

CENTRAL EUROPE'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ECOLOGICAL SECURITY

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Abstract

The issue of ecological security and even wider - environmental policy is being permanently undervalued in discussions and policy making in Central Europe.

It enjoyed its renaissance for a very short time just after 1989, and than - shadowed by current problems - is less and less present in public debate.

The paper focuses on political but also social and economic implications evolving from environmental challenges the region of Central Europe faces. It must adopt to global trends of economisation affecting many arenas of social and political life – including the environmental problems. The CEE states are trapped in glorifying capitalism as the new (better) system - however more and more it gets obvious that in environmental protection functions this system is highly imperfect.

Quite important part of this analysis will concentrate on ecological heritage of “socialism”. It has its economic, social and political dimension but it also must be put in an environmental context as without this background any analysis would be incoherent.

Analyzing Central and Eastern European countries' share in environmental exploitation leads me to some conclusions on the specifics of transition period and its consequences for the environment.

The transition processes in Central Europe were oriented (and to some extent stimulated) towards the EU integration goal, therefore the next part also touches the basic principles of up-keeping ecological standards in the UE block.

All this will be put in the context of „Ecological Era” ambitions (Rio declaration) as well as eco-development postulate. As environmental resources are vital in structuring the political and economic development, I would refer here to the matter of environmental protection policy - its institutionalization, instruments, methods – in the scale of one country as well as integrating block and global context.

Analyzing structure of ecological interests in Europe would be a great contribution to the final conclusion which would result in better understanding of ecological security and its dynamics.

Key words

Ecological security, European integration, Global trends.

Introduction

Our species has a long and colourful history of misjudging ecosystem capacity, stability and resilience and these errors cost particular cultures their survival [6]. This notion has been known at least since 1864, when George Perkins Marsh published his “Man and Nature” [4] Today's realities are that we are reaching or exceeding the limits of nature's possibilities.

For an environmentalists it would be probably difficult to imagine that the majority of economic and political scientists have never been taught that ecosystems provide humanity with crucially important (for the continuation of its existence) services: operation of hydrologic cycle, disposal of wastes, recycling the nutrients essential to agriculture and forestry, etc.

While these services are “free”, they would of course be infinitely costly to replace. This „suicide phenomenon” is notoriously neglected in societies’ awareness – many scientists are shocked when confronted with the truth – they discover that an industry appears to be destroying its resource base. (for example – the whaling industry was deliberately harvesting at a rate to the extermination of the species). [3]

Environmental economics (as well as connected environmental policy analysed by political scientists) remain a sub-discipline, fairly low in the professional order and has only minimal influence on the mainstream of economic or political thinking.

A new paradigm must be constructed that unites ecology, economists, politicians, and many others, placing nature in a dominant role. Some claim however that there is no need to worry about how today’s actions will influence people decade hence, since those people will be dealing with entirely new set of resources. [3]

It is enough to ask what was the structure of vital resources 50 years ago. Different than today, so in 50 years it will also likely be different. This is so called “grow for ever” dogma [3]. The problem is that some of them are anyway – irreplaceable.

Economisation

The today’s pragmatic world has answer also for this problem. According to economy rules – every resource is limited. The shortage of any resource is calculated by the market in the form of price.

And this has been the approach of the last years also towards the environmental resources.

What we observe in almost every sector of our life is economisation (of everything) – of social life, politics, etc. also ecology.

The Greens’ mantra: command-and-control approach to environmental policymaking (mandate, regulate, litigate) is slowly changing. Yesterday’s hopes, today’s heavy costs and tomorrow’s demanding ambitions have been driving public policy quietly towards market-based-approaches. Market mechanisms can be employed to achieve environmental goals at the lowest cost.

The most “promising” aspect of Kyoto Protocol is the innovative use of market – based instruments such as carbon – emissions trading. Many claim that if environmental groups continue to reject pragmatic solutions and instead drift toward utopian visions of the future, they will lose the battle of ideas.

The complaints are that it reduces nature to dollars and cents. In one sense it is right. Some things in nature are irreplaceable – literally priceless.

Also in Europe the environmental arena was influence by this market-driven approach. The answer of UE is the European Union’s Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) [7] - now the price is being determined more by fundamentals like temperatures and rainfalls (rather than set mandates). It is settling into a regular market.

A new profession emerged. Now we have eco-brokers that trade emissions allowances. And the market is gigantic: for the four months prior to the official opening of the UE ETS, market volumes held between 2 and 3 Mt (metric tons) per month. [7]

For the next phases of analysis it is necessary to move slightly from this contestation of capitalism forms adopted to the environment and bring back Soviet block countries’ experience with the collective ownership phenomenon.

Many authors claim that successful approach to many environmental threats will involve new forms of property institutions “more like” common property and “less like” either private or state property. Furthermore, since common property institutions usually exhibit a

fairly equal distribution of claims to resource, common property regimes are generally more oriented towards economic democracy than are private or state regimes. [6]

At this stage we need to further discuss the issue of commodities and discommodities. A commodity is something you want to acquire. A discommodity is something you want to get rid of. To acquire something is to acquire something from someone.

But to get rid of discommodity is not necessarily to get rid of it to anyone else in particular. The discommodity then becomes the (unwanted) possession of society at large [2]. James A. Swaney notices obvious and fundamental “(...) asymmetry between commodity and discommodity. A commodity is a good, and possessing goods is desirable. A discommodity is a bad and possessing bad is something most of us try to avoid.” [6]

When something is a good (commodity) the market works beautifully. When something is a bad (discommodity), the market works miserably, as it is in the interest of the producer of the discommodity to get rid of it “under the cover of darkness”.

“The whole notion of property rights is quite different for discommodities from what is for commodities. Property rights in the case of commodities protect the owner of the commodity. Property rights in the case of discommodities must protect the whole society. Because discommodity “property rights” typically protect society at large, they usually extend duties and responsibilities, rather than economic opportunities and freedoms. [6]

It is the society that limits the freedoms and opportunities of some market participants. The imperfection of capitalism is that its design rewards those who create, produce and distribute commodities. Unfortunately, due to the commodity-discommodity asymmetry, capitalism’s model also rewards those who create, produce and distribute discommodities. Capitalism’s design provides mechanism for capturing the benefits of commodities. Unfortunately, capitalism’s design provides no parallel mechanisms for capturing the costs of discommodities. [6]

Glorified common property regimes are not just abstractions. Many historians claim that pre-Columbus America was based on common property rule. The nomadic tribes were of course fighting for territories, but not for exclusive ownership, but for exploitation – that (in comparison to European counterparts) remained in balance with the nature. It is estimated that the “European settlement” was the process of destroying common property regimes.

This is why it is so important to promote efficient property rights and transparent markets. Socialism experience brings however bad memories of common properties, collective properties.

Guilty – Not Guilty

Global ecological threats bring about negative consequences for almost all countries. To different extent. To different extent different countries or different groups of countries are also responsible for those dangers – emissions, etc. [1].

It is worth giving such an example that in South America and Africa countries - the ozone coat is the thinnest and those regions are the least responsible for this phenomenon, because the heat emission they represent is the lowest.

Another example: India – inhabited by 16% of world’s population, consumes 3% of world’s energy and produces 1 % of world’s GDP. USA, inhabited by 5% of world’s population, consumes 25% of world’s energy and produces 5% of world’s GDP.

Also inter-generation perspective should be implemented when discussing the ecological consequences responsibility.

There is no doubt that the success of highly – developed countries and their economic and political high position in international relations - is to some extent based on the historical factors.

In the times of their industrialisation (intensive environment exploitation) there were no ecological arguments taken into account (no strong ecologists' movements existent) which resulted in irreversible damages of the nature.

The costs of their development have not been calculated yet. We can talk about a kind of debt those countries have to the next generations and other regions. Not to mention - negative heritage of colonial era.

As far as the Central and East European countries are concerned – the ecological situation is problematic. Some authors claim that even catastrophic. Destruction of large forest areas on the border of Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic, water pollution in the Czech Republic and Poland, pollution of the Baltic Sea, etc.

Many of those phenomena were began in processes that lasted in periods of time, in which the conditions of development were very similar in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Western Europe.

The example of Upper Silesia (South – West Poland), which was in XIX century a part of Prussia had the same development conditions as Westfalia in Western Germany – their level of development was very much similar, due to the fact that the structure of their industries was similar. The developments after the II WW. was very much different which can be seen also in the ecological consequences.

It is widely agreed that the poor condition of the environment in Central and Eastern Europe is tied to the set of reasons, that can be characterised as succession of economic, social and political specifics of 1945 – 1990. [1]

There are basically three groups of reasons for this phenomenon:

– **Connected with the specifics of central planned economies**

The communist regimes preferred the heavy industry as the economic priority (military production, competition with the West in the sectors of mining, steel, etc.) which are very aggressive towards the eco-system.

In central planning there was no enough impulses / motivation for rational management of resources (including raw materials, and natural resources).

If there was, for example in Poland or East Germany, deficit of coal, the communist government decided on building new coal mine [1].

– **Mistakes in economic policy**

The policy of limiting import (due to the Western currencies deficit - dollars). Therefore almost exclusively home-available resources were used.

The technology was also home-made (usually), and those were very energy-consuming and raw materials – consuming. To short (practical) perspective of economic plans. The role of the basic 5-years plans was gradually limited.

– **Political system (lack of citizens' freedoms)**

The example of Western countries shows that many environmental initiatives were undertaken under the pressure of media or non-governmental organizations. In a totalitarian regime there is no free media or civil society.

Mono-party system – no space for the “Greens”. Lack of reliable (available) statistical information. All these brought about the consequence of lower (compared to the West of Europe) level of eco-awareness [1].

Transformation

The transition period was the crucial time for the further environmental developments in Central Europe.

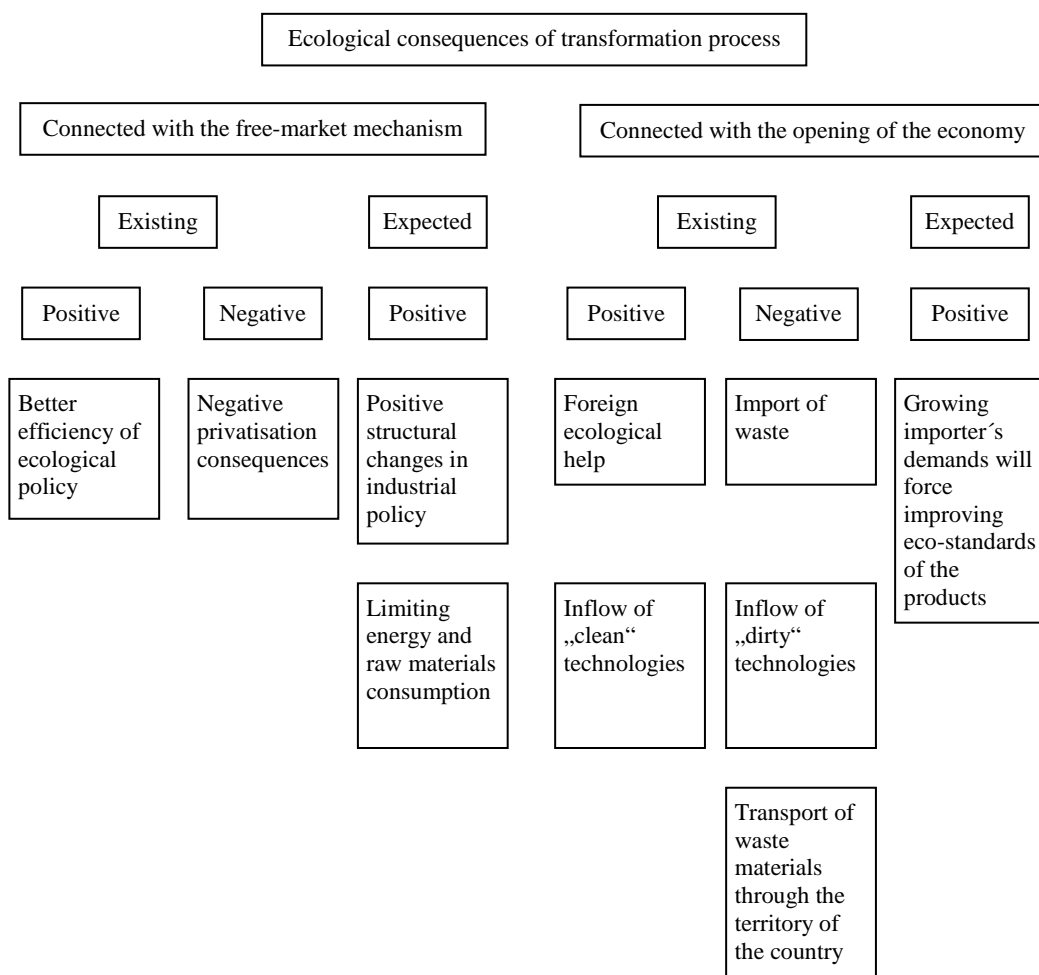
Many authors claim that it is too early to evaluate the transition time from ecological perspective as the necessary time-distance is needed.

The only certain conclusion is that the environment in Poland was in very bad condition – 12% of its territory (inhabited by 35% of Polish population) were classified as ecological disaster.

Also Polish “contribution” to the larger eco-system was un-proportionally huge.

Now – many has changed – Poland does not “enlarge” its environment by importing “energy-, raw materials consuming goods” and also many other environmental arenas Central European countries are less aggressive (unfortunately more as a result economy changes rather than ecological awareness increase).

The below chart shows ecological consequences of transforming the economy.



It is also worth noticing what were the tendencies of energy consumption in post-communist countries before and after the major phase of transformations.

Energy consumption per GDP unit (mega joules / 1 USD)

State	1989	1993
Bulgaria	47	45
Czechs Slovakia	51	54 53
Hungary	46	47
Poland	79	69
Romania	56	70

EU's umbrella and global context

When creating European Economic Community (EEC) – 50. XX c. – the problems of protecting the environment were estimated to be the internal affair of the member states.

But the more frequent and more “spectacular” ecological catastrophes (first tanker ship catastrophe – 1967, or development of nuclear energy sector and accompanying risks) increased the necessity to re-define environmental policy.

It became one of the EEC priorities in 1972 – Paris conference's conclusions:

- protecting the environment,
- rational exploitation of natural resources and
- protection humans' health.

Now – after 50 years of integration – EU developed a system of environmental policy consisting of:

- member state's environmental policy,
- primary law of EU,
- EU directives,
- International treaties.

It is not my intention to present and analyse every document or programme implemented. At this point I would like to refer to basic principles of environmental policy in EU, which are:

- ***polluter pays principle*** – including the costs of protecting the environment within the costs of production + eventual restoration costs;
- ***prevention principle*** – prevention is less expensive than restoration (if possible);
- ***effectiveness principle*** – achieving the most beneficial relation between efforts and effects;
- ***fairness principle*** – the costs should be distributed proportionally to the damages created but also to the financial possibilities of a country;
- ***subsidiarity principle*** – ecological actions are undertaken on the level of UE only when absolutely necessary and the issue cannot be effectively dealt “lower”.

European Union is not a desert island in international community. It is also influenced by larger processes connected with environmental policies. They are part of international

relations and consist also of legislature, programmes, rules, etc. They are even more numerous than those at the EU level.

Here, I would like to refer to one – introducing the idea of Ecological Era – Rio de Janeiro conference. Twelve basic principles of “Ecological Era” (Rio Declaration) [4]:

- Psychological development is the basic goal of human being (the goal is healthy and harmonious co-existence with the nature)
- Setting the impassable level of satisfying one’s material needs
At the level comparable to Polish (economically- GDP/capita)
- Agreeing on average 2 children per family standard
- Accepting the eco-development concept
- Protecting major Earth’s eco-systems
- Acquiring the knowledge on eco-systems management
- Protecting the concept of supportive, open economical system
- Partnership and fairness instead of profit – the need to philosophical change in business understanding
- Fair term of trade
- The existing ones discriminates the poorer states.
- Developed countries taxation for developing countries
- Creating state’s environmental policies
- Developing citizens’ activities
- Building new pro-environmental organisational structures

When discussing the Ecological Era context one cannot ignore the related eco-development postulate.

The term “Eco-development” was launched on a UN conference in Stockholm in 1972 [5]. The society that recognises the idea of eco-development is aware of the supremacy of ecological balance that cannot be disturbed by growth – economic, etc. civilisation in general.

The general rules of current environmental policies are based on obligations and prohibitions as oriented toward production and consumption. Therefore it was worthy to analyse a document that consisted of a positive programme, rather than set of restrictions.

Herewith I would like to present another example of politicisation of environmental issues – ecological matters become part of primary laws – for example: constitutions.

Polish constitution (1997):

- accepting the sustainable development as the priority,
- providing environmental protection,
- providing environmental security,
- accepting the rule that environmental protection is the responsibility of public bodies,
- free access to information on the condition of environment and its protection,
- individual obligation to protect the environment and responsibility for exploitation.

Foreign help in ecology

Even very general analysis of above mentioned document brings about the conclusion of the necessity of implementing solidarity mechanisms in international community. Among many forms – there is ecological help, which can be financial, technical or organisational support in pro-ecological initiatives given by (usually) highly developed countries.

The most frequently undertaken, when sharing one eco-system (for example Baltic Sea).

Motivations of such help:

- economic, sometimes it is cheaper to prevent than to cover the cost of damages or restoration,
- humanitarian,
- political.

Forms:

- Direct investment
- Co-operation in a project
- Dept – for – nature swap (dept conversion)

No matter if the intention of ecological help is rooted in politics or economy – it refers to the issue of environmental security, therefore at this stage I would like to address some content of this paper to this issue.

Environmental security the evolution of security issues in international relations

Etymologically the term “security” comes from Latin *securitas*. In Roman times it meant *political stability*. Originally was defining the internal state’s stability. But very soon was re-defined and enriched with external violence threats [5].

Defining security was evolving. With the process of time it was widening – leaving narrow understanding, mainly military. Now it also includes political, economic, social, and ecological matters.

Among impulses of ecological security thinking, there are milestones like Chernobyl catastrophe. At the end of 1986 in Oslo, the Defence Ministry of Norway organised a conference on ecological dimension of international security.

Environmental security is understood as a state of international relations (E. Schevardnadze) – others – a state of social relations, which limits and eliminates ecological threats and promotes positive undertakings, enabling realisation (materialisation) of values important for the existence of nations and states.

Directly from the definition we need to move to the key word of international relations - interest. Also in international ecological relations (security issues), it is the interest that form and define the priorities, forms, and methods of states (or other actors of international relations) behaving in international environment.

One of the basic elements defining the structure of interests is the symmetry or asymmetry of pollution flows. Symmetric “exchange of pollution” is a pre-condition and factor stimulating co-operation. Asymmetric one – the opposite.

For example – the sulphur pollution of air is exported from Great Britain to Scandinavia because of the winds blowing 95% from the West. It results in the Scandinavian countries being the leader of opinion makers to limit the emission of sulphur, while Great Britain refused to sign a protocol on sulphur emission reduction (1985). The environmental problems analysis from the perspective of political or economic sciences, may – of course - not only limit itself to biological understanding. It consists of analysis taking into account the processes of internationalisation, conflicts and tensions, as well as the structure of interest of different countries. [5]

Another political aspect of environmental problems is the presence of military forces in Europe – almost forgotten after the period of the Cold War. The concentration of numerous and large armies is the reason of nature exploitation not only during war. The armies, also when peace, are one of the strongest polluters on European continent. The surface of military areas in Europe is estimated to 1-3% of the continent.

Conclusions

Basic ecological threat is of social-economic nature – it is citizens' consumerist affection. The model of consumption (typical for the developed countries of the West – so popular in other parts of the globe) leads to growing demand for widely understood natural resources.

Even the “environmentally aware” societies are not “environmentally sensible” enough to resign from – even from part of – their prosperity.

This is not clearly seen when debating on the challenges of approaching environmental threats – on the level of declarations, there is no better talkers than politicians. It is clearly seen when negotiating, for example, emission reduction.

This is largely problematic because of the fact that institutionally, the international environment (international relations actors) have not worked out effective procedures of decision making. We suffer the deficit of democracy (and consequently democratic decision making) on the level of European Union and – what is even more obvious and painful – in a global context.

Is this situation hopeless? Certainly not. We observe some increase of ecological awareness, also increasing activities of NGOs in the field of ecology as well as many other positive phenomena.

Environmental awareness among political elites was proved in 1972 – Rome Club launched a document “The Limits of Growth” where emphasised the global dimension of ecological threats.

The wider public became aware of ecological threats later – 80. and 90. (of course – western part of the continent.) the example of Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992).

In Poland (which is probably representative for Central European Countries) - after the wave of increased interest in the transition period – it went down, shadowed by growing problems in different fields.

The pre-condition of any serious and satisfactory ecological debate is improving political culture to the level in which the public debates will not only be full of current problems but the electoral debate will focus on environment protection and related issues.

Only political interest (pressure from below – the voters) can push the decision makers to effectively deal with environmental issues. It is in the sphere of good wishes that this will happen with positive motivation, and more likely – will happen when humanity becomes confronted with environmental “no good solution” situation, which may be, ecological catastrophe, running out of some natural resources.

Namely – eco-ethics must be rooted in people' thinking to the extend that it will be as much (and preferably – more) important as consumers priorities. Responsible consumer's behaviour is the key element of long-perspective strategies in ecology, as it's the market's demand pressure results in industry dynamics and consequently environmental exploitation.

Ecological problems are not only the technology imperfections, but also (mainly?) a direct result of values systems preferred by the societies [5]. The conclusion may be painfully obvious, but in this “we” vs. “they” polarisation, it is “we” who are decision makers.

This charges us also with the individual responsibility for the environment not only in local but also in global scale and context.

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