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Europe, a Region with Variable Geography

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1.1. Introduction

Tendencies such as globalization, networks, and transnational social and economic practices perturb the classic divisions of the world into areas that vary in size. In this context, we can ask ourselves if Europe, as a functional reality or as a representation, has not already been diluted in the world of strong, generalized connections among territories, in the perpetual movement of very fast or even instantaneous exchanges over long distances. In this chapter, we explore three hypotheses in succession. First, Europe is being shaken up, transformed and perhaps recomposed rather than dissolved by globalization. As a continental idea, it is a paradox: it seems obvious and natural, but it has always given rise to many debates over its boundaries. In the end, we can ask ourselves if the essence of Europe does not lie precisely in the absence of clear boundaries. The tendency toward regionalization seems to confirm this intuition, perhaps by tracing a macroregional reality vaster than Europe. Second, in a counterintuitive way, the same remarks can be made about the European Union (EU), though it would seem to be a more clearly defined geographical object. Its exterior limits are no less problematic than Europe. Just like the European continent, should we speak of an EU gradient in place of an EU territory? Should we speak of geographical transgression when noting that the common European area is constructed by projecting itself beyond its borders? Third, the end of the Cold War and of bipolarism did not translate into an erasure of some internal divisions. The latter persist or transform but do not disappear. Moreover,

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here and there, the modalities of constructing Europe create or resurrect certain lines of division that are hard to eradicate.

1.2. Europe between globalization and (macro)regionalization: from continent to functional macroregion

1.2.1. *Europe within a continental vision of the world: an old "*idée fixe*" about an uncertain object*

The dominant representation of the world has, for several centuries, been that of a juxtaposition between continents (Lewis and Wigen 1997; Capdepuy and Grataloup 2013). In this way of dividing, the European continent has long had a prominent place, but therein lies a contradiction. Few people doubt the existence of this continent, which appears in the mind's eye as a self-evident entity lying between several seas and oceans (see Chapter 2), but its boundaries have always been a subject of debate, notably in the East.

Europe is already a very ancient notion that has experienced highs and lows, almost disappearing in the Middle Ages, though it never disappeared entirely. Even in Antiquity, it was already referred to by several Greek authors. Herodotus thought it stretched east up to the Tanais River (Don). For Aristotle, Greece was situated between Europe and Asia (*Politics*, VII). Later, in his *Geography*, Strabon recalled that the Romans held almost all of Europe, up to a boundary that went through the Danube, the sea, the Rhine and the Don (*Geography*, II, 5, 8). After him, Pliny the Elder affirmed in his *Natural History* that Europe "gave rise to the people who vanquished all other nations [and] is by far the most beautiful of places" (III, 1).

In the Middle Ages, "Europeans" progressively became aware of their particularity. Certain cultural traits spread, in particular due to evangelization, but the word "Europe" was rarely used before the 14th century, even among the educated classes. People instead spoke of "*Christianitas*". Authors who spoke of Europe were rare (Bede the Venerable, Isidore the Younger, and Angilbert). It was at the end of the Middle Ages, with the Ottoman expansion, that the idea of Europe was revived and the use of the word was brought back through the works of several authors (Tacitus and Erasmus, for example). Then came the great campaigns of exploration instigated by Portugal and Spain, and then England and France, that reinforced the awareness of a European particularity in opposition to what would later be called "the exotic".

After the 15th century, Europeans imposed the representation of a world divided into continents and propagated it through cartography. The idea that a continent called "Europe" existed was thus well established in geographic mindsets. The discussions about its boundaries were the primary concern of the literati, philosophers and scholars. This principally revolved around the matter of eastern boundaries, on the side of Russia, with two visions. One was inclusive: to thank Catherine of Russia for her help in the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot imposed the Ural Mountains as the eastern boundary of Europe (Grataloup 2011); Montesquieu had a map drawn on which "European Russia" extended to the Volga. The other was exclusive: Rousseau, in Chapter 8 of the *Social Contract*, asserted that "Russians will never be really civilized".

The scholarly debates over European boundaries never ended. If we confine ourselves to the literature in Geography from French and Francophone universities, we can easily distinguish the three principal conceptions currently in use. Some authors propose a clear-cut definition, maintaining the conventional linear boundaries of a Europe that goes from the Atlantic to the Urals and from the North Cape to the Mediterranean (Frémont 1996; Vandermotten and Dézert 2008). Others believe instead that that there exists a European core made up of the countries with the highest scores on a scale of Europeanness, situated in the west of the continent. Europeanness supposedly decreases gradually as one moves toward the east (Durand et al. 1992; Lévy 1997; Thébault 2006). This gradient demonstrates, again, that it is the eastern limit of Europe which poses the most problems. This representation follows in the wake of the discussions that arose between the two wars. Albert Demangeon was hesitant over Russia: he excluded it from Europe from a political perspective, believing that the Bolshevik regime was incompatible with democracy, while asserting that its presence in Europe was necessary for the economic equilibrium of the continent. Jacques Ancel believed, on his end, that the physical and human geography of Russia distanced it from Europe. In a recent study, Clarisse Didelon questioned a large panel of European researchers and demonstrated that these hesitations are just as great today (Didelon 2010). Certain geographers, finally, prefer a critical approach to Europe showing that it is a convention – Michel Foucher speaks of its "false self-evidence" – recalling that continents are deconstructable, contingent constructs (Foucher 2000; Grataloup and Capdepuy 2013).

Beyond the academic sphere, geographical conceptions of Europe are no less interesting, especially with respect to the eastern boundary. This has been demonstrated by several recent studies on Russia. First, throughout the 2000s, Russia's political leadership repeatedly reaffirmed that Russia was part of the European sphere, presented as divided into two polar opposites: the Russian sphere

on the one hand and the EU on the other hand. Second, according to large-scale opinion polls taken regularly in Russia over many years, a notable proportion of the population does not consider Russia and the EU to be from the same area of civilization (Richard 2010). Third, according to a study from 2009–2011, Russian students showed certain hesitations regarding the eastern boundary of Europe, but a majority believed that Europe ended at Russia's western border (Didelon and Richard 2015). We can also mention the studies regularly carried out by the Razoumkov Center for Sociological Studies in Ukraine. In a study from 2010, the Ukrainian population had very mixed views regarding the eastern boundary of Europe. The proportion of Ukrainians who believed that Ukraine was in Europe varied depending on the criterion being considered: a great majority – approximately 90% – with respect to geography, a little over 50% with respect to history and a very small minority with respect to culture, politics and economy (Richard 2010).

In a general sense, variations in the mental regionalization of the world hold the attention of certain geographers who depict them using cartographic representations by looking at the ways in which students, firms and national and international institutions divide the world. For example, students polled in 18 countries provided, in 2010–2011, a continentalized representation of the world (Beauguitte et al. 2012), with Europe structured around a rigid core of six countries located in the west and fuzzy boundaries going toward the east. Meanwhile, transnational firms tend, for the most part, to distinguish a Europe whose boundaries pass through the eastern borders of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine (Didelon 2010), thus placing Russia on the outside. Finally, international institutions present varied conceptions of Europe: some, such as the UN, tend to include Russia with Europe and exclude Caucasia and Turkey. Meanwhile the World Bank continues to separate the west from the east of Europe, with a division that recalls that of the Cold War.

Let us also recall that certain popular practices contribute to the establishment of a broad conception of Europe, all the while maintaining hesitations over its limits. For example, European sporting associations and championships include countries that correspond to a classical definition of Europe, while also going well beyond it in certain cases. Thus, among the participating countries, we find Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia, but also Israel and Turkey. The UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) goes the furthest by including Kazakhstan in the European football championship. Eurovision (transmitted by the European Union of Radio and Television) also proposes a wide notion of Europe, including all of the Russian Federation, the three Caucasian countries, Turkey and Israel, but also Morocco in the 1980s and even Australia since the 2010s.

1.2.2. *The European continent beyond itself: from Europe to the European macroregion*

Should the debates over the continental division of the world still take place? Continents are a priori conventions. We might therefore consider that it would be more legitimate to observe the spatial distribution of certain practices and their possible geographical concentration in order to identify large-scale, functional, geographical ensembles a posteriori. And we can hypothesize that their forms do not correspond to that of conventional continents.

Several trends call the conventional representation of a continental division of the world into question. The first of these is what we call regionalism. By regionalism, we refer to the fact that one or more actors decide to prioritize their neighboring relationships in their external action. This is a planned strategy and is implemented at a given moment by actors situated in the same part of the world, namely in States. Several neighboring States decide, for example, to lower the border barriers that separate them, thus deepening their relationship as neighbors. They develop their cooperation in certain areas and sign regional agreements that provide a structured and stable framework for their relations. It is in the realm of commerce that the number of agreements has increased most significantly since the Second World War. Several hundred are now registered with the WTO and are functional to different degrees. Their shape generally does not correspond to that of continents, particularly in Europe. For example, the geographical extension of the EU does not correspond to that of Europe. The eastern side of Europe is structured by other regional agreements that are dominated by Russia. The Eurasian Economic Union encompasses former countries of the USSR found on both sides of the Ural, in Europe and Asia, conventionally speaking (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan). And the military alliance known as the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) encompasses these same countries as well as Tajikistan.

Another trend is the regionalization of the world. This designates the regional concentration of trade, that is to say, a more rapid increase in trade among spatial units (countries, for example) that are situated in the same part of the world than with the rest of the world. We observe this kind of concentration in numerous areas (tourism, migration or mobility, investments, commerce, etc.). For example, although new ways of getting information and traveling have abolished certain distances and globalization has brought to light unprecedented migratory systems that link countries situated at great distances from one another, geographic proximity remains a determinant factor in the establishment of coupled countries or regional migratory systems. Thus, the majority of international migrants in Europe come from Europe or from countries neighboring Europe (the former USSR and North Africa,

principally). We see a migratory field taking shape that is vaster than Europe. We can say the same for flows of tourism: Europeans who travel abroad go, for the most part, to other European countries and to nearby countries such as Turkey or Tunisia. French geographers are interested in the regionalization of the world, founded, after the fact, on cartographies of the distribution of international trade, certain social practices or certain indicators. We can cite, among others, the spectacular maps of potential richness (Figure 1.1) and population (Figure 1.2) created by Glaude Grasland for the *Atlas of Europe in the World* (Didelon et al. 2009).

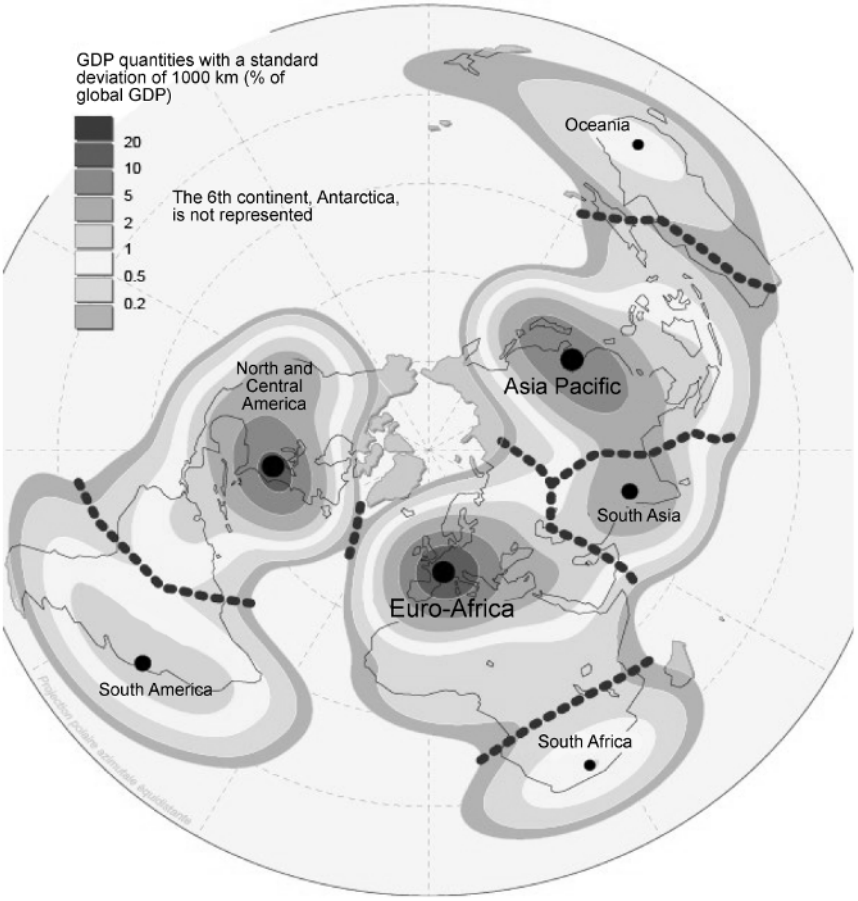

Figure 1.1. *Economic potential (source: Didelon et al. 2009). For a color version of this figure, see www.iste.co.uk/baudelle/europe.zip*

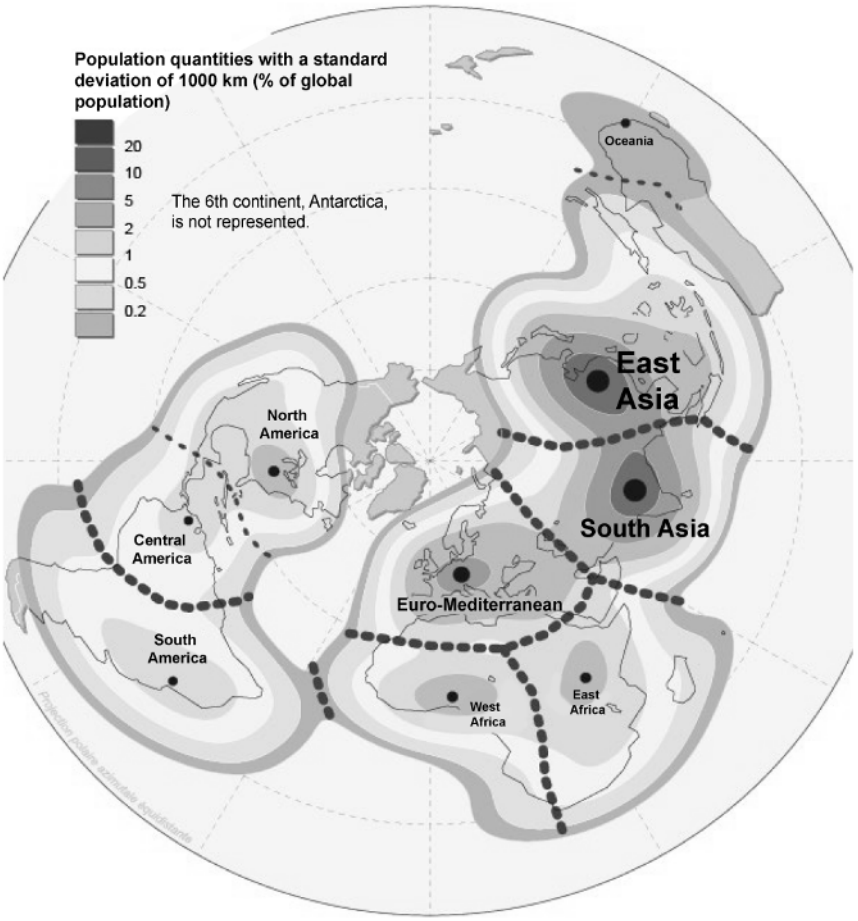

Figure 1.2. *Population potential in the world (source: Didelon et al. 2009). For a color version of this figure, see www.iste.co.uk/baudelle/europe.zip*

Here, we see regional aggregates whose form differs markedly from that of continents. We also see here how Europe is diluted into a vast "Euro-Mediterranean" that includes a notable portion of the Middle East and North Africa.

Regional integration also disrupts the map of continents. This designates the creation, growth and deepening of interactions among initially distinct but contiguous territorial units, for example, neighboring countries. The growth of these

interactions elicits the construction of autonomous, multi-State regional systems that are spatially continuous, that is to say, great functional regions structured by internal relations among constitutive spatial units that are stronger than those with spatial units situated on the outside (Mareï and Richard 2018, 2020). Different studies demonstrate the existence of strong interactions within the EU, but also and above all, between the EU and nearby countries. The EU is often the main partner of these countries in areas such as commerce, financial flows and mobility, such that we can advance the hypothesis of a vast, macroregional apparatus including the EU and its southern and easter neighbors. The limits of this macroregion are fluid and changing, but certain empirical studies attest to its existence, which, as it happens, goes back a long way (Beckouche 2008; Beckouche and Richard 2008). A study devoted to the geography of value chains confirms it (Grasland and van Hamme 2010). It reveals, among other things, the persistence of a center, semi-periphery and periphery division of labor between the EU and its neighbors, and in other parts of the world. The 1970s to 2000s thus witnessed the relocation of the most labor-intensive sectors of activity toward peripheral zones, while the sectors characterized by strong technological aptitude remained concentrated in the west of Europe. Halford Mackinder was already wondering about the importance of functional relationships in creating boundaries for Europe at the start of the 20th century. He believed moreover that the southern boundary of Europe was the Sahara and not the Mediterranean: "A vast band of almost uninhabited land, since it is almost devoid of rain, forming the Sahara, stretches through northern Africa up to Arabia. Central Africa and Southern Africa were almost as completely cut off from Europe and Asia for the majority of history as the Americas and Australia were. In fact, the southern border of Europe is the Sahara rather than the Mediterranean" (Mackinder 1904).

1.3. European community: an undefinable regional political object without limit?

Europe the continent and Europe the functional macroregion are geographical problems. It is difficult to trace their boundaries with full confidence. Inversely, we could hypothesize that the EU is an easy object to define since it is an entity founded on treatises. Logically, we can surmise that it corresponds in space to the simple sum of territories of the 27 Member States. The inside and the outside are therefore theoretically distinct. But therein lies a false assumption; the empirical reality shows that the EU is a complex arrangement of territories with varied statuses among the Member States. The EU finds itself at the center of an arrangement that includes neighboring countries such that the boundary between the inside and the outside is blurred (see Chapter 4).

1.3.1. *The territorial projection of the EU*

The EU is in theory composed of the sum of the territories of its members. Nevertheless, this assertion does not hold when faced with the empirical reality, which is more complex. First, some Member States have territories that are found thousands of kilometers away from conventional Europe. The outermost regions are situated overseas while nevertheless being part of the European communal space. They belong to France (Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, Reunion, Mayotte and Saint Martin), Portugal (Acores and Madeira) and Spain (Canary Islands). They are subject to European laws, with certain exceptions. This confuses the perception of the exterior boundary of the EU: It is counterintuitive to say that the EU has a common border with Brazil. We add to this a second category of spaces, which are the overseas countries and territories that belong to France (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, French Southern and Antarctic Lands, Wallis and Futuna), Denmark (Greenland) and the Netherlands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Saint Eustache, and Saint Martin). They are not part of the EU, but they are part of the territories of its Member States. In order to complete this complicated picture, we can also recall that Spain's territory expands beyond the Mediterranean into the north of Africa with the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Recently, Brexit made the outer boundary of the EU a little more difficult to read than before. The situation is theoretically simple. With the United Kingdom's exit agreement, the outer limit of the EU passes, in theory, between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, through the Irish Sea and along the line that separates Ireland from Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the signatories of the agreement believed it was necessary to find an accommodation to maintain the land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland open, to avoid the risk of rekindling the Northern Irish conflict which ended with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The implemented apparatus is therefore as follows: the political border of the United Kingdom does indeed pass along the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, but the commercial border passes between Great Britain and the island of Ireland. This is a way to keep freedom of movement, namely of commercial goods and people, between the two Irelands, which do not both belong to the EU. In this location, we can therefore consider the EU as having two nearby borders: one is the political border between the UK and Ireland, the other is the Union's customs border that goes between Great Britain and the island of Ireland. This gives an ambiguous status to Northern Ireland, which finds itself between these two borders, and which elicits some opposition from the unionist fringe of the Northern Irish population.

The outer limit of the EU also poses a problem in terms of status. Should we speak of a border or a boundary? To speak of an EU "border" supposes that we accept the idea that there is a common European territory, which provides more clarity over the political object that is the EU. Nevertheless, this poses three problems. First, no State called the EU exists. Moreover, the notion of territory is associated, in practice, with that of a State and with sovereignty, which does not exist in the case of the EU. Second, Member States consider themselves to be the only ones in possession of territory or sovereignty; they are not ready to accept the existence of a common European sovereignty, for that would replace their own sovereignty, de facto and de jure. On the contrary, the States affirm their sovereignty and their territory. They thus present themselves as the intermediaries between the EU and European citizens, preventing the construction of a direct and strong relationship between the latter and the communal construct (Pullano 2014). Third, the word "territory" and the expression "European Union territory" do not appear in European primary law, that is to say, in treatises. Moreover, European treatises say nothing about the line of Europe's borders, which would be a prerequisite for claiming which countries can legitimately present themselves as candidates for joining. That means that the EU has never stated what its maximum legitimate geographic extent is. It is therefore an entity that stretches with successive expansions – and retracts, as seen with Brexit – without European citizens knowing where it is supposed to end.

1.3.2. *The EU's transgressive borders*

The EU is not only a territorial entity defined by a boundary. We can also define it as a collection of policies that are not all implemented in the same geographical area. This gives a geographic object whose contours are difficult to identify.

There is an internal differentiation that makes it possible for Member States to move forward with integration if they wish to, when unanimity would be a source of paralysis at the community level. Reciprocally, it makes it possible for the countries that are most reticent with regards to integration to refrain from participating (opt out). We thus take the divergence of preferences into account without blocking integration. The Treaty of Lisbon, for example, makes it possible to implement reinforced cooperation between only certain Member States. We can recall that Ireland is not part of the Schengen area and that several countries do not use the Euro, or do not participate in the European exchange mechanism or Europol.

Moreover, certain European policies are already applied in spaces that go beyond the EU, including non-Member States in the Balkans, Moldavia, Ukraine and Georgia. Certain countries are observers (Armenia, Turkey and Norway). We can

recall in this respect that certain non-EU countries are members of the Schengen area (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). The EU thus tends to project its boundary outwards: by exporting directives and norms to the territory of its neighbors, it de facto includes these in its regional measures (energy community, for example).

This transgression of the EU's outer boundary is framed by tools that make the construction of neighboring relationships possible. The richest neighbors are already quasi-members of the EU: some (Iceland, Norway and Lichtenstein) have been part of the European Economic Area (EEA) since the signing of an agreement in 1992 that allows for free movement of merchandise, services, capital and people. We can add to this the agreements that provide a framework for policies on competition, consumer protection or education. The body of laws is thus already present outside of the EU. In exchange, third party countries have obtained a right to consultation during the preparation of European directives. There is no internal coordination of customs tariffs, but the EEA is considered a customs union, or even a de facto, vast common market. To complete this picture, let us recall that Switzerland has signed so many bilateral agreements with the EU that it is also a de facto member of the common market and part of the Schengen area. And since 1995, Turkey has been part of the European customs union. It even signed the updated version of the customs agreement when new Member States joined during the 2000s, with one reservation: Turkey refuses to apply the agreement to the Republic of Cyprus, despite it being a member of the EU.

We can make a typology of other neighbors according to the instruments that frame their relationship with the EU, instruments which also make it possible for the EU to export its norms and its policies into the neighboring areas. In the Western Balkans, in 1999, the EU launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and created a Regional Cooperation Council in 2008. All the countries pertaining to the SAP are potential candidates for the EU and signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), which provides a framework for political and economic cooperation, allows for free trade and includes permanent structures for cooperation. These countries are therefore already adopting certain aspects of the European legal corpus as they go along and are receiving financial aid from the EU to implement reforms. There is, moreover, an EU visa exemption for visitors from Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Boulineau 2014; Beckouche et al. 2016).

There are also countries that are eligible for the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Launched in 2004, it relies on legal agreements with partnering countries (partnership, cooperation and association agreements) and bilateral action plans that

contain partnership priorities. The latter promote certain fundamental values (socially equitable and fair democratic societies), economic integration, transnational mobility of people and market access (negotiation of far-reaching and total free-trade zones, mobility and management of migration with mobility partnerships and agreements regarding visas). In 2016, a dedicated financial instrument (the Migration Partnership Facility) was added. Very advanced and far-reaching association agreements were signed with Morocco and Ukraine. The Association Agreement signed with the latter in 2014 came into effect on September 1, 2017, but the free-trade zone was operational from January 1, 2016. The EU is Ukraine's leading economic partner, supporting a reform process in numerous areas. Even if the success of these reforms has been uneven, it was nevertheless a "Europeanization" of Ukraine that was initiated in the 2010s, and rejected by Russia, as demonstrated by the invasion of February 2022.

With other countries, political and contractual relationships are more tenuous, or even nonexistent, even if the functional relationships (such as in commerce) are at times intense. This is principally the case with Russa, Belarus, Syria and Libya.

These policies and tools create a very complex regional apparatus: it has no clear limits, but instead a gradient based on a principle of uninterrupted and simultaneous internal and external differentiation. It is an evolving apparatus because the EU implements expansions and agreements with neighboring countries from time to time, and the signed agreements undergo evolutions themselves. It is very difficult for European citizens to take charge of this apparatus, to eventually make it a reference point and to associate a common territory with it, since it is impossible to find a simple representation that can easily be mobilized. We can therefore speak of a European paradox, in that the more the EU is integrated, the more complex and difficult it is to grasp it in a clear, spatialized representation. This in part contributes to the political crisis of the EU and its weaknesses.

1.4. Europe and its divisions, old and new

After the Cold War, the expansion of the EU meant the inclusion of countries that had formerly belonged to the Warsaw Pact or even the Soviet Union. We can hypothesize that this noticeably modified representations of Europe. Certain divisions of European space remain in frequent use, others less so. New ones have emerged, at times under the impact of integration in the European community, and at times corresponding to sociopolitical economic realities. Combined, these inherited or new divisions of the EU, or of Europe in general, create a complex and dynamic image.

1.4.1. *The persistence of a post-split Europe*

After the Second World War and for several decades, Europe was divided into two blocks, setting a zone of Soviet influence in opposition to a zone of American influence. The expression "Eastern Europe" was then used to conveniently designate all at once the countries dominated more or less directly by the USSR (Hassner 1969). The populations of the countries in question generally prefer to speak of Central Europe, but it is indeed the expression "Eastern Europe" – or "Eastern countries" or "Eastern bloc" – that came to be used in Western countries. In theory, this expression was made obsolete through several events: the disappearance of the USSR, the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (1991), the reunification of Germany (1989–1990), the progressive association of the Eastern countries and then their admission to the EU in 2004 and 2007. In short, the division between the two blocs no longer exists.

Nevertheless, in reading certain publications, we notice that the East/West division persists in people's minds, even if it is difficult to interpret how it is used. It seems that the regional aggregates used here and there to divide Europe have no particular political or economic meaning. The expression "Eastern Europe" is sometimes used as a neutral geographic category, a way of locating and situating events without giving them any political or economic connotation. In the regional groupings used by the UN to collect and represent statistical data, it distinguishes Eastern Europe, including within it former Soviet Republics (Belarus, Moldavia, Russia and Ukraine) and ancient neighboring or satellite countries of the USSR (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania). Such a grouping is surprising since the latter six countries have been part of the EU since the 2000s. They are no longer part of the same group as Russia. The incoherence of this boundary is even greater when one considers that the Baltic countries, which were part of the USSR with Russia, are included by the EU in a Northern European region and not in Eastern Europe. The UN's division does not entirely fit into the polarized framework inherited from the Cold War since Western Europe, for its part, does not include certain countries that were part of the Western bloc until the 1980s (Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal).

The confusion is accentuated by the fact that we find other cartographic divisions in certain sources. *Time* seems to have remained in the Cold War since the Europe it proposes is still divided in two. The border between the two Europes stretches along the western border of Finland, Germany, Austria and Italy. There are thus 12 countries that are current members of the EU and are located in Eastern Europe. The *World Factbook*, published each year by the CIA, suggests another division: for them, Eastern Europe begins at the former western border of the USSR, including

the Baltic countries, but not the countries of Caucasia, which are nevertheless former Soviet Republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). This division would lead an uninformed or inattentive reader to think the USSR still exists. The confusion is at its pinnacle in the "Eastern Europe" article in the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which contains a surprising contradiction: a map shows an Eastern Europe that begins at the former western border of the USSR, which encompasses the entire Russian Federation, but the text of the entry affirms that Eastern Europe does not stretch beyond the Urals.

The geographical aggregate that corresponds to the former USSR does not correspond to reality. We know for example that the international organization that replaced the Soviet Union is the CIS (Community of Independent States), but it has never worked. Today, it is the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the CSTO that are operational, and their geographical reach does not correspond to that of the USSR in the slightest: the Baltic nations, Moldavia and Ukraine are not part of it. Moreover, certain countries that were once part of the USSR (Ukraine, Moldavia and maybe Georgia, for example) have ostensibly reoriented their international relations toward the EU, with which powerful, functional links have been forged, while other countries remain solidly tied to Russia (Belarus and Armenia).

Francophone academic research is hesitant, with several trends in place since the end of the Cold War. The expression "Eastern Europe" is used by authors in varied disciplines. Still today, we find it in the titles of numerous articles and even of special editions of scientific journals that deal with Europe, as we can see from a quick perusal in the titles of journals and publications currently used in France, especially by students and researchers.

Some authors prefer to use the expression "Central Europe", situating it between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Central Europe is a recent notion in academic literature, appearing in the Francophone sphere (in the work of the geographers Élisée Reclus and Auguste Himly) during the second half of the 19th century. It is partially rooted in the term *Mitteleuropa*, which politically, economically and culturally corresponds to the breadth of the German Empire and the Austrian and then Austrian-Hungarian Empire before 1918. Despite the upheavals caused by the First World War, French-speaking authors continued to speak of "Central Europe". We can recall that "*Europe centrale*" (Central Europe) is the very title used for one of the volumes of the *Géographie universelle* (Universal Geography) by Lucien Gallois and Emmanuel de Martonne, published in 1930. It was written by E. de Martonne to include Germany, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia. Soon after, in his *Manuel géographique de politique européenne* (Geographical Manual of European Politics), Jacques Ancel

proposed a first volume also entitled *Europe centrale*. But he included fewer countries (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia). The notion of central Europe then became almost meaningless with the Cold War, which literally cut it into two and markedly reduced the connections between certain pieces of Europe. It reappeared in the 1990s, at the same time as *Mitteleuropa*, with the disappearance of the Soviet buffer zone. It resurfaced quickly at the start of the 1990s, in France especially, in articles by Foucher (1991) and Maurel (1992). Both considered Central Europe an idea and a social representation and wondered what possible role it might play in the post-split reconfiguration of Europe. Michel Foucher reused the notion of Central Europe in 1996 to designate countries situated to the east of the EU and to the west of Russia from Belarus to Ukraine (Foucher 1991). And Gilles Lepesant published *Géographie économique de l'Europe centrale* in 2011, in which he tasked himself with demonstrating that Central Europe does not exist. Rather, he saw an "absence of political solidarity, of strong historical involvement" and "an objective diversity of situations". For him, "Central Europe is therefore not a bloc. In truth, it never was. The Communist period as well as the 2004 EU joint enlargement created the illusion" (Lepesant 2011).

Use of the expression "Central Europe" is very common, with some geographical variation however. In its place, the expression "Central and Eastern European Countries" is sometimes used (designated by the acronym PECO in French and CEEC in English), and more rarely "Danubian Europe", etc. The IMF itself uses the category "Central and Eastern Europe" in its publications, including within it the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, that is to say, only EU Member States. Among this variation in ways of dividing Europe internally, other expressions have had some popularity, namely, "Median Europe". Used as early as the 1980s by Fernand Braudel and Yves Lacoste, it has appeared regularly since the 1990s in the work of numerous authors, notably historians who include within it the entirety of the Balkans, Ukraine, Moldavia and Belarus. Among them, we can cite Marie Delapierre, Paul Gradvohl, Bernard Lory and Antoine Marès. Francophone geographers are not to be outdone: "Median Europe" appears in the publications of Georges Prevelakis (the journal *Géographie et Cultures* in 1998) and Béatrice Giblin and Yves Lacoste (1998), in *Fragments d'Europe* by M. Foucher (1993), in a volume of the last edition of *Géographie universelle* edited by Violette Rey, etc. Today, "Median Europe" has its own research network at the CNRS (GDR); a diploma is devoted to it at the INALCO; it was the object of a colloquium in 2013; it was even on the program for the Agrégation exam in Geography at the end of the 1990s. The success of this name comes from the fact that it does not carry ideological connotations. It designates a space found between the Baltic Sea, the Adriatic Sea, the Black Sea, Germany and Russia. "Median Europe" has the following characteristics: weakness of the State, vulnerability with respect to

neighboring powers, instability of borders, ethnolinguistic complexity, absence of State projection toward the sea or overseas and influence of great exogenous models such as liberal capitalism or communism (Gradvohl and Marès 2018; Marès 2020).

With "Median Europe", we are not far from what the historian Jenő Szűcs called "Central-Eastern Europe" in *Les trois Europes*, published in the 1980s, where he proposed a tripartite division of Europe based on the degree of autonomy in the sociopolitical sphere with respect to divine transcendence. He saw this part of Europe in the modern era as a juxtaposition of weak States, made fragile by overabundant aristocracies. Szűcs' "Central-Eastern Europe" is located between a West it cannot catch up with and an Eastern Europe that has ended up submerging and absorbing it. He included Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia and Hungary, among others. The historical and geographical idea of a tripartite Europe, distinct from the east/west division of the Cold War, was also developed by Violette Rey, with the notion of a European "in-between", which she began to reflect on in the 1980s. The in-between was, according to her, that portion of Europe situated between the Baltic Sea and the Balkans, within a sphere of influence from external hegemonies: "external forces coming from spaces on either side weigh decisively on the internal future" (Rey and Poulot-Moreau 2014). The particularities of a European "in-between" lay in the "confrontation of internal and external forces at the expense of the latter", in the "relationship with historical time, which passes through the mode of new beginnings", in the "force of obstacles to accumulation, which means that heightened creativity is forced to evaporate" (Rey 1998).

1.4.2. *Cleavages (re)activated through the construction of Europe*

European regional integration can have counterintuitive effects. While considerably reinforcing the functional ties between the countries that make it up, it maintains or creates certain cleavages between groups of countries. Should we speak of fragments of the EU?

In the representations of Europe and/or the EU, these fragments reappear from time to time, especially during moments of crisis. It was during the financial crisis, starting in 2008, that an internal divide was inscribed into the speeches of European leaders and elected officials, as well as in the press. To designate the Member States of the EU that were hit the hardest by the crisis (Spain, Greece, Portugal and Ireland, especially), the expression "Club Med" was frequently used, in other words principally Mediterranean countries with high debt that were deemed incapable of any budgetary rigor. Certain anglophone publications even used the pejorative expression "PIIGS" (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain). After experiencing growth rates that were above the European average, these countries experienced

a greater drop in their GDP after 2008. The expression "Club Med" carried on well beyond the financial crisis. A dispatch from Reuters in March 2020, for example, was introduced by an unambiguous title that opposed the countries of the so-called "Club Med" to the frugal countries of northern Europe (namely, "Club Med takes on the Frugals in EU 'Corona bond' Bailout Battle"). The newspaper articles that used this theme, generally without any critical distance, were numerous in several countries, especially in the United Kingdom where the *Financial Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian* and the *Economist* all happily referred to "Club Med countries". The countries most impacted by the 2008 crisis displayed macroeconomic performances that were below the European average in several areas over the long term, which led people to think that in the end, they could only be disadvantaged by their inclusion in the Euro zone. The rules for the common currency, though perfectly adapted to certain economies, combined with the inexistence of a common economic policy in the EU and the almost inexistence of intra-European financial transfers (based on what each State does within its territory with its national budget), could only make certain countries more fragile (Richard 2012).

Another representation, tied to the previous one, opposed so-called "spendthrift" countries and "frugal" countries, sometimes called "austere" or "stingy" countries, which advocated an unwavering budgetary orthodoxy (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and sometimes Finland). They formed an informal group that appeared during the negotiations of the European budget at the start of 2020, consisting of governments that were otherwise ideologically distinct (conservatives, ecologists, liberals and social democrats). These countries traditionally advocated for a liberal EU, economically speaking (which it already is), and limits on its political dimension. They were above all opposed to any idea of communal debt by the members of the EU when negotiating the major recovery plan for Europe proposed by certain countries to address the impact of the coronavirus crisis. The "frugal" countries also asked that the reduction in their contribution to the European budget, granted after the United Kingdom rebate, be maintained. This opposition among groups of countries within the EU points, in turn, to an older distinction between net contributor countries and net beneficiary countries of the European budget. The former give the European budget more than they receive. The latter receive more than they give. The net contributors are above all the countries in the west and north of the EU, while the net beneficiaries are located in the east and the south. This division constitutes a permanent background for each European budgetary discussion every 7 years. It is willingly instrumentalized by net contributing countries in order to limit their contribution and to maximize it through a sort of return on the investment to the benefit of their own territory and businesses.

Finally, the construction of Europe stimulated the consolidation of a group of four countries called the "Višegrad group" (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia). It is a now well-established group (founded through the initiative of the Czech president, Vaclav Havel) that has been mentioned more and more since 2015 due to the political and ideological convergence of the leaders of these countries, which are known for their nationalist rhetoric and their Euroscepticism, all the while defending a strong transatlantic connection and a very liberal approach to the common market. This group created controversy in the context of certain European debates. In 2015, during the migrant crisis that especially impacted Italy and Greece, these four countries successfully opposed the refugee distribution arrangements that had been proposed by the European Commission even though they were in accordance with European policies. Ever since, these countries have hit the brakes on discussions over the reform of asylum policy because they fear being over-exposed in any future migrant crisis. Overall, the Višegrad group has limited influence on EU dynamics due to its inferior economic weight. Moreover, its cohesion has been called into question since the start of the Ukrainian invasion, as Hungary's positions toward Russia are ambiguous. Nevertheless, the very obvious increase in its activity and notoriety can be seen as a consequence of European integration, which is exactly what it is trying to stop in certain respects.

1.5. Conclusion

Did the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 accelerate the reconfiguration of Europe? We will have to wait some years before we know for sure, but we can already say that this shock has had some notable effects. First, it has hardened the cleavage that has been growing between two groups since the middle of the 2000s: the EU, on one hand, and Russia with part of its former Soviet regional buffer, on the other hand. The polarization of Europe is thus accelerating. The three Europes of J. Szűcs may now therefore be replaced by two Europes, facing off, in direct contact.

In this polarized representation, the EU is undergoing non-negligeable evolutions. Originally an economic and commercial construction, it is now developing its political and even military dimension in a number of ways as a result of a brutal awakening (caused in particular by the influx of millions of Ukrainian refugees into several EU Member States). It has adopted a strategic compass (March 2022), that is to say, a pathway that should "orient the European Union's foreign relations for the next ten years" and make the EU "a world actor in the field of

defense" by equipping it with "ambitious means". In other words, Member States are converging in the identification of threats and in the establishment of certain priorities. At the same time, the EU is demonstrating some objectives: the development of joint arms provisions, reinforcing cooperation in terms of security, the creation of a joint military force for rapid deployment via land, air and sea, etc. All the while they are maintaining strong ties with NATO, which is expanding significantly (with the accession of Finland and Sweden, which have long been close allies of the Atlantic Alliance but neutral) and will clearly reinforce its presence in Europe. Simultaneously, Denmark (a Eurosceptic country) has decided to join with the EU's common defense and security policy, and Germany has agreed to a long-term financial effort in order to update its military means. Finally, from the outside, we can see a real and unprecedented implication of the EU in the war, by delivering arms to Ukraine (the purchase and delivery of arms and other equipment by certain Member States, but also by the NGO Uso Europe, in its current form). These events are spectacular but we will have to wait to see if they mark the start of an enduring and robust trend.

We will also need to wait to see if the perception of a Russian threat has an impact on the construction of Europe in a more general way. The question remains open, beyond the decisions made in the heat of the moment. Will the EU mutate into a more integrated and more federal construct, desiring and capable of playing the power game? Will it become a political actor in the proper sense? It is far too early to say. But certain effects of the war are already more or less tangible. First, the EU has granted Moldavia and Ukraine the status of candidate countries. The process will be very long and full of obstacles. But it was a political decision that was heavy with meaning, enacting, in a way, the end of the idea of a Russian empire in Europe. Georgia had made the same request but the European council asked it to make some more efforts in order to obtain the same status. Second, a chorus of voices is openly wondering about the reinforcement of European sovereignty. The European council of March 2022 echoed these questions by highlighting the idea of the sovereignty of the EU, namely in the areas of defense, energy and food supply. Looking more closely, the purpose is to substantially reduce the outward dependence of the EU, already seen as worrisome at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, lowering the level of dependance has already had an impact on commercial relationships between Russia and the EU. The latter wishes to do without certain raw materials sold by the former. And the former is redeploying its business toward other partners, namely Asian ones. Should we see in this the end of an old interdependence and conclude that Russia is leaving what we earlier called "functional Europe"? Time will tell.

1.6. References

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