

Preface

The subject of the present edition of “Limes” refers to contemporary debates, inspired by Samuel Huntington’s controversial thesis of the “Clash of Civilizations” on the status and meaning of the concept and phenomenon of “civilization” in the modern/post-modern world, more specifically in our region, our part of Europe.

According to which criteria can we distinguish different civilizations? Is the criterion of religion still relevant? Does it suffice in the context of modern/post-modern transitions? Is civilization really a crucial factor in defining collective identities in the era of globalization?

From our perspective, one of the most interesting questions is whether we can or cannot speak of different civilizations in the Central-Eastern Europe. If so, how should we conceive the borders of the civilizations in question? Can they be determined, using the historical, cultural and religious criteria? Or, rather, should we adhere to political indices, referring, on the one hand, to various acceptances of democratic values in different countries and, on the other hand, to the current geo-political interests and power games?

It becomes frequent to apply to the countries of Eastern Europe, especially the former Soviet Union (SU) republics, the concept of borderland in order to emphasize the ambiguous, mixed character of their cultures and collective identities. Does it provide a viable alternative to the traditional (and Huntingtonian) approach to the problem of civilization? Perhaps, instead of distinguishing different civilizations in our region, should we speak rather of a special kind of borderland culture, non-reducible either to the “West” or to the “East”?

Finally, can we perceive Europe and, more particularly, the current European Union (EU) as a specific civilization, distinct from what has traditionally been called the Western or Latin world? If so, we should admit that European civilization, even if considered as tantamount to the present EU, including already some Non-Western countries and comprises many religions, is based mainly on economical, legal and political institutions, not on religious, linguistic and cultural community. We can also consider that given that particular character of European unity or its inherent cultural pluralism, it deconstructs – in a similar way as a borderland culture does it – the very concept of civilization understood as the biggest, relatively homogeneous cultural area. But the question remains whether and how we can outline the borders of Europe, especially in the East. And how Europe is related to, or has to deal with other, more traditional civilizations – within Europe itself and beyond it?

Are borders of civilizations an arbitrary political institution, or do they result from some important life experience, based on collective habits and long-lasting symbolic patterns? How have these borders changed and how could/should they change, depending on the policies carried out and on our common efforts of understanding the other?

Given the current border of the EU, reinforced by the recent enlargement of the Schengen zone which divides Eastern Europe into politically “European” and “Non-European” parts, such questions – treated further, in different ways, by our authors – have, obviously, broader than purely theoretical meaning and implications.

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