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## INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of the paper is to answer the question: what is the main reason why the Central and Eastern Europe countries did not enter into fruitful and long-term cooperation both in the interwar period and after the collapse of the Soviet Union despite a far-reaching commonality of interests? Conflicts between these countries are not decisive factors in their lack of integration. The degree of integration is proportional to the degree of involvement in Central and Eastern Europe of powers that could act as an external hegemony. In the interwar period, the United States, England and France, and after 1989, the United States had the right potential to undertake such a task in its interest. None of them, however, took up such a role in the long run. Attempts to integrate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to date, starting from the Versailles conference, indicate that the American protectorate is a necessary factor for implementing closer forms of cooperation between these countries.*

### **Keywords:**

*Central and Eastern Europe, Little Entente, Central European Initiative, Three Seas Initiative, Visegrad Group*

## **Introduction**

A close political and economic relationship among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would bring them immense economic benefits and increase their sense of security. From a world policy point of view, such a union would contribute to stabilizing the political situation in Europe. Such attempts were made both in the interwar period and after the collapse of the

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Soviet Union. Yet, it all ended in a spectacular defeat or remained only on paper. Therefore, it is very important to clarify the factors that shaped this state of affairs and to understand what elements might contribute for possible reintegration. In my paper, I try to examine those factors and elements in the context of the policy of powers that have a decisive influence on European policy: England, France, and the United States.

### **The failure of President Woodrow Wilson's European project**

As a result of World War I, a geopolitical vacuum was created in Central and Eastern Europe, and independent states were formed on the ruins of empires. In 1919, the British scholar Halford Macindere drew far-reaching conclusions from that fact by making the following thesis: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World Island commands the World”<sup>2</sup>. It was a kind of appeal to the statesmen at the Versailles conference deciding on the post-war order in Europe. Mackinder's ‘realistic’ approach is often opposed to the alleged idealism of US President Woodrow Wilson. In fact, the only decision-maker at the Versailles conference who understood the geopolitical significance of Central and Eastern Europe was Wilson<sup>3</sup>. That was demonstrated by the peace program he presented to Congress on January 8, 1918<sup>4</sup>. Of the 14 Wilson’s points, in Poland we know the 13<sup>th</sup> best of all. Point 10 was relevant to the peoples of Austria-Hungary, point 11 to Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro, and point 12 to nationalities which were under the Turkish rule. We do not know exactly how Wilson imagined the post-war order in Europe under the American protectorate because his concept was rejected by the US Congress. In that situation, he also had to succumb to the British pressure to limit American influence in Europe<sup>5</sup>. What came out of the Wilson-League of Nations concept was actually a negation of its original idea. Isolationism did not benefit the Americans because they had to join World War II.

### **Little Entente as a missed opportunity to stop Germany**

Little Entente was founded in 1921 on the initiative of the first Czechoslovak president Tomasz Masaryk. It included Czechoslovakia, Romania,

<sup>2</sup> H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, London 1919, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> M. Ádám, *Woodrow Wilson and the Successor States*. “Danubian Historical Studies”, Vol. 1. No. 4. Budapest, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Address of the President of the United States Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, January 8, 1918*, Hathi Trust Library Online <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074797914&view=1up&seq=2>> (31.12.2019); *Interpretation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points by Colonel House*, <<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/doc31.htm>> (31.12.2019).

<sup>5</sup> J. Levy, *The Intermarium: Wilson, Madison, & East Central European Federalism*, PhD dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2006, pp. 134-138.

and Yugoslavia. This agreement was caused by fear of revisionism on the part of Hungary, which lost three-quarters of its territory at the Versailles conference<sup>6</sup>. The alliance of these three countries was under the political and military patronage of France. The mutual relations between Poland and Little Entente were bad, because both Poland and Czechoslovakia aspired to the role of hegemon in Central and Eastern Europe. The conflict over Zaolzie region, inhabited by 90% of the Polish population, was also significant. This area was occupied in January 1919 on the instructions of Masaryk<sup>7</sup>. After gaining the independence, Poland concluded a military alliance with France and Romania. Thanks to such an alliance system, France was able to control Central and Eastern Europe politically. In the early 1930s, France completely abandoned the alliance policy to balance Germany's potential. In 1930, French Foreign Minister Aristides Briand proposed the creation of a federation union headed by France, Great Britain, and Germany. This idea was completely unreal<sup>8</sup>. After Hitler came to power, France moved to a defensive position, which, combined with appeasement policy, accelerated the outbreak of World War II and the total defeat of Paris. French resignation from the role of a hegemon in Central and Eastern Europe led to a general decline in the importance of the Little Entente. Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu tried to counteract that with no result by strengthening contacts within the Little Entente<sup>9</sup>. In February 1934 he was the initiator of the Balkan Agreement, which included Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. However, it did not play a greater role without the support of France.

### Heartland as a crumple zone

After the US withdrawal, the United Kingdom could take over the role of a protector against pivotal states in Central and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the British government throughout the interwar period consistently pursued a policy contrary to Mackinder's advice, treating Heartland as a crumple zone. During the Versailles conference, Prime Minister David Lloyd George was against the creation of strong Poland<sup>10</sup>. In the face of Hitler's pressure, the United Kingdom refused to grant a guarantee to Czechoslovakia, also discouraging France from doing so, which led to the Munich conference on September 29-30, 1938 and, consequently, to the liquidation of the Czechoslovak state<sup>11</sup>. The appeasement

<sup>6</sup> M. Ádám, *The Little Entente and Europe (1920-1929)*, Budapest 1993, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> R. Szporluk, *The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk*, New York 1981, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bernard, H. Dubief, T. Forster, *The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914–1938. The Cambridge History of Modern France*, New York 1985, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> A. Dubicki, *Nicolae Titulescu: portret polityka i dyplomaty*, Łomianki 2010, pp. 14-20.

<sup>10</sup> M. Howard, *The Legacy of the First World War*, [in:] *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War*, ed. R. Boyce and E. M. Robertson, London 1989, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> R. A. Cole, *Appeasing Hitler: The Munich Crisis of 1938: A Teaching and Learning Resource*, "New England Journal of History", 2010, Vol. 66, No. 2, pp. 1-30.

policy pursued by Arthur Neville Chamberlain at the expense of Czechoslovakia did not prevent the outbreak of World War II. Concluding the August 25, 1939 treaty with Poland, the British government was aware that it was unable to provide Poland with a real military assistance. The only goal was to gain time<sup>12</sup>. A similar maneuver His Majesty's Government pursued with regards to Yugoslavia, where, on March 27, 1941, the regency was overthrown by British machinations, which led to the appointment of underage Peter II. The new pro-British government broke off the existing agreement with Germany counting on British guarantees. The result was a German attack and the breakup of Yugoslavia, which was plunged into a bloody conflict. The Allies' attitude to the Polish cause at the Yalta and Tehran conferences, where practically entire Central and Eastern Europe was given to Stalin, shows a total disregard for the geopolitical role of the area between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Although it is an open question whether the Allies could successfully oppose Stalin under those circumstances, the fact remains that without supplies under lend-lease, the Red Army was not capable to conduct warfare.

### **Central European Initiative and the breakup of Yugoslavia**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe, just like after World War I, a geopolitical vacuum emerged. That enabled the creation of the Central European Initiative aimed primarily at opposing German hegemony in Europe. On November 11, 1989, Quadragonale was formed on the initiative of Italy, which included Austria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Italy. In 1990, Czechoslovakia joined the initiative, creating the Pentagonale, and in 1991 Poland too followed the trend, creating the Hexagonale. This form of cooperation of Central and Eastern European countries was effectively stopped as a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia initiated in June 1991 by Slovenia and Croatia, which Germany immediately recognized as independent states. The attitude of Americans to that issue revealed itself in the Bush administration completely ignoring the CIA report published in the fall of 1990 New York Times' issue that strongly warned about the consequences of Yugoslavia's break up and a possibility of a bloody ethnic war<sup>13</sup>.

### **Three Seas Initiative with German participation**

An attempt to rebuild Hexagonale was the Three Seas Initiative established by the presidents of Poland and Croatia. Its first summit took place in Dubrovnik on August 25 and 26, 2016. It brought together 12 EU countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania,

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<sup>12</sup> M. Peszke, *The British-Polish Agreement*, "Journal of Slavic Military Studies", 2011, p. 654.

<sup>13</sup> L. J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds. Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkans Politics in the Transition*, Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford 1995, p. 218.

Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary. However, this was not an initiative that was an alternative to the European Union and Germany. Hexagonale's official documents have repeatedly stated that the Initiative is pro-European and complementary to existing forms of European cooperation. It is an infrastructure project, not a political or geopolitical one, which does not concern military cooperation but it is only an informal platform for obtaining European funds<sup>14</sup>.

The structure defined in this way does not give an opportunity to create any political entity under an American patronage that might somehow curb a German influence in Europe. Therefore, the declarations of President Donald Trump at the second Summit of the Initiative in Warsaw did not bring any practical results<sup>15</sup>. Poland supported Germany's request to participate in the work of the Initiative as a partner country and the third summit in Bucharest was also attended by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Cretu. That is a clear signal as to the further direction of the Initiative's activities.

### Geopolitical dilemmas of the Visegrad Triangle

In 1991, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary formed the so-called The Visegrad Triangle, which after the fall of Czechoslovakia on January 1, 1993, covered four countries. Cooperation within the Visegrad Group is declarative rather than real due to the conflicting interests of individual countries<sup>16</sup>. It is limited to meetings of prime ministers every six months and annual meetings of presidents. The reason for the lack of effective cooperation within the Visegrad Group is not disputes between individual countries but their different geopolitical preferences. Currently Poland is strengthening military and political ties with the United States. The Czech Republic focuses on closer integration within EU organizations. In turn, Hungary prefers cooperation with Russia, Turkey, and Germany. In relation to the European Union, the Visegrad countries spoke with one voice only on the issue of emigration policy. However, this is not sufficient for lasting cooperation in other fields in the face of various geopolitical preferences.

<sup>14</sup> *The Second Summit of the 3 Seas Initiative. Joint Declaration*, <<https://www.ceep.be/www/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/THE-SECOND-SUMMIT-OF-THE-3-SEAS-INITIATIVE-joint-declaration-2017.pdf>> (17.04.2019)

<sup>15</sup> *Trump Trip to Poland Forces 3 Seas Summit Change*, Fox News, 13 June 2017, <<https://www.foxnews.com/world/trump-trip-to-poland-forces-3-seas-summit-change>> (31.12.2019); *FACTBOX Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw*, CNBC, 4 July 2017, <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-poland-usa-trump-factbox/factbox-three-seas-initiative-summit-in-warsaw-idUKKBN19P0U1>> (31.12.2019).

<sup>16</sup> B. Góralczyk, *Współpraca Wyszehradzka: geneza, doświadczenia, perspektywy*, Warszawa 1999, p. 8.

## Conclusion

The attempts to integrate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to date, from the Little Entente to the Visegrad Triangle, do not promise any optimistic results. In fact, the question is whether it is possible to accomplish that very integration in the first place. Yet, despite the historical experience, there are indications that such a project could be implemented<sup>17</sup>. The history to date has indicated that the American protectorate is a necessary precondition for implementing closer forms of cooperation among the countries of this area. Currently the first time in history, the United States is looking for it's a good market to sell her hydrocarbons<sup>18</sup>. The condition of the long-term supply of liquefied gas to Central and Eastern European countries might secure the American influence in this region<sup>19</sup>.

The latter can be a great opportunity for Central and Eastern European countries that, on one hand, would like to avoid the trap of a dependent development caused by close relations with German economy, and, on the other hand, to ward off the military threat coming from Russia<sup>20</sup>. The potential for a possible union of the "Three Seas" zone countries under the umbrella of the USA would bring together 100 million people, which both demographically and economically would be comparable with the potential of both Germany and Russia. Such a union would effectively stop Germany's tendency toward economic and ideological domination in the area, and Russia's aspiration for political and military domination, stabilizing our region of Europe for many years forward.

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<sup>17</sup> G. Friedman, *From the Intermarium to the Three Seas*, Geopolitical Futures, 7 July 2017, <<https://geopoliticalfutures.com/intermarium-three-seas/>> (31.12.2019).

<sup>18</sup> J. Bekić, M. Funduk, *The Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Initiative as the Revival of 'Intermarium'*, Institute for Development and International Relations Brief, February 2016, <[www.irmo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRMO-Brief-2-2016.pdf](http://www.irmo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IRMO-Brief-2-2016.pdf)> (31.12.2019).

<sup>19</sup> M. J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land between the Black and Baltic Seas*, New Brunswick 2012, p. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> R. D. Kaplan, *Europe's New Medieval Map*, Wall Street Journal, 19 January 2016, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-new-medieval-map-1452875514>> (31.12.2019).

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