

Views on Central Europe in Hungary and Slovenia

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POVZETEK

MADŽARSKI IN SLOVENSKI POGLEDI NA SREDNJO EVROPO

Članek prikaže mnenja slovenskih in madžarskih intelektualcev o možnosti srednjeevropskega sodelovanja, in deloma tudi konfederacije od leta 1848 do najnovejših časov. Medtem ko so do leta 1918 madžarski politiki in pisatelji (Teleki, Klapka, Kossuth) dali več spodbud za izoblikovanje konfederacije, so se Slovenci zavzemali za Zedinjeno Slovenijo, oziroma za federativno ureditev Monarhije, in šele leta 1898 je pisal E. Kristan o demokratični konfederaciji.

Med Madžari je bilo precej razprav o Naumanovi misli, in tudi mnogo pristašev te ideje, Slovenci so v glavnem zavrnilo njegovo idejo, saj so v njej videli prizadevanje nemškega imperializma. Med obema vojnoma so hoteli Slovenci predvsem federalizirati Jugoslavijo, in samo nekaj ljudi (A. Novačan, J. Puntar, L. Ehrlich) je hotelo neke vrste južnoslovansko, oziroma srednjeevropsko konfederacijo. V istem času je na Madžarskem živela ideja Srednje-Evrope, čeprav so D. Szabó in njegovi privrženci na resni podlagi razvijali tezo o novi integraciji, o izoblikovanju neodvisne vzhodne-evropske federacije.

Teza o Srednji-Evropi je po drugi svetovni vojni oživila v drugi polovici 80-let. V tej tezi so Madžari in Slovenci poudarili svojo drugačnost v odnosu do Rusov oziroma Jugoslavije.

Precedents: The Idea of (Con)federalism before 1915

Since the 1840s both countries have seen numerous proposals to find tangible solutions to the heated problems of all the small nations in the region between Germany and Russia. Having long traditions of statehood dating back centuries and acquiring a kind of privileged position within the Austrian Empire, Hungary's approach has always been different from that of the Slovenes, who have never acquired an independent statehood and who have always lived in three different countries in the region. Surprising as it is, we can still find a lot of striking similarities in the approaches of the two nations.

The proposals conceived in 1848 aimed at unifying the Slovenian nation living in two Hungarian counties, the Kingdom of Lombard and Venice and six different provinces of the historical Austria. Parallel to this main stream approach there ap-

peared several other ideas, including the idea of establishing a federal state in the territory of the monarchy or developing a special relationship between the Slovenes and the Croats (and the Serbs in Vojvodina).¹ The main purpose of the Slovenes was to obtain new rights.

On the other hand, some Hungarian political leaders, who had an independent state and even a certain amount of power to control other peoples, realized that the old methods of practising power could no longer be maintained. László Teleki for example, who was familiar with the ideas of Adam Czartorisky, leader of the Polish emigrant community in Paris, suggested that the Hungarian government should give territorial autonomy to the Croatian, Romanian and Serbian national minorities. "All nationalities - not only the ones under our control and not only in Hungary - will admire and envy us and will be happy to accept Hungary as a central ruling power of a confederation along the Danube..." Other thinkers supporting *March the Fifteenth*, a radical newspaper in Hungary, had very similar ideas when they suggested that "Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia - and even the Slavic nations in the Highlands (provided that they agree) - should immediately establish a federal republic." Nevertheless, the Minority Act, adopted on July 28, 1848 but never sanctioned, was much less radical; it ensured only linguistic and not territorial autonomy to the minorities.

A great many Hungarian politicians followed the same line in the next few decades as well and made it clear that most of the issues of the Hungarian empire, especially those concerning the problems of statehood and minority groups could only be solved if all the nations in the region were ready to collaborate. At the beginning of 1850 the emigrant leaders of Europe's defeated revolutions established a confederation committee in London, in which the Hungarians were represented by László Teleki, György Klapka and Ferenc Pulszky. The collaboration of the Hungarian, Romanian and Southern Slavic leaders resulted in a plan to establish a Commonwealth of the Danube Nations. The Assembly of the Commonwealth was to have had representatives of the founding nations in equal numbers and the headquarters were to have been in a different capital each year. Lajos Kossuth himself worked out a proposal of confederation, which he mentioned to László Teleki in his letter of June 16, 1850. Twelve years later, in 1862 he published his proposals in the *L'Alleanza* in Milan. Unlike his previous plans in 1850, the new proposal of the Danubian Confederation did not include his original idea of having the Poles and the Czechs as members and did not designate Hungary as the permanent capital of the confederation. According to his plans Hungary (Transylvania), Romania, Croatia and probably Serbia and the other Southern Slavic nations could have established a federal state. György Klapka and Mihály Táncsics had a similar plan in 1855 and 1857 respectively.²

The main purpose of the Slovenian politicians of the time was still to unify all the territories where people of Slovenian origin lived and as a consequence, to support the idea of federalism but they did not intend to establish independent states within the monarchy and join them in a form of federalism. Andrej Einspieler's proposal conceived between 1861 and 1865 to divide the monarchy into nine provinces was one of these ideas. According to this plan the central part of Austria (Innerösterreich),

1 V. Melik: *Leto 1848 v slovenski zgodovini* (XVII. seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture 6-18. julij 1981. Zbornik predavanj). Ljubljana, 1981, 7-27., J. Prunk: *Slovenski narodni vzpon. Narodna politika* (1768-1992). Ljubljana, 1992, 54-67.

2 Kossuth Lajos *Iratai*. 6. köt. Budapest, 1898. 9-23.; *Dunavska konfederacija*. in: *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*. Zagreb, 1958.; *Magyarország története 1848-1890*. 1. köt. Budapest, 1979, 420-422., 512-513., 710-711.; Hanák P.: *Közép-Európa: az imaginárius régió*. Világosság, Budapest, 1989, 8-9, 563-566.

where most of the Slovenians lived would have been one of these provinces.³

Another proposal suggested by Fran Podgornik tried to find a solution to the Southern Slavic issue by federalizing the monarchy. Podgornik adopting the idea of a Ukrainian politician, A. I. Dobranjski, suggested that different, German, Czech, Polish, Ukrainian and Southern Slavic autonomous provinces should be established in the territory of the monarchy. Slovenian territories, together with Dalmatia, Istria, Croatia, Slavonia, the Serbian quarters of Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina were to have been a part of the Southern Slavic province.⁴

The first Slovenian politician who raised the issue of a democratic confederation in one of his writings in 1898 was a Social Democrat, called Etbin Kristan. His principles were adopted by the Congress of the Yugoslavian Social Democrats held in Ljubljana in 1909.⁵ The aim of the so called trialist proposal suggested by the Slovenian clerics between 1908 and 1918 was to make it possible for the Slovenians to become a coherent part of the Southern Slavic unit of administration within the monarchy. The Slovenian Liberals had a very similar idea, that is they supported the development of a Yugoslavian unit within the trialist monarchy.⁶ Vladimir Knaflič, whose thoughts were very close to those of T. G. Masaryk, gave voice to a very interesting and remarkable idea in 1912. He thought that by changing the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy spreading from the Sudetes to Zlati rog and from the Boden Lake to the Adriatic, Aegean and Black Seas and the Polish Lowlands and by involving the Southern Slavic people "there could be a conglomeration of different nations as well as autonomies and state units established in the region, a political structure which would be organized on the principle of autonomy and which would bear characteristics of a federal republic and a confederation."⁷

An article called "Slovenci in Jugoslovani" published by Ivan Cankar in 1913 was quite straightforward about the doubts that the Slovenian issue could be solved within the framework of the monarchy and put more emphasis on the unity and collaboration of the Southern Slavic people: "We can no longer be ignorant about the fact, that we are not only Slovenians and even less only citizens of the Austrian Empire, but much more a member of a family living here from the Julian Alps to the Aegean Sea."⁸ At the same time the author was quite critical about the new Illyrian approach, which denied the necessity of a strong national identity. Cankar considered it important to preserve the Slovenian people's national identity which according to Dimitrij Rupel partly originated from the fact that they belonged to Austria (Central Europe).⁹

3 V. Melik: Slovenska politika ob začetku dualizma. Zgodovinski časopis, Ljubljana, 1968, 25-28.

4 J. Pleterški: Jugoslovanska misel pri Slovencih v dobi Taaffejeve vlade (1879-1893). Zgodovinski časopis, 1975, 267.

5 Zgodovina Slovencev. Ljubljana, 1979, 587.; F. Zwitter: O slovenskem narodnem vprašanju. Ljubljana, 1990, 355.

6 J. Pleterški: Trializem pri Slovencih in jugoslovansko zedinjenje. Zgodovinski časopis, 1968, 169., 171.

7 L. Čarni: Prispevek k zgodovini sociološke misli na Slovenskem: Vladimir Knaflič (1888-1944). Anthropos, Ljubljana, 1991, 31.

8 I. Cankar: Zbrano delo. 25. knjiga, Ljubljana, 1976, 229.

9 D. Rupel: Življenje v Srednji Evropi. Nova revija, Ljubljana, 52/53, 1986, 1380.

Reflections on F. Naumann's theory

Although in 1915 Leonid Pitamic, a Slovenian lawyer was quite positive about Naumann's ideas saying that he was sympathetic and understanding about the strivings and ambitions of every small nation in the area,¹⁰ as early as 1917 another thinker, Janez Evangelist Krek realized that "Naumann's concept of 'Mitteleuropa' was quite different. On the surface Naumann was really sympathetic and understanding, but on the undersurface the whole idea was actually the dream of a Great Teutonic Empire without any consensus or compromise with people of Slavic origin." In December 1917 though Henrik Tuma, a Social Democrat was still convinced that the conflicts leading to the breakout of World War I could be solved only by establishing "a unified state of autonomous groups of equal rights and power in the region of the Adriatic and the Danube, the Sudetes and the Carpathians."

According to Albin Prepeluh's accounts the inside opposition of the party rejected Tuma's ideas saying that the ultimate purpose was the establishment of an independent state of the Southern Slavic people.¹¹ There is another fact worthy of mention. While organizing the new state, on November 9, 1918 Anton Korošec managed to sign an agreement with Ante Trumbić in Geneva which would have guaranteed a kind of confederation of the National Council in Zagreb and the Kingdom of Serbia. Unfortunately the Serbian politician invalidated the agreement¹² and finally the SHS Kingdom was organized by unitary and centralizing principles.

Naumann's ideas were not accepted without reservation in Hungary either. His theory was supported and attacked within each social strata, he had supporters and enemies among the ruling classes, the Bourgeois Radicals and the Social Democrats as well. Those who were against his theory were generally afraid of a kind of German supremacy and of strong tendencies towards Germanization. Although a small group of Hungarian capitalists hoped to make profit from the introduction of a customs union and expected to cooperate with the German capital, most of them, similar to the majority of the landlords in the country, were not very happy to see a strong Germany with immense economic potential and worried about the state of the home economy. Nor did the idea of a *Mitteleuropa* seem to be advantageous for the Hungarians for political reasons. The strongest argument against it was that in such a political structure "the Hungarians would lose their leading and unifying role" in a multinational state, which Hungary was at the time. The Catholic Church had its own reasons to oppose the idea as well. Apart from some economic considerations, the most important reason why they objected to the proposal was that the Catholics would not have been in an absolute majority in this new political formation. Most of the prominent members of the ruling class - István Tisza, Albert Apponyi, Gyula Andrássy, etc. - were against the proposal irrespective of their political commitments. Although they definitely wanted a kind of German- Austrian-Hungarian cooperation and they were attracted by the idea of a Central European collaboration as well, they rejected the idea of a *Mitteleuropa* partly for economic reasons and partly because they were worried about the political consequences probably influencing the future of the Hungarian state in a way they could not accept and they did not want to give up the dualistic form of state.

The French and English oriented Oszkár Jászi, a prominent figure of the Bour-

10 P. Vodopivec: *Srednja Evropa je, Srednje Evrope ni*. in: *Srednja Evropa*. Ljubljana, 1991, 7.

11 A. Prepeluh: *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi*. Trst, 1987, 34., 61-62.

12 J. Prunk: *op. cit.* 206-207.

geois Radicals was also worried about Hungarian statehood. After long and thorough analysis of the majority issues he ended up with a Leftist, Liberal solution. He was convinced at the beginning that "the victory of the Allies would result in a total falling apart of Central Europe ... There would be numerous small states organized by the principle of national identities ... and under the military autocracy of Russia, which would automatically entail the cessation of the German hegemony and the prevalence of a Russian hegemony in the region." Being afraid of the probability of the latter, he hoped that after establishing a Central European Union Hungary could be rescued from the danger of Pan-Slavism and Dacoromanism and there would be more possibilities to solve the minority issue in a more liberal and humanitarian way.

A great part of the Bourgeois Radicals agreed on these issues with Jászi, but their experts on economic issues rejected the idea of a confederation of such type for both political (danger of Germanization) and economic reasons. Even his closest friends - Endre Ady, the Social Democrat Zsigmond Kunfi or the Bourgeois Radical Róbert Braun - were against the idea of a Mitteleuropa, because they found it dangerous to let Germany gain more power. It is important to emphasise though that Jászi, when speaking about German hegemony, could never forget about the imminent danger of Russian supremacy and when supporting the idea of a Central European Union, always had a much more democratic Germany in mind and never meant a strong military empire. By the end of 1916 most Bourgeois Radicals had turned against the idea of a Mitteleuropa and even Jászi revised his thoughts after the February Revolution in Russia in 1917. "Czarism has collapsed in Russia, the danger of the Pan-Slavic imperialism has passed It is quite evident now that in the present situation Central Europe as a political structure cannot be anything else but an aggressive and militaristic formation, an exclusive military friendship between Germany and Hungary. Previous suppositions about the possibilities of a free alliance of all the different nations and independent states in the region are no longer relevant."

There was no consensus among the Social Democrats either. Ervin Szabó, who had close relationships with the Bourgeois Radicalists, thought that the establishment of a Central European Confederation was historically inevitable and expected it to bring the bourgeoisie into power instead of the old feudal classes and hoped for a much more democratic social formation. The Social Democratic supporters of the Mitteleuropa proposal strongly held the belief that for different political, geographical and economic reasons it was almost impossible for any small nation in the region to have an independent nation state and hoped that with the victory of the confederation social reforms would be much more easily realized.¹³

Oszkár Jászi never gave up the idea of a Central European Union organized upon the principles of democracy. His book on the proposals of a United States of the Danube Nations was published on October 1918. According to his plans there were to have been five independent states in the territory of the monarchy: Hungary, Austria, the countries of the Czech Crown, Poland and Illyria and they would have formed a confederation. Illyria would have included all the territories with Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian inhabitants. This plan was totally unrealistic - neither domestic nor international affairs made it possible to realize it - and since the main purpose of the proposal was the defence of the Hungarian national identity and integrity it totally excluded the possibility of federalizing Hungary. The model Jászi tried to follow was

13 Irinyi K.: A Naumann-féle "Mitteleuropa"-tervezet és a magyar politikai közvélemény. Budapest, 1963.; Hanák P.: Jászi Oszkár dunai patriotizmusa. Budapest, 1985, 64-67.

that of the United States and Switzerland.¹⁴

Views on Central Europe between the two World Wars

While the period between the two world wars saw quite a strong anti-Slovene atmosphere both in Italy and Austria and Hungary was loud with irredentist slogans, most Slovenian politicians and intellectuals tried to democratize and federalize the Yugoslavian system and their thoughts remained within the intellectual framework of the politically given Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, there were three proposals that might be worth mentioning. Anton Novačan and the Slovenian Republican Party took a definite stand in 1922 and 1923 supporting the idea of a Yugoslavian (con)federation. According to this plan the Republic of Slovenia and the republics of Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria would have formed a confederation.¹⁵ At the beginning of 1923 Josip Puntar published a plan about a Central European confederation (the United States of Central Europe), which would have been a kind of political and economic alliance in the Central European region as a balance between a German- Roman world and Russia. The first step of establishing this United States of Central Europe would have been a confederation between the SHS Kingdom and Bulgaria.¹⁶ The third proposal of confederation was made by a right-wing, anti-communist Catholic group led by Lambert Ehrlich, whose main objective was to build up a Catholic confederation in the region.¹⁷

After the Nazis came to power in Germany, their political ambitions concerning Central Europe became more aggressive. Slovenian thinkers and politicians - Franjo Baš, Janko Mačkovšek and Svetozar Ilešič for example - tried to protest and fight against these aggressive political ideas. Bogo Grafenauer analysed the issue especially from a geopolitical point of view and came to the conclusion that the ultimate purpose of German ambitions were to achieve a kind of German supremacy in the region and establish a Great Germany. He was convinced that only the cooperation and the agreement of all the small nations in the Central European region could serve as a balancing power between the German and Russian interests and made it clear that the only way to achieve such an alliance was for it to be based upon equality and universal human values.¹⁸ Since all three neighbouring countries had always had a kind of hostile attitude towards the Slovenes and they would have been predestined for an inferior role in an alliance, Izidor Cankar rejected the idea of a confederation in autumn 1944 and thought the only possibility for the Slovenes was to become a part of Yugoslavia.¹⁹

Between the two world wars there were several ideas and proposals in Hungary as well, on how to solve the most crucial problems of the region. Irredentist voices in the Hungarian government on the one hand and the influence of a Pan-European movement on the other, made Elemér Hantos express his ideas on Central Europe the

14 Jászi O.: *A Monarchia jövője. A dualizmus bukása és a Dunai Egyesült Államok*. Budapest, 1918.; Hanák P.: op. cit. 68-71.

15 I. Grdina: *Kratka zgodovina Slovenske zemljoradniške in Slovenske republikanske stranke Antona Novacana*. *Zgodovinski časopis*, 1989, 86., 93.

16 J. Perovšek: *Oblikovanje programskih načrtov o nacionalni samoodločbi...* *Zgodovinski časopis*, 1984, 19.

17 J. Prunk: op. cit. 302.

18 B. Grafenauer: *Slovensko narodno vprašanje in slovenski zgodovinski položaj*. Ljubljana, 1987, 82., 139.; B. Grafenauer: *Srednja Evropa? Zakaj ne preprosto Evropa?* in: *Srednja Evropa*, 20.

19 V. Rus: *Na kriznih križpotjih*. Ljubljana, 1988, 39-41.

way he did. Hantos, whose main concerns had an economic origin accepted the status quo of the region as a fact and thought that this new formation "could serve as a kind of political, economic and cultural alliance of all Central European nations." As far as the inner political structure is concerned, the alliance would be a constitutional conglomeration of different autonomous nations." According to his views Central Europe was an independent cultural entity and he considered the integration of Central Europe as the first step towards a larger integration, namely the development of a United States of Europe. In the 1920s Dezső Szabó, a Hungarian writer wanted to see a strong national democracy in Hungary based on the power of the Hungarian peasantry, which, for him, was equivalent to the concept of the Hungarian nation. This new type of nation, based upon a purely Hungarian origin, excluding all 'aliens' should find a new type of integrity - he thought. "We should not support the idea of a united Central Europe," he said, "instead, we should go for an independent federation of all Eastern European nations, independent of any German influence. This federation would serve as an umbrella protecting all the small, powerless nations in the region."

His ideas, which were basically anti-capitalistic and possibly racist to a certain degree, but at the same time somehow republican and federalist (his thoughts often reflected Lajos Kossuth's republican and federalist ideas) were revived and reconsidered and sometimes modified by the Miklós Bartha Association (MBA). One of its basic doctrines was that there existed a distinct, well-defined Eastern European culture as such, and as a consequence, there had to be a special Eastern European race as well. Consequently, in their opinion, the natural framework of a confederation had to be a Turanian (Hungarian)-Slavic culture and the participants in the alliance were to be the members of the Eastern European 'peasant- democracies'. Being harshly criticised, Dániel Fábrián, the leader of the MBA rejected the racist ideologies in Szabó's thoughts in a later period and put more emphasis on the economic aspects, underlining the economic vulnerability of these small nations and the importance of mutual assistance. Miklós Makay and some members of the MBA made it very clear that Central Europe as such was not a unified, homogeneous entity; it had a more developed region (German-Czech-Austrian) and a less developed region (East-Central-European) and the only chance for the less developed Eastern part to keep up was to act together and establish a confederation.²⁰

Neither the theory mentioned above nor the other theories on the issue (we can find an ample collection of articles on the topic in a book edited by Iván T. Berend)²¹ - are very clear about the borders of the region they are talking about and they are quite hesitant and inconsistent even about the name of the region. Central Europe, Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe, Central-East Europe are only a few of the most common ones, sometimes we can find names like the Danube region or even Carpathian Europe. It is all the more surprising, because besides prominent economists and writers many politicians, historians and literary historians have made attempts to define the region.²²

20 E. Hantos: *Das Kulturproblem im Mitteleuropa*. Stuttgart, 1926.; K. Bernát I.: *Utópia, remény, valóság*. A Bartha Miklós Társaság Közép-Európáról. Világosság, 1989, 8-9, 683-689.

21 *Helyünk Európában. Nézetek és koncepciók a 20. századi Magyarországon*. I. Budapest, 1986.

22 Fried I.: *Kelet- és Közép-Európa között. Irodalmi párhuzamok és szembesítések a kelet-közép-európai irodalmak köréből*. Budapest, 1986, 22-27.

Central Europe between 1944 and 1984

Although public opinion in Slovenia was quite unwilling to acknowledge Yugoslavia at the end of the war²³ and the people generally were eager to have a strong Slovenian republic,²⁴ domestic and foreign affairs did not make it possible for the SLS to realize their plans and establish a Catholic confederation along the Danube and the Slovenian Communists strictly refused to discuss the problems of the economic systems in Central Europe.²⁵ Up to the middle of the sixties - at least that is what we saw from Budapest - the Slovenes were exclusively occupied with their own problems within Yugoslavia. In the sixties there was a debate about confederalizing Yugoslavia and even secession seemed to be a real possibility for some.²⁶ Although in a 1968 publication the Epsilon group of the Slovenian academicians found it important to emphasise how vital it would be for the independent Slovenia to join an international integration, unfortunately they were not too specific about it.²⁷

Although since 1966 there have always been Slovenian participants at the meetings of the Central European nations (Incontri Culturali Mitteleuropei) in Gorizia, they have always had a lot of reservations concerning the concept of Central Europe.²⁸ In 1971 in Koper there was a round-table discussion on "the Slovenes between the Mediterranean and Central Europe", but apart from the minority issue neither Janko Messner,²⁹ nor Ciril Zlobec³⁰ said anything about the essence of the problem. Between 1945 and 1947, when there was a temporary democracy in Hungary, numerous politicians, writers and scientists got involved in the debate on the possibilities of cooperation between the countries of the region. The 1945 Communist Party program promised to realize the Danubian Confederation of Lajos Kossuth and wanted to set up a customs union with the Romanians and the Yugoslavians in order to help the confederation work. Between 1948 and 1958 there was no mention of the importance of the issue at all.³¹ It was in 1958 that Emil Niederhauser published an article called "Development in Eastern Europe",³² which somehow can be considered to be the starting point of a long debate. The article discusses the difficulties of drawing the geographical borders of Eastern Europe but finally gives quite an exact description of it, defining the borders somewhere West of present day Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia and East of the European part of Russia.

From the beginning of the sixties there have been more and more historians and literary historians who have been trying to define the characteristics of the region, which also was first called Eastern Europe at this time.³³ The terminological confusion concerning the name and the territory of the region was just as bad as before. There were debates on whether the region diverted from the West-European development, could not keep up with it or Eastern Europe had always had its own ways

23 J. Vodušek Starič: *Prevzem oblasti 1944-1946*. Ljubljana, 1992, 80.

24 B. Repe: "Liberalizem" v Sloveniji. *Borec: Revija za zgodovino, literaturo in antropologijo*, 9-10, Ljubljana, 1992, 24.

25 J. Vodušek Starič: *op cit.* 121., 124-125.

26 C. A. Žebot: *Slovenija včeraj danes in jutri*. Celovec, 1969, 184.

27 *Slovenija 1968 kam?* Trieste, 1968, Ljubljana, 1990, 13.

28 B. Marušič: *Srečanje "Srednja Evropa v dvajsetih letih: kultura in družba"*. *Zgodovinski časopis*, 1990, 287-289.

29 J. Messner: *Zasramovanci... združite se!* Ljubljana, 1974, 41-45.

30 C. Zlobec: *Poezija in politika*. Ljubljana, 1975, 7-30.

31 *Helyünk Európában... II.*

32 E. Niederhauser: *Zur Frage der Osteuropäischen Entwicklung*. *Studia Slavica*, Budapest, 1958, 359-374.

33 *Helyünk Európában... II.*

right from the beginning. While Iván T. Berend and György Ránki considered the region to be the Western part of Eastern Europe, Jenő Szűcs argued that for different internal and external reasons there developed an independent region here between East and West Europe and the borders cannot be exactly defined in any direction. Later the emphasis shifted more and more from debates on terminology to the characteristics of the region. In 1982 Péter Gunst writes the following: "This Western strip of Eastern Europe ... adopted the Western-type development in such a perfect way that it has become a very special model itself.... (That is why it is reasonable) to distinguish this small region of Europe spreading from the Baltic area to Slovenia and Croatia both from the West and the East. This is what we can call Central Europe in a historical sense." This was the definition which served as a basic term for Péter Hanák, Jenő Szűcs and Miklós Laczkó when they tried to reanalyse these problems. They emphasised that instead of the earlier prevalent eco-historical descriptions we needed a much more complex approach, including a thorough structural analysis of the different political, cultural and social characteristics.³⁴

At that time Endre Bojtár, a literary historian was still quite indistinct about the different nations and labelled all the literary products from Russia to Slovenia as Eastern European.³⁵ Csaba Gy. Kiss another literary historian at the same time liked to use the term 'East-Central Europe' (by which he meant the Eastern part of Central Europe), but he did not define exactly which territory he meant by this.³⁶

Central Europe after 1984

Since 1984, when M. Kundera published his famous essay and later, when the planned date of the European Union in 1992 became well-known, Central Europe has become a major issue not only for research workers but also for writers, journalists and politicians. In Slovenia the issue has been discussed publicly, Central European writers have had special conferences in Vilenica since 1986 and a great many of articles have been published. In Hungary public opinion was stirred especially about the writings of György Konrád. Marjanca Mihelič drew attention to some similarities in the writings of Hungarian (Miklós Mészöly) and Slovenian (Rudi Šeligo, Drago Jančar) authors.³⁷

While the main concern of most of the writings published in Hungary in the fifties and sixties was to give an ideological framework to justify the fact that we belonged to the Russian sphere of interests (Eastern Europe), later the emphasis shifted to the other direction and most writers tried to find the differences (in the case of Hungary from the Russians, and in the case of the Slovenes from the Serbians) instead of the similarities. The definition of Central Europe was still a crucial problem, since everybody felt embarrassed and hesitant when they had to define the most important characteristics of this special entity. Both the Slovenians and the Hungarians emphasised that none of the small nations in the region had independence, that all of them felt vulnerable and threatened. All of these statements manifested a kind of protest against Communism and a strong desire to belong to the West. In some ways they

34 Gyáni G.: *Történeiszviták hazánk Európán belüli hovatartozásáról*. Valóság, Budapest, 1988, 4. 76-83.

35 Bojtár E.: *A kelet-európai felvilágosodás*. Valóság, 1977, 12, 1-18.; Bojtár E.: *A romantika a kelet-európai irodalomban*, Valóság, 1983, 12, 81-95.

36 Kiss Gy. Csaba: *Közép-Európa, nemzetek, kisebbségek*, Budapest, 1993, 17., 21.

37 M. Mihelič: *Približevanje zgodovini*. Miklós Mészöly: *Lescanje polkovnika Suttinga*. in: *Corvin Mátýás-konferencia. Posvetovanje Matjaža Korvina*. Maribor, 1991, 81.

all expressed utopias and dreams.³⁸

It is quite natural that at the same time there were different voices both in science and literature. This side had its own historical, political and ideological arguments as well. It cannot be denied that the historical experiences of the Slovenes warned them to be careful. Scientific reactions can basically be put into two categories. One of the views can be represented by Vojan Rus, who argued that there were no other possibilities for the Slovenes other than Yugoslavia. It is a fact however, that the idea of a renewed Central and Western Europe was welcomed by Vojan Rus as well.³⁹ The other side, Bogo Grafenauer and Tine Hribar for example, said (although true that it was in 1990) that if Slovenia were independent it would be useless to find a Central European community; instead they should try to integrate themselves directly in to the renewed European community.⁴⁰

The interest in the issue in Hungary has been manifested in by numerous articles and special issues of two well-known magazines: in 1989 the *Világosság* and the *Századvég* devoted a special issue to the theme, entitled 'Central Europe - Theories and Reality'⁴¹ and 'Do we Really Need a Central Europe?'⁴² respectively. Although some of the authors gave voice to their doubts and reservations - e.g. Péter Kende raised the following question in his article (also known to the Slovenes) whether: 'Does a (con)federation of Central Europe still have a chance or make sense?'⁴³ - most of them declared a strong belief in a special Central European identity and expressed their hope that this way Central Europe could put an end to the nationalistic tendencies in the region and could join a greater Europe more easily.

At the same time it was quite clear on both the Slovenian and the Hungarian sides that Central Europe as such would not be a special form of state, only a kind of alliance of small independent states in the region. This kind of cooperation seems to be acceptable even for thinkers like Vojan Rus and this is the Central Europe which Csaba Gombár, a Hungarian sociologist has in mind when he writes: "A Central Europe where the nation states guarantee increasingly effective ethno-regional freedoms internally and build supranational institutions based on consensus outward is a very worthy vision for the realization of which it is worthwhile to contribute. This way - even if it did not exist until now - Central Europe can become a reality."⁴⁴

Since 1990 there have been an increasing number of politicians in both countries who have supported the idea of a cooperation among the Central European nations. They might have misunderstood each other sometimes and meant different things when they used the term of Central Europe but they were always ready to cooperate and somehow assist the other party. Péter Kende mentions in his writings that a Central European (con)federation is not possible and is not a real goal: there is no economic complement in the region, which is not sufficiently homogenous and is full of unsettled border disputes, and the joining of Europe can only be accomplished by individual countries, etc. In fact, if we examine the countries of the region since 1991

38 Konrád Gy.: Van-e még álom Közép-Európáról. Hírmondó, Budapest, 1984. július; D. Rupel: op. cit.; Simbolični svet in podsvet Vilenice. Pogovor z Venom Tauferjem o nagradi "Vilenica". Naši razgledi, Ljubljana, 30. januarja 1987, 61.; D. Jančar: Srednja Evropa med meteorologijo in utopijo, Nova revija, 58-60, 1987, 555-585.

39 V. Rus: op. cit. 33-45., 140.

40 Srednja Evropa. Ljubljana, 1991, 25-26., 28., 38.

41 Közép-Európa - Eszmék és realitások, Világosság, 1989. 8-9.

42 Kell-e nekünk Közép-Európa? Századvég Különszám. Budapest.

43 P. Kende: Van-e még esélye és értelme egy közép-európai államföderációnak? in: Kell-e nekünk... 7-20. = Zveza podonavskih držav. Nova revija, 101/102, 1990, 1323-1337.

44 Gombár Cs. in: Kell-e nekünk... 220.

- when the Soviet and the Yugoslav armies withdrew - then it appears that Tine Hribar and Péter Kende were right about the future: the region's countries seek to join the European Community one before the other, there are economic and border disputes between Slovenia and Croatia, minority disputes between Hungary and Slovakia, etc.

However, we are also witnessing a trend in the opposite direction. It appears that the European Community is not in a hurry to admit any country from the region. The difficulties of the intervening period must be somehow be bridged. Thus, slowly but surely, the Central European Initiative grew out of the Pentagonale. The fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia have joined the CEI and that others seek to join as well is extremely fortunate, but it also makes the question of the future cooperation of the Visegrad group more interesting. In relation to this, I would emphasise that not only a few researchers (Janko Kos, István Fried, Péter Hanák) assume that within Central Europe there is a narrower or central region,⁴⁵ but economists are also mentioning it more and more frequently. Almost every researcher mentions the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia - and sometimes Croatia - as belonging to this narrower region.

Dimitrij Rupel, who made an account of the negotiations between Lojze Peterle and he and József Antall and Géza Jeszenszky,⁴⁶ on the other side said that independence for Slovenia meant a move towards Central Europe from the Balkan. Recently there have been talks about a potential cooperation between Slovenia and the Visegrád countries; in several of his interviews given in Hungary, Milan Kučan president of the Slovenian Republic, stated the existence of the Central-European region and also declared that Slovenia would be interested in the Visegrad cooperation. Lojze Peterle announced at the CEI conference in Debrecen (19. nov. 1993) that Slovenia would like to join the Visegrad group.⁴⁷ Although the cooperation between these countries depends on how advantageous it is considered by the West, the realization of such a cooperation would by all means contribute to peace and economic development within the region, as well as to joining Europe.

Therefore Csaba Gombár is correct: "This way - even if it did not exist until now - Central Europe can become a reality."

Translated by Éva Lengyel

45 J. Kos: Srednja Evropa kot literarnozgodovinski problem. in: Srednja Evropa...43-46.; Fried I.: op. cit. 36., 67.; Hanák P.: Közép-Európa tudata. Beszélgetés Hanák Péter történésszel. Népszabadság, Budapest, 1989. október 14. 17.;

46 D. Rupel: Skrivnost države. Ljubljana, 1992, 68-69.

47 D. Rupel: Odčarana Slovenija. Ljubljana, 1993, 161.