

GERMAN MITTELEUROPE PLANS BEFORE AND DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

INTRODUCTION

The German Reichskanzler of the XIX century dawn Bernhart von Bulow recounts in his “State of Germany”, “In the middle of XIX century, when I was an envoy to Rome, my English counterpart Sir Clair Forse told me, “It was nice and easy in politics when the whole European tribunal consisted of England, France and Russia, as well as a part of Austria”. These magnificent days are gone. Europe let in a new member, who had not only interests, but the power to support them” (БЮЛОВ, 1915, 4). The most thorough representation of the German strategic plans was reflected in the territorial expansion projects and the international integration by the end of XIX — the beginning of the XX century.

German political circles’ main attention was drawn by the plan, which envisioned foundation of the “Great Germany” right there, in Europe. The ideological basis of the plans alike was the already mentioned Mitteleuropa concept. Well-known economist W.Sombart noted, “German people already lack space, and their economy more and more is forced to seek the basis in foreign lands” (Зомбарт, 1924, 206).

Even early Mitteleuropa propagandists believed that the central geographical position of Germany assures its right to claim leadership upon other European states. That vision was reflected in the most characteristic works of German scientists G.Daniel and F.Ratzel. Theologian, pedagogue and a geographer Daniel wrote “The Geographic Manual” noting there that Germany is the “middle land”, the “heart of Europe”, and as heart needs the whole body, Germany needs the whole world. The German example symbolized “geographic and historical unification point” for the whole world (Daniel, 1894, 95). Germany was destined by God to bring mankind happiness in its Germanism and culture, claiming great difference from all other Western and Eastern nations. It was essential thus that the Germans, knowing the centrality of their position in Europe, created powerful middle-European state, otherwise known as the “United States of Europe” as an instrument for further world domination conquest.

As for the XIX — XX century works of the geographer F.Ratzel, they were the base for the “Mitteleuropa” term definition, totally unmatched with geographical “Central Europe”. The latter, after Ratzel, was the vast territory situated between the Alps, Northern and Baltic Seas,

stretching from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, i.e. the whole Western and Central Europe. The German objective was to “unify and assure support of the Middle Europe powers” (Ratzel, 1921, 201). Ratzel has not set the Eastern borders of Mitteleuropa, and not accidentally in that: he considered them to be „geographically uncertain, which had special meaning for Germany” (Ratzel, 1921, 5-6). It is clear that this fact directly pointed towards Russia as an object of either expansion led by Germany-driven Mitteleuropa with its part of the Dual Monarchy, or the influential European power — a partner to divide the spheres of interest.

In this way, by the end of the XIX — beginning of the XX century, the Mitteleuropa in Germany was commonly understood as a political or economic union of, first of all, Central-European states led by the Gogenzoller crown. Special place in the Mitteleuropa plans was reserved for the German-Austrian union as a German ground against Slavs. As Mitteleuropa union ideologists viewed it, the German sphere of interest should have consisted of Western regions of the Russian Empire, South-Eastern Europe, Turkey and Middle East. Meaning that even during the period for the World War I reasons’ shaping up, the German variations of the Mitteleuropa creation plans deemed necessary to incorporate the Dual Monarchy under the Wilhelm II Empire.

MITTELEUROPA-PLANS OF THE GRAND GERMAN CAPITAL

Plans to create Mitteleuropa were popularized and spread in Germany on the eve of World War I. Considering the need of industrialists and bankers, pangermanists broadened geographic scale of the would-be Mitteleuropa union. They refined the projects of its economic and political order. According to the “founders”, the future Great-German confederation and Grand-German customs union had to grant advantages to the minor member-states comparing with other European nations. However the Mitteleuropa blueprint, especially in terms of citizens’ rights, proved those arguments lame. In fact, junior allies were doomed to total economic and political domination by the German interests. As for Russia, it was considered by the pangermanists to be the arch-enemy and proposed to lock it within its national borders by gaining control over its Western regions. Generally, the supporters of the Pangermanist movement viewed Mitteleuropa as an important step toward creation of the “Grand Germany”.

Gradually the Mitteleuropa idea shifted from the pure academic discussions sphere into the practical propaganda domain. Expressing the vision of several grand German capitalists, national-liberal G.Meller on December, 18, 1891, proclaimed from the Reichstag rostrum: “Germany must support trade and political unification of the Central Europe to counter the influence of the East and Far West” (Stenographische Berichte, 1892, 3417). In 1904 the Breslau (Wroclaw)

J. Wolf created Middle-European economic union. His aim was to propagate customs union between Germany, Dual Monarchy, Romania, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. The tasks of the organization were stated in the first abstract of its charter. The document stressed that the “union, decisively rejecting pursue of whatsoever political objectives, was aimed at drawing public and official attention to the economic problems, over which Middle-European states have no contradictions, rather than common interests. With that, both economic sovereignty of each state, as well as all national politics in general remain untouched” (Wolf, 1904, 108). Cautious politics of the Middle-European economic union left part of the founders dissatisfied. As a result, in 1913 the Reichstag Vice-president, professor A.Paasche proclaimed the German-Austro-Hungarian economic union with purely practical goal — creating economic union between Germany and the Dual Monarchy.

In this way, on the 1914-1918 War eve, the Mitteleuropa idea rusted deeply into the German trade and industrial capital elite. However there were essential contradictions in the role and importance of the “Middle Europe”. The first group of the German industrialists and bankers represented interests of the Rein-Westval magnates of the mining industry and seen its enemy in the French monopolistic capital. The latter, controlling significant ore deposits, fought the German metallurgical monopolies for the foreign influence. The concern president G.Tissen was convinced that gaining control over new raw material centers and the resulting industrial development was to be a result of the foundation of a “significant middle-European custom union covering Germany with its new regions, as well as Netherlands, France, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary and the Balkans” (Matschenz, 1965, 835).

The second group consisted of the electro-technical, chemical, machine- and ship-building industrialists as well as the representatives of the banks tied to them. Its main speaker was one of the Berlin trade unions number, the president of the General electric society (AEG) Walter Ratenau. He opposed the direct annexing plans of ultraimperialists. Ratenau noted: “Conquering colonies, division of France, British world domination end — those are the dreams deemed realistic for any stimulated imagination” (Matschenz, 1965, 829). His program’s main point was the “Central Europe, united under the German leadership, politically and economically opposing England, America and Russia” (Matschenz, 1965, 829). Ratenau viewed Mitteleuropa as not merely mechanical union of certain countries by their annexation, but, first of all, their economic cooperation to ease the task of seeking the new markets for German industry. With time capitalistic developed state could be economically integrated into what he considered to be the true Mitteleuropa. Ratenau and the industrial group behind him considered the organization of European economic community the main objective of the future war.

On July, 25, 1912, Rathenau, speaking to Reichskanzler T. Betman-Holweg presented his project of the custom union between Germany and the Dual Monarchy, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands. Notably, this union offered partnership to Britain. German researcher J. Kuczynski explained the reason behind it. He described the pre-war situation in the following way: “Electric and chemical monopolies achieved undoubtedly great success in the aggressive economic struggle for world domination due to goods and capital exports, as well as due to their enormous international contacts. That is why they had more time to prepare themselves for the World War than the “coal-iron-steel” monopolies... “AEG” had especially close ties to the American monopolistic capital, as “Siemens” had with the British one” (Хайч, 1982, 63). Despite the contradictions in methods of the Mitteleuropa plans realization, both monopolistic groups strived for German imperialism’s world domination. Mentioned above Rathenau stressed before the war: “We need colonies. With the future redistribution we must get everything we need to meet our demands the way our neighbors did” (Rathenau, Bd. 1, 270).

The Middle-European plans of the grand German capital on the eve of the World War were supplemented by the military and political projects. The German General Military HQ head Helmut Moltke repeated the geopolitical idea of the struggle of the “superior German race” against the Slavs. In his letter to Konrad von Getzendorf in 1913, he candidly wrote: “I hold on to the view that sooner or later the European war will come, which would be rather over fight between the Germanism and the Slavism on the first place. To prepare for it is the obligation of all nations under the flag of German culture... To fight this war we need to concentrate all our forces and use all our chances. But first of all, we need complete understanding of the need of such world-historic decision by the nations” (Троян, 2013, 219).

This vision was, in fact, a call to realize the famous idea of the Pangermanist union leaders on the eastern borders of Germany. Hasse firmly stated that the German empire and the Russian state borders are not eternal. He proposed to create buffer states both to the East and to the West. Hasse thought these states to be Poland, Finland and Baltics on the East. The Pangermanist union head openly stressed that the open road of German political influence led to the East. This point of view was completely supported by the Pangermanist organization member, professor of several universities Georg von Below. In 1914 he wrote that the medieval German state made “grave mistake” by stopping its pursue toward East and stopping the “Germanization of Eastern Europe”. Below concluded that the goal of the new time was to broaden German aggression eastward (Below, 1914, 167).

As a result, the September war objectives program of Betman-Holweg was synthesis of the Pangermanist union, military circles and both capitalistic groups’ demands. The Kanzler’s

September 9, 1914, memo “On the political guidelines to making peace” presented the most comprehensive and complete essence of the “Middle Europe”: “We must seek to create the Middle-European economic union including France, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Dual Monarchy, Poland, and possibly Italy, Switzerland and Norway by means of collective customs treaties. This union, without general constitutional regulation, and with outside equality of its members, but in fact under German governance, has to stabilize German economic domination over Central Europe” (Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, 1966, Bd.2, 436).

It was a vivid example of the two expansion methods’ infusion — the “peaceful” economic and the forceful takeover. The core of the Betman-Holweg program was the idea of “Middle Europe”. As defined by the Hamburg historic school representative F.Fischer, it was “modern economic form of applying power and simultaneous strengthening of the continental objectives, broadening the German basis on the continent as a mean of its “peaceful policy” (Fisher, 1961, 312). The Mitteleuropa concept was also aimed at calming the public within and outside the state, at approving its idea about German defensive war and cloak its hegemonic striving for Europe and world.

MITTELEUROPA “LIBERAL IMPERIALISTS”

During the World War I the most popularity in Germany got the Mitteleuropa concept introduced and supported by the “liberal imperialism” representatives — M.Weber, F.Naumann, P.Rohrbach, G.Onken, F.Meineke, G.Delbruk, F.Liest. All of them were convinced that Germany must join the World War to approve itself as the great state. But as war didn’t promise it real transoceanic colonial expansion, the “liberal imperialists” set their vision on Europe. It was here that the number of semi-independent states — the German satellites, were to be installed. Aside from that, along with military strategic vision, one of the main motivation was broadening the economic “living space”, represented with increasing the German capital investment capabilities and opening the new markets, using as well the Danube Monarchy territories.

Famous German sociologist Max Weber is rightfully considered to be the ideologist who inspired the “liberal imperialism”. He openly proclaimed that Germany faces “cultural tasks” towards Western-Slavonic nations, Poles foremost. He demanded that Germany to become a liberator of minor nations from “Russian despotism” and sought the creation of allegedly independent Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Ukrainian states. Germany had to be granted right to build military installations on the Eastern borders of the Polish state, with the Dual Monarchy doing the same thing on its Southern borders. Weber also envisioned deploying German garrisons in Latvia and Lithuania. Then, he proposed that these would-be nation states become economically

dependent on Germany in terms of their membership in the customs union (Виноградов, 1988, 161). Simultaneously, the same dependence form had to be placed over Habsburg monarchy. That would mean complete Gogenzoller hegemony over both Eastern Europe as well as generally within the Mitteleuropa.

To substantiate German annexation plans, the “liberal imperialists” widely used the nation’s central geographical position in Europe. The most vivid example here is “The German Rise in 1914”, a book by historian F.Meineke published in Stuttgart in 1914. As Daniele did, Meineke considered the geographical position of Germany to be define its historic mission in terms of world evolution: “Our specific, tight continental position urges us to unite in all aspects — military, economic, social, political... We are stifled and thus we are strong” (Meinecke, 1915, 30-31). To set the order needed by imperial circles, Meineke proposed an organization blueprint for the Middle Europe, where nations on the Western side of Russia would have been united under Germany and Austria, led by the Wilhelm II empire (Meinecke, 1915, 82-83).

Still, speaking of the “liberal imperialism” representatives, one should pay close attention to famous publicist Paul Rohrbah and pastor Friedrich Naumann and their valuable contribution to conceptual shaping of the Mitteleuropa idea. They based their visions on the “imperial understanding of the German policy”, grounded on large-scale industry and world trade. With that, the ideologues didn’t support the “extreme pangermanist claims” and didn’t quote the “Heavenly-destined racial and national superiority of the German people” (Попѡх, 1915, 11).

Rohrbah explained his vision in his “War and German politics” book. He generally supported the idea that destiny of the German world policy has to be set on the European continent. Here Rohrbah defined three main objectives, closely connected to the Dual Monarchy future. The publicist believed it was crucial to maximize efforts to not only save the Danube Monarchy from deterioration, but also to substantially strengthen it. The following Rohrbah’s thoughts prove this: “If the Habsburg state collapses, soon we would find ourselves fighting off powerful Slavonic onslaught led by Russia. By supporting and defending Austria, we look after insuring our own existence. We must secure the Serbian loss of harm potential. If Russia decides to intervene and uphold Austrian dragoon against Serbia, we and Austria should make any necessary, even the most radical conclusions. The Dual Monarchy must be preserved as the powerful state” (Попѡх, 1915, 83, 87). Rohrbah thought that Germany, by refusing to support the Dual Monarchy, would all by itself destroy the main stronghold against Russia and the Slavonic world.

The German publicist suggested that Russia should be cut away from the seas, and separate in terms of European security, “as Russian policy has long been a threat to existence of the two Central European states: Germany and the Dual Monarchy” (Попѡх, 1915, 88). According to

Rohrbah, it was the only way “to secure the Middle Europe” with its core in German and the Dual monarchies.

THE MITTELEUROPA OF FRIEDRICH NAUMANN

Special role in the Mitteleuropa ideas global war-time popularization within the German population was reserved for pastor and influential publicist Friedrich Naumann (Садовая, 1990, 97-112). Scandalous fame and popularity came to him with the 1915 publication of the “Mitteleuropa” book. The work, translated into all the main European languages was destined to propagate the Great German Empire, resurrected after a “long dream” (Naumann, 1915, 42). Not coincidentally, the Russian diplomats called the book the “New Testament” of the Mitteleuropa movement (Архив внешней политики, 1916, 2). Naumann wrote that the ultimate goal of the German imperialism was the resurrection of the medieval Rome Empire of the German nation. It was the World War I that gave the main push to such unification: “Now or never, the unity must arise between the East and the West, the Middle Europe between Russia and Western states” (Науманн, 1918, 33).

The future Mitteleuropa had to represent specific type of the industry, providing maximum development for the German capitalism as a transition stage to socialism and drastically contrary to British type of capitalism. As Naumann viewed it, all Central Europe should have absorbed the German military discipline supporting the German economic system successes. The center of the Naumann’s Mitteleuropa was supposed to be the German-Dual Monarchy federation (Naumann, 1915, 139). Hence the first step for Germany was to get hold of Western and South Slavonic lands, as well as other territories of Danube Monarchy. Naumann wrote of this as of a self-evident need. He considered that the Dual Monarchy simply has no other option as such decision was a result of an “implacable need of self-preservation”. Naumann was convinced that during the times of war it is essential to reject the “uncertain plans” and spoke only of German and Dual Monarchy unification: “These two states should be unified first of all, before anyone can think of any successful union with other states” (Науманн, 1918, 104).

His book reads, „Essentially, the Mitteleuropa is going to be German; it’s going to use German language for conducting foreign policy, but from the very first day of its existence it has to consider national features of its member-nations”. Naumann wrote, “Around planetary states, there is a mass of disorganized national elements, like comets, afloat... But sooner or later, each of them has to join in”. In the center of Europe Germany was going to be such “planetary” state, hence the publicist stressed, “the Middle Europe is populated by Germans, towards whom farther nations are gravitated”. Highly regretting the failure to “Germanize” the Czechs, Nau-

mann proposed to turn Prague to Mitteleuropa ground center, Hamburg — to its sea center, Berlin — to its stock market center, and Vienna — to its legislative center (Науманн, 1918, 24, 69, 125).

Naumann fully realized the complexity of the task to implement the Mitteleuropa concept. There were so many obstacles on the way, that he considered appealing even to irrational, supernatural powers' assistance. Naumann pathetically exclaimed, "Oh, you, the History of the Past, you, the miraculous Chaos, the Chain of shapes, we beg you: help us! If you desire, you can assist us in our task! Come, oh heroes of History, you, the prophets of future destinies of nations, open the mysterious purport of seeking and struggle for the Mitteleuropa!" (Naumann, 1915, 58).

Publication of the book was met by German public not solely with approval. Different circles expressed various views on Mitteleuropa and the ways of its foundation, which, however, had not been so widely spread and supported as the Naumann's concept. Analyzing his work, Berlin newspaper "Vorwärts" noted, "We also support Mitteleuropa, but, unlike Naumann, our basis and goals are different. For us, the German–Austrian rapprochement has its own value and sense only in terms of transfer to higher organization form of Europe in general and the whole world. Our plans start where Naumann's drop" (Vorwärts, 1915, 15 November).

Historian G. Oncken had its own, different from Naumann's, vision of the Mitteleuropa creation. In his book "The old and the new Europe", published during the WWI years, he wrote, "We are the heart of Europe, and the target for all arrows" (Oncken, 1917, 4). Oncken stressed the unique position of Germany: it was jammed between France and Russia and thus endangered by the war on two fronts — an idea realized already by Bismark. The historian saw an outlet in creation of the Middle European block under German leadership. World War I validated, as Oncken thought, the accuracy of his idea. As the war continued, a new version of Mitteleuropa was developed: "the new Middle Europe was born from the fires of the world war" (Oncken, 1917, 101). Inspired by German victories, Oncken noted, "The war... proved the deepest sense of things: geographically locked unity, natural basis of the Central nations, became source and measure of their military achievements". As a result, "the Middle Europe showed the word its undivided unity, capable of not only to fight for itself, but further shaping its main goals of common future life program" (Oncken, 1917, 90, 93).

Author argued Naumann's understanding of the Middle Europe. Duly noting his "merits" and "patriotism", Oncken disputed the foundation of the union state, as well as closed economy as Naumann understood it, warning against being carried away by the Middle-European economic organization. As Oncken viewed it, the future Mitteleuropa, unlike the old one, had to consist of powerful block of central-European states supplemented by colonial empire. "The new Mitte-

leuropa has, is going to be forced to seek the needed economic addendum in closed colonial empire” (Oncken, 1917, 101), historian wrote. So, the Mitteleuropa concept has been extraordinary widened, with its core, “the heart and brain” laid still within Germany and the Dual Monarchy. They were to play the leading role in the whole Middle-European nations system.

Let us note here that Naumann’s ideas were the most respected and favored. With that, publication of the book was only the first step to implement the strategic plans. Soon, with the aid of supporters, Naumann founded the Labor committee for Mitteleuropa. Besides, he was a member of the Middle-European economic union, representing interests of influential business circles. Apropos, during 1915 — 1916, industrialists from Germany and the Dual Monarchy gathered more than once for consultation purposes to discuss pressing economic and political issues. A little later, in 1917, with Austrian pangermanist circles’ support, the German people’s council (Deutsches Volksrat) and the German foreign institute (Deutsches Auslandsinstitut) were founded. Their foreign policy orientation was undoubted. The jewel of the crown of those organizations was then-independent Dual Monarchy Center association (Mittelstelle für Österreich-Ungarn) (Kováč, 1987, 217, 221).

Activities of the mentioned above organization and Naumann himself to create Mitteleuropa were so energetic that after the end of WWI, on January 21, 1919, J.Redlich wrote in his dairy, “This morning I was visited by Doctor Schott from Berlin, who said that Naumann will be the next President of the German Republic. He thinks that it is now that the most favorable moment to create Mitteleuropa has come” (Redlich, 1954, Bd.2, 330).

The Mitteleuropa according to Naumann’s book concept popularity is explained by the fact it absorbed pangermanic ideas of widening German borders with other states, as well as the Ratenau’s plans to economically unite Europe. At the same time Naumann tried to unite desires and goals of different German social groups. He wrote, “If I think of Mitteleuropa, at the first place I think... about wide mass, the whole of our nation with all its classes,... as only upon healthy, well-brought up, replete mass, the military, financial and cultural Middle Europe from our dreams can be built” (HayмаHH, 1918, 82).

Naturally, everyone outside Germany, especially in Russia, Great Britain, France, as well as in the Dual Monarchy, treated any plans based on expansionist ideas, which envisioned German domination over not only Europe but over the world, with apprehension. This notion is very true for the whole scope of Mitteleuropa projects, from “ultraimperialistic” to “liberal” ones. Not surprisingly, even before the WWI there were plans to counter the idea of Mitteleuropa, though at that time they were aimed rather at generally German expansion in Europe. Practical moves to counter the implementation of German Mitteleuropa concept were made by the Antanta nations

during the world war, especially starting from 1916. It caused serious tensions in actually deteriorating Habsburg's dual monarchy.

World War I was essentially lost by the German block states. What's more, it aggravated domestic, national, economic problems both in the Wilhelm II and in the Habsburg empires. Together with military catastrophe, it resulted in start of dynamic revolutionary processes in these countries. Writing on the topic, V.P.Fisanov rightfully noted that "revolutionary wave of 1917 — 1918 has naturally shaken the world of old empires" (Фисанов, 1999, 213). Let us add: not only shaken, but ultimately destroyed. The foundations of the world were a subject to Paris peace conference and the after-war peace treaties system.

After the war, allies tried to resolve simple, as they viewed it, task to punish the culprits of war and the oppressors as well as accordingly reward Antanta supporters. That is why Eastern European borders were redrawn according to territorial and ethnic realities. However, ethnic "islets" and "islands" remained all over the region. Attempts to preserve Danube system as a federation and confederation were not successful. As an American researcher S.F.Galetti reckons, decision reached at the end of the war not only ignored historic realities of Central and Eastern Europe and did not secure long-term interests of the victors, but also substantially decreased the potential of preserving peace in the region, endangering stability and progress (East Central European Society in World War First, 1985, 597). Here, evidently, lies one of the reasons why not one peace in the world history had not been shorter than the Versailles one.

CONCLUSION

To sum things up, let us point to the following. The complex Mitteleuropa concept as a synthesis of ideological constructs and their practical forms of implementation with obligatory inclusion into German empire, firstly, the Habsburg monarchy, as represented by pangermanists, the "liberal imperialistic" ones, by industrial and banking circles, led the foundation of imperial military and political program presented by Kanzler Betman-Holweg in September, 1914.

Seeking the adequate answer to German Mitteleuropa scheme, Western capitals paid close attention to ethnic and national problems of the region with focus on the Dual Monarchy. It was the account of disintegration processes in Danube monarchy, especially during the last years of the world conflict, that the strategic and tactical basis of Antanta nations, USA as well as Central and South-Eastern Europe was grounded on. Hence one of the prominent role was played by the separate truce with Vienna. This scope suits to view military objectives' programs proposed by the allies during various periods of war.

Duality of the Dual Monarchy was deteriorating as since mid-1918 the West decided to support liberation movements of the deprived imperial nations and their political representatives, all to counter Hapsburgs. Viewing the creation of the independent states in the region as an important condition for ultimate destruction of Berlin's Mitteleuropa plans and ideas to create powerful union under its control, many politicians seriously considered transforming national pulses into economically and politically sustainable union of states. However, projects, aimed at creation of the confederate system in the Danube basin were never implemented, as narrow nationalism overpowered common sense and economic advisability. V.P.Fisanov is very precise at that, "... the last years of the Dual Monarchy were that very Gordian knot of history, by cutting which Europeans didn't feel the happiness, despite all the expectations" (Фисанов, 1999, 216).

However, life went on, and new challenges awaited new answers. Both victors and the defeated ones of the Great 1914 — 1918 War faced that realization very soon. Despite the drama and tragedy of those years, they had to learn to build their relations under the post-war truce conditions. Overcoming aftermath of the pangermanist imperial idea didn't come fast and easy. However, it was gratifying that soon after the first global confrontation of the world nations, the German sociologist Rudolf Smendt introduced the term "integration of Europe", which, after "the grand thirty-years' war of the XX century" (Грицак, 2008, 15, 54), gave essentially new meaning to not only general sense of German-Austrian relations, but also substantially pushed the development of contemporary integration processes which led to foundation and enlargement of the European Union.

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