

## VISEGRÁD FOUR OR GERMAN EUROPE TWO FICTIONAL STRESS TESTS ON AND FOR CENTRAL EUROPE

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### Abstract:

*Contrast going on for decades: after old concepts of economic and political integration of central Europe, there has been a shift to the acceptance of the thesis that Central Europe is only a cultural area. After 1968, the mental direction switched to Austria and old Bundesrepublik which should play central role in complex restoration of Central Europe. New start after 1989, present situation and perspectives: V4 as an illusion and organisation verging on inefficiency from the beginning. Hardly perceived deep differences between individual V4 countries. Mental relations to the Great Britain as naive ideas or results of anti-German resentment. Expected consequences of brexit for V4 countries. Actual relations and connections between economies of V4 countries and Germany and their strengthening. Political relations between Germany and the V 4 countries. New activities of Austria in Central Europe. Austerlitz Triangle in cohesion of Central Europe; France and the Austerlitz Triangle. Currency euro in Central Europe. Migration or invasion? Experiences with the integration of migrants and failed integration of other migrants in Central Europe. Perspectives of Central Europe in EU.*

**Keywords:** Central Europe; integrated Central Europe; Visegrád Group+ Austerlitz Triangle; Germany in Central Europe.

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The drafts for economic and political integration of Central Europe after the WWI were provoked not only by the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, but also by other far reaching changes in borders, e.g. between Germany and Poland. Economic trouble at the beginning of the 1920s were not only the result of preceding war load and disruptions, but they were perceived quickly to be the consequence of the disappearance of old economic areas. Vast marketplaces were suddenly abroad.

Any stabilisation or conjecture after the end of the post-war crisis was seen as provisional and as short as possible. New borders were predicted to overload and disrupt economic processes, leading to new economic crises, whose character would have been more lasting.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1918, Rudolf Hotowetz demanded as close as possible economic convergence of the countries that replaced Austria-Hungary in the form of Central European custom area. A model of Central European custom union was suggested as the best solution for the near future. In the half of 1920s, Hotowetz analysed in detail the consequences of the division of Central Europe unto too small economic units that caused economic isolation, decrease in the ability to compete, decline in production, etc. He admitted that under new conditions – Central Europe was organized differently – a quick transition to custom union would have damaged some branches of economy even more. Therefore he suggested step-by-step approach, using well-planned procedures, starting with preferential tariffs between Central European countries, establishment of partial custom unions, and ending with full custom union in Central Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Hodža's ideas on the concentration of Central Europe were based on the goal to harmonize economic interests and cooperation. Furthermore, Hodža stressed that the will for union had to come from inside of the countries. Only then truly consensual common interest could be found and the will to converge and unite could arise. Any plans based on copying the

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<sup>1</sup> Near: Vladimír Goněc, „New Central Europe“ in *Co-operating and United Europe. Czechoslovak Ideas i 1920s and 1930s and Attempts at Co-ordination with Austrian and Hungarian Ideas*, in Wilfried Loth, Nicolae Paun (eds.), *Disintegration and Integration in East-Central Europe (1919 – post 1989)*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014, pp. 78-92.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Hotowetz, *Hospodářské sblížení evropských států*, Praha: Česká národohospodářská společnost, 1926.

dead double monarchy were nonsensical and any plans coming from Paris or Berlin had to be identified as false and doomed to fail.<sup>3</sup>

Namely, Hodža's speech in National Assembly in May 1922 should be mentioned. Hodža spoke about the necessity to reach European „thought and political community“; key role would be played by the formation and then dominance of common „European conscience“.<sup>4</sup> These ideas have to be perceived as significant parallel to the programme manifesto by RN Coudenhove-Kalergi, moreover, they appeared one year earlier.

Above mentioned as well as other models of new organization of Central Europe refused strictly any organization of Central Europe without isolating it from other parts of Europe and claimed that „economically united Central Europe within economically united Europe“. Beside Hotowetz, Václav Schuster and his draft of Economically United States of Europe from 1919-1920 can be mentioned.

At the same time, the plans for integration of Central Europe stated clearly the notion of „Central Europe without Germany“. This is easy to understand from political point of view because Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia were French allies after the WWI. However, such view is simplified because economists from these countries saw economic core of Germany at the Rhine and expected economic integration of Germany with France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

In the 1920s, political union of Central Europe was discussed carefully because the public opinion in the new countries opposed strongly such an idea. Therefore, Hotowetz pointed out the possibility of strong economic union of Central Europe while retaining political sovereignty and free cultural development of particular countries. Other thinkers saw high rate of actual cultural interconnection and self-fuelled process of cultural

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<sup>3</sup> Milan Hodža, „O zemědělských clech“, in *Venkov*, No 82, 1923 [10<sup>th</sup> Apr 1923], p. 1; Milan Hodža, „Podmínkou soběstačnosti je parita cel zemědělských a průmyslových“, in *Venkov*, No 190, 1923 [16<sup>th</sup> Aug 1923], p. 1; Milan Hodža, „Agrarizmus a Slovanstvo“, in *Slovenský denník*, No 206, 1924 (10<sup>th</sup> Sep 1924), pp. 1-2; Milan Hodža, „Hospodářskou novou střední Evropou proti „Dunajské federaci““, in *Venkov*, No 291, 1924 [13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1924], pp. 1-2. [Reedition: Milan Hodža, *Články, řeči, štúdie*, IV, Praha: Novina, 1931, pp. 458ff, 449, 39ff, 237ff]

<sup>4</sup> Hodža's speech at 140<sup>th</sup> session of National Assembly, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1922. Digital Library of the Czech Parliament [<http://www.psp.cz>], 21 January 2018.

integration in Central Europe. Any visions concerning political integration were labelled strictly as „new Central Europe“ so as to keep away from Austria-Hungary of old and any practical implementation of political integration was suggested for far future.

In spite of that fact, particular conditions for political integration were analysed in detail and as soon as in summer 1918<sup>5</sup> František Weyr demanded that member states of politically integrated whole would have had to be strictly democratic; any presence of a country with politically defunct government would have blocked the integration process.

A network of Central European institutes for the support of economic and cultural convergence, which was formed in 1929, was to harbour common ideas and serve as organisation base for top Central European activists in the field of European and Central European cooperation, coordination, and union. *Mitteeuropainstitut zur Förderung der wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Annäherungen* was established in Vienna in March 1929 by Austrian and some Hungarian thinkers, followed by the institute in Brno in May 1929.<sup>6</sup> The statute defined clearly that the institute was founded to „bring prerequisites for economic and educational understanding and convergence of Central European nations and countries, while their political independence remains untouched“. In contrast with German name *Mitteuropa*, a new name came into being – „*Donaueuropa*“ („*l'Europe danubienne*“).

It is essential to point out personal connection between particular Central European institutes and local branches of Pan-European Union.<sup>7</sup> The ideas on Pan-European Union and economic convergence of Central Europe had the understanding of the same pool of supporters.

At the beginning of 1930s, the course and consequences of the economic crisis led to the formation of programmes based on analyses of individual tools to solve actual problems of particular countries. Economic union of the countries most affected by the crisis – Czechoslovakia, Austria,

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<sup>5</sup> That is, before the end of the war.

<sup>6</sup> Central European Institute in Budapest was formed paralelly as partner organization of Vienna Institute and other institutes were expected to be established, eg. in Bucharest.

<sup>7</sup> František Weyr was the chairman of Moravian organization of Pan-European Union as well as the chairman of Central European Institute in Brno.

Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania – was proposed.<sup>8</sup> In particular, Fritz Jellinek demanded more complex transformation of economic relations between above mentioned Central European countries. A mere custom union would not have been enough; the transition to the free movement of capital and workforce would have been necessary. Only in such a setting and using new mechanisms, the free movement of goods would have been feasible. That kind of transformation would have been able to fuel individual economies in Central Europe. Jellinek suggested to establish special fund managed by Central European Bank, a new purpose-established institution. The fund would have been used to restart economic relations among Central European countries. Jellinek demanded repeatedly the formation of a Central European parliament that would discuss Central European economic issues.<sup>9</sup>

Victor Bauer was one of the most prominent proposers of Central Europe as functional cultural community. Later, he became known for his analysis of Central Europe as functional both cultural and economic community. He had synthesised his ideas for some 20 years before publishing his work on Central Europe as living organism.<sup>10</sup> Bauer presents Central Europe as specific cultural and civilisational conglomerate. The nations had influenced each other culturally for a long time and had been influenced together by European Latin culture. On the other hand, they were somewhat isolated from seaside European cultures. This Central European conglomerate, including common town culture, was seen by Bauer as important value and its further development would have been desirable. This would have been possible only by forming supranational federation in the area naturally centred on Vienna. Bauer expected the naturally developing Central European unit to become soon fully integrated and organized. The crucial dimensions would have manifested itself not only in economic integration but also in political integration of the form of supranational federation.

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Tugendhat, *Ein handelspolitischer Konsolidierungsplan*, Brünn: Mitteleuropa Institut zur Förderung der wirtschaftlichen Annäherungen, 1930, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Fritz Jellinek, "Das Problem Mitteleuropa". A chapter in: Fritz Jellinek, *Die Krise des Bürgers*, Zürich: Europa Vlg., 1935.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Bauer, *Zentraleuropa, ein lebendiger Organismus*, Brünn-Leipzig: Irrgang, 1936.

The core of the most important inter-war Hodža's draft is his speech at the 21<sup>th</sup> interparliamentary economic conference held in Westminster Palace in October 1935.<sup>11</sup> The conference was focused on international trade and Hodža presented the closest possible economic cooperation in Central Europe as the interest of whole Europe and the goal of European politics.

The first level of Hodža's programme was based on sector integration of farming and food production. Further step-by-step levels would include deepening of economic cooperation, custom union, and federation. Rearranging of relations within Central Europe was the most acute task, in parallel to similar larger European regions and new relations within Europe as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

Hodža pointed out the role of politics and safety, warning that without economic consolidation of the countries between Germany and Russia, this area would pose political threat. In Russia, as well in some European countries, including those in the West, dangerous attempts to „replace healthy individualism by forced collectivism appeared.“Hodža stressed the freedom of the individual as a value that builds the foundations of European peace.

The flood of integration plans during the WWII brought many completely naive plans, including Polish visions based on the mere idea that „if we have had federation here [in Central Europe], it [1<sup>st</sup> September 1939 invasion and subsequent occupation] would not have happened“. However, it is easy to understand that safety motives stood firmly in the hub of ideas.

Significant qualitative shift was brought about by Czechoslovak exiled politicians, among others by Edvard Beneš, Milan Hodža, and Hubert Ripka. The goal of specific integration of Central Europe in the model „united Central Europe within united Europe“ appeared already in Beneš's university lecture at Chicago in spring 1939.<sup>13</sup> Hodža presented his new plan on federation in Central Europe in 1942.<sup>14</sup> Beneš's idea is based on reworked idea of the „balance of powers“, Hodža was inspired by „common history roots“ of Central Europe.

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<sup>11</sup> At the conference, Hodža was the main speaker for agriculture. He spoke about main ideas on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1935, followed by detailed information on 3<sup>rd</sup> October. Official edition: Milan Hodža, *Le problème agricole en Europe centrale*, Prague: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1935.

<sup>12</sup> Milan Hodža, *Le problème agricole...*, pp. 13-20.

<sup>13</sup> Edited: Edvard Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow*, London: Macmillan, 1939.

<sup>14</sup> Milan Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe. Reflections and Reminiscences*, London-New York: Jarrolds, 1942.

The importance of Hubert Ripka in exiled government and ideas lies in his original and typically Central European negative definition. He followed the principle that is essential to keep back and not to propose in detail the organization of future political integration. The structure of such an integration should have been discussed by properly elected state representations after the war.<sup>15</sup>

In spring 1939, in contrast with older Czechoslovak European thinking dominated by „united Europe as economic necessity“, Hubert Ripka brought back the idea of „united Europe to guarantee European peace“.<sup>16</sup> Only when nazism is destroyed, real and lasting peace can be found and it has to be based on „free federation of European nations“. At the same time, Europe has to be internally united by consenting with „humanitarian ideals of freedom, law, equality, and justice“.<sup>17</sup>

During the war, exiled economist thinkers came with the idea of economic balance as equalizing of economic structure of „West“ and „East Central“ Europe. This idea was proposed mainly by Antonín Basch.<sup>18</sup> The process should run as transformation of backward strongly rural economic structure of East Central Europe under some specific „roof“ as well as convergence of economic structures of West and East Central Europe. That is, chiefly the way from rural to industrial economy. There should not be static relation „one Europe and another Europe“, with both of them fighting for their specific, different, even opposite economic interests, but finding tools to build common interests. At the same time, Basch warned against the idea of all-saving federation, respectively all-saving political integration. He revived the idea that immediately after the war it would be necessary to restart economic growth in all European countries under regional, European, and global coordination.

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<sup>15</sup> In full extent, this happened only in Austria. In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, this happened half-way and under Soviet pressure, however, the Soviet pressure helped soon to destruct these buds. In Poland, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, not even partial democratic restart occurred. (This is not perceived enough as an important difference to the decision of exiled Belgian, Dutch, and Luxembourg governments to start economic integration immediately after the liberation.) True liberation in Central Europe was missing for a long time, appearing firstly in Austria in 1955.

<sup>16</sup> Hubert Ripka, *Munich: Before and After*, London: Gollancz, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Dtto, pp. 468, 480, 482-483.

<sup>18</sup> Antonín Basch, *The Danubian Basin and the German Economic Sphere*, London: Kegan, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1944; Antonín Basch, *A Price for Peace. The New European and World Markets*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945; etc.

From the half of the war, the Soviet Union viewed any plan to integrate Central Europe as inimical act.

In the phase after the WWII, the idea of specific nature of Central European integration beside West European integration also followed some inter-war trends and accelerated with the arrival of new anti-communist exile. In autumn 1947, International Peasant Union was the first organization with this goal and its activities followed deliberately Hodža's ideas. His son Fedor Hodža was an active member.

New strong wave peaked in 1950s, its economic ideas running in parallel with ongoing economic integration of West Europe. Jan Wszelaki, Hubert Ripka, and Edward Raczyński worked on an important draft.<sup>19</sup> European Coal and Steel Community was their inspiration and incentive, however, they did not copy it. They formed original structure of their own, not excluding common organization in the future. Headed by Ripka, they reasoned that Central Europe is in dire need of integration and it has to be run faster than in West Europe.

Logically, the integration because of safety reasons, was put in the foreground. They claimed that safety should be the core of integration structure in Central Europe. In this field, the integration should be as fast and possible and full; specific intermediate plans were also devised, including Ripka's plan of neutralisation of Central Europe from 1955, innovated in 1957.<sup>20</sup>

This trend of specific motives for Central European integration was reflected by European Movement and its „Commission of Central East Europe“ and close cooperation between West European politicians and exiles Central East European politicians ensued. Grigore Gafencu and Hubert Ripka were the most active thinkers. After their demise, Edward Raczyński and Pál Auer became the key persons in the circles of Central East European exile.

The specific reasons for Central European integration used to resurface with each new generation with slight variations until 1980s. After 1968, the safety theme was accentuated again, arguing that safety of West Europe can be guaranteed only in this way.

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<sup>19</sup> See also: Vladimír Gonč, *An Eastern Schuman Plan? Project of Central and East European Coal and Steel and Political Community (1953)*, Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> See also: Vladimír Gonč, *Hubert Ripka: un européen*, Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2006, pp. 212-257.



From the territorial point of view it was always clear that there is only „Central Europe including Austria“ and that there will be no functioning Central European integration without Austria.

Since 1980s, the cultural integration found its place, as well. This was incited by Czesław Miłosz being awarded Nobel Prize for literature. It was demanded that Central European culture be revived, its specifics and importance for whole Europe studied. Cultural liberation of Central Europe was perceived as necessity.<sup>21</sup>

Counting on Austria as integral part of Central European arrangement started with Czechoslovak projects by WWII exiles and was revived in 1950s in cooperation with exiled Hungarian thinkers. The activity of Austrian policy itself, that stood under Soviet pressure in the 1980s, was also important. Austria was able to help indirectly by supporting Czechoslovak and Hungarian exiles as well as directly by open and vast cultural cooperation.

Pronounced shift of the role of Austria grew in the first half of 1980s. Austrian political, economic, and cultural circles initiated the arrangement of Central European cooperation, aiming at the formation of organizations that would coordinate economy and politics. Austrian politicians opened the „problem of Central Europe“<sup>22</sup> and saw its solution in breaking up of existing bloc arrangement and influence zones in Europe.<sup>23</sup> The first real result was the „Adriatic Initiative“ that was formed in 1989. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Austrian policy reverted to careful attitude and refused to become „the bridge“ between West Europe and countries that got rid of Soviet rule.

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<sup>21</sup> Near: Vladimír Goněc, „Central Europe as Common Area or More? Ideas of Czechoslovak, Polish, and Hungarian Exile from 1970s and 1980s“, in: *Polska, Europa Środkowa, Europa zjednoczona. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana Profesorowi Józefowi Laptopsowi* (Andrzej Kozera, Wojciech Prażuch, Paulina Szyja, eds.), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2014, pp. 148-157.

<sup>22</sup> For example Erhard Busek, later vice-chancellor of Austria. See for example: Emil Brix, Erhard Busek, *Projekt Mitteleuropa*, Wien: Überreiter, 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Such goals were set also by France, but by nobody else. West Germany demanded maintaining „state of balance in Europe“, any „disquiet“ would have threatened budding relations between both German counterparts.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the public opinion in Czechoslovakia and Hungary (not so much in Poland) expressed renewed sentiments of Central European convergence and cooperation. However, the politics went not this way. Escaping the Soviet bloc meant also escaping one another. Do not forget that in 1991, the beginnings of Visegrád Group started as political demonstrations of the heads of states only, also in the form of political demonstration against home political elites, mainly in cases of „weak“ presidents (from the point of view of their constitutional rights): Havel versus Klaus, Göncz versus Antall.<sup>24</sup> Wałęsa, too, felt the need to confront Polish government. Common steps of Central European post-communist countries to accelerate their entry in the NATO and the EU were stressed, however the reality was soon somewhere between competing and zero communication, mainly with respect to the entry to the EU.

Only much later, since 2013, Visegrád group grew to lasting cooperation model. However, the dimensions are limited. The most visible V4 coordination in recent time has been in problems concerning migration.

However, there is no full consensus and Poland is perceived as unpredictable under stress.

Low cohesion of Visegrád Group can be illustrated by Czech attitudes towards V 4: Some Czech politicians persist on ignoring V 4 or refusing any sense of its existence, e.g. Václav Klaus. Some politicians have pointed out for a long time that Austria has been the first and crucial partner in Central Europe. Slovakia thinks quietly the same. Some Czech politicians add Slovenia, which is nearer than Hungary and perhaps even Poland, both mentally and with respect to interests. The idea that Czechia, Austria, and Slovenia form the natural core of Central Europe is proposed. Slovakia is interested in joining the core. This idea is not new as it appeared already after the division of Czechoslovakia.

Instead of overestimating the importance of Visegrád Group it is advisable to identify actual internal barriers as well as true connecting lines in Central Europe. At the same time, it should be realized that any overestimation of Visegrád Group by West European politicians or EU organs fuels populist and Euroscepticist circles in these countries.

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<sup>24</sup> After the division of Czechoslovakia, also Kováč versus Mečiar.

The connection between Czech Republic and Germany is extraordinarily strong. Close economic relations have formed since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and have intensified immediately since 1990. The structure of industry, services, and finance sectors in both countries is almost identical, particular economic sectors are interwoven, including car and electronics industry, banking, etc. For many years the comments have been running that, economically, Czech Republic is simply one of *Bundesländer*, i.e. direct part of Germany. Recently, mental connection between inhabitants of Czechia and Germany have been on the rise. Most people think that the past, including the WWII, does not have impact on Czech-German relations any more.

Chiefly since the start of Trump's presidency, Czech public opinion have expected Germany to be the main safety guardian of Czech Republic (and of Central Europe in general). Following NATO exercises, Czech army perceives Bundeswehr as its key partner. Common military exercises are frequent. Actual political connection between Czech Republic and Germany is very high and forms a specific barrier between Czechia on one side and Poland and Hungary on the other. Czech Prime Minister Sobotka (2013-2017) and German Chancellor Merkel had similar ideas and new governments that should be established in 2018 should continue in this trend. Since 2014, there have been pronounced understanding with Bavarian government.

Between Slovakia and Austria, there is also strong connection. Czech-Slovak relations weakened economically, politically, and mentally immediately after the division of Czechoslovakia (with strong personal influence of prime ministers Klaus and Mečiar). In 1998, new demonstrative political convergence occurred. Economically, Slovakia became connected to Germany and Austria. The hub of all Slovakia lies in the southwest at Austrian border. Bratislava formed very quickly a united agglomeration with Vienna. This resulted in weakened relations with Poland and Hungary. Slovak mentality in general does not feel well in the space between Poland and Hungary and Slovak policy respects it. Czech Republic and Germany are perceived as Slovak supporters, while Austria lying at the forefront. This was confirmed by the fact that the first official visit of new Austrian minister of foreign affairs was to Bratislava, in January 2018.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The speech of Slovak minister of foreign affairs one day earlier was even clearer.

It is important to note and acclaim that Germany is acting as the economic and political cornerstone of the whole V 4 area, with Austria playing the supporting role. Since 1990s, the economic structure of Germany and Austria has acted as important partner in the times of economic growth, as the source of incentives. In times of economic recessions or crises it plays the role of life line. Both countries are crucial partners in exchange of goods and services and bring investments.

However, they deal with each V 4 country separately.<sup>26</sup> These relations serve as a tool for transfer of German and Austrian ideas and technologies to Central Europe. Germany operates as reliable bridge between V 4 countries and the rest of West Europe. The interconnection of German and V 4 economy bids smaller West European countries – the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Sweden, and Denmark – to enter the area, as well. Surprisingly steep increase of direct investment from the Netherlands and Luxembourg have occurred lately.

Direct economic relations between individual V 4 countries are of secondary importance, German and Austrian mediation is much more important. Rather than any V 4 country, Romania became important economic partner of Hungary.

What is the reflection of Brexit in public opinion in V 4 countries? Strong mental relations to the United Kingdom are present in Polish public opinion and politics only. When choosing from English speaking countries, Slovakia and Hungary prefer mentally USA and Canada. Czech public opinion is rather indifferent.

An internal generation gap has formed. After 2002, there was deep decline in teaching German and French (Italian and Spanish have never been practically taught at all) throughout V 4 countries. The reason is suggested easily. At Copenhagen negotiations preceding entry of 10 countries to the EU, EU member states gained right to ban free movement of workforce for as much as 7 years. While Germany and Austria used the whole period, some European countries opted for shorter obstructions, and the United Kingdom and Ireland refused the ban completely. New generations now prefer English.<sup>27</sup> Young people in media master English

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<sup>26</sup> Statistical data on the foreign investments see the web sites of National Banks of Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. Statistical data on the foreign trade see the web sites of Ministries of Industry and Trade of those countries.

<sup>27</sup> Resulting in comic situations like Erasmus programme students from V 4 countries arriving to Italy or Portugal to find out nobody is going to teach them in English there.

only and are not able to pass information flow from other European countries. For these generations, Brexit came as shock.

On the other hand, Brexit will not bring significant economic load for any V 4 country. In that part of society of V 4 countries that has pro-British sentiments, these will disappear gradually. Brexit will not bring V 4 together. However, as direct consequence of Brexit, there will be deeper economic connection between individual V 4 countries and Germany, thus strengthening the position of Germany in Europe. This will not lead to „German Europe“ as feared by nationalists because Germany is specific historically new „post-nationalist“ element.

The lack of coherence in Central Europe was presented by Polish exile historian Oskar Halecki at the beginning of 1950s. His idea published in *West Central Europe contra East Central Europe* states that there is no single Central Europe, but two of them that do not belong together. There are political, cultural, mental, and social differences. *West Central Europe* includes Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, and Slovenia. *East Central Europe* contains Poland, Lithuania, old Hungary (in pre-1918 borders), and Croatia. His idea includes the contrast of skipping own neighbours: West Central Europe tends to cooperate with East Europe and East Central Europe is close to West Europe.<sup>28</sup>

New light on the cohesion of Central Europe was thrown by the Austerlitz Triangle (A 3). At first sight, this seems to be a substitute solution, as contemporary politicians in Hungary and Poland are not willing to discuss anything. Wider perspective suggests that this group is more convenient for both Czechia and Slovakia and helps to strengthen democratic environment in Europe.<sup>29</sup> The first movement can be attributed to Petr Drulák, the first deputy of the Czech minister of foreign affairs in 2014.<sup>30</sup> Austerlitz Triangle was established by prime ministers of Austria, Czechia, and Slovakia in January 2015. Some comments saw only a triangle of three social democratic prime ministers. However, this triangle brings together similar interests and long-term expectations.

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<sup>28</sup> Oskar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*. London-New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950, chapter VII.

<sup>29</sup> Jan Hlavatý, *Může Slavkovský trojúhelník nahradit V4?* [August 2017, web site: <http://hlavaty-jan.cz/politika/>]

<sup>30</sup> At the moment, Czech ambassador in France.

For a long time, Czech government has been looking for a way to add Austria to Central European affairs. On political level, Austrian interest was very low and conflicts because of nuclear power plants have been long standing. Traffic and energy infrastructure (gas pipelines, electricity) are expected to become connected even more and implementation of Austrian experience with professional education and employment of young adults is sought after. Prime Minister Sobotka desired transborder cooperation programmes and coordination of attitudes on European level.

With Kurz as Austrian minister of foreign affairs, there was significant convergence between Austria and Czech Republic.<sup>31</sup> Beside very quick convergence with respect to migration crisis, there was mutual convergence in many points. New governments established in both countries in 2018 are supposed to follow this way. Poland is becoming nervous from the rate of Czech-Austrian convergence.

With respect to „East policy“, Austerlitz does not work. In this field, Czech thinking is close to Polish support of Ukraine. In contrast, Hungary, Austria, and Slovakia support Russia.

Therefore, the discussion „Austerlitz Triangle + Macron“ is not surprising. Another idea attributed to Macron by Czech and Slovak thinkers is the convergence with Romania as counterbalance to Poland.<sup>32</sup> Within East Central Europe, Romania is example of good historical experience of cooperation for Czech Republic and Slovakia. The talks of prime ministers A 3 + Macron in August 2017 put clearly A 3 forward, moving V 4 aside.<sup>33</sup> Slovak prime minister Fico said indirectly but clearly that Slovakia is interested in the EU, not in V 4.

From the point of view of Austrian policy, there is contrast between Austerlitz and Visegrád. FPÖ prefers obviously Austrian entry to the Visegrád group and its leader Strache perceives Orbán and Kaczyński as

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<sup>31</sup> At that time, Zaorálek was Czech minister of foreign affairs.

<sup>32</sup> Tomáš Prouza, „Macronova spanilá jízda do východní divočiny“, in: *Aktuálně.cz*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2017. [Web site: <http://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/tomas-prouza.php?itemid=29796>]

<sup>33</sup> For the Czechs, the most sympathetic countries and nations are Slovakia and the Slovaks. This is the historical heritage of the former Czechoslovakia, which is still reborn. The second in turn in sympathies, the first really "alien" are France and the French. It is deeply embedded in the mentality and reproduces over generations. The best and happiest period in history was the inter-war-phase for the Czechs. France and Romania were then the best allies of Czechoslovakia. Both Czechoslovakia and Romania were strongly interconnected with French culture at that time, etc.

his key partners. On the other hand, ÖVP prefers Czech Republic and Slovakia as partners.

Is it possible to see A 3 as the return of Austria into Central Europe? Kurz, the new chancellor, refuses automatic attitude of pioneers to welcome anything different or new. That does not have to be positive. The ex-chancellor Kern claimed in the past as well as before last elections in October 2017 that it is essential to defend open, modern, democratic, and varied Austria. Both Austrian ÖVP and Czech liberals opposed him: Does this open Austria<sup>34</sup> want to accept a group, whose traditions, educations and behaviour patterns embody isolation, anti-modernism, refusal of democracy, and fight against variety (including any „apostasy“ in religious behaviour)? Traditionalist Czech liberals are also inspired by the old adage of balance of powers and agree that: Austria is returning to Central Europe to counterbalance Germany.<sup>35</sup>

In West Europe, the relations with Russia are really underestimated. In Germany, „advantageous Russian-German cooperation“ is mentioned often. In Europe „east of Germany“ Russia is perceived clearly as threat. This concerns Russia as state. Top persons of Russian culture are welcome, even top Russian politicians have been welcome for some 100 years, but they have to „accept European values“.<sup>36</sup>

The exclusion of Russia as state from Europe is accepted - „do not let Russia in“. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was perceived as confirmation that Russia does not belong to Europe. This historical trend was also opportunity because Russia left Europe finally and true parts of Europe that used to be controlled by Russia could come back. In the 1990s „weakened sleeping Russia“ was seen as Europe's neighbour with whom one can communicate. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Russia is again seen as threat.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Within this kind of Europe.

<sup>35</sup> Zbyněk Petráček, „Kurzovo Rakousko“, in *Lidové noviny*, 17<sup>th</sup> Feb 2017, p 10.

<sup>36</sup> P. Miljukov can serve as good example as he transformed himself into true European democrat (influenced by TG Masaryk). LN Tolstoj as „politician“ and bearer of European values was later in conflict with Russian government.

<sup>37</sup> Nothing new in Central Europe. Before the end of WWI, Masaryk in his New Europe accentuated Russian danger for Central Europe and any German-Russian cooperation threatens whole Europe.

Political thinking in Central Europe was offered new theme in 2017: „Spain as worse neighbourhood than Poland or Hungary.“ What happened in Catalonia with respect to its independence referendum brought new expectations. Concerning the cases of Poland and Hungary, Rajoy is presented and evaluated as more negative person than Orbán or Kaczyński. The organs of the EU should act adequately, however, they behave selfishly which is unacceptable and cowardly. Not us, it is Spain who is the defunct part of Europe. Such proclamations by Polish and Hungarian thinkers were also presented in Czech and Slovak media.<sup>38</sup>

Czech and Slovak comments did not hesitate to label Spain government as neofrankist and cartoons depicting Rajoy kissing Franco were published. Another comparison is at hand: shooting with rubber bullets was not practised even by Czechoslovak communist police before November 1989.<sup>39</sup>

Other comments on dubious and rotten roots of Spanish democracy joined:<sup>40</sup> The steps of Spanish government are viewed as copy of South American governments of 1970s, that is, completely unacceptable and non-European. Spanish constitution and its use by the government are compared to Putin's Russia. In Slovak and Czech media, Spain and Catalonia were recommended to use the experience of „velvet division“ of Czechoslovakia.

Central Europe remains disunited also in the case of common euro currency. Slovakia has been so far the only V 4 country to introduce euro and that happened 9 years ago. Common currency helped to accelerate Slovak-Austrian convergence. On the other hand, contemporary Polish and Hungarian politicians refuse euro.

The situation in Czech Republic is complicated. Euro has been operating as parallel currency there for many years. Medium-sized and large companies and many small companies lead their books in euro and

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the Czech daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* reprints the Hungarian commentaries more often. The Redactor in Chief of this daily, István Léko, is a Hungarian living in Prague.

<sup>39</sup> However, they did use water guns and rubber sticks.

<sup>40</sup> Example: weekly *Reflex*: Cover of issue 40/2017 from 5<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017 – large headline „Madrid thrashes Barcelona“. Other headlines in the same issue: „Spain on verge of civic war“ (understand: caused by Madrid). In the same issue, a series of reports headed across two pages „Bloody day“. Conclusion of comments: Catalonia on inevitable way to independence, provoked by Madrid.



pay in euro – everything except wages and taxes, which have to be accounted in Czech crowns by law. The union of industry and traffic calls for fast introduction of euro in Czech Republic.

The largest Czech right wing party – Civic Democratic Party – has been agitating hysterically against euro since the times of Václav Klaus. The communist chime in. Populist parties share this idea and media are quick to adapt. 70 % of people used to consent with the implementation of euro in Czech Republic, now 70-80 % of people refuse it. The voters are warned and threatened that Czech Republic would end as Greece. Many parties choose not to choose, saying that future will tell and other parties refuse quick implementation of euro.

The guilt lies also with Czech National Bank.<sup>41</sup> The bank is suspected from fear of losing its power that would be inevitably brought about by the introduction of euro. A lengthy row of declarative intervention to weaken Czech currency demanded huge costs amounting to about one and half of Czech state debt. That was paid by Czech consumers.

Vast reserves of euro held by the bank threaten to cause loss as Czech currency is naturally rising. And that would be paid by Czech taxpayers. There is high risk of destabilisation for Czech economy in general. New board of Czech National Bank wants Czech crown to grow as slow as possible. In 9 months, the exchange rate for 1 euro fell from 27.020 to 25.520,<sup>42</sup> while natural rate is estimated to lie at 24 or even 21 crowns. The demand for full stabilisation of natural rate of Czech currency prior to the implementation of euro is logical.<sup>43</sup>

Using Greece as warning examples have been successful argument of right-wing as well as populist parties of all sorts for many years. In 2010 elections this threat help the right-wing coalition to win. The government led by Civic Democratic Party (after 2006 elections) caused the onset of finance crisis in Czech Republic even sooner than in West Europe. The government led by the same party after 2010 elections opposed those changes in economic policy that would have led Czech Republic out of economic crisis faster. Czech Republic was the last country from East

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<sup>41</sup> Governor and board named by the president. V. Klaus named his „boys“.

<sup>42</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Nothing in common with populist speeches by president Zeman and his like that Czech Republic would enter eurozone only after expulsion of Greece.

Central Europe that disentangled itself from the crisis. This happened in 2013.<sup>44</sup>

When speaking about migration as binder between V 4 countries after 2015, specific dimension of public opinion in these countries have to mentioned. Without any populist manipulation, the public asks: „migration or invasion?“ The population of East Central Europe is extraordinarily sensible to any entry of larger amount of „uninvited people“ on its territory. This is textbook example of history-bound „collective memory“ or „collective experience“. The depth of these roots can be demonstrated by most popular Catholic pilgrimage sites at Legnickie Pole in Lower Silesia/Poland and Hostýn in Moravia/Czech Republic that are related to Mongol invasion of 1241, the former commemorates bloody and lost battle, the latter the fact the invasion missed the country. In the time of Ottoman invasion in East Central Europe, the Central European Habsburg-Ottoman front lasted from 1540 to 1688. In East Europe, the Polish-Ottoman front lasted even longer – 1485-1699. In both cases, it was Tartar cavalry, whose raids were exceeding the borders by as much as 250 km. Ottoman and Tartar incursions have remained deeply rooted both in folklore and literature of Central Europe. In East Europe this experience was by up to two centuries longer and Greece has been strongly nervous because its Turkish neighbour.

The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968 are often compared to new Tartar or Tartar-Mongolian invasion.<sup>45</sup>

There are still many people who were affected by these invasions – deeply and for life. The Russian invasion of Crimea is a new case that reminded Central Europeans of their not so old experience of their own.

Unsuccessful attempt at coup in Montenegro in October 2016 that was organized by Russians is another example.

It is the public opinion in Central Europe that is sensible to the question: „Which wave of immigration can be expected in Central Europe in particular?“ West Europe does not see migrants from East Ukraine that

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<sup>44</sup> After the demise of the government because of ridiculous cause and subsequent elections.

<sup>45</sup> The entry of the Soviet army into Central and Southeast Europe in 1944/45 is not openly called a raid, however, many people think it was so. Intellectually tuned and „politically correct“ sentence runs: The Soviet army liberated us, that is, occupied us.

headed, with respect to their preferences, either for West Ukraine or for Russia. Their number is estimated at 4 million. The psychologists claim that refugees hope for return for 4 or 5 year at most. If they are not able to return within this period, they tend to „go further“ and look for new home. Central Europe is at hand. Many Ukrainians have identified themselves with Central Europe since the division of the Soviet Union. Moreover, in Poland and in Czech Republic there are many Ukrainians working and living. In 1990s they were coming from West Ukraine. At present, there is as the first migration wave from East Ukraine.

Welcoming political exiles is not extraordinary in Central Europe.

At the beginning of 1920s, Czechoslovakia accepted some 100000 refugees from Bolshevism, and 30000 of them stayed. Other waves of refugees came from East Galicia in 1919, from Hungary in 1919, from Poland in 1926 and 1930, from Yugoslavia after 1929, from Germany after 1933, from Austria in 1934 and 1938. Austria accepted numbers of refugees from Czechoslovakia in 1948 and after 1968, and from Hungary in 1956.

However, there was always high rate of successful integration of immigrants in the accepting country.

Czech Republic and Slovakia have good experience with the integration of Vietnamese at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Czechs and Slovaks are frustrated by cumbersome or in some regions even impossible integration of Roma.<sup>47</sup>

While pointing out that West European politicians and EU representatives are perceiving feebly or incorrectly or even ignoring the specifics of Central Europe, it is important to stress that, after the Treaty of Lisbon, there has been no constructive discussion on European integration in Central European countries. The support of teaching European integration at universities was restricted and the funding became even

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<sup>46</sup> The second generation is integrated to such an extent that its members can be ranked among top Czech or Slovak film makers, artists, scientists, and even writers. The reasoning includes the thesis that Buddhism is not Islam or that Buddhism may be nearer to the Czech or Slovak culture than Orthodox Christianity.

<sup>47</sup> This problem is very complicated. It should not be forgotten that almost all Roma in Czech Republic and most in Slovakia immigrated only in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most significant obstacle in their integration are persisting remnants of clan organisation in Roma society.

more complicated due to the shock from financial and economic crisis. Central Europeans perceived the activity of EU representatives and organs as puzzled and clueless. This fact was easily abused by populist and „Euroscepticist“ forces. The example of Greece was abused repeatedly, too: „Greece is the victim of the EU“. The Merkel-Sarkozy discussion on crisis was presented as a lack of democracy in the EU. The media were following this trend passively or kept quiet. Brexit is still used as populist argument that the Brits „decided correctly“ that they should leave the union. We, Czechs (Slovaks, etc.) should follow suit.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, the future of European Union has to solve the rational dilemma: „Unification or unity in diversity?“ Central Europeans perceive contemporary EU as „different than the union we entered in 2004“. This generalization is based on particular steps that touched them.

This can be easily abused by populist politicians. At the present, the most sensitive problem is security. The population in general identifies this problem as the inability of the EU to guarantee safety or inability to agree on tools and steps to warrant it. This leads to simplified solution: it is only the USA who can ensure safety, only USA pays some role in NATO.

Surprisingly, the idea that Brexit is an important loss with respect to maintaining security, remains in background.

In contrary, the steps of EU organs towards linear unification are perceived as „hyperactivity disorder. “The unity in diversity“, so much desired by „the Fathers of Europe“, is lost. Europeanism is dissolving because anything „all members of the EU do not accept “does not allegedly form a part of Europeanism. To put theory in practice, such ideas should not be included in EU documents. Fallacy in the form of *petitio principii* follows: If it is not present in EU documents it is not Europeanism.

The return to „the unity in diversity “would have meant the consent that Europeanism can not be unified idea stream. It has to be a group of all relevant idea streams. The elementary values, that is European values, are not only those that form concordance, but also those that are combined or compete with each other. It was the competition between ideas and values

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<sup>48</sup> Namely, a great number of articles by Alexander Tomsky in the daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* and in other media.

that fuelled European spiritual development when it was possible to abandon violence as tool for the solution of „intraeuropean “relations.<sup>49</sup>

Internally pluralist Europe will be able to retain its dynamics. In contrary, linearly unified and administered Europe will lose it or there will be resurgence of „national identity “in its negative and aggressive sense.

Visegrád lacks the ability to be the foundations for any further deepening of cooperation, closer form of „Central European integration“. Using „European roof “conditions would not help either.

Pragmatic cooperation in selected points will be likely, but it is the revival of Austrian policy in Central Europe that promises strong cooperation between Czech Republic and Austria, between Slovakia and Austria, and innovatively, Slovakia and Czech Republic. The triangle France-Austria-Czech Republic can also be based on reality and would be welcome by public opinion in Austria and Czech Republic. At the same time, economic importance of Austria and Germany for Central Europe will not change, which is positive. This can serve as a concrete example of European „unity in diversity“.

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<sup>49</sup> Sentence provoked by the essay: László Öllös, „Európska identita“, in *Fórum. Spoločenskovedná revue*, 2016, p 137ff.

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