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Similarities and Differences of Eastern-European Cultures in Transition: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

In order to understand and answer the similarities and differences of Eastern European cultures there are many questions to be examined as far as geopolitical, spatial, historical and social aspects are concerned. First of all, where Eastern Europe is, where its borders are, which countries belong to it and which not and the reasons behind

it. As regards history whether the Eastern European countries have common roots in their histories and how deep it is. The main aim of this article is to analyse and point out similarities and/ or differences among Eastern-European countries in transition in an empirical way by using data of European Values Study, respectively.

Keywords: Intercultural Management, Cultural Dimensions, Eastern Europe, European Values Study

Theoretical Background: Geographical, Geopolitical Aspect

According to international researchers there is no common view about which countries belong to and constitute the Eastern part of Europe so that the international literature is quite shared. According to the definition and classification of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN): *'the region lying between Central Europe and Western Asia, with main characteristics consisting in Byzantine, Orthodox and limited Ottoman influences'*. Similarly, to that Prusin (2010)^[9] says Eastern Europe is *'the lands between'* which means the countries between Germany and Russia. That would mean that today's Eastern Europe would include the following countries: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the former Yugoslavian countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo). International organisations and intergovernmental institutions like OECD, Worldbank etc. in general follow the division of Eastern Europe by the UNGEGN:

- Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Uzbekistan.
- East Central and South East Europe Division: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine.
- Romano-Hellenic Division: Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Holy See, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Romania, Moldova and Turkey.
- Baltic Division: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

Table 1: Divisions of Europe

	Divisions	Basis of standardization
UN Statistics Divison	Western Europe Central Europe East-Central East South-East	Geographical
UNGEGN	Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia East-Central and South-East Europe Romano-Hellenic Baltic	Cultural, linguistic, geographical
CIA	Western Europe Central Europe Eastern Europe South-Eastern Europe	Geographical, geopolitical

Source: Author's compilation based on UN, CIA

The UNGEGN tries to fulfill of inbuilding both geographical and cultural aspects when subdivides Europe. It has to be mentioned that it does not make any distinguish between East-Central and South-East Europe. The specialised organisations of UN (FAO, ILO etc.) and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) use other classification for standardisation of European countries. Some authors underline the legacy of Soviet era and its influence on the countries consisting Eastern Europe: ‘... refers to a strip of thirteen countries (at the time of writing) that runs north and south in an uneven band several hundred miles wide, from the Baltic Sea to the Aegan...’ (Stokes 1999). According to Johnson (1996)^[6] there seems to be a historical constant and distinguishes Central Europe from the west and east side of Europe in that way: ‘Central European states are behind the West but still ahead of the East and of the Southeast’.

Consequently, the prevailing political climate has in all case a great influence on a country’s cultural values pressed on the society cannot be easily restored and only in the long run. So the interpretation of Eastern Europe is highly context-dependent and volatile, too. On the ambiguous basis of geographical determination the question is how to tackle the region as a cultural entity: to standardize or to separate? Maybe Bergland *et al.* (2004)^[1] are right which according to the term of Eastern Europe is ambiguous and in many ways outdated.

Historical and Religious Aspect

The earliest differentiations between east and west in Europe go back to the history of the Roman Republic. As the Roman domain expanded, a cultural and linguistic division appeared between the mainly Greek-speaking eastern provinces which had formed the highly urbanized Hellenistic civilization. In contrast the western territories largely adopted the Latin language. This cultural and linguistic division was eventually reinforced by the later political east-west division of the Roman Empire. The division between these two spheres was enhanced during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages by a number of events. The Western Roman Empire collapsed starting the Early Middle Ages. By contrast, the Eastern Roman Empire, mostly known as the Byzantine Empire, managed to survive and even to thrive for another 1,000 years. The rise of the Frankish Empire in the west, and in particular the Great Schism that formally divided Eastern and Western Christianity, enhanced the cultural and religious distinctiveness between Eastern and Western Europe. Much of the Eastern-Europe was invaded and occupied by the Mongols. The conquest of the Byzantine Empire, center of the Eastern Orthodox Church, by the Muslim Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, and the gradual fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire (which had replaced the Frankish empire) led to a change of the importance of Roman Catholic/ Protestant vs. Eastern Orthodox concept in Europe, although even modern authors sometimes state that Eastern Europe is, strictly speaking, that part of Europe where the Greek and/or Cyrillic alphabet is used (Greece, Cyprus, Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia).

Historically Eastern-European countries share more than just their position between the powerful countries of the Russians and the Germans. They have also had a type of nationalism that is usually different from West-European

nationalism, being based more on (Ramet 1998):

- Shared ethnicity than political loyalty,
- A much slower process of economic modernization and industrialization (due in part to their being land-locked and to their usual role as raw material providers to Western Europe),
- A lower population density,
- A complex mixture of religious groups which included large numbers of Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslims,
- Different patterns of landholding and inheritance,
- A smaller historical role for cities with their rising commercial classes, professionals, and intellectuals,
- Multinational empires imposed by outside powers that lasted for hundreds of years; and a historically close relationship between church and state.

Table 2: Standardization of Eastern-European countries regarding language family and religion

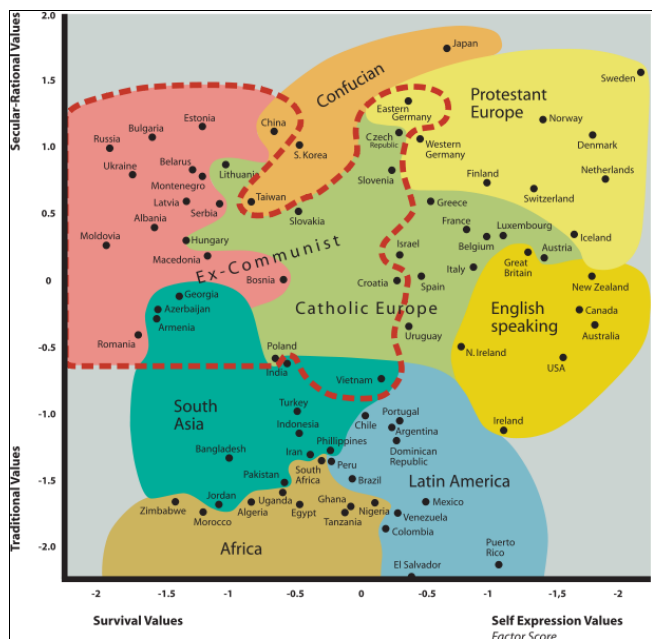
Language family	Country	Dominant religion
West Slavic	Czech Republic	Roman Catholic
	Slovakia	
	Poland	
East Slavic	Belarus	Orthodox
	Ukraine	
	Russia	
South Slavic	Croatia	Roman Catholic
	Slovenia	
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Orthodox, Musulman
	Bulgaria	Orthodox
	Macedonia (FYROM)	
	Montenegro	
Serbia		
Baltic	Estonia	Evangelic
	Latvia	
	Lithuania	Roman Catholic
Hungarian	Hungary	Roman Catholic
Neolatin	Romania	Orthodox
	Moldova	Romanian, Russian Orthodox
Alban	Albania	Musulman
	Kosovo	
Greek	Greece	Orthodox

Source: Author’s compilation

In terms of history, language, religion etc. Eastern-Europe can not be restrained solely on geographical aspect. As a whole it encompasses christian, slavic (even islamic) countries at the same time when the term of ‘east’ is extended from north side to south of Europe: countries geographically belonging to Central-Eastern, North- and South-Eastern Europe are also parts of Eastern Europe (Bideleux *et al.* 1998, Wallace 1990)^[12]. Consequently, Eastern-Europe can be subdivided as regards history, language, religion etc. Martynov (2000)^[7] underlines the role of history in a Europe where borders tend to cease but that does not mean the end of ‘cultural’ borders.

For significant cultural classification of countries the most widespread, accepted and applied model is the Inglehart and Wetzels (2005)^[5] cultural map based on the World Values Survey. By using statistical methods they classified countries into specific cultural regions in an empirical way according to two dimensions (known as ‘traditional vs. secular-rational’ and ‘survival vs. self-expression’) in which a number of variables are reduced. They gave us evidence for the existence of intercultural differences in a two-

dimensional way which explains more than 70 percent of the cross-national variance in a factor analysis of ten indicators.



Source: Inglehart-Weltzel (2005) [5]

Fig 1: Cultural typology of countries

Due to results of factor reduction Inglehart and Weltzel classified countries into eight clusters. Four out of the eight clusters refer to Europe. What is common in each European clusters is the rational and secular characteristic. The difference can be observed in the extent of self-expressions. Contrary to the 'Ex-Communist' and some 'Catholic European' countries belonging to the east part of Europe, they assessed that in the 'traditional' Western-European countries the grade of individuality, the opportunity of self-expression and its importance in these societies are relatively higher in the 'Protestant' and 'English speaking Catholic' European clusters. There are several outliers: the degree of self-expression is the highest in Sweden and in general in Scandinavian countries, 'one nation two countries' dilemma regarding that in Ireland traditional

values have greater importance than in Northern-Ireland (perhaps because of the Britain cultural effect or even assimilation) or Romania, Poland with traditional and survival values or the Czech Republic contrary to that. We can assess that the self-expression values generally are low in the so called 'Ex-communist' cluster. It has to be mentioned that their survey is based on questionnaire, therefore the subjectivity cannot be excluded on the one hand because of the number of respondents participating in the survey, the given questions and answers affecting them and on the other hand because of the role of changing values in a society by time.

Empirical Results of European Values Study

The European Values Study (EVS 2020) [3] covers all countries of Europe, from Iceland to Azerbaijan and from Portugal to Norway, with a minimum population of 100,000. In total, the fieldwork is administered in 47 countries/regions. Up to now the EVS had five waves (in 1981, 1990, 1999, 2008), the last in 2017. Questions with respect to family, work, religious, political and societal values are highly comparable with those in earlier waves. In each country, a random sample was drawn and 1,500 persons were interviewed, personally. In 2017 more than 60,000 Europeans participated in the EVS from 37 countries. The EVS is a large-scale, cross-national and longitudinal survey of moral, religious, political and social values. The survey was designed to investigate the nature and inter-relationship of value systems, their degree of homogeneity, and the extent to which they are subject to change across time. This longitudinal scope of the study offers opportunities to explore trends in time. A serious improvement is the rich set of socio-demographic background variables which was added to the questionnaire, facilitating far reaching analyses of the determinants of values. The data cover a whole generation: almost 30 years and about 250 questions were answered.

Based on the classification method of Globe I examined the participating countries through several aspects, subjectively, reflecting the attitudes of respondents by using data of 2017. In all case the source is the Values Surveys Databank.

Table 3: Individualism

BASE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Autonomy Index				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Determination, perseverance/Independence	17573	27.2 %	27.2 %	28.1 %	28.1 %
1	11197	17.3 %	44.5 %	17.9 %	46.1 %
0	2934	4.5 %	49.0 %	4.7 %	50.8 %
1	20911	32.3 %	81.3 %	33.5 %	84.2 %
Obedience/Religious faith	9848	15.2 %	96.5 %	15.8 %	100.0 %
Missing; Unknown	2239	3.5 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author's calculation based on EVS

Applying Inglehart model the degree of individuals' attitude can be examined. According to that one third of respondents are closer to religious and obedient rather than persevering

characters. The most obedient is Greece, the less is Poland, the most persevering is Romania, the less is Lithuania.

Table 4: Attitude of individuals on income equality

BASSE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Income equality				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Incomes should be made more equal	6017	9.3 %	9.3 %	10.7 %	10.7 %
2	2820	4.4 %	13.7 %	5.0 %	15.7 %
3	4107	6.3 %	20.0 %	7.3 %	23.0 %
4	3551	5.5 %	25.5 %	6.3 %	29.3 %
5	6979	10.8 %	36.3 %	12.4 %	41.7 %
6	4319	6.7 %	43.0 %	7.7 %	49.4 %
7	5948	9.2 %	52.1 %	10.6 %	59.9 %
8	8230	12.7 %	64.9 %	14.6 %	74.5 %
9	4521	7.0 %	71.9 %	8.0 %	82.6 %
We need larger income differences as incentives	9817	15.2 %	87.0 %	17.4 %	100.0 %
Don't know	2069	3.2 %	90.2 %		
No answer	346	0.5 %	90.8 %		
Not asked in survey	5950	9.2 %	100.0 %		
Missing; Unknown	29	*	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author's calculation based on EVS

About the same percent (36) of respondents reckon that income should be equal in a society and not. Even there are about 15 percent who say income inequalities are good as

incentives. Its score is the highest in post-societ region, and the lowest in Slovenia and Albania. In Hungary people believe in income equality.

Table 5: Future changes

BASSE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Future changes: Less emphasis on money and material possessions				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Good thing	29095	45.0 %	45.0 %	50.8 %	50.8 %
Don't mind	10833	16.7 %	61.7 %	18.9 %	69.7 %
Bad thing	17358	26.8 %	88.5 %	30.3 %	100.0 %
Don't know	3756	5.8 %	94.3 %		
No answer	435	0.7 %	95.0 %		
Not asked in survey	3014	4.7 %	99.7 %		
Missing; Unknown	211	0.3 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author's calculation based on EVS

Near half of the respondents say that less emphasis are needed to material possessions. However those number are relatively lower who want income inequality which refers to the degree of individualism, in total 62 percent think it is

good or at least do not mind. The highest scores are in Greece, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the lowest are in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Table 6: Happiness

BASSE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Feeling of happiness				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Very happy	5679	8.8 %	8.8 %	9.1 %	9.1 %
Quite happy	35018	54.1 %	62.9 %	55.9 %	65.0 %
Not very happy	18647	28.8 %	91.7 %	29.8 %	94.8 %
Not at all happy	3244	5.0 %	96.7 %	5.2 %	100.0 %
Don't know	1523	2.4 %	99.1 %		
No answer	556	0.9 %	99.9 %		
Missing; Unknown	34	0.1 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author's calculation based on EVS

Parallel to less emphasis on income status, material possessions 63 percent of people are happy, which let us conclude that Eastern-Europe is basically an optimistic region. Only a third does not feel happiness. Albania is

outstanding with its 80 percent, but the Eastern-Central-European countries are happier regarding the first category. The least happiest are from the post-soviet area.

Table 7: Health

BASSE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	State of health (subjective)				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Very good	5578	8.6 %	8.6 %	11.3 %	11.3 %
Good	17451	27.0 %	35.6 %	35.2 %	46.5 %
Fair	19577	30.3 %	65.9 %	39.5 %	86.0 %
Poor	5772	8.9 %	74.8 %	11.6 %	97.6 %
Very poor	1191	1.8 %	76.6 %	2.4 %	100.0 %
Don't know	154	0.2 %	76.9 %		
No answer	103	0.2 %	77.0 %		
Not asked in survey	14859	23.0 %	100.0 %		
Missing; Unknown	16	*	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author's calculation based on EVS

The same is the situation as far as health of individuals is concerned. Those are happy, whose health status are good or fair, too and vica versa. Have to be mentioned that 23

percent of respondents were out of survey thereby reducing the authenticity of the survey.

Table 8: Country’s aim I

BASE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Aims of country: first choice				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
A high level of economic growth	32792	50.7 %	50.7 %	71.3 %	71.3 %
Strong defence forces	4454	6.9 %	57.6 %	9.7 %	81.0 %
People have more say about how things are done	6455	10.0 %	67.5 %	14.0 %	95.0 %
Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful	2287	3.5 %	71.1 %	5.0 %	100.0 %
Don't know	1074	1.7 %	72.7 %		
No answer	155	0.2 %	73.0 %		
Not asked in survey	17426	26.9 %	99.9 %		
Missing; Unknown	59	0.1 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author’s calculation based on EVS

It is always an interesting topic what the aim of a country should be. Half of the respondents say that economic growth is the most important, in Albania it is nearly 90 percent and in general the less developed countries. Only ten percent think that publicity should be involved in decision-making

process, with the exceptions of Slovenia, Poland and Hungary with a relatively high score. Thinking and acting local does not play an important role. Defence and armies are important in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Table 9: Country’s aim II

BASE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Most important: first choice				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
A stable economy	31428	48.6 %	48.6 %	66.0 %	66.0 %
Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society	5762	8.9 %	57.5 %	12.1 %	78.1 %
Ideas count more than money	2271	3.5 %	61.0 %	4.8 %	82.9 %
The fight against crime	8133	12.6 %	73.6 %	17.1 %	100.0 %
Don't know	647	1.0 %	74.6 %		
No answer	102	0.2 %	74.7 %		
Not asked in survey	16323	25.2 %	99.9 %		
Missing; Unknown	36	0.1 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author’s calculation based on EVS

Parallel to the need of economic growth respondents think that stable economy is priority. Public safety is a second priority with a low score and the building of a more human, tolerant society, latter scores are relatively high in the Baltic

states and Georgia. Ideas instead of money – reflecting creativity, innovativity of a society – is less important at least in present days. In all country the economic stability is the most important.

Table 10: Long term orientation-attitudes to society

BASE=64702 Weight [with split ups]	Basic kinds of attitudes concerning society				
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative valid percent
Society must be radically changed	6229	9.6 %	9.6 %	12.9 %	12.9 %
Society must be gradually improved by reforms	35243	54.5 %	64.1 %	73.2 %	86.1 %
Society must be valiantly defended	6685	10.3 %	74.4 %	13.9 %	100.0 %
Don't know	4628	7.2 %	81.6 %		
No answer	541	0.8 %	82.4 %		
Not asked in survey	11299	17.5 %	99.9 %		
Missing; Unknown	77	0.1 %	100.0 %		
Total	64702	100%		64702	100%

Source: Author’s calculation based on EVS

Concerning the long term orientation of the society most of the respondents believe that society must be gradually improved by reforms rather than radically or valiantly. Hungary belongs to the middle group. From this aspect Latvia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova can be considered as radical countries and the typical defenders are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and North Macedonia.

Conclusions

In this article my intention was to present the main

intercultural models through the example of Eastern-European countries. From the beginning I had to encounter several obstacles, e.g. the term of Eastern-Europe, the geographical, geopolitical as well cultural determination. Eastern-Europe is mainly used to express certain historically informed sociocultural differences within the continent. As it turned out cultural behaviors, attitudes and values are changing by time, so once a theory based on classification, standardization accepted or adapted have to be tackled with conditions and restraints. Another important role is on the appropriate selection and involvement of variables in order

to reduce factors and classify the units. Consequently, Eastern-Europe carries heavy layers of ambivalence: although the societies embraced by it all are regarded as European, they do not come up fully to the standard of what Europeanness implies. In this ambivalent classification, the implicit norm is the West, and Eastern Europe remains as much Eastern, as it maintains its other than Western character.

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