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**Item 18 of the Provisional Agenda:
Other toponymic issues**

A Subdivision of Europe into Larger Regions by Cultural Criteria

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This paper is based on an extended discussion in the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen, StAGN), which has been asked by the Translation Service of the European Commission through the German Foreign Office for an expertise on the subdivision of Europe into larger regions according to political criteria. This shows that there is a practical need for spatial subdivisions: not only for the definition of regional responsibilities in public service, but also in the economy, for the division of registers and map works, to attribute regions and countries in reference works, etc.

It has, however, also to be pointed out that every spatial subdivision and every assessment of spatial identities is essentially a social and cultural construct, even if it can be based on empirical data. This is true even more for a subdivision into larger regions, for which the choice of criteria is wider and a wider variety of personal backgrounds may occur.

The subdivision of Europe into larger cultural regions to be advertised by this paper starts from a notion of Central Europe, since a geographical notion of Central Europe has early developed, was intensively discussed in the 19th and 20th centuries up to Europe's partition into two antagonistic political blocs, and enjoys a certain renaissance thereafter. When the term "Central Europe" is defined, defining the rest of Europe's larger regions is not a problem anymore. The definition takes into account factors, which (1) leave traces in the cultural landscape, (2) have an influence on human attitudes and behaviour, (3) are relevant for historical as well as current societal, political and economic situations and (4) result in a spatial subdivision that sustains and is not subject to frequent changes. Boundaries between cultural regions, however, are rarely clear-cut and cultural regions do hardly border each other without gradual transitions. When the following 8 factors are used to define a cultural region called "Central Europe" it has to be remarked that some of them can be traced also outside Central Europe, albeit in different intensity. Within Central Europe they occur each with its own core and periphery and may be missing in some parts of the region completely. But the presence of a significant number of these factors is certainly the precondition for attributing an area to the cultural region "**Central Europe**":

- synchronic or diachronic existence of Protestantism and Catholicism, while Orthodoxy and Islam play only marginal roles;
- shaped - as a specific - by German and Jewish culture in addition to Slavonic, Romance, Hungarian a.o. cultural layers (present also outside Central Europe);
- early development of an urban system and an independent urban society in counterbalance to nobility, sovereign and church compared to East and Southeast Europe;
- early free farmers independent of feudal landlords;
- traditions of local and regional self-government as a consequence of early political particularism;
- cultural (linguistic, denominational) and ethnic variety within countries;
- politically and economically oriented towards the continent (and not towards overseas);
- delayed industrialisation compared to West Europe, but much earlier than in East and Southeast Europe.

Taking these factors into account, **Southeast Europe** is shaped by Byzantine culture, but also reshaped under long Ottoman rule. From Central Europe it was strictly divided – and in this way for centuries – by the former Austrian Military Frontier. What can be called **East Europe** in the cultural sense coincides with this part of Europe under Byzantine and Orthodox influence, which has only randomly been touched by an Ottoman impact, but significantly been shaped by Russian influence during the Russian Empire (from the middle of the 16th

century up to 1917) and in the Soviet period (1917-1992). **North Europe** may in the cultural sense be defined as this part of Europe, which has remained Protestant, where settlement is (by European measures) not very dense and land use not very intensive. The notion **West Europe** includes the former colonial powers oriented towards the Atlantic Ocean and at the same time regions with a sustaining impact of Reformation, an early urban system and early industrialization. **South Europe** comprises permanently Catholic and essentially Romance lands with great seafaring traditions.

A long version of the paper is currently under review with a scientific journal. After publication, maps on the subdivision of Europe into larger regions by cultural criteria into cultural regions as well as into countries will be available at www.stagn.de