

## THE EUROPEAN SPACE THROUGH THE PRISM OF GEOGRAPHY

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### Abstract

The article discusses some aspects of the relation between territory and space. In political-geographical sense the dynamics of the ratiocinations of Bulgarian and foreign scientists, politicians, public figures on the nature of spatial relations and their taxonomy has been traced.

A variant for hierarchization of taxonomy units in different fields of Geography has been proposed.

**Keywords:** territory, space, territorial structure.

### Resumo

O presente texto discute alguns aspetos da relação entre o território e o espaço. Em termos político-geográficos é analisada a dinâmica da conceção de cientistas búlgaros e de outros países, bem como de políticos e figuras públicas sobre a natureza das relações espaciais e a sua taxonomia.

É proposta uma alternativa para a hierarquização das unidades taxonómicas em diferentes domínios da Geografia.

**Palavras-chave:** território, espaço, estrutura territorial.

There are different opinions on the problem of space (in political-geographical and human aspect). In the Bulgarian scientific literature we should mention “The Political Geography, Geopolitics and Geostrategy” of Karastoyanov (Карастоянов, 2009), the monograph of Kolev (Колев, 2008), the works of Hristov (Христов, 2001), Vachvarov (Бъчваров, 1999; Бъчваров,

2001), Geshev (Гешев, 1997), Dimov (Димов, 1999; Димов, 2000; Димов, 2000), Stoyanov (Стоянов, 2009), Rusev (Русев, 1997), Yankov (Янков, 2009) and others. We are tempted to pay attention to the first, but encouraging attempts of Parashkevov (Парашкевов, 2007), discussing the socio-cultural relations among the states of the Black Sea Region, the distant Luzitanian scientific secret aspirations of Dimitrov (Димитров, 2007), the historical and geographical studies of the Southwestern part of the continent, a counterpoint of the South-East, of Popov (Попов, 2008), and others.

The list can be extended. But unfortunately, not much.

An enormous amount of sources on these problems exist in the Western (and especially in the Western-European) literature. The authors are not only geographers. Even the best works are not by geographers. We do not intend to list and analyze them, because it is not our main purpose. But we have to mention only some of them, which are in the spirit of this article: Nitkin (Nitkin, 2007), Oakes and Price (eds.) (2008) and Thrift (2004), Massey (1991), Harvey (1990), Molle (2000), Masser, Sviden and Wegener (1992) and Heffernan (1998).

For instance Nitkin (2007) examines the changes in the post-Soviet space and its contact with the Western space.

Oakes and Price (eds., 2008) emphasize on the dynamism of spatial dimensions through the prism of the cultural differences.

Quite interesting point of view presents us Heffernan (1998). In his "Europe – the Historical Geography of an Idea" he asks himself "Which Europe?". The one from the best times?

Of Paris in spring? Of Eurasia and the geographical turns? Of Germany – the empire of progress? Of the Pan Slavism? Of people? Of the scientific borders? Or of the regional utopia?

Following the geographical political alteration of Europe in historical aspect, getting back to the pre-war romantic period, the war terror, the post-war hopes, the stagnation, the new excitement, the sobering, and the scientific pragmatism, Heffernan (1998) recommends us not a space without borders, but a space whiffed by respect.

The question about space is not purely geographical. It is philosophical, as much as territorial-ascetic. We do not dare to determine the difference.

The problem of territory and space is usually connected with the problem of the taxonomy of territory (Figure 1). In spite of the long-term dispute on the types, number, range, genesis, terminology and character of the districts (regions), as if there is an approved taxonomic and classification structure, in which central part takes the district (region), no matter what is the type of zoning – economic, social, cultural, political and so on. As a whole system, it has a definite structure.

Under territorial structure Golubchik and others (2005, p. 137) mean the combination of the spatially segmented components and the connections among them. Each of the components of the territorial structure has a particular function, the realization of which is fulfilled through the corresponding type of infrastructure.

The territorial structure can have a radial-concentric, radial-arc, grated, linear and other character.

One of the important questions of the theory of zoning is the studying of the dynamics and stability of districts and the processes, connected with them.

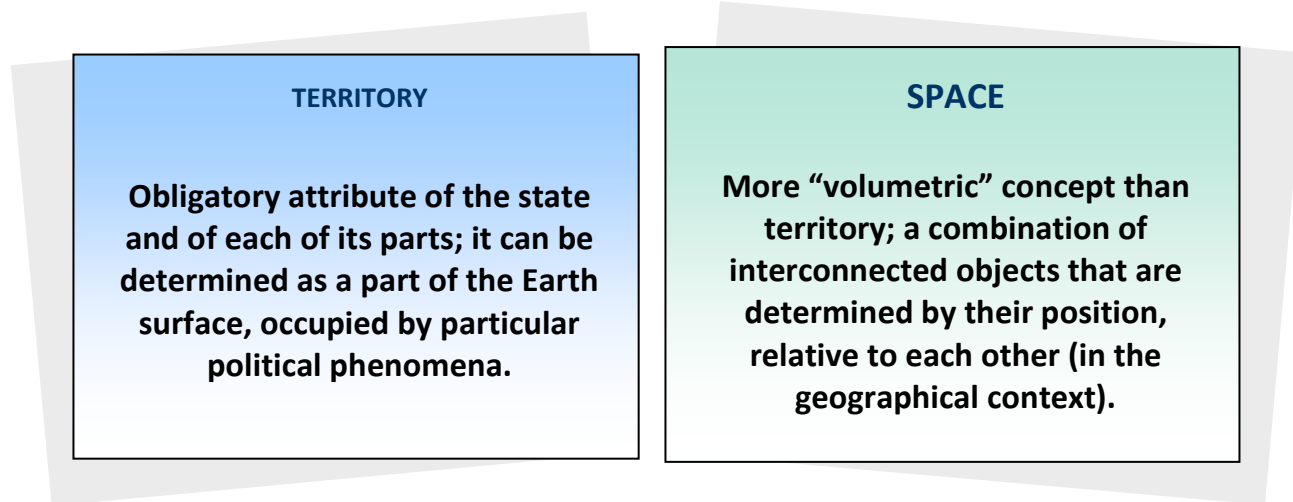


Fig. 1 – Difference between territory and space  
Source: Туровский, Р. Ф., 2006, p. 30.

The system of districts (regions) represents a peculiar combination of hierarchically mutually subordinated territorial units. The following taxonomical units of zoning can be outlined:

Zones – groups of districts, differentiated for the purpose of long-term prognostication;

Consolidated districts (macroregions) – formed within the borders of the zones on the basis of homogeneity;

Large districts – main group in the system of zoning. They represent the whole territory, having its specificity and tight relations inside the district;

Mesoregion – specialized complexes, but having more narrow specificity and strong internal relations;

Microregion – primal district “cells” in the taxonomy of zoning (*Регионоведение*, (1998).

Under hierarchy of the districts (regions) Gladkiy and Chistobaev (2000) mean such structural relations among them, at which the districts of the lower level form a definite entirety within the frames of the systems of the higher level (Figure 2).

Space (a debatable concept in respect of volume, content, processes, display, outlines, specificity and so on) is distinguished for three special features: territory, substratum and spirit.

Its parameters are expressed in its geographical perception, its socio-economic resources, its civilizational orientation.

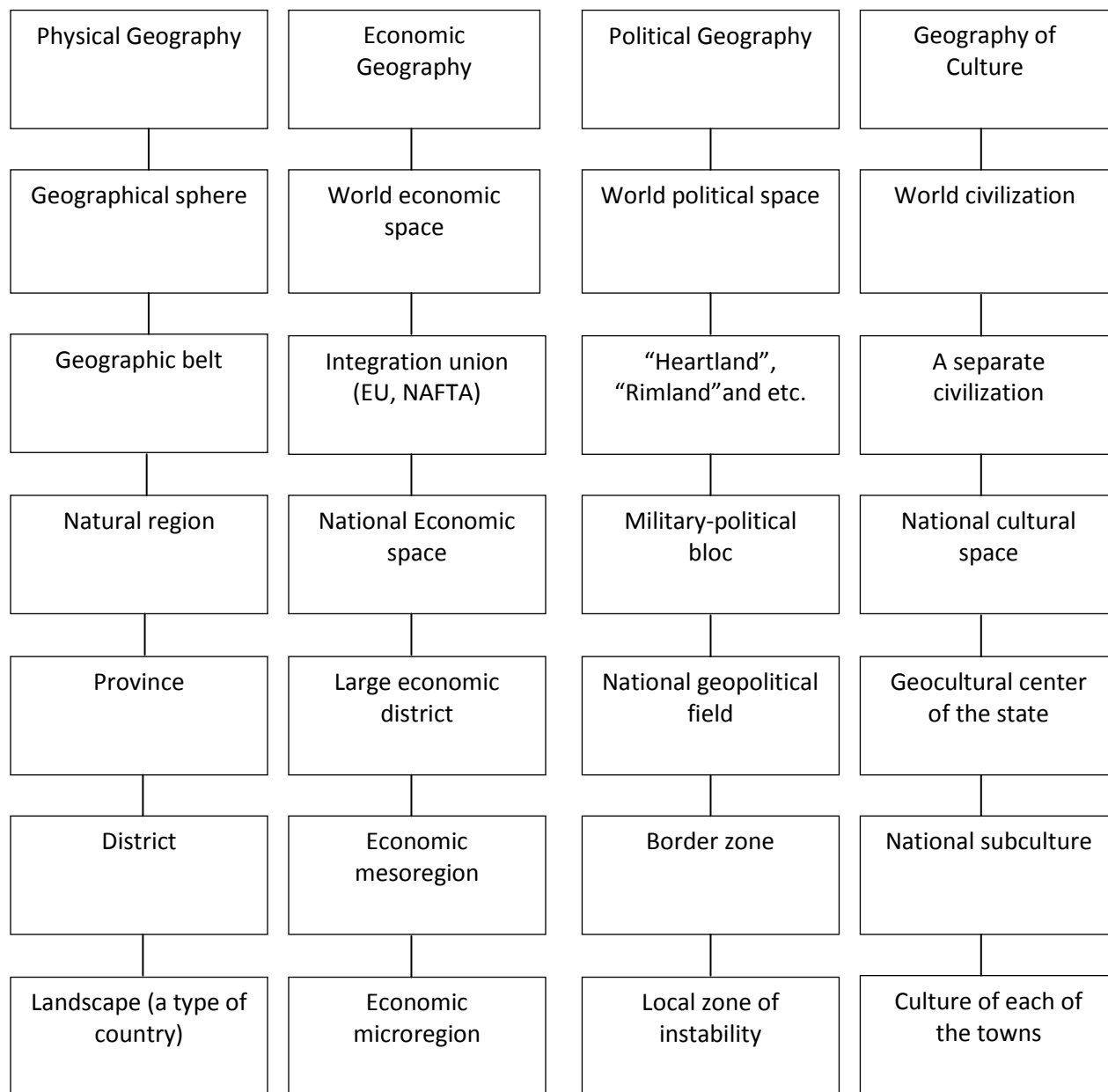


Fig. 2 - A variant of a hierarchy of districts (regions) in different spheres of Geography

Source: Голубчик and others, 2005, p. 140.

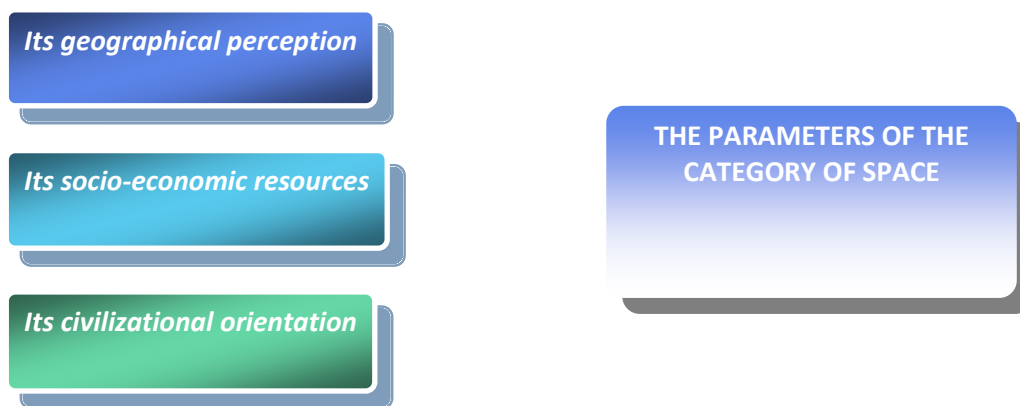


Fig. 3 – Parameters of the Category of Space.

The geographical look towards Europe discovers a mosaic of countries, a way of survive of different sciences, peoples and ethnoses. The European space is in constant “motion”, according to the concrete historical conditions and “the historical situations” (Яснецп, 1938).

And it is that way, because territorial space is target of private and public interests, of geopolitical aspirations of separate countries, blocs and alliances. It is in close context with the complex interrelation that takes part in itself: balance of powers – balance of interests.

Practically Europe faces the question: self-determination of peoples, or indestructibility of the borders.

The “territorial space” category affects a number of contemporary problems of internal and external character, and mostly the problems of borders: old, new, virtual.

In their nature, using the words of Fr. Mitterrand (Дерменджиев, 2010, p. 283), they are “embrace and fierceness”.

The history of Europe, socially-geographicated, lead to a mosaic of nation-states, “full” of peoples and ethnoses, who do not have state formation (Basques, Gaels, Flemish). Actually, may be they are more than the existing states. And we should not be surprised by the obvious aim of these communities to form their own “state system”, and the creation of sovereignty that “fondles” their nationalistic ego, which eventually would send us within the sweep of separatism, ethnic conflicts, and God forbid, civil wars.

In this connection, we should remind the thoughts of the French philosopher A. Fontaine: “If once we open Pandora’s Box for the straightening of borders, we will prove to be in a situation that will turn Europe in a military firing ground for decades ahead” (Дерменджиев, 2010, p. 283).

The spiritual space of Europe is connected with the territorial “recognition” of the battle of ideologies: liberal, communist, fascist, with confrontation of religions: Christian, Islamic..., which for themselves have dividing intentions.

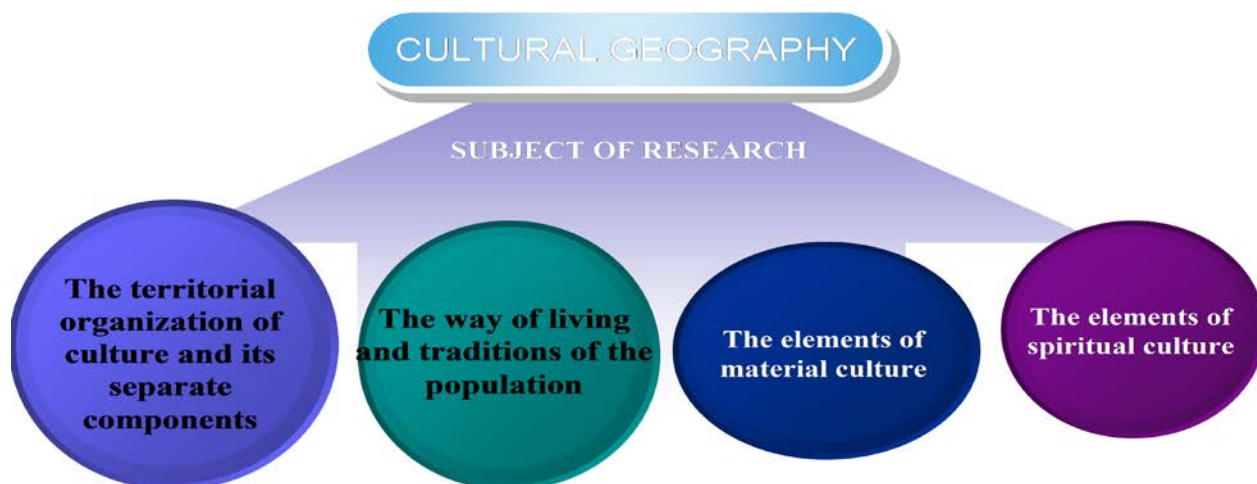


Fig. 4. – Subject of Research of Cultural Geography.

Thematically the cultural-geographical studies develop very variously and not always as interconnected directions. Variants are the studies of spreading of religions (Confessional Geography), the monuments of cultural heritage and others. In these studies, Cultural Geography borders on Ethnical Geography, Social Geography, Historical Geography, and also on Culturology and Art studies (Исаченко, 2004, p. 49).

The geopolitical and intellectual fault, the civilizational crisis, which brought social heterogeneity and conflicts leads to the emergence of the problem of identity. It is considered to be succession and entirety in the development of the different types of societies. The European idea and its slogan “united in diversity” correspond to the concept of European identity as a formula to overcome isolationism, nationalism and separatism in Europe. In the same time, analysts stand up for the presence of the category of national identity as a reason of the existence of distinctive nations and states, usually belonging to definite civilizations.

The mass migration and the creation of national Diasporas lead to the appearing of the term “group identity” as self-consciousness, regarding religions and civilizations. The Vatican poses the problem of the presence of catholic identity within the framework of Christianity. And

when are we going to pose the problem of the presence of social comfort in the conditions of aggressive religious reality?

The conception of European identity has the role of peculiar dogma in the European Union, asking: “What kind of identity? What kind of European family as a civilizational base for integration? An Atlantic one, as a guarantee for security or a national one, as a base for the historical traditions?” (Дерменджиев, 2012, p. 492). These rhetorical questions have their political resonance on different taxonomy level.

The European Union represents a superstate that is directed to the common European identity and homogeneity of the continental political space. Its ideologists presume the existence of countries and Diasporas, of ethnical groups and others, which are orientated to the adoption of western values. However, concerning the Muslim community, this is questionable.

One of the directions of the European Union strategists (eurooptimists) presumes the pursuit of formation of “the European family”, making the concept of “European citizenship”, of unity regarding the foreign policy and the military-political identity. This is the direction caring for united political space, or in other words for United States of Europe.

The other direction (europesimists) follows the idea of preservation of national identities as a base for the civilization. Trigano thinks that national doctrine doesn’t enter in “the nation as an element of Europe” category (Дерменджиев, 2012, p. 493). According to him the liquidation of national identity questions democracy, leads to chaos and racialism, to primary and secondary identity. Under the secondary one he means the voluntary association and infusion in civil society over a decade.

Too topical is the usage of the concept of negative identity (Dahrendor, s/d). The relations between the European identity and the European (western) solidarity are put to the test. It is obvious that to the test are put not only the pillars of the Atlantic alliance, but also the identity of the European Union itself, evidence of which are the following two facts: the different political vectors and the orientation, concerning the problems of international security.

From the present-day point of view, too commented (and supported) are the doctrines of multiculturalism, cultural hybridization and political propriety. For instance, Verhofstadt (s/d) in his report “Our Opinion on the Future” marks the diversity of cultures and the policy as a wealth of the European Union.

Fischer in his article “The New World Order in XXI Century” defends “religious and cultural tolerance”.

These humanitarian conceptions, borrowed from the liberal arsenal of the Great French Revolution, now can be seen in conditions of different ethnical cultures, religions, group self-

consciousness and values, which are not always compatible with the mirror characteristics of “the others”.

Because of that, the attitude of analysts to these problems is ambiguous. Some consider that multiculturalism and political propriety come from the USA as an ideology of the Atlantic civilization.

According to others, they are the result of the classical liberalism as a base of the European civilization.

In religious aspect, according to Zidentop (2001, p. 47), they lead to “an abrupt retraction of moral principles of Christianity”. The American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (2007) states that “multiculturalism is a problem, which will never disappear, as long as the capitalist economy exists.”

Nevertheless the common theory of integration is not capable of interpreting the run and inertia of this process, represented by the concepts of “unity in diversity” and “unity in variety”.

For Geography, especially for the social one, remains the not so easy task to territorize this process and to find a way to unriddle its hidden socio-psychological mechanisms.

Within the range of Social Geography is the problem of dichotomy between Western and Eastern Europe, perceived (simply said) as a battle between “the civilized West and the barbarian East”.

What kind of civilizational is there in the brothels of Amsterdam, or barbarian – in the cathedrals of Lvov, for instance?

Europe of absurdities, of old sinners and new “prophets” is just as sinful as the thought of the sin itself. If in a Belgian suburb there are more Belgians (let us recall Destre – “there are no Belgians in Belgium; they are either Walloons or Flemish”), than there are in the European centers of the “City”, we would think that the process of European hominization has really started (Дойков, 1993, p. 69).

In the conditions of new interpretations of the European space, trying to oppose the trunk thought of General Charles de Gaul, regarding “Europe from the Atlantic to Ural”, as if the most adequate is that of his already mentioned compatriot François Mitterrand “Europe from Brest to Vladivostok”. The East pours its essence to the... East, reminding the proud West the value of its intellectual stability, and diplomatically warning it of the determinant role of the “mittelland” for the formation of the psycho-geographical new space.

That gives us the grounds to doubt the truth of all the “classifications” – from that of the already departed Pope Joan Paul II for “continental united Europe”, and the “New” and the “Old”



Europe of the USA minister of Defense D. Rumsfeld, up to the four Europes (Western, Central, Mediterranean and Baltic) of Dahrendorf.

## Conclusion

The geopolitical changes, part of which are internally installed, gave the grounds for a number of analysts to begin to speak about a new spatial era, for “mutation of space”, for the new balance of powers and interests. From the macro-geopolitical aspect, probably there is some reason for “speaking” like this. From the micro-political, however, we come upon not strategic intentions, but realities – nationalism, separatism, social failures, giving birth to local and regional conflicts, nihilism, mental emigration. Then, what are the two Europe we are talking about?

The truth appears to us, is in the fact that we created the new European order before waiting for the echo from the Potsdam political fireworks to come. But did we build a new one? The old one hasn't “collapsed” yet?

Romano Prodi made the wonderful remark, reflecting the enlargement of the EU – “a political masterpiece” (Дерменджиев, 2010, p. 277). He doesn't stop on the public self-consciousness of communities, on the unipolar political-economic life that comes up, not even on terrorism. He doesn't refer to the question (problem) of globalization and the consequences from it.

Because the punctuation mark that encloses the term makes all other explanations senseless.

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