



The Meaning of Borders and Border Issues in the Age of Globalization: Europe and Asia

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THE NEW EUROPEAN FRONTIERS⁴

ABSTRACT

In this article, the authors have attempted to explain different meanings of the term *frontier*, especially in context of the process of European integration and enlargement towards the East. Understanding its complex nature — geographic, political, legal and cultural — is essential for any serious analysis of contemporary international relations and border issues understanding. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, this article discusses several central issues, including changes in political identities within the EU, the extent to which the internal frontiers have become different in kind from the external frontiers.

Key words: Europe, European Union, frontiers, borders, regions

The term Frontier can be seen from different perspectives. On one side, it is a geographical, and on the other, it is a political term referring to regions near or beyond a boundary. Frontiers are places where confrontations occur due to all kinds of differences for example differences in worldview, religion, customs, wealth etc. These are the very locations where one finds unresolved political problems. In the first place, Europe's borders can be interpreted in the geographic sense. One can think here of the outer borders of Europe and all the controversies surrounding so-called *Fortress Europe* with regards to security, migration, disparity in wealth and opportunities and so on. Resolution of these issues should not be left to an *ad hoc*, emergency management, but

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should instead form the centre of the political debates on the fundamental identity and politics of Europe.

In the European Union, the term frontier describes the region beyond the expanding borders of the European Union itself. The countries surrounding EU are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This is a foreign relations instrument of the European Union (EU), which seeks to tie primarily developing countries, into the EU. The EU offers financial assistance to countries within the European Neighbourhood, so long as they meet the strict conditions of government reform, economic reform and other issues surrounding positive transformation. An Action Plan, as agreed by both Brussels and the target country, normally underpins this process. The ENP does not cover countries, which are in the current EU enlargement agenda, the European Free Trade Association or the western European microstates.

Also, the inner borders of Europe constitute sites of unresolved tensions and differences and are thus important frontlines in the construction of a European Commons. Albeit perhaps somewhat less intense and spectacular, important differences still exist between the different European member states, ranging from dissimilar political or corporate cultures, social rights, health care and public transport to prostitution and drugs policy. These differences cause many problems and conflicts, especially in Europe's internal border regions, also called "Euroregions". Again, the point here is not to see these problems as the last remnants of the 'old Europe' or as the petty differences between the diverse nation-states that will fade away slowly over time. Rather, they can be considered as constituting the basis of, and a challenge to, rethinking some of Europe's basic choices *vis-à-vis* its politics, its economic, foreign or asylum policies and other issues.

The political geography of Europe and the issues confronting the European Union have changed radically since 1989. Understanding the complex nature — legal, political, linguistic and cultural — of international frontiers in Europe is essential to any serious analysis of contemporary politics and government.

The frontiers of Europe became at the end of the last century one of the essential political questions as the European countries, European Union member states in the first instance, took steps towards closer cooperation and as radical transformation followed the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Process of European integrations gained impulse through the 1986 Single European Act, creating the Single European Market by 1 January 1993, while a borderless Europe was envisaged in the 1985 Schengen Agreement, which entered into force on 1st September 1993. Economic and political integration caused a blurring of the distinction between international and sub-state boundaries within the EU, particularly within Schengen zone. This raised the possibility that, as international frontiers lost the visible trappings of police, border check points and barriers, their importance, as markers of identity would become more important.

The fall of Eastern block resulted in the drawing of roughly 20 000 kilometres of new international frontiers — a reconfiguration of the political map only witnessed before in Europe after major wars. Collapse of the Eastern block also allowed opening of the borders to East and Central Europe in 1989–90 and created the presumption of EU and NATO enlargement towards the East. This cataclysm therefore created both new international frontiers as new states were established, and it altered the nature of these frontiers. The end of Communism and the opening of frontiers help to heal the ‘wound’ of the Iron Curtain and abolish the ‘unnatural’ division of the continent. The practices of the EU, including its mode of frontier management, have been extended to the East. EU programmes, INTERREG and PHARE, have supported the creation of Euroregions along the former Cold War border. But, there is contradiction between the project for EU enlargement and the Schengen practices which require hardened external frontiers. One of the most closed frontiers in recent history had been dismantled, but the EU countries still perceive threats coming from the east and their response has been to delay EU enlargement and engage in relative closure of frontiers. The response from the EU’s eastern neighbours is a question why invest in improved border controls at a frontier, which would become, in the relatively near future, part of the borderless Europe.

Here stands the question who is European? The answer has two aspects. First is what Europe is more important, “more-European”, then the other. And, the second aspect is what organizations are “truly European”, to whom the International Organization recommendation is mainly addressed? Is the difference between East and West still relevant?

The answers to these questions can be sought both in science and politics. The statement made by Charles de Gaulle that Europe is “de l’Atlantique à l’Oural” (From Atlantic till Ural) is characteristic for the time when United Europe was created. The most well-known scientific theory is the one of Huntington who claims that after the ideological division of Europe had been abolished there was created a new cultural division between the Western world on one side, and the Orthodox and Islamic ones on the other.⁵ It is assumed that the most characteristic demarcation line is the South-North vertical, cutting the Western part of the Euro-Asian space and the Balkans.⁶ William Wallace describes this

⁵ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations”, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, p. 21.

⁶ Since the Enlightenment, when the West European imagination gradually abandoned the polarity “North vs South” in favour of the “West vs East” divide, the Balkans found itself in a geographical no-man’s land: to be sure, the region was placed in the “East”, but in a rather restrained way: it belonged to the “Near East”, part of the “less known”, and “barbarous lands”, which were, nevertheless, neither truly “Oriental” (for which read: Arab and Muslim) nor truly “Asiatic” (for which read: “Turkish”).

Throughout the XVIII Century, European maps described the peninsula as “Turkey in Europe”, a term which competed with “Near East” up until the early XX century, when “Near East” died an unceremonious death with the rising of the real article: the “Middle East”. Hence a “paradox”, to use Wolff’s term: the Balkans, at least geographically, belonged to “Europe” despite its “otherness”. Travellers and writers continued to describe the area as “Savage Europe”, or “Oriental Europe”, but despite these adjectives, its admission to Europe remained a cartographic convention. Larry Wolff,

in his book “Transformation of Western Europe” who also indicated that it was drawn in the 16th century. The answer to the question was also sought by Tubi, who opposed Europe (Indo-German and Greek-Roman aggression) and the Middle East. The same was true for Prof. Duroselle who divided Europe by religion, as well.⁷

“The First Europe” (Brzezinski) or “The European Fortress” (Mann) was created with the adoption of the so-called Schengen Border, while the enlargement of the EU and NATO is meant to guarantee Europe a security belt, i.e., a periphery and, in that way, a “soft” contact with the East. In this sense, we have “two Europe’s” again.⁸

The US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, provoked his European audience when, at a press conference in early 2003, he suggested that there was now a political divide between Western Europe (“Old” Europe, signifying essentially France and Germany) and Central and Eastern Europe (“New” Europe, Poland being its main representative). Whereas “Old” Europe was becoming increasingly lethargic, “New” Europe was ready to assume its responsibility in the global struggle against terrorism and rogue states.⁹

Notwithstanding the fact that a large proportion of the supposedly “Old” Europe is arguably “New” (i.e. Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Spain) Rumsfeld’s distinction did have some political resonance. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are still in the midst of a massive process of political and economic transition. They are highly dependent upon the goodwill of Western governments and are thus essentially demanders in the present international system. They have to accept whatever is on offer and are not really in a position to challenge the decisions made by Western governments, especially the US government.

On the other side, we have a question: Who are the parties to European security integration? The Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) may reasonably be considered all-inclusive, in that people not represented there in one way

Inventing Eastern Europe, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994, pp. 144–194; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 62–88. See also the Introduction in: Malcom E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792–1923*, Longman Pub Group, London, 1989.

⁷ Opposite allegations can be found in a special number of *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 1993. See also, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Velika šahovska tabla*, CID, Romanov, Podgorica, 2001, Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Simon Schuster Adult Publishing Group, New York, 1994, etc.

⁸ Michael Mann, “Nation-states in Europe and other continents: diversifying, developing, not dying”, *Journal of American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Summer, Vol 122, 1993, No. 3, pp. 115–140.

⁹ The statement came on January 22nd 2003 at a high point of the Iraq crisis in a dialogue with the media. A journalist had asked the Defence Secretary about the opposition of France and Germany to the war, to which Rumsfeld replied: “Now you are thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. I think that’s old Europe. If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the east and there are a lot of new members. And if you just take the list of all the members of NATO and all of those who are invited in recently — what is it, 26, something like that? [But] you are right. Germany has been a problem, and France has been a problem”.

or another could make a plausible case for being European. The OSCE, however, cannot be the exclusive, or even the predominant locus of European security integration. Least of all, can the OSCE carry the torch for European unity?

Yet while the OSCE cannot be the primary forum for security integration, all its members have legitimate interests in European security, and no smaller, more homogeneous and exclusive grouping dare embark on a process of security integration without carefully considering the need to involve other European or semi-European actors. Consequently, European security integration tends to proceed in a plurality of four, groups of overlapping membership developing different facets of integration in pursuit of distinct but complementary goals.

The present configuration is unstable and in some danger of partial collapse. The previous Cold War configuration was economical to a fault, consisting essentially of two mutually exclusive organizations, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, each designed primarily to achieve security against the other. But, the end of this potentially lethal system of rival blocs has led to structural chaos.

First, there are non-EU NATO states in Europe — Turkey, Norway, and Iceland. Of these, Iceland play only a small role, while Norway is showing increasing signs of reconsidering its negative attitude to EU membership, which would automatically add it to the core. Turkey is of great importance to European security, and their ambiguous relationship to the core makes it difficult to develop European security integration either within NATO (because Turkey is not part of the Union) or within the Union.

Second, there are non-WEU EU states — Denmark, and Ireland (but both Observers in WEU). These states have severely hampered progress in European security integration within the EU, Ireland because of its neutrality, and Denmark because of its equivocal attitude towards defence in general and defence in the Community in particular.

Third, there are the countries of ex-Yugoslavia (except Slovenia), and Albania. These counties are still big security problems and they still are under a revolutionary euphoria or what President Havel and others have called a “security vacuum”, and they are all in varying degrees too anxious to attach themselves somehow to the centre.¹⁰

Finally, there is the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union has disintegrated into its constituent European, semi-European, and non-European republics, and the process is likely to cloud the picture of European integration, and create security concerns, for some time to come. Even without the overarching threat, European security integration is still profoundly influenced by events within the ex-USSR.

The existing configuration of European security, then, is a core of ten — the WEU states — surrounded by five peripheral groups: non-EU NATO, non-WEU EU, Central and East Europeans, and the Soviet Republics. This complex configuration does not

¹⁰ Vaclav Havel, *Statement at NATO Headquarters*, 21 March 1991. See: Theo von den Doel, *Central Europe: The New Allies? The Road from Visegrad to Brussels*, Westview Press, USA, 1994, p. 19.

make security integration easy. Who is to be included and who excluded? How can any institution make significant progress in an integrative project without running up against from within or objections from without?

The line is more diminished with the fact that some of the countries from the ex-communists block were accepted in EU, NATO and other international organizations. In spite of this, the difference between “old” and “new” Europe still exists in the contention of the organizations, and the different historical course they passed.

Despite these remarkable changes regarding European frontiers during last 50 years, they nevertheless remain the focus of anxieties. Some of these anxieties are linked to the future of the EU after enlargement and whether it will be able to maintain its present frontiers policy, while others are provoked by globalization. These transformations encouraged political changes and, in particular, the development of global and European institutions. European institutions have progressed far beyond the status of international meetings in which no authority was capable of holding states to the agreements made. Neither in its international dimension — states were not bound by any superior authority — nor in its internal dimension — states had absolute control over activities on their territory — is the doctrine of sovereignty reflected in contemporary European political practice.

Nonetheless, frontiers and territorial control remain of basic political importance. The international frontier remains the limit of criminal and civil law jurisdictions, police authorities, state administrations, educational systems, tax regimes, social security systems, as well as of many non-governmental organizations. In all these areas, tendencies towards transnationalisation are developing, which involve regular and systematic transfrontier co-operative relationships. If present trends continue in Europe, a slow integration of public institutions, characteristic of federal systems, and a more rapid integration of some social and economic organizations will take place. The degree of social integration will remain constrained by the important role of frontiers as the limit of official languages and the languages of everyday communication.

Whether further erosion of frontiers, and the end of the hypersensitivity about territorial questions, which characterized the high tide of the sovereign state, are close in Europe, depends on a continuing sense of military security and a relatively even spread of economic development. But, it crucially depends on how large populations feel about homelands and their boundaries. Apart from a modest growth of a European identity and the strengthening of certain regional/minority national identities, the creation of new identities is not happening on any large scale. Sub-state frontiers have assumed greater importance, particularly in Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom. Globalization has created anxieties based on ill-defined threats to societies and their interests. But, as yet, there is no sign in the EU of the violent upheavals, which, in the past, have been necessary to create new identities.

There are four basic conceptions of frontiers and territory held by European elites, and these have deep historical roots.¹¹ The first is that territory is an attribute of a culture or a national group in the sense that it belongs to a people and the culture of that people is embedded in the land and in the landscape. When territory is regarded in this way, frontiers are inviolable.

The second attitude is territory as a frame within which differences and conflicts can be controlled and managed. Arbitrary division of territory is often the most important factor in the creation of identities (rather than that frontiers represent the limits of pre-existing identities).

The third conception is that territory is a tool of a political project. In this conception, when a new power centre emerges, a redefinition of territory is certain. An obvious example is the case of EU in which territorial limits are relocated or their functions redefined to correspond with the development of the Union. According to this view, an ascendant political movement can conquer, symbolically or in practice, territory; Territory is embodied to demonstrate the new distribution of power.

Fourth, territory is conceived as a constraint on political action. The policy of governments, whether at the local, regional, national or European level is shaped by the nature of the territory and resources which they control. This geopolitical vision assumes that the configuration of territory and frontiers are factors, which influence or determine the form which political changes take.

Despite the official rhetoric by politicians on the withering away of the last social, economic, political or cultural borders in Europe and, consequently, the near realization of the European utopia, the reality of life in a united Europe offers a bleaker picture, especially after crises with Euro. It is not just that the consequences of Europe's ever tightening outer borders — earning it the nickname 'Fortress Europe' — are washing up along the shores of its Mediterranean member states on an almost daily basis; inside the Union, too, new borders relating to job opportunities, income security, access to housing or voting rights are constantly being erected between different population groups, like, for instance, old and new member states, the young and old, employers and employees, working people and the unemployed, illegal and legal residents.

Europe's borders can pop up wherever and whenever economic, political or cultural differences manifest themselves and cause confrontations between different individuals or groups. Migrant workers from the new Eastern European member states, due to grave disparities in social rights and wages are resettled to the big Western European cities.

Four concepts of territory are background to countless political arguments taking place in modern Europe, especially on the ongoing debate on the openness of internal frontiers and the degree of closure of the external frontier of the EU. Almost sacred four

¹¹ Malcolm Andersen, Eberhard Bort, *The Frontiers of the European Union*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, p. 9.

freedoms — free movement of goods, labour, capital and services — from the 1957 Rome Treaty did not abolish frontiers during 1990s because many areas of public policy, especially physical force, remain under the control of states.

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