

ON THE CONCEPT "COMMUNITY OF CULTURES
OF CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE"

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This is usually a theme for books rather than articles, notably documentary type books, written in foreign languages, best of all in Latin or Italian. The best contribution towards the explanation of the above concept on the part of Slovakia would accordingly be such works as the "Bibliography of Printed Materials Published in Slovakia before 1700" by Ján Čaplovič; "Bibliography of Slovak Writings from Ancient Times" by Ľudovít Rizner with supplements; "History of Older Slovak Literature" by J. Mišianik, J. Minárik, M.M. Michalcová-Cesnaková, and A. Melicherčík. It would also include all Slovak-Magyar research work carried out by historians: the works on the Slovak diplomata, documentation of codices in medieval libraries in Slovakia, a universal history of Slovakia, a history of arts and architecture, music culture, thinking, Church history, etc.

There are several interpretations of the concept "community of cultures of Central Eastern Europe" all of them being covertly or openly ideological, that is to say, each serving to enforce a certain interest. But this interest is not hidden, it is lived. It follows on from the character of Slovak scientific experience of the Central European matters of concern that we define and defend, chiefly our undeniable place in the context of Hungarian culture. Undoubtedly, such an understanding of the concept has its foundations in material from the Slovak perspective and so can be considered reliable. No comments are made on its position in the structure of relations of the community as a whole. The community is not "Magyarocentric" but "Italocentric". In feudal hierarchy the Magyars would have been "vassi" and in terms of such a self-definition, the Slovaks "vassi vassorum". Historical Hungary was always a terrain upon which Italian interests were put across. When this had changed, the Italian protection was withdrawn as a kind of punishment, as shown by the Pressburg congress in 1687 in which the Hungarian crown became hereditary to the Habsburgs (Slovakia belonged to the Habsburg monarchy administration already from the Turkish occupation of the central parts of Hungary in 1547). Undoubtedly the fact that the Magyar states largely remained Protestant, influenced this as evidenced by Magyar intellectuals. One of the most dramatic manifestations of the national position in question is a commentary of Emerico Várady on the respective chapter of his work of particular importance entitled *La storia della letteratura italiana e la sua influenza in Ungheria* published in Rome in 1934:

"In enthusiastic and various poetical reflections of the Rákóczi revolt (which led to the defeat of Magyar Protestant states and to the peace of Szatmár in 1711 – P. K.), the nation makes for the first time instinctive use of the fatality following from its geographical position, which heavily affected its whole history. The identification of its fate with the fate of the West for seven centuries was in vain, bloodshed in struggling against eastern attackers, Tatars and Turks was in vain, their alliance with the West in faith and in culture was in vain: it always remained isolated among the nations of Europe. Its victims are not taken into account at all and a grudge is held incessantly against it as against an intruder. They require an unbearable price for tolerance and protection: to give up their national identity. The Magyar nation will neither deny characteristics of its race, blood and spirit of their ancestors nor will it abandon western culture. With embittered stubbornness the nation defends its rights to western culture until it drops from complete exhaustion and becomes devotedly resigned with oriental fatefulness and unmerciful self-contempt..." (p. 235, volume 1).

In the first, i.e. in the political plan, relations within community are quite burdensome: embracement of Latin Christianity by Stephen I and refusal of the Greek provided the Hungarian crown with a unique status in western world – bulwarks of western Christian civilization (*il baluardo della civiltà cristiana occidentale*). Such a position implied several advantages: not only the factual recognition of the claim to the state integrity outwardly but also to the internal integrity, to different forms of the execution of hegemony over non-Magyar nations living in Hungary. A protective bastion cannot decide to change its position, its culture, spiritual orientation at will; it is bound to its function as a vassal. This led in various historical periods to the change of the proud attribute "bastion-defence" of a syndrome of "the utilized and then abandoned bastion" (*il baluardo utilizzato e poi abbandonato*). These are the dramatic moments of seclusion in the life of the community of the cultures of Central Eastern Europe since in spite of its isolation the "Magyar nation... defends its rights to western culture with embittered stubbornness...". There are moments when not only the hegemonic nation in the region starts to execute its rights to western cultural identity (the right to the state, national, and cultural identity) by its own force but, under its pressure, also other nations.

It is not our problem to deal with severe consequences, political or even military misunderstandings. We are simply interested in this release from the protective union. It seems paradoxical that in such a situation there are increasing efforts to prove that it is impossible to eliminate Italian culture from the union. Let us have a look at the communist half century, when Hungary in cooperation with Italy launched an unprecedented detailed and systematic research into common Magyar-Italian history, culture and arts (everything important except for the essential works of Andreas Veress – three volumes about Hungarian students at old Italian universities except for two quoted volumes of collective – Magyar-Italian – literary history by Várady and one volume of excerpts from the reports of Italian travellers and envoys to Hungary by Andreas Veress was created in that

time). The preceding half century witnessed in Slovakia the appearance of the essential works documenting our undeniable share in cultural heritage of historical Hungary. Lack of power guarantees for the place in the "western sun" from the Italian side evokes thus instead of abandoning the Central Southern area (an attempt at a political but not at the cultural level, was the attachment of Slovakia to the Czech Lands) intensification of the evidences of cultural belongingness to this region. However, we have noticed a difference: Hungary on its part proves its affiliation directly as an inseparable bond between the history of Hungary and Italy (moreover, in cooperation with Italy and in joint publications published in Italian); on the other hand, Slovakia presents its history as an inseparable part of the cultural history of Hungary. This is an asymmetric position, which can, however, be changed. Its change is the most interesting point, which from the Slovak perspective, implies the concept of "Central Eastern Europe". It can even be said that it makes the concept dynamic.

Let us at first return and try to elucidate the artificially sounding concept Central Eastern Europe. The Italians often replace it with the expression "Central Southern Europe". Although not more colloquial, yet a more transparent expression. One can deduce that it concerns the cultures of Central Europe, which have primarily been Europeanized under the influence and protection of Italy at various levels – from political through religious up to artistic. We apologize for using the facts from unpublished foreign contributions dealing with our problems to illustrate the arguments; they will appear in our publication "18. storočie/18-ème siècle" (Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV). The contribution about including Poland into this community ends in the declaration of the eminent Italian historian of the 18th century Franco Venturi: "Beccaria, Filangieri, Mazzei, Piattoli: The Italians accompany Poland on its "via crucis" in its unprecedented struggle for reforms and survival" (K. Zaboklicki). The four names belong to the personalities, who participated in the preparation of the Polish constitution of May 3, 1791 either directly or as advisers. It was the most important act of one of the most difficult centuries of the Polish national existence, which, after three partitions, ended in the loss of statehood. What Venturi had in mind was that Italy, in spite of being a split state, lived a mature political life and was able to help the Poles in their desire for a constitution, which would be mild, respecting conservative Catholic conventions of the country: not to lose belief in the unity of Poland and Italy (along with many others, Father Kořantaj, one of the creators of the Constitution, who took lessons with the Reformers Filangieri, Galiani, Genovesi in Naples, did not lose his belief). Every culture of Central Europe, which looked in trust to Italy, belongs to the family of the cultures of Central Southern Europe. It is thus a set of cultures, which need not have anything in common except their bonds to Italy. They can be mutually independent, partner-like. Multinational Hungary, where further hierarchization was taking place, lacked such a position. It seems that particularly after the separation of Croatia and Slovenia the development

headed towards communities of partner ~~Italophile~~ national cultures under a possibly artificial name "Central Southern community".

The content of the concept "Central Eastern Europe" is slightly different. We shall try to elucidate it by presenting the attitude of Carl Denina (1731-1813), who, as a historian and the first Italian historian and theorist of the term "universal literature" moved within the framework of the Piedmont-Prussian friendship to Berlin to follow the cultures of Central Europe from there. He divided them into those, which were under the Prussian acculturation influence (mainly Prussian Polish territories and the Czech Lands) and those under the Habsburg-Viennese acculturation influence (mainly Galicia and Hungary). The second group would correspond to the community of cultures of Central Eastern Europe, into which, in contrast to the former one, a tradition of primarily Italo-Mediterranean literature penetrates chiefly through Vienna. However, Denina perceives both areas of Central Europe as culturally subaltern, because they have no literature written in their own national language. Unpleasant connotation of the concept Central Eastern Europe is thus cultural inferiority. Denina even says that all the more significant writers in historical Hungary use German in their works. This, of course, is merely his confined literary view of the time, since a hundred-years' connection with Italy influenced the area very positively in all respects. But in spite of such a well-developed influence, the cultures of the nations of the area indeed remain, as Denina put it, at the level of folklore ethnic groups. The concept Central Eastern Europe is apparently used with the aim to emphasize the overall subaltern position of the recipient cultures with respect to the introduced universal one and within the framework of this subaltern also to hierarchize recipient ethnic groups according to the different degree of the ability to acquire the universal values.

In spite of this, let us base our considerations on the term community of Central Eastern Europe instead of "Central Southern Europe" since the role of the Slovak element in this relationship had long been impersonal and the common Magyar-Italian research in this century got simply used to take the Slovak culture as a supplement to the life of the community. Since during the existence of Czechoslovakia it was undesirable to allude to even a supplementary position of the Slovak culture in other than Czech connections and there was especially a ban on the so-called political clericalism, i.e. religiously and politically motivated declaration of the thousand-years' links of the Slovak territory with the civilization influence of the Catholic Rome and Italy, a simple coming out of our shell and our awareness of the place where we belong, raises manifestations of satisfaction, sometimes even of enthusiasm. The reason is that the community is Italo-centric but we know that Italian culture itself has not been a mere emitter but it has sometimes been involved in long crises or it has required a response from the outside, a response, which would not be a conventional consent, but also a stimulus to communication about its problems. Such responses can chiefly come from the place where it has once left its vestige. But this is not all: the community of

Central Eastern Europe has probably its mentality, its own type of architecture, literature,... slightly different from other communities in Europe. A necessity to compare, so to speak, at the global level emerges. And the results may be universally beneficial. The third type of dealing with the categories of the Community is useful for Slovak culture: if the connection of the phenomenon considered as exclusively Slovak with the processes taking place within the Community is confirmed, it is doubtlessly a self-promotion from the subaltern position up to the level of the communication on an equal footing. These are the three ways how to avoid the efforts of Magyar science to place itself in the position of an exclusive investigator of the Hungaro-Italian relationships.

We have not done much on this route so far and the main problem is that we have no institutions for such work. The only thing we are not short of is the unexplored and inaccessible material. We based our two annuals on this encouraging fact, both published in Italian or in western languages. The next two volumes of both titles are to appear in this year. One of them is entitled "Studi italo-slovacchi" and the second "18. storočie/18-ème siècle". Our account of the concept of the Central Eastern European cultural community will probably become more lucid after reading these four little volumes. They show that there are more than the three mentioned ways of the entry of the Slovak context into the area of the issues concerning the Community. In the first place it is a completely elementary entry: amendment and abridgement of the partially investigated Slovak-Italian themes and their translation into Italian. These are the most striking pieces of evidence of the participation of this territory in the civilization processes of the Community and therefore they meet with a spontaneous reception. Because of our prolonged silence they are perceived within the Italian context as discoveries of their civilization function in little known places. On our part this is a way to "remind ourselves": that the phenomena had not probably been primarily associated with the Slovak culture, but they did directly model us and therefore we must share in common heritage. Among the works published and belonging to this type of research are those dealing with the following themes: – bibliographic completion of the published bibliographic data on Italian melodramas, which were played towards the end of the eighteenth century, by the side of German, as a main component of the repertoire of Bratislava German and Magyar noble theatres; – summing up and circular division of the part of codices in the Slovak libraries in the Middle Ages, which are of Italian provenance or the authors of their originals are Italians (research conducted by J. Sopko); – Scriptorium and illumination workshop of a Dominican monastery in Košice and its relationships with Italy; – mural paintings of Italian inspiration in Gemer; – the so-called Eastern Slovak Renaissance in architecture. These types of works are not a mere repetition of the known; for instance, it was thought that Italian libretti of melodramas had been deposited in the Hungarian National Library and that those missing would be lost for ever. Thanks to our interest in the issues involved, we have found in the

meantime that another two so far unpublished libretti of the Italian melodramas performed in Bratislava were discovered in the Bratislava University Library. One branch of research opens up the possibilities for another one. A similar situation is in the study of the Italian influence in the regions of Eastern Slovakia.

Another access to the issue of the Community is through the topics of the Slovak-Italian cultural relationships. We can say that the Slovak-Hungarian cultural-historical research has been hampered in the sphere of Italian connections, in both evident and well known facts and where these connections have been relatively hidden. The Italian extracts from the Simonides' book of travels through Italy written after his escape from the escort on the way to the Naples galleys now also published in Slovak can be said to be the repetition of the known. The Italian reader can see the situation as an unconventional outlook of Ján Simonides similarly as the extracts from the diary of Palatine Juraj Thurzo from his journey to Venice in 1597; our Italian version deposited in the archives of Bytča has made the priceless diary accessible probably for the first time in Slovakia (Prof. Jozef Minárik). The history of Slovak literature was moulded by the Italian travel topic much more than we realize. A comprehensive account of this theme and its causes is presented in an article, which creates, in addition to the mentioned books of travels and those of Masník and Láni, a comprehensible and lucid panorama of fictional and factual books of travels with the Italian theme in Slovak literature from Kuzmány's novel *Ladislav* through two Laskomerský's books of travels *Zo Slovenska do Ríma* (From Slovakia to Rome) and *Zo Slovenska do Talianska* (From Slovakia to Italy), Kompánek's *Putovanie do Ríma* (Pilgrimage to Rome), Vajanský's *Volosko-Benátky* (Volosco-Venice) up to the works from our century starting with the works of Hrušovský, Jégé, Mitrovský and ending in modern Slovak exile literature. The article is based, however, on Kollár's *Opis jednej cesty do severného Talianska* (A Journey to Northern Italy, 1843) and on the Kollár's idea that the impressions of Italy were more favourable than those of Germany, which opened up the route for Italy to the predominantly Evangelical literature of Slovak romanticism. The entry of the critical Slovak Evangelical outlook on the questions of the cultural Community of Central Eastern Europe has remarkably enlivened the communication within the whole Community.

The attempt at reviving the memory of the Community may be viewed as another Slovak peculiarity. It consists in the fact that advanced Slovak culture had passed from the Byzantine-Slavonic unity to the Roman-Western unity (both of these unities were notable for their claims to universality). The Byzantine theme is avoided by the traditional Central-European-Italian, particularly Hungaristic, researches, but this is just the point where we can introduce a lot of novelties. Generally speaking, suppression of one cultural universalism by another one forces on an understanding of cultures and their alternation as a conventional phenomenon.

There are some Slovak-Italian themes not yet investigated, which can set the interpretations common in the Hungarian studies in motion: one of the studies deals with the relationship of the Arcadian Italian influence to Slovakia. All the members of the international Roman Academy of Arcadia from historical Hungary have so far been perceived as Magyars and to tell the truth, our literary historiography has not shown interest in them for various reasons either; after all, they have not created any school of national poetry. But there is a fact that Mr Hanulík, the member of Roman Arcadia was of Slovak origin and devoted part of his poems to Slovak connections, that an Arcadian poem about Nitra was written by the historian Dežerický, that also others were writing in this mood, chiefly Piarists. If the Italo-Arcadian connections of Latin poetry of the second half of the eighteenth century had been studied in detail, it would have been shown that it is not only Magyar, but common Magyar-Slovak Mediterranean heritage. It would have been shown that current interpretations, according to which the only essence of Holý's Mediterranean inspiration had been Horatius or Vergilius or that no Mediterranean poetic tradition had operated before Holý, might be deliberately misleading. A look at the literary processes from the perspective of the Community can enrich the viewpoint of the research into national literature.

A community becomes dynamic if its ability to react to the outer stimuli in a similar way is shown; in the eighteenth century primarily to antirationalist "anomalism", a modern line of thought (concepts of "anomaly" versus "analogy" were elaborated by Umberto Eco in his work *Trattato di semiotica generale*) based on the belief that the order of semantic universum and of the naturalness of languages is not a reflection of their correspondence with the system of logical ideas. In other words, it is not language that is an unerring leader of man, but human being is a victim of the long-standing stereotype use of language. This revolutionary idea of English empirism penetrated into Italian quarrels about the necessity of language reform as the following argument: "It is enslavement if somebody claims his right to force others not to venture to enrich and update Italian" (Alessandro Verri). Similarly the Slovak language reformer Bernolák has accepted this idea in spite of his religiosity and adjusted it as a methodological basis of his reform of the Slovak language as follows: "The human race was given the ability to create new words as early as in Eden. Why should just we let ourselves be deprived of this right? If it is allowed in Greek, Latin,... does not have Slovak this right too?" (Preface to *Slovár* of 1796). Discovery of this parallel led in a study on the modernization of Italian and Slovak in the eighteenth century to an assumption that Bernolák had not had any methodological idea of the reform of the Slovak language not only from Doležal but he had also been affected by the atmosphere within the Community. His accentuation of the difference between the language system of Czech and Slovak, which is the principle of anomalism, can serve as evidence and its beautiful Italian parallel can be found for instance in Parini: "The languages of nations do not so much differ one from the other

because of the difference in words as because of different way of their connection and the use in speech;..." This again is thanks to the correlation between the Slovak phenomenon and the life of Community a new anchorage of the turning point of national culture, which has been explained, possibly because of the lack of information, maybe intentionally, more or less as an individual-group decision (i.e. essentially voluntary, unpunishable), associated with the Czech context at the most, in no case, however, connected with a large-scale cultural and ideological movement within the region of the Community. We see that the Community is for national cultural decisions a sort of instance of appeal, which confirms their legitimacy and prevents them from being attacked (something like a reservoir of the movement rules in intertextuality). This is why the Community represents for national cultures the good and the high value. On the other hand, such a presentation of parallels promotes internal cohesion of the Community, and such an event of national culture, otherwise private and therefore outwardly negligible, is valuable from the point of view of the Community.

An issue central to the vitality of each community of cultures is its ability to identify its standing in comparison with others and thus also its possible appraisal by others, its asset to universal culture. Slovak research can enter such self-identification efforts with equal efficiency as other ones. Since the Community is Italocentric, in search for the distinctions of the positions in the field of literature one has to look at the uniqueness in the Italian literary development, which has not favoured the call for rational mastering of the world to such an extent as other western literatures. It looks as if Italian literature safeguarded this essential quality of the "literariness" from the Renaissance up to Arcadia (just to mention Ariosto's Orlando in the Renaissance epic *Orlando furioso*, who, after falling in love, goes out of his mind and he does not get his brain back until Astolfo sets out on a journey to the moon, where he finds it). A study "Sensualism and Poetics in the Eighteenth Century" tries to show that this constant is also preserved even when in the North-Western Europe under the influence of the poetics of the Sublime (the necessity to portray Nature in its irrational deformity-dreadfulness-sublimeness) an idea predominates that such realities uncontrollable by reason should be used by literature to shape the rational and moral personality of the reader. There is nothing like that in the Italian Arcadia (except for the classicists Gravina and later Parini): so unpredictability of external semantic interconnections cannot be the reason for the art to protect the reader against them. Thus we have the poetics "del Diletto" vs. the English poetics "del Sublime – the Sublime". Diletto is "kindness, entertainment". If Holý has named the idyllic part of his works "kind", this term is not in a vacuum. As if this unique quality of literary feeling within the Community predestined the later valuable principle explicable by sensualism (É.B. de Condillac) that the explanation of a sign is not found in reason but in another sign (in the modern era, the principle was elaborated by

C.S. Peirce). We are therefore condemned to orientate ourselves by the senses, and not to have the criteria for the interpretation of the world given for ever.

Now we approach the profound distinctive traits of the Community, which show in any case that the community of Central Eastern or Central Southern Europe is much more extensive than the questions of the Hungarian studies and of the coercively supplemental position of the Slovak culture within its framework. It is a problem of its internal identity, external impulses, interactions, and changes. This requires a patient and collective work. We have therefore decided to direct our research towards the goal, which would demonstrate what are the sources of Italian culture apart from its uninterrupted literary traditions to be able to foster efficiently the idea of cultural universum as continuous semantic alluding without the sign being necessarily embodied in the logical Idea or in another referent. (In the eighteenth century, for instance G.B. Vico's work with his principle "verum ipsum factum" goes in this direction.) As we have already mentioned, this is a very desirable characteristic of a community. There are so far two analyses of this theme. The first is levelled at the traditional philosophico-religious supports of belief in sensuous life (unprotected by rational institutional barriers).

We have based our research on the thirteen volumes of poetry published by the Roman Arcadia and found out that part of these poems is written "on thesis" and that at the same time they are mutually controversial. On the one hand, an austere classicist orientation based on Plato and on the other hand lyric sensuous poems built on neo-Platonism of Plotinos and Marsilio Ficino. Both Platonism and neo-Platonism have been transferred into Christian tradition but they are quite different: while a body is for Plato "the prison of the soul", which is obliged through asceticism to free itself from the sensuous and to elevate itself to the Idea of the Good, by which it was created without delay, in neo-Platonism the soul's duty is to become enthusiastic about the earthly beauty perceivable by the senses, which is the only way to return to God (and to save a piece of earthly sensuousness otherwise doomed to destruction for eternity).

Although the support of sensuousness is quite strong because through Christian tradition it has penetrated into the entire Community, it is not the only one. It could be said that it stimulates modern ways of thinking, which try to defend sensuous cultural tradition and transfer it to modern era using different means (so as the sensuous or semantic idealness would not have to incline to rest in Logos). We therefore addressed Professor Martone from Naples, who in his contribution pointed out how Giovanbattista Vico had set to this kind of work in his New Science on common nature of nations by taking "the era of heroes" as a basis for historical cycles instead of our rational era. In "the era of heroes" people perceived the world with discomposed mind (*con la mente turbata*); there were no fixed names – types, which make our present-day communication automatically rational, but the perceived phenomena looked like new to such an extent that they promoted feelings of necessity to "caress them", to seek new names for them,

which would utter their categorization into the unprecedented groups. Each object was understood as being potentially capable of changing our vision of the world.

Vico's way of thinking is admirable because it was formed at the beginning of the eighteenth century – and our decades revealed the topicality in a roundabout way – through a discovery and a full interpretation of Peirce's concept "abduction" (the concept means approximately "hypothetic thinking") – equivalent to Vico's thought. Martone has introduced the parallel Vico – abduction to us as a novelty but we can refer with pleasure to Romboide No. 9/1990, where the question of abductivity of the life's philosophy or the attitude towards sign reality has been thoroughly elaborated mainly through Umberto Eco. The time (the time of science) just confirms how relevant is the type of mentality, which is developing in various periods in various ways, but always approximately in one direction in Italy and which enlivens the settled type of view throughout the Community.

The world of today is of course small and no national culture can be closed within a certain cultural type. For this reason we try in our research of the Community of Central Eastern Europe to simulate lively communication of cultural types, so far mainly in the eighteenth century, by comparing the situation in Swedish, French, Lithuanian, German region, in Russia according to the degree of one's willingness to contribute to confrontation and to go from national uniqueness to the features of larger cultural types.

In comparison, for instance with Magyar research, the amount of work done is negligible since under the superiority of the East-Western (simplified Russian-Czech) orientation, there is nobody to listen to the opinion that it is the research priority that is in question.

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