The term "postcolonialism" is used today as a collective term for various kinds of theoretical approach that take a critical attitude towards the problems of knowledge, politics and cultural collision. Postcolonial studies, which have become popular as a consequence of literary research, are not confined today merely to literary studies. In fact they were never confined exclusively to this field. Even if they did regard literature as their main subject, they went beyond it and touched upon the fields of history, politics, sociology and ideology. Today, postcolonial studies are interested in many areas of the humanities that are more or less independent of each other, such as history, political studies, sociology, philosophy or archaeology (literary studies continue to play, however, a very important role in this research). The broadening of postcolonial research to embrace the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been enabled by the fact that postcolonial theories still do not have a permanent and accurately defined field of research. Also, they have not yet worked out any consistent and coherent methodology. Admittedly, they are being constantly reworked and improved but they have been created ad hoc at a critical moment in the development of other disciplines, such as the history of literature, history, sociology, political studies or ethnology. Just as with gender theories, which read known canons anew and carry out, for example, new historical analyses while bearing in mind hetero-normative structures, so too postcolonial theorists carry out new readings of known canons from the perspective of the position of authority (the oppressed : the imperialist). We can look in a similar way at the modern history of Central and Eastern Europe, at the recently fallen Soviet Empire, and research the imperialist discourses of the "West" on the subject of the European "East" as well as re-evaluate the work of Slavonic and Soviet Studies that was deformed by the atmosphere of the Cold War.

The idea of applying a postcolonial perspective to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe may seem controversial, since postcolonial theory arose out of literary and cultural studies that were analysing the connections and contrasts between Western empires and the so-called "third world" and researching the effects of the colonial presence of these countries on their territories. Attempts to apply this kind of theory to other geographical areas have encountered the opposition of traditionalists. Opponents of the application of postcolonial theories to the area of Central Europe emphasise that we are not dealing here with classical colonies, which are distant and lie across the seas, in relation to the imperial centre. We can, however, accept, generally speaking, the essence of research into imperialism and colonialism, as an attempt to understand how the imperial centre of authority aims in theory and practice to subordinate to itself or dominate the territories (or provinces) desired by itself. Neither administrative or natural (e.g. maritime) borders nor official declarations determined in the first place the spread of imperialism and the effects of its internal logic can be seen without difficulty in the lands of Central and Eastern Europe. One of the most outstanding researchers into postcolonialism writes that in the case of Tsarist Russia, despite the fact that its tactics depended on a gradual acquisition of neighbouring territories and not on the conquest of overseas territories, we are still dealing with evident imperialism:

*The primacy of the British and French empires by no means obscures the quite remarkable modern expansion of Spain, Portugal, Holland, Germany, Italy and, in a different way, Russia and the United States. Russia, however, acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacency. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving further and further east and south [Said 1994, 9].*
Why should this way of thinking be appropriate when talking about Tsarist Russia and not appropriate when applied to the imperialist procedures of the Soviet Union (or Russia today), whose expansion was/is governed by similar mechanisms? Also, another important question arises when discussing this: why are nations and minorities fighting for sovereignty within the framework of today's Russian Federation completely ignored by the postcolonialists?

The current situation in Central and Eastern Europe obviously differs from that of the Cold War period economically, politically and culturally, while remaining at the same time under the influence of events from this earlier period. The fact of the announcement of democracy did not eliminate overnight the effects of the long process of Sovietization in all its aspects from the administrative and political, through the social and economic to those of culture and identity. Furthermore, Russia, as can be seen from recent events, is evolving in the direction of a "hard" democracy with imperialist ambitions and is not averse to using old Soviet economic structures for the purposes of political blackmail (e.g. its recent cutting-off of gas supplies to Ukraine). The new racisms currently plaguing Central and Eastern Europe should also be understood as one of the effects of de-Sovietization, that is both as a problem for the nascent postcolonial, multi-cultural society in the epoch of globalization and/or as a problem arising out of the surviving discourses of the USSR period and other relics of the Soviet colonial epoch.

Race is another important argument used in order to exclude the lands of Central and Eastern Europe from the sphere of interest of postcolonial theories. Opponents of the application of postcolonial theories to the area of Central Europe assume that this category should be paramount and above all others, e.g. national or ethnic affiliation or individual identity. But is racial chauvinism not comparable to national chauvinism? Obviously there exists a fundamental difference, since group or individual identity can be shaped and variously constructed, whereas racial affiliation cannot be changed... Racism and national chauvinism, however, discriminate against the individual in a similar way, collectivising him or her and writing him or her into some greater community, which is then regarded, for various reasons, as less valuable or indeed completely worthless. The racial arguments and criteria, moreover, have often been used by politics, culture and ideology as well as in practice (for example by the Soviets or the Nazis) both against white and "non-white" groups and nations inhabiting the lands of Central and Eastern Europe. As a historian writes in his latest work devoted to the history of the Jews, in this area Jews were:

*cremated in crematoria in the name of the superiority of the Aryan race and burned in stables in order to cleanse the nations, as a kind of utilization of the chaff separated from the wheat in the inevitable process of improving the world* [Jasiewicz 2004, 29].

The idea of looking through the prism of colonial problems at the situation in the Eastern Bloc appeared as early as in the 1960s in the émigré monthly "Kultura" ["Culture"]. It was then that the culmination of postwar decolonising processes took place and a record number of colonies regained independence. A leading columnist of the periodical supported the efforts of the anti-colonial movements in Afro-Asian countries, arguing at the same time that the situation of these movements and nations that had been was similar to that of the nations incorporated into the USSR and of the countries that had been incorporated into the Eastern Bloc, since:

*Both racial apartheid and ideological apartheid are contrary to the most elementarily understood principles of democracy. Democracy after all assumes the building of a society that is multi-racial and multi-viewpoint* [Londyńczyk 1960, 62].
"Kultura" regarded the racial discrimination and colonialism of the "West" as deserving of the same condemnation as the national discrimination and "ideological" and economic pressure perpetrated by the Soviet empire. It seems that the starting-point for postcolonial theories may be, as Londyńczyk (Juliusz Mieroszewski) suggested, liberal-democratic conceptions. These do not tolerate any kind of discrimination; they advocate the freedom of the individual, of all social and national groups and define the rights and duties of individuals, social groups, and national, ethnic and sexual minorities. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the undermining of the binary system of world politics, these principles would seem to be increasingly more crucial.

Here mention should be made of another very important aspect of the reluctant attitude of postcolonial theorists towards the problems of Central and Eastern Europe. Postcolonial theories and studies emerged in connection with leftist discourses and mainly within Marxist circles at the time of the Cold War. At the same time, the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries supported, with reference to Marxism, the independence movements within the colonised "third world" nations (because this weakened the power and influence of their Western rivals). By inscribing on their banners such slogans as "internationalism" and freedom "for those oppressed by capitalism", the Kremlin became an ally of anti-colonial movements (and of the leftist groups supporting them in the West). It was fear of the collapse of this "anti-imperialist" façade that so angered the First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, that he banged his shoe on a conference table at the United Nations in 1960. This was not a question of course of his lack of good manners, as the Western media suggested. Khrushchev’s fury was caused by the proposal of a delegate from the Philippines who wanted the Soviet Union's demand to grant self-determination to colonial countries to be extended to embrace ... the countries of Central and Eastern Europe!

Expecting a similar critical reaction from Moscow and seemingly close to it in ideological terms, postcolonial theories broached only reluctantly questions of totalitarianism, colonial oppression and imperial domination within the Communist world. They were not interested either in a critical assessment of the Kremlin's policies towards the nations and minorities of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc or in criticism of the - fundamentally ambiguous - Communist ideology and propaganda. Despite the fact that at the same time as they were taking shape, it had been noticed that:

The Communist theory of colonialism and imperialism has two aspects - one offensive and the other defensive. On the one hand, it is a weapon the Communists use against their political and ideological opponents; on the other, it serves as a smoke-screen to hide Soviet Russia's own imperialism from critical and inquisitive characters [Kolarz 1964, 14].

Soviet propaganda, while praising internationalism and demanding freedom for the oppressed movements and nations of the "third world", was quite simply diverting attention from its own actions: Russification, the total subordination to itself and the economic exploitation of the non-Russian republics and the political and economic domination of the countries and nations incorporated into the Eastern Bloc.

Let us return to the question: is there any possibility of, and is it worth, applying a postcolonial perspective to the areas of Central and Eastern Europe? The question as to which social and national groups and which geographical areas could be recognised as "postcolonial" has been asked for some time and it still absorbs some theorists today. This type of deliberation, or even the very formulation of the problem, may be regarded as the heritage of postcolonial literary studies [Eriksson 2005, 17], which used the term to describe literature written in the territories of
the former colonies (such as those of the Commonwealth). If this matter is liberated, however, from a purely geographical and literary-studies point of view (and in fact the field of literary studies has already abandoned this point of view [1] and freed from the political strategies and ideological context of the Cold War, then it becomes less significant and the attention of postcolonial studies can then be concentrated on the mechanisms of imperialism per se, the various kinds of hegemony and the methods used for attaining domination, on colonial discourses, on strategies of subordination, on the mechanisms needed for the emergence of individual, group and national identities and their mutual relations, on the culture, language and literature of the coloniser and the colonised... on everything, quite simply, that is the essence of the relationship between empire: and the conquered, between the centre: and the provinces, and on that which evokes and strengthens the political and cultural situations of hegemony and serfdom, domination and subordination.

Postcolonial studies most often emerge from the situations of colonised countries and peoples and they accept the perspective of their cultures, although they also sometimes tackle the problems of the colonising countries, analysing their cultural foundations and their imperialist discourses. This two-sided postcolonial perspective is particularly interesting in the case of the cultures and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which, like Poland for instance, once played a role in history as coloniser and then found itself the victim of colonization. Many examples can be taken from the history of Ukraine. On its territory, for example, the Russians russified the Ukrainians, the Poles polonised them but the Russians also russified the Poles, who in turn were repolonised by the Poles. [Beauvois, 1999] In these cultures there can still be felt (even today) both the experience of being a perpetrator of hegemony as well as imperial discourses and the experience of being a colonised "victim".

The fundamental dilemma facing postcolonial theories and one of the most important notions for them is cultural identity. In the first works published in the field, considered to be the canon of postcolonialism, there dominated a recurring question: how are our cultural identities formed? Frantz Fanon, in his book "Black Skins, White Masks", conducted a phenomenological analysis of the encounter between the black man, colonialism and Europe [Fanon 1967]. The most important question for Fanon was: do any possibilities exist for creating alternative identities and strategies that would not have to be subordinated to Western modernity? The same question could be asked regarding any kind of "imposition" of another identity, regardless of whether the imposer is colonial France, Tsarist Russia or the Soviet, German or American empire and regardless of whether the coloniser makes use of "War and Peace", Hegel [Surynt 2006, 38-49], Lenin or Hollywood. Such an approach renders cultural identity crucial - and not only in postcolonial research. It becomes central to every imperialist project and equally important and decisive for both the coloniser and the colonised. It is accepted here as the fundamental premise of colonization that the culture and ideology of the imperialist (citing Michel Foucault, it could be said that this generally is a question of episteme [2] of a given culture) stand above all other cultures. The coloniser tries to instil in the territory of the colonised culture his conviction of the superiority of his own identity and/or of his own ideology. The colonised, when confronted with this point of view, experience a conflict between the imported values and the values of the culture or ideology which they regard as their own.

The postcolonial perspective on Central and Eastern Europe, now liberated from the above-mentioned limitations and focused on the notion of cultural identity, should not concentrate exclusively on the issue of the Soviet period versus the post-Soviet one. Such a view is insufficient for an understanding of many cultural, social and political processes taking
place both before and after de-Sovietization. It would be desirable to take a postcolonial look at the whole region, its literature and culture, and to describe the imperial experiences of all the pretenders to hegemony, not only Tsarist Russia, as Said suggested. He also observed, by the way that Ukraine and Poland, just like the other countries and nations of Central and Eastern Europe, had found themselves in the spheres of influence of not one but two imperialisms: Russian and German. This partly explains, incidentally, why the problems connected with this region of Europe were either ignored or falsified in the cultures and academic scholarship of both these empires. This is not a small, local problem. The institutions of these empires (from the Academy of Sciences to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) determined after all the range and content of the knowledge to be acquired by other nations about the cultures and nations of Central and Eastern Europe. The image that was created and disseminated arose more from the idea of subordinating these territories to the imperial power rather than from any thought of disinterested objective knowledge. It was constructed with the aim of conquering, subjugating and absorbing them while at the same time confirming their own German or Russian identity (and retaining a clear conscience). The annexations, pillaging and destruction of national identity were transformed in this way into works of civilization (Germany) or acts of historic justice (Soviet Communism).

They were helped in this, as in the classical example of Said's Orientalism, by art and by both "Western" and Russian and then Soviet scientific research. One of the main reasons for the "West's" ignorance and prejudices towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was (and still is) the uncritical acceptance of extremely tendentious, pro-imperialist concepts devised by Russian and German historians. This is the view of the historian and Slavist, Mark von Hagen [von Hagen 1995], while one of the Ukrainian pioneers of postcolonial research, when discussing von Hagen, writes:

With all their differences, and even hostility, the two official historiographies had one common feature: they both considered Eastern Europe to be a sphere of interest and the legally justified dominion of Germany and Russia, respectively, and both implicitly or explicitly assumed the "sub-standard" nature of the stateless Eastern European nations (or those whose statehood had been liquidated by the partitions of Poland or the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact - J. K.), which were as if incapable of independent statehood and should, therefore, submit voluntarily to Russian or German 'kulturträger' protection. These two hegemonistic conceptions were received in the West as 'objective' and 'scientific', while any attempt at expressing their own ideas by Ukrainians, Croats or Slovaks was a priori rejected as 'nationalist (or 'relatively of minor importance' in the words of Arnold Toynbee) [Riabchuk 2000, 14].

Literature meanwhile portrayed the problems of Central and Eastern Europe in a similar way to politics and science. A researcher who has applied postcolonial theories to Russian literature [Thompson 2000, 85-108] demonstrates, for example, that the geographical space between Russia and the German-speaking countries described by Leo Tolstoy in the worldwide bestseller "War and Peace" was occupied by no other nations with their own separate identities:

Seen from this perspective, War and Peace appears to be a colonialist novel in many respects, one that expresses Russia's self-confidence as a colonial empire while at the same time suppressing the narratives of the defeated peoples. It is also, to borrow an expression from Lyotard, a grand narrative of the legitimization of Russia's imperial status. It presents Russia as a country possessed of a well-developed national consciousness, and it does so not by invoking...
that consciousness directly and therefore weakening its appeal to foreigners (as Dostoevsky
does in The Idiot when Prince Myshkin recites the advantages of being Russian), but by
contributing to the consolidating power of national mythology [Thompson 2000, 106].

"War and Peace", a work known to several generations of readers around the world, is then
just as much an imperialist novel as the Western "orientalist" novels analysed by Said.

The colonial discourse forming around the German notion of "Eastern Europe" during the
nineteenth century [Surynt 2006, 14]. This does not mean to say that the German, or generally
"Western", colonial discourses that chose this region of Europe as their object were a matter of
the remote past or were peculiar to the nineteenth century. As the latest research shows, in the
contemporary discourses of the countries of Western Europe and the USA (and therefore in the
"West" according to the geographical shape that the Second World War and the Yalta
Agreement gave to it) the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are still:

marginalised and patronised in a similar way, although maybe not to the same degree, as India
and the 'third world'. In the 'West' - both in the street and in the university - Eastern Europeans
are commonly treated as somewhat old-fashioned, backward and not modern, as 'not yet'
people, to borrow an accurate term from John Stuart Mill, After the fall of Communism, Eastern
European countries should ‘catch up’ with the West, both economically and politically, and
socially and culturally; ‘they' should join the European Union and NATO and become normal
people - in other words, like 'us'. Much is said about economic development or about how far
the democratic processes in these countries have progressed. Into this way of thinking is written
the automatic premise that the 'West' represents the apogee of the longed-for development,
which is at the same time the longed-for aim of all other countries and nations. The (Western -
J. K.) European (late/post) modernity and (late) capitalism are presented as global values. What
is also characteristic is that in the discussions about 'Eastern Europe' historical time is used as
a measure of cultural distance. 'They are fifty (or twenty or ten) years behind us (...).'

How did these countries and these people find themselves in the 'imagined waiting-room of
history'? It is after all clear that 'Europeanism' does not embrace (has ceased embracing?) the
Eastern borderlands of the continent, namely those which for a large part of the twentieth
century found themselves under Communist rule as satellites of the Soviet Union and Moscow
[Lindelöf 2001, 15].

In Western European discourses, certain phenomena, usually the negative ones, occur in
countries which are not Western European or in areas where "Western" culture has not fully
taken root, such as the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Enlightenment, modernity,
enterprise, democracy, human rights, individualism etc. are terms reserved for the Western
European cultural and geographical zone. Slavery and racism are for Africa or, at times, the
United States of America. Mass murders, anti-Semitism [Gerner 2000, 72-76], the persecution
of women and national minorities are concepts reserved for the countries of Central and
Eastern Europe regardless of who was or is responsible for them.

Despite the changes in the political and administrative situation (the inclusion of a substantial
part of Central and Eastern Europe in the European Union), the lands between Germany and
Russia still retain a specific position in the Western episteme. This should be no cause for
surprise, however, since it was not until 1996 that the first historical work appeared which took
Europe as its subject and systematically included the cultures and nations of its central and
eastern areas in the history of the European continent [Davies, 1996]. Earlier histories of
Europe:
confined themselves to the circles of western Christian civilization, using such notions as "Western Europe", "our history" etc. and understanding thereby the history of a group of several countries or nations. This was usually a selective combination of the histories of France, Germany, Italy and England, sometimes with the addition of Spain [...] [Jasiewicz 1999, 21].

During an informal conversation at a conference in which I participated last year in Poland, a certain professor from Paris admitted that he was sorry, but had the impression that Warsaw was still situated in "Eastern" Europe. The remark may have been geographically accurate but one so obvious that he could not have meant it only in that sense. Was he talking about the sanitary aspects? Like him, I too had travelled to the conference from the station called Warszawa-Śródmieście [Warsaw-Town Centre], where the smell of urine mingled with the greyness and dirt of the walls. Even if his remark had been provoked by the insanitary condition of the Warsaw station, then his not mentioning the fact implied that "East" on his lips had lost its concrete nature and referred instead to something undefined, but obviously very unpleasant. Undoubtedly this was a category that not only associated Warsaw with vulgar Communism and its residue but also a term that signified the general cultural inferiority of the "East". This was confirmed by the monologue that followed this remark. It teemed with stereotypes. It was not really clear by the end whether it was he who was speaking or whether the discourse was talking through him. His words were evidence more of the image of Central and Eastern Europe in the discourses of Western Europeans (which had been formed some time in the eighteenth century) than of the historical facts or the contemporary realities that could be seen from the hotel window. Incidentally, it was just such an image of Central and Eastern Europe that facilitated the decision to leave these countries and nations in the Eastern Bloc after 1945. Today it influences the statements of those Western European politicians who are demand discipline and obedience from those "Eastern European" countries which have recently been allowed to join the "high society" of the European Union.

Once again the already cited classic of postcolonialism springs to mind. It was Said who showed how the notions of "West" and "East" were constructed within Western discourses as mutual contradictions of one another, (although he obviously did not take into account the lands of Central and Eastern Europe). Despite this, Said's "East" in many important respects is reminiscent of the Central and Eastern European one: epitomised by sensualism, irrationality, traditionalism or conservatism, despotism, primitivism, compliance and femininity. All these characteristics are constructed in the context of the "West", which is characterised as rational, progressive, democratic, modern, dynamic and masculine. I believe that the category of "Orientalism" could also be applied with some success to Western scientific discourses on the subject of Central and Eastern Europe. In Said's understanding, "Orientalism" is a particular way of seeing and representing Asia and Asians by the West and Western researchers, primarily linguists, literary scholars and historians of religion. This way of seeing and representing led to the creation of a hegemonistic discourse in which the Asian was treated as an object which had to be discovered and written about, revealing his secrets, and then he had to be conquered in the name of development and civilization. In accordance with the logic of progress, the West obtains in this discourse the right to conquer and rule the Orient. For Said, it is obvious that the West needs such an image of the Orient, not for the good of its inhabitants but for itself, in order to strengthen its own identity and to create its own positive image in opposition to that of the Orient. Analogously to "Orientalism" and the image of the Orient analysed by Said, a certain relatively unchanged way of seeing and representing Central and Eastern Europe in the West may be
distinguished and described. Those guilty of this in the Western scientific world may be found not only in the politics, press and literature of Western Europe but also in its university departments, in "Slavic Studies" or in Sovietology (which flourished until the collapse of the USSR), where the literatures and cultures of the countries and nations of Central and Eastern Europe still constitute to this day an "addition" to Russian or German culture unnecessarily complicating the historical and actual situation. Just as Orientalism had its Orientalists, so "Central-and-Eastern-Europeanism" had its Slavists and Sovietologists. The influence of this Central and Eastern Orientalism can still be observed today, in everyday life, in popular culture (particularly in film) and in the art of "Western" countries. Then we hear about romantic colonial nostalgia turning into gripping acts of "rescuing" (i.e. civilizing) the "Easterners", in which stereotypes abound of possibly good, but certainly naïve and primitive, people from "Eastern Europe".

At this point it seems appropriate to address the following question: Do the terrains lying geographically in Central and Eastern Europe belong culturally to the West or to the East and where does the border (if it exists) lie? This question, which was mindlessly asked for years (and it still appears in works written nowadays), is quite simply wrongly worded. It does not make the matter any clearer that the very opposition "West" versus "East" is a product of the Middle Ages, disseminated (and broadened to include Central and Eastern Europe) in the Age of Enlightenment and strengthened (in the form of the Eastern Bloc) in the Cold War period. The whole problem, even when arguments based on empirical evidence are used to give it a better image, testifies to the strength of the thinking which needs (for ideological, political or mythological purposes) a binary image of the world. The division into "East" and "West", demonised, constructed on the principle of mutual contradiction and understood as an irreplaceable alternative, does not exist in reality. This can be demonstrated by postcolonial research carried out, admittedly on other lands, cultures and nations, but still applicable to Central and Eastern Europe. Could any of the researchers who have dealt with this problem reply convincingly to the question as to what percentage of "eastness" and what percentage of "westness" are characteristic of the cultures of nations, the behaviours of social groups or the morality of individuals living in any region of Europe? On what does this inalienable "eastness" or this inherent "westness" depend? Culture has never consisted of certain constructs with strictly defined boundaries and with an "essence" that can be unambiguously defined or which has a permanent and unchanging "source" of creative energy. In the place of cultures understood in this way, postcolonial theories introduce other more precise and concrete notions, such as "cultural currents" or - above all - notions of identities, both individual and collective, that change in time.

Today's postcolonial studies suggests that no "pure", completely homogeneous cultures could ever have arisen without contacts or confrontations with other cultures. On all levels - from the nation, through ethnic minorities and social groups to individuals - culture is formed in relation to other cultures, accepting, opposing or adapting elements from them for its own aims and requirements. We should, therefore, look at the cultures of particular societies from the point of view of their differences and not apply to them disqualifying categories or mutually exclusive categories of opposition (e.g. "East" : "West") or even, as some researchers would like, through the prism of the opposition "Centre": "Periphery". All cultures are hybrids [Bhabha 2004, kap. 7], constantly changing, renewing, looking at themselves in a mirror, reflecting and re-evaluating.
The opposition "East": "West" then, irrespective of the geographical area to which it is applied, is an abstract and heavily over-ideologised category and as such it is not useful in scientific analyses and research. This does not mean, obviously, that this opposition does not exist and that it does not influence what we think and do. This division, however, has rather hindered than helped our perception and understanding of the cultural phenomena of Central and Eastern Europe and its post-Soviet situation. The publication of "Orientalism" by Edward Said in 1978 somehow forced the "Orientalists", i.e. the researchers of Asia in the West, if not to discard completely such notions as "the Orient" or terms such as "Oriental" - as relics of the colonial epoch - then at least to engage in a critical discussion about these terms and the theories connected with them. In the case of the nations and ethnic groups of Central and Eastern Europe and their languages and cultures, it would also be an enormous step forward if the category of "eastness" could be used only in its geographical sense.

The category of "Central and Eastern Europe" used here is not, obviously, a notion free from ideology, mythology and politics. For many Central and Eastern European writers and journalists it was connected with the myth of multiculturalism and creative vitality. The same is true of the category "Central Europe". The latter was a political project for Tomas Masaryk, for Milan Kundera as well as for Central European politicians after 1989. Similarly, the twentieth-century conceptions of Central and Eastern Europe were political projects for constructing a cultural or political opposition to both the West and the East. In reality we were dealing in both cases with many countries, various nations, diverse ethnic groups, different languages, cultures and religions...

Instead of asking, therefore, how to define Central Europe and what features are distinctive of Central Europe and make it different from the rest of Europe, we should be asking why certain people in certain historical circumstances try to construct the notion of Central Europe. What is this notion to serve and what consequences are to arise from it? [Dziamski 2004, 176].

In reply to these questions, I think that we should ask about anything and everything, although it never does any harm also to ask about intentions. I shall therefore take this opportunity to state that the notion of "Central and Eastern Europe" as used by me in this essay is understood by me to have a purely geographical and spatial meaning.

It seems to me that a list of problems and perspectives common to postcolonial theories and to the study of Central and Eastern Europe would not be by any means short and that attempts to define and compare them would constitute an interesting undertaking in themselves. It would also seem possible to devise a language that would allow for the expression, description and comparison of cultural phenomena and colonial experiences during the time of Sovietization as well as in the post-Soviet period, while maintaining all the differences that exist between them. The more the processes of globalization broaden and deepen, the greater the need for describing these (often only apparently) completely different experiences and for comparing and understanding them.

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Central and Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective

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Rzeczypospolitej (Białoruś, Litwa, Łotwa, Ukraina, wschodnie pogranicze III Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) w latach 1772-1999, Warszawa/London, s. 401-432.

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[1] “Postcolonial studies now includes within its scope the experiences of Ireland, Scotland and North America and explores connections with multicultural, feminist and subaltern studies. The examples these countries provide, as well as the more "classical" experiences of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, can illuminate many aspects of Eastern European literatures.” [Shkandrij 2001, XII]

[2] "By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds, which may coincide, be subordinate to one another, or be separated by shifts in time; the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences in so far as they belong to neighbouring, but distinct, discursive practices.”[Foucault 1997, 191]

[3] Concerning the public colonial discourses of the German 'civilizing' of the European "East" during the nineteenth century see: [Surynt 2006].

[4] Norman Davies writes that the notion and the idea of the "West" appeared in opposition to the notion and image of the Muslim world (as its antithesis) as early as the seventh and eighth centuries. [Davies 1996]

[5] For example, in countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland or the Baltic states, the vast majority of the population admits to its Mediterranean traditions and regards itself as Western European in the cultural sense.