

Where Are Europe's Borders?

*Conversations on Europe/Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies Lecture
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October 8, 2009*

- European politicians, diplomats, and experts – as well as ordinary people – often contemplate the question of Europe's borders. This could appear to be a strange phenomenon for someone who lives outside of Europe, especially in the United States, but it is still a valid point for Europeans. The question resounds not only due to nationalist or even xenophobic sentiments, which are still popular among many Europeans, but mostly in relation to fundamental aspects regarding the future of the European Union and European integration.

GEOGRAPHY

- The word "Europe" is first of all a geographical term, but it has also strong and clear cultural, civilizational, and historical dimensions. Europe cannot be however clearly defined only as a continent or political entity. So where does Europe begin and where does it end? How far do the European borders reach? Where does "*Europeanness*" begin and where does it end? There are no easy answers to these questions. Furthermore, any answers given would reflect one's political, ideological, or cultural heritage and profile.
- The precise location of Europe in the geographic, territorial dimension is in practice a classic effort of labor lost. There is an old saying, perfectly underlining the complexity of our agenda:
"Where are Europe's borders? The answer depends: For the Frenchmen, Asia lays just to the East, beyond the Rhine River. For the Germans, Europe ends at the Oder and Neisse rivers. For the Poles, everything on the other side of the border with Belarus and Ukraine belongs to Asia. The Belarusians and Ukrainians argue that Asia lies beyond their borders with Russia. The Russians in turn are sure that Asia lays far more to the East, in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan strongly protests and points to China. And only the Chinese do not protest the claims that they live in Asia."
- The above adage in some simplistic way shows us how complex the question of Europe's geographic range is. The precise and commonly accepted definition could be problematic, however.
- So, where does Europe "end"? The answer to that question should be both of a geographic and civilizational nature. There are many theories here. One – preferred by my great compatriot, the late Pope John Paul II – has defined Europe in a broad way, including all Orthodox countries. In strict geographic terms this creates some problems. For example, Siberia is not a part of a traditionally interpreted geographical Europe, but people living there are

Orthodox and therefore Europeans by their thinking and way of living, as well as by belonging to a nation and state anchored to the European soil.

- Others, like Samuel P. Huntington, have stated that the eastern and south-eastern borders of Europe are determined by old Roman *limes* (borders of the ancient Roman Empire), which define the boundaries of Western culture and civilization, forever connected to Ancient Roman values and history. According to Huntington, the eastern borders of Europe lay therefore somewhere in western Belarus and Ukraine. This also however could be problematic. How could we exclude all of Scandinavia, not to mention the Baltic States or even Ireland, from Europe and refuse their inhabitants a European identity?
- Moreover, the geographic description of Europe and its borders could be also elusive. For example, one should remember that Cyprus – arguably a part of Asia – belongs to today’s Europe by the fact of the island’s membership in the European Union. It shows us how difficult and complex the issue of Europe’s borders is.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

- There are similar troubles with using cultural, civilizational, and even historical factors to define Europe’s borders. Historically, Europe grew for centuries from Christian roots and after many upheavals, Christianity and the Church, together with Christian rulers, created modern Europe.
- Does this mean that today we should not even discuss the possibility of integrating Muslim countries – like Albania, Kosovo, and ultimately Turkey – into “our” common European institutions? Probably not. Today’s Europe – although deeply rooted in Christianity’s legacy – should also focus on countries and nations with different cultural and/or civilizational roots that also have a long history closely related to Europe’s, though this may be a difficult process.
- Now then, while delimiting Europe’s borders, one should take into consideration not only the demands of “true Europeans,” but also the claims of nations and states willing to become European entities.
- So, finding the borders of European civilization is as difficult as pointing at the geographic frontiers of our continent. What is interesting in that context is that the cultural archetypes of Europe have always been defined in a negative mode, by a confrontation of opposites. Historically, we therefore have an ancient **Hellenic Europe** vs. Asiatic East; an ancient **Roman Europe** vs. barbarian North (with Germans, Sarmatians, Saxons, and many others); a medieval **Christian Europe** vs. Byzantium, Islam, or paganism; and finally, nowadays we tend to define a **modern Europe of democracy and human rights** vs. other political entities with different values.
- However, such Manichean attitudes have not favored – and probably still do not favor – an open and tolerant Europe. They also do not favor – on the strategic level – a fast and painless European integration processes. Europeans’ dualistic approach to their civilization and history create an integration model focused

more “against” others than “for” themselves. Somehow it could explain our current problems with deepening and strengthening European Union integration.

POLITICS

- Today, the most important issue of Europe’s border question is its political dimension (as it always is, to tell the truth). This issue is one of several that are closely related to the future of the European Union and its further enlargement.
- Europe’s attitude toward its borders is crucial for further integration (not to mention enlargement). The future shape of Europe will be determined by the path we choose today: federalism, co-federalism, or maybe something in between? The struggle is still far from over – one could see it very clearly in the problem of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty. The main axis of that dispute is the choice between identity and openness; this is a false alternative, however. I am strongly convinced that Europe could be much more open, preserving its identity at the same moment.
- Eventual membership of Turkey (and to a lesser extent also Ukraine) is the main challenge for the European Union in the context of its enlargement and future borders (read: geopolitical shape and position). Aside from the tremendous economic, social, and political problems and challenges posed by incorporating Turkey into European institutions, it also would demand a fundamental and ground-breaking change in the hitherto European way of thinking about Europe, its range, and ultimately...its borders. I am afraid that many Europeans are not ready to accept such changes, at least not yet. Although modern Europe is largely secular, it still “remembers” – in a common, popular feeling – its Christian roots. The membership of Muslim Turkey could therefore raise many problems. Nevertheless, I am positive that we the Europeans have no choice other than to open our common institutions to Turkey and expand our continent’s borders.
- The case of Ukraine is a different issue, and a much less controversial one I think. Ukraine is a country located close to the geographic and geopolitical heart of Europe and strongly connected – by its long-lasting links with Poland – to European history, culture, and civilization. European Union enlargement to the east in general and the Ukraine’s potential membership in particular are essential factors in determining the future of European integration. Europe – and I mean “Europe” as a political, or even geopolitical entity, not strictly geographic – will not be fully integrated and unified without Ukraine.
- Ultimately there is the question of Russia – is it a part of Europe or not? I am afraid that even the Russians themselves do not know the answer. The Russians’ recent attitude toward Eurasianism suggests that they probably do not want to answer such a question.
- Generally, Europe should see the process of expansion and enlargement as a historic necessity and a moral obligation. Political, economic, and social stability, as well as security and peace – at present felt across more than half of the Old Continent – must be shared with the rest of Europe. This would expand

the zone of stability and predictability in and around Europe, thereby improving international security.

- It is worth mentioning here in the context of the political dimension of European borders that continuing integration within the frameworks of the European Union has allowed us to achieve a breakthrough moment of diminishing the status and existence of borders between most EU members. This so-called “zone of Schengen” has changed the way of thinking of millions of ordinary Europeans, who for generations have been accustomed to borders, passports, border controls and so on. Now, a citizen of Lithuania or Latvia can drive his car across almost all of Europe without any formal approval, ending up in France or Spain. For Europeans, and particularly East Europeans, this is a real revolution.

CONCLUSION

- Europe is probably more of a cultural and historical term. In all of the meanings discussed here, Europe embodies different borders and different territorial shapes. Geographic borders of the Old Continent do not match cultural or political ones. And vice versa. The political dimensions of the issue are most important, much more so than geographic or even civilizational ones.
- The borders of Europe – for centuries shaped by brutal force, wars, and conquests – are now determined by political processes, with European integration and EU enlargement being the most important. This must be seen as a great achievement and a good prognosis for the future. And let it always be true in the future!