Introduction

The subject matter of this inquiry – Central and Eastern Europe – has been notoriously difficult to define. It is a frontier region, physically part of Europe, but on the edge of it and not fully integrated with it. The region’s name, what and whom it encompasses, and its physical and social geography have all been fundamentally influenced by global politics. In this article, the terms “Central and Eastern Europe” and “accession countries” are used synonymously to refer to the post-communist European countries that joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004 (that is, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). We use these terms not to imply an essential sameness among either the eight new EU members or all post-communist European countries, but to recognize that these countries share a similar position in the mainstream western discourses of development and underdevelopment, security and threat, and Europe vis-à-vis Eastern Europe.

A diversity of peoples have settled in the Central and East European region, but they rarely live in consolidated and clearly defined territories. Empires, both modern and ancient, only further promulgated the migration and mixing of people. To control and to protect their populations, states put up both hard (i.e., physical) and soft (i.e., permeable) borders. The most notable of such borders – not least for its longevity and severity – was the barbed wire fence of the Cold War, which demarcated a clear dividing line between Eastern and Western Europe. An entire generation of people both within and outside of Europe grew up with this blatant separation deeply engrained in mind (and body) that extended well beyond Europe to international scope.

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1. Discourse is understood as a set of assumptions, claims, and modes of analysis that enable and constrain speech and practice. EU enlargement discourse is therefore not the sum of what is said about EU enlargement, but the framework of meaning within which enlargement is problematized in a self-reflective and introspective process.
generating other, similar barriers. Today, this division, along with its attendant connotations of security, development, and identity, has been re-framed in the process of European integration. The division of East and West is also re-conceptualized in a global arena of supranational spaces, such as the EU formation. Supranationality (or post-nationalism or supraterritorialization) all refer to a distinctive character of contemporary globalization, signifying a higher permeability of borders and its transformative power over identity. The resulting narratives in and of accession countries are mutually constituted as they integrate, to various degrees, domestic, regional, international, and global considerations. The indeterminate nature, or changing determination, of the Central and East European location has had a fundamental impact on the shaping of political identities in the region.

This article investigates the ways in which the EU enlargement discourse is framed by the construction of a stable and secure Europe and an unstable and insecure Eastern Europe. The concept of security is a keyword in this discourse. We understand security in a broad sense, including both the military aspect of negative peace (i.e., lack of war) and the social-ecological-psychological aspects of positive peace (i.e., absence of structural violence).


4. Johan Galtung originally framed the term “structural violence” to refer to any constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures (“Violence, Peace and Peace Research,” Journal of Peace Research, 6, no. 3 [1969], 167-91). Structural violence is pervasive and has a powerful negative impact. It encompasses poverty, unemployment, and diverse arbitrary discrimination, such as racial, ethnic, religious, class, and sexual discrimination in political and social life. Structural violence differs from the other types of violence in that power relations within structural violence are less visible and exist in various forms infused in the existing social hierarchies. Urie Bronfenbrenner suggests that structural violence is nested within three systems, the socio-political (the macrosystem), the socio-environmental (the mesosystem), and the psychological (the microsystem). See Urie Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development.