the British Gordon East, defines Romania as being „an essentially Danubian, and not a Balkan state“.¹³⁶ East adds that this is the very way that country perceives itself. Characterizing Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia as „the agricultural states of Central Europe“, Gordon East also verifies the quite widespread post-World War I tendency to include the whole of (the former) Yugoslavia within Central Europe.¹³⁷

Sharing for the most part the views of Ischirkoff and Cvijic in respect to the northern border of the Balkans, Hugh Seton-Watson makes, however, an exception for „the Dobrudja which, although on the Balkan side of the Danube, belongs rather to the Danubian Basin than to the Peninsula.“¹³⁸ Writing in 1970, another British scholar, J.C. Matley, observed:

Romania is often described as a Balkan country. The term Balkans is, strictly speaking, the name of a range of mountains in Bulgaria and as such is not applicable to a geographical region. As popularized by historians and political writers, however, the term has come to designate the culture, political systems, and other aspects of a group of countries of Southeastern Europe. Still, if we characterize Romania as a Balkan country in this sense, we are not being strictly accurate. The most important historical influences that have helped to shape the Romanian state and its people have come as much from the north, west and east as from the south. It is logical to consider Romania part of Central Europe, with strong links to the 'Balkan Region'. But it may be more meaningful to associate Romania with Hungary, northern Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Austria than with Albania, Bulgaria and Greece...¹³⁹

Coming back to the 'Balkans' place on the map of Europe, this author believes that many analyses dealing with the said area could gain in both accuracy and nuance if the term „the Balkans“ would be seen more as a shorthand for South-Central Europe and less as a stamp which designates automatically a sort of „endless European disease“.

A few years ago such an approach would have been viewed as atypical. Recently a number of analysts have started to favor it. For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski seems to have come back to his 1990 larger definition of Central Europe (see Chapter 1). He already uses the locutions „the Balkans“ and „South-Central Europe“ as equivalents.¹⁴⁰

One could suppose that Brzezinski was influenced by the US's official position with respect to the confines of Central Europe and its two zones (see Chapter 1). But, unlike the US State Department, Brzezinski includes Romania in South-Central Europe, not in North-Central Europe. On the other hand, since 1993, he has championed a possible inclusion of Ukraine (currently placed by the US State Department within the area of the Community of Independent States) in Central Europe.¹⁴¹ Therefore, most probably, the new image advanced by the renowned American expert in international relations was reached independently.

Significant steps in „the enlargement“ of the confines of post-Cold War Central Europe have also been taken by scholars from the Visegrad countries. A Hungarian expert on security matters, Pál Dunay, up to 1995, used to more or less equate Central Europe with the Visegrad countries. Nonetheless, assessing the security needs and interests of the larger area to which the four states belong, he has repeatedly insisted that „it is questionable whether any differentiation [by the Western structures] among the former non-Soviet Warsaw countries would be desirable.“¹⁴² Dunay's balanced approach has finally resulted in a larger representation of the region's expanse. In a study published in October 1995, the Hungarian scholar is of the opinion that Central Europe:

is largely identical with the western peripheral states of the former East, encompassing probably ten countries: the former non-Soviet Warsaw Treaty Organization (VTO) member states [Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia], the three Baltic states and Slovenia.¹⁴³

4.2 Romania and Hungary: A Special Case

In the literature devoted to (East) Central Europe, Romania and Hungary represent a special case. The latter is, among today's Visegrad four, the one most frequently included within the confines of either „South-Eastern Europe“ or „the Balkans“. Conversely, Romania is, among the states „outside Visegrad“, the one which has been most constantly seen as part of a narrow Central Europe having as its southern border the Danube-Sava-Kupa rivers. Whatever their specific opinion on the Balkans, that is, a zone which belongs/does not belong to (East) Central Europe, numerous authors (who wrote either during the inter-war or the Cold War years) have identified Romania and Hungary as an interface or a link between the Balkans and the northern zone of (East) Central Europe. Studies written after 1989 continue to take into account the two countries' closeness (in every sense of the word) to the Balkans. Some of them go so far as to include their southern regions within the Balkans. Thus, Stephen Iwan Griffith holds that the Balkan states would consist of „the ex-Yugoslavian republics, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey and to some extent southern Hungary and Romania.“¹⁴⁴

At first sight, such opinions seem to create even more confusion with respect to the location of the various countries in (East) Central Europe. Carefully read, they simply indicate that whereas theoretically clear-cut delimitations between its three zones (in Magocsi's acceptation) can be advanced, in practical terms they might obscure significant aspects. On the other hand, a not too rigid approach of natural or religious „barriers“ between zones and countries is able to shed a better light on the geostrategic significance of certain Central European countries.

An example in case is the position of Romania and Hungary, situated in the very center of (East) Central Europe, on a North-South axis as well as on a West-East one. Aware, like many of his predecessors, of the geopolitical significance of this situation, the Foreign Minister of Romania, Teodor Melescanu, remarked in a speech delivered, at the invitation of the Hungarian Association for Foreign Policy, during his 1994 official visit to Hungary:

I hope that you would agree with me that from a geographical point of view, within the 'classical' Central Europe, Romania and Hungary occupy the central place. This is one – though not the most important – of the reasons why, in geopolitical terms, the relationship between our two countries was, is and will be central for the security of Central Europe at large.¹⁴⁵

This author would not deny that, in spite of Romania's self-perception as a Central European country, which can be traced to well before 1918, today, as in earlier periods, a number of authors think that Romania would have „ceased“ to be part of the Balkans after the World War I. Their main argument sounds more or less

like the one invoked by Gordon East, in 1939. Although identifying Romania and Yugoslavia as Central European, the British author believed that they would have achieved „a more direct link with Central and Danubian Europe than with the Balkan Peninsula“, as a result of the fact that, after 1918, the said countries had united with territories formerly included in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.¹⁴⁶

Given that Slovenia and a good part of Croatia are situated above the natural northern border of the Balkan Peninsula, such a statement might be valid in the case of former Yugoslavia. As for Romania, all her historic provinces, that is, Transylvania as well as Moldova [the Romanian name for that territory] and Wallachia, have always belonged to the Alpine-Carpathian zone. During the inter-war period, such a view was supported, along many other geographers, by the German Ernst Schmidt.¹⁴⁷

Drawing the historic picture of the „central tier“ of (East) Central Europe, Magocsi aptly observes that:

[it] roughly coincides with the lands of the historic Habsburg Empire (minus Galicia) before the mid-nineteenth century and the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.¹⁴⁸

In light of the above, it is obvious that, on one hand, the notion that Romania would owe her geographic „Central-European-ness“ to Transylvania alone is not verified. On the other hand, Magocsi's *Historical Atlas* recalls certain significant historical facts. Although the Ottoman Empire was the suzerain of the Danubian principalities (Moldova and Wallachia), unlike their south Danubian neighbors, the latter preserved their sovereignty, gaining full autonomy through the Treaty of Adrianople (1829). In other words, they were a periphery rather than part of the „core provinces“ of that empire. This geo-historic reality is clearly emphasized by the following remarks:

The Sava and Danube rivers have been chosen as the northern boundaries of this zone [the Balkans], because it is south of that line that for most of early modern history (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries) the core provinces of the Ottoman Empire were found.¹⁴⁹

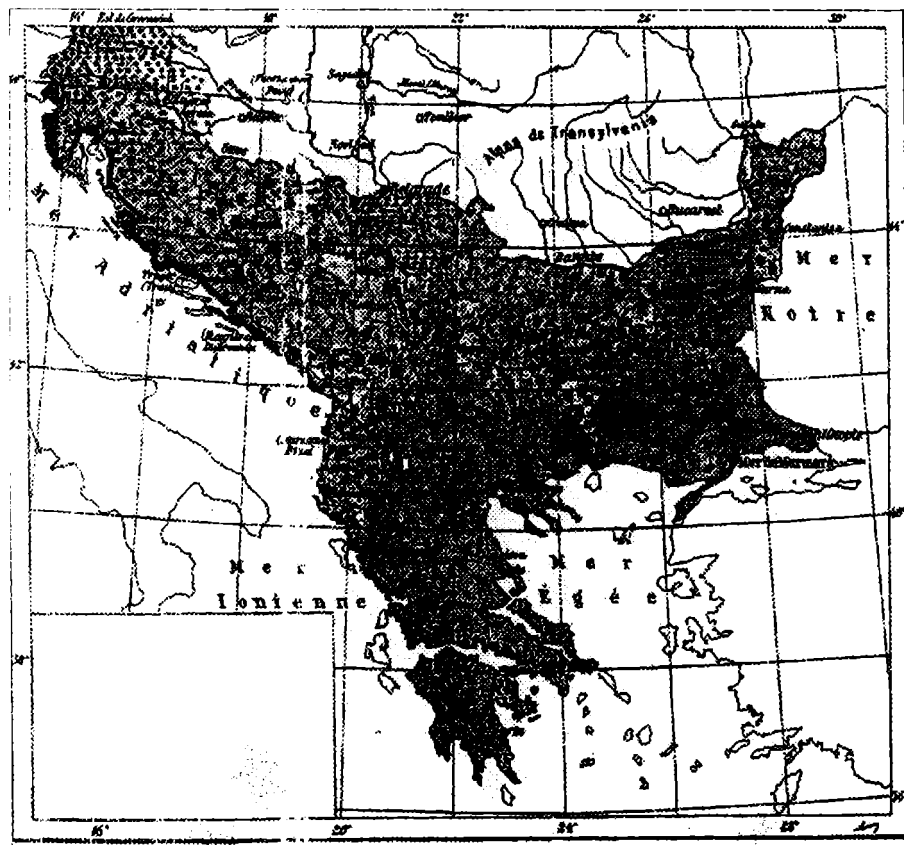
Among Romanian writers, some like Alexandru Sturdza, in 1904, hold that the Danube is a separation line between the countries dominated by the Carpathians and the Balkan ones. However, politicians have been mostly inclined to consider the Danube a natural frontier *within* Central Europe. This might be a reflection of Romania's specific position of a bridge-country, a position described by Ernest Lémonon in 1931:

Geographically and historically, Romania is a bridge between the West and the East... Its role has to be, once again, one of coordination and rapprochement... Looked at from a Western perspective, it has to facilitate the relationship between the Danubian and the Balkan countries, because it is a link between them. It has to rely on both the Danubian, and the Balkan groupings. Romania could not belong to just one of them. But it is necessary component in each of those groupings, in so far as it is the country that can ensure their junction.¹⁵⁰

**Samuel P.
Huntington:**
*„The Clash
of Civilizations?“*

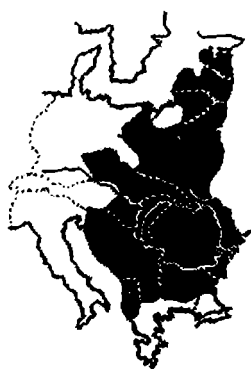


The Balkans

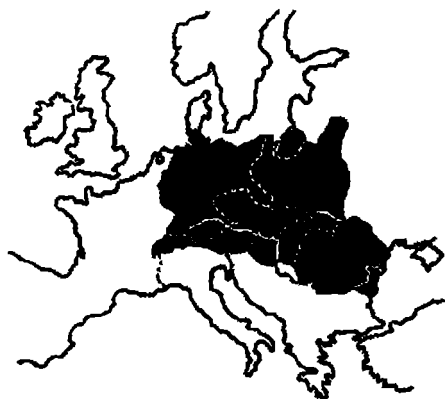


Source: Jovan Cvijic, *La Péninsule Balkanique*, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin

Inter-war Representations of Central Europe



(G. Wirsing, 1932)



(Emm. de Martonne, 1934)



(Jacques Ancel, 1936)



(N. Al. Rădulescu, 1938)

Source: N. Al. Rădulescu, „Poziția geopolitică a României”, *Revista Geografică Română*, 1938, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 34-37.

Mutatis mutandis, the same is true about Hungary. Therefore, the significance of good neighborly relations between the two countries goes beyond their bilateral relations. For various reasons, whose examination exceeds the scope of this essay, there have been many verbal disputes between the two neighbors this century. However, predicted military conflicts never took place.

Under the new circumstances created by the end of the Cold War, the fundamental domestic and foreign policy options of the two countries are identical. Today, the external situation offers Romania and Hungary more favorable conditions than ever before to become „security producers“ in a key zone of post-Cold War Central Europe.

This is within their grasp. This is the important message of the Romanian proposal of August 1995 for a Romanian-Hungarian historical reconciliation, inspired by the successful Franco-German model. The background of such an endeavor is a Europe which values respect for existing borders and protection of minorities. Romania and Hungary are interested in being in the first group of countries that will join the Western structures. Encouragement and even-handed treatment by Western states and institutions can be a valuable catalyst for their necessary rapprochement. An insufficiently exploited resource for security and stability in post-Cold War Central Europe could thus be activated.

Notes

122. André Sellier and Jean Sellier, *Atlas des peuples de l'Europe centrale* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).
123. Paul Robert Magocsi, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.
124. *Ibid.*
125. *Ibid.*
126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Ibid.*
129. Alphonse Carpentier, *La Roumanie moderne* (Bruxelles: Imprimerie Coloniale, 1910), pp. 3-4.
130. Otto Freiherr von Dungern, *Rumänien* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Berthes, 1916), p. 3.
131. Anastase Ischirkoff, *Bulgaria, Land und Leute* (Leipzig, 1917), p. 17.
132. D. Rizoff, „Vortwort“ to *Die Bulgaren in ihren Historischen, ethnographischen und politischen Grenzen* (Berlin, 1917), p. vi.
133. Jovan Cvijic, *La Péninsule Balkanique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1918).
134. Riccardo Riccardi, *La Romania* (Roma, 1924), p. 8.
135. Auguste Gauvin, „Preface“ to André Tibal, *La Roumanie* (Paris: Editions Rieder, 1930), pp. 8-9.

136. Gordon East, *Géographie historique de l'Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), p. 375.
137. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
138. Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the wars* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 4.
139. J.C. Matley, *Romania* (London, 1970), p. 9.
140. Zbigniew Brzezinski, „Fifty Years After Yalta: Europe's and the Balkan's New Chance“, *Eurobalkans* (Greece), No. 18, Spring 1995, passim.
141. Zbigniew Brzezinski, „The Great Transformation“, *The National Interest*, Fall 1993, p. 9.
142. Pál Dunay, *Adversaries All Around? (Re)Nationalization of Security and Defence Policies in Central and Eastern Europe* (The Hague: Clingendael Paper, January 1994), p. 56 (Emphasis in the original).
143. Pál Dunay, „Whence the Threat to Peace in Europe?“, in Ian Gables (ed.), *A Lasting Peace in Central Europe?* (Chaillot Papers, no. 20, October 1995), p. 40.
144. Stephen Iwan Griffiths, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Threats to European Security* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 34.
145. Teodor Meleşcanu, *Romania's Integration with the European and Atlantic Structures* (5 September 1994, Budapest), p. 10.
146. Gordon East, *Op. cit.*, p. 383.
147. Ernst Schmidt, *Die rumänischen Staaten in ihrer historischen Entwicklung* (München, 1932), passim.
148. Magocsi, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.
149. *Ibid.*
150. Ernest Lémonon, *La nouvelle Europe centrale et son bilan économique, 1919-1930* (Paris, 1931), p. 212.

(Fragment din studiul *Mapping Central Europe*, Clingendael Paper, 1996, p. 44-49. Netherlands Institute of International Relations)