

Rethinking the history of Europe

Borders and Borderlands

Europe's borders have both an internal and an external connotation. There are the lines separating European nation states from each other, and then there are the lines that separate Europe from other regions or continents. In both cases, they emerge over the course of centuries in historical processes of contention, conflict and peace making. The borders are not only physical demarcations of territories, but also constructions of mental barriers. Eastern Europe is a case in point, alternately seen at once as belonging to and not being part of Europe.

The aim of the Academy session in July 2003 is to analyze the processes of inclusion or exclusion by virtue of which Europe's borders were constructed as a result of ideological, military, political, economical, religious and cultural considerations. The emergence of Europe of today should be seen as a historical process, with its borders – internal and external - changing, over time, in meaning and content. The Academy's focus will be on what contemporaries at various times, in the course of often contentious processes, have defined as the borders of Europe.

In the past two decades, the borders of Europe, and the territories they enclose, have been undergoing a profound transformation. One expression of this transformation is the parallel emergence of the concept of "globalisation". Another example is offered by the case of Eastern Europe. A third case is that of Turkey as a potential member of the European Union: is it or is it not part of Europe? Even if the ongoing transformation is new, there is an enduring element in the fact that Europe cannot be clearly defined either in cultural or in geographical terms. The transformation deals as much with values as with geography.

In short, Europe as a set of values, or as a region of shared history, has no clear demarcation. There are many competing claims to constitute its historical core, while the values inscribed in the concept are often contested and contradictory. The nation states of this evasive Europe have long occupied a space that is much more clearly defined than is the broader area to which they supposedly belong. Their boundaries were historically constructed. Through a

concept of clearcut frontiers, people were divided by means of envisaged lines, where the civilisation of one “people” was unambiguously delimited from that of another.

The European construction of frontiers started early. An important step in this creative activity was taken with the great explorations in the 16th century. When the oceans and the New World were mapped, the boundaries of the Old World were drawn. The maps, which emerged in this context, were produced to control space and to dominate it conceptually. This development was reinforced by the emergence of centralised state bureaucracies that claimed physical dominion over the subjects in their demarcated territories.

Two developments contributed to the reinforcement of an abstract and more rigid demarcation of frontiers. In the first place, from the mid-19th century, political space was compressed by means of new communication technology (most importantly telegraph and railways).

Conceptually and symbolically, the periphery came closer to the centre at the same time as the extent of an often expanded *territorium* was brought under control through colonisation. The idea of territorial regime and practice – with the attending concept of a definite frontier - was further sharpened when politics was linked to the concept of nation, and, in turn, the concept of ethnicity emerged as a parallel to race in the Enlightenment classification.

This European development was in contrast to the American construction of a frontier image as a rolling zone, which marked the end of settlement and civilisation. The American historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued that it was in this borderland that the whole American way of living was moulded. An important question in the current rhetoric on globalisation and on War on the Evil is the possible meaning of these historical experiences of constructing boundaries through exclusion and inclusion.