

## IRAH KUČEROVÁ, **Geopolitics of Central Europe - A Historical Perspective**

**Abstract:** Geopolitics may be summed up as an approach exploring the relationship of the country, or its space, and state. Geopolitics cannot offer objective assessments: in practice it will always be subjective in terms of the major players, which, in Central Europe, are Germany and Russia.

Central Europe is a logical buffer zone between Western and Eastern Europe, not only in terms of geography, but also, of course, with regards to security and institutions, as well as culture and economics. For centuries, one major subject of interest in Central Europe has been the conflict between the powerful historical Germanic and Russian states. Although for a thousand years Central Europe was subject primarily to Germanic influence, after World War II it fell into the Soviet sphere of power. The Berlin-Moscow vector was a murderous one for Central European countries - continuously from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The Russian vector of power has still not ended - twenty years after the lifting of the Iron Curtain, Russia is still surprised that Central European countries really want to break away from the Russian sphere of influence.

The geopolitical significance of the Central European region contributed primarily economic characteristics initially, establishing a free territory for colonization, called *Ostsiedlung* by the Germanic tribes. Political changes, namely the formation of early medieval statehood within Central Europe, were associated with the acquisition of a hereditary royal title and Christianization. An important proof of emancipation was provided by ecclesiastical investiture - the right to decide on who would fill roles within ecclesiastical authorities and the autonomy of these authorities.

This paper, then, covers the development of Central Europe's geopolitical importance from the early Middle Ages to World War I; the geopolitical perspective of Central Europe after World War II, the vision of Central Europe as a *cordon sanitaire*, the Cold War and the Sovietisation of Central Europe.

**Keywords:** Central Europe, geopolitics, Germany, Russia, Sovietisation.

Irah KUČEROVÁ, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University of Prague, the Czech Republic; e-mail: irah.kucerova@fsv.cuni.cz.