

Central Europe between Empires: Milan Hodža and His Strategy for “Small” Nations*

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Introduction: Central Europe and Milan Hodža

In this paper, I will focus my discussion on “small” nations between empires, not on empires themselves. Especially, Milan Hodža’s (1878–1944) ideas and activities will be discussed here. According to Hodža, a Slovak statesman, “small” nations located between Germany and Russia or USSR would not be able to survive by themselves. He insisted that such nations including Slovaks in Central Europe should have developed a cooperative relationship with each other. During the Second World War, Hodža even proposed a federation plan for Central Europe, which “surpassed the East Central European federalist schemes hatched since the First World War by being well thought out and specific.”¹

However, the idea of Central Europe itself is an extremely elastic concept, as Jacques Le Rider pointed out.² The idea was invented and utilized amid the German unification process and growing nationalism of the nineteenth century. Concepts of Central Europe can be divided into two types, perhaps at the risk of oversimplification: German ones, and non-German ones. The former type envisions a German-oriented unit under the auspices of Prussia or the Habsburg Empire, which definitely lost the German unification game with Prussia in 1866. Such a concept was popularized even among ordinary people by the book *Mittleuropa*, published by Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919) in 1915. The German word *Mittleuropa* was eventually used as a legitimizing term for the expansion of Germany into Eastern countries during the Nazi era, so *Mittleuropa* became something of

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¹ Vojtech Mastny, “The Historical Experience of Federalism in East Central Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 1 (1999), pp. 64–96, esp. pp. 80–81.

² Jacques Le Rider, *La Mittleuropa: Auf den Spuren eines Begriffes* (Wien: Deuticke, 1994), Aus dem Französischen von Robert Fleck. On recent studies about Central Europe, see Patricia Chiantera-Stutte and Bo Stråth, “Introduction,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 2 (2008), pp.147–153. See also other articles in this special issue for “Mittleuropa: Symbolic Geographies and Political Visions.”

a taboo after the Second World War.³

This paper, however, focuses on the latter type: the non-German concept such as Hodža's. The Czech historian František Palacký (1798–1876) was a pioneering figure. In his famous letter to the Frankfurt National Assembly in 1848, Palacký praises the value of “Austria” (the Habsburg Empire) as a protector of its “small” nations, such as that of the Czechs, which were located between the German and Russian Empires.⁴ After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, nation-states such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the remnants of the Empire, i.e. Austria, were founded. Most of the “small” nations in the area finally achieved self-determination and established democratic regimes, at least in the beginning, but they could not maintain stability in the area, except for Czechoslovakia, and helplessly watched Nazi expansion in 1930s. During the Second World War, quite a lot of intellectuals and politicians regarded the principle of self-determination for the area as a grave mistake and agreed on the need for a federalized polity in the “corridor” between Germany and Soviet Russia.

I'm concerned here with Hodža's concept of Central Europe as an instance of the non-German type. The first reason for considering Hodža is that he weathered three periods: the Habsburg era, the period between the two world wars, and the Second World War period. As mentioned above, Central Europe is an extremely elastic concept, so it is remarkably difficult to get a big-picture view of it. In this respect, analyzing Central Europe through the eyes of a statesman who considered many alternatives to the regional order in various periods may be a good method. Hodža was a member of the Hungarian parliament in the Habsburg Empire and a kind of collaborator with Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914), the imperial heir. After Czechoslovakia gained independence, Hodža distinguished himself as a leader of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party and became prime minister of the state just before the Munich Pact of 1938. During the Second World War, he formulated a postwar plan for Central European federation⁵ as a statesman in exile, though he eventually lost the struggle for power.

The second reason is that Hodža has been lost to oblivion from two perspectives.

³ As concerns the concept of *Mitteleuropa*, an outstanding work in Japanese was recently published: Takumi Itabashi, *Chūōron no keifu* [Genealogy of Mitteleuropa] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2010).

⁴ Peter Bugge, “The Use of the Middle: *Mitteleuropa* vs. *Střední Evropa*,” *European Review of History* 6, no. 1 (1999), pp. 15–34, esp. p. 20.

⁵ Milan Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe: Reflections and Reminiscences* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1942). See also its Slovak version: *Federácia v Strednej Európe a iné štúdie* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1997).

Because of his strong anti-communist stance, his views were considered taboo in the age of socialist regimes. After the systemic transformation in 1989, his name was rehabilitated and a number of symposia on Hodža were convened, especially from 2005 to 2007 at the impetus of the then prime minister Mikuláš Dzurinda (1955–).⁶ However, Hodža's name does not seem to have been fully reappraised. Why? In my opinion, his “Czechoslovakism” stands in the way of his full-fledged rehabilitation.⁷ Having broken away from the Czech Republic in 1993, Slovakia seems to need new symbols that embody its own Slovakness as well as its Europeanness. In this sense, a “Czechoslovakist” such as Hodža, who had been committed to a harmonious relationship between Czechs and Slovaks, might not be fully welcomed in the new Slovak historiography.⁸

Below, I'd like to present a comprehensive view of Hodža's life in three sections, i.e. the Habsburg era, the Interwar period, and the Second World War period, and also to examine his idea of Central Europe that was conceptualized in order to cope with the German and Russian (or Soviet) Empires.

1. *The Habsburg Empire in Central Europe*

1.1. Hodža's personal experience and the modernization of Hungary

Hodža was born in 1878 in the small city of Sučany, in mid-northern Slovakia. At that time, Slovakia belonged to the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire. After the *Ausgleich* (Compromise) of 1867 between the Germans and the Magyars, the Empire was divided

⁶ The following scholarly books were published as the results of each symposium: Miroslav Pekník, et al., *Milan Hodža: štátnik a politik* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2002), 3rd edition, see also its English version: *Milan Hodža: Statesman and Politician* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2007); idem, ed., *Milan Hodža a integrácia strednej Európy* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2006); idem, ed., *Milan Hodža: politik a žurnalista* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2008); idem, ed., *Milan Hodža a agrárne hnutie* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2008). On Hodža's historiography, see M. Pekník, “Milan Hodža vo svetle výskumu po roku 1989: odkaz pre súčasnú politiku a otázka ďalšieho smerovania Dní Milana Hodžu,” in *Milan Hodža a agrárne hnutie*, pp. 23–31.

⁷ Several biographies of Hodža were published after 1989, but they seemed to put a higher priority on rehabilitating him, rather than providing a balanced account of his life. See Ján Juriček, *Milan Hodža: kapitola z dejín slovenskej, československej a európskej politiky* (Bratislava: STIMUL, 1994); Karol Kollár, *Milan Hodža: moderný teoretik, pragmatický politik* (Bratislava: Infopress, 1994); Samuel Cambel, *Štátnik a národohospodár Milan Hodža 1878–1944* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2001). A young promising historian Pavol Lukáč, before his early death in 2004, had attempted in clarifying Hodža's activities via new archival researches in the USA in particular. His unfinished dissertation was published as *Milan Hodža v zápase o budúcnosť strednej Európy v rokoch 1939–1944* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2005).

⁸ For an example of negative view on Hodža's “Czechoslovakism,” see Jozef Markuš, “O podstate polemiky alebo polemiky o podstate,” in *Polemika o československom rozkole* (Milan Hodža: *Československý rozkol*; Jozef Škultéty: *Stodvadsaťpäť rokov zo slovenského života*) (Bratislava: Politologický odbor Matice slovenskej, 2008), pp. 7–13, esp. pp. 7–9.

into two equivalent parts, Austria and Hungary, each of which had its own parliament and cabinet, with the exception of common fields like foreign policy, military affairs and finance concerned with the above-mentioned foreign policy and military affairs.

In Hungary, including the Slovak area, the Nationality Law of 1868 intended to create a modern Hungarian nation. Under the new law, all citizens were to compose a politically integrated, indivisible Hungarian nation, while every nationality should be given isonomy and the right to use their own language in public organizations like administrative institutions and schools. The reality was, however, quite different. The Magyar elite preferred the Magyarization of all citizens in Hungary, rather than respect for the individuality of each nationality. Also in Slovak areas, three Slovak-language gymnasia and the Slovak Foundation (*Matica slovenská*), an institution championing Slovak culture, were forcibly abolished in the 1870s. Magyar leaders felt that the modern Hungarian nation should have a Magyar character.

Hodža allegedly was aware of his own ethnicity from a young age. He studied at three gymnasia: one in Banská Bystrica (a Slovak area), one in Sopron (a Magyar area), and one in Sibiu (a Romanian area). He entered the University of Budapest and founded the Association of Minority Students (*Združenie národnostných študentov*). Although only one in four adult males were eligible to vote in parliamentary elections until the First World War, Hodža was able to win election at the age of twenty-six in the Kulpin district (a Serbian constituency) in 1905, where Slovaks predominated. He also took the initiative of creating a parliamentary group of non-Magyar nationalities, that is, Romanians, Serbians, and Slovaks, although this garnered only twenty-six of the four hundred and thirteen seats in parliament at the most. One could argue that his central European network and septalingual ability were essentially formed at that time.

1.2. The Belvedere Circle and attempts towards reorganization of the Empire

A turning point of Hodža's career was a fateful encounter with Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the imperial throne. Addressing the Hungarian problems that were arising at that time was the one of the most difficult tasks for Vienna and the entire Dynasty. Magyar nationalists demanded an army of their own, commanded not in German but in Magyar. Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830–1916), strongly adhered to the idea of an integrated and indivisible army. Ironically, he had succeeded in containing Magyar nationalists by calling their bluff on introducing universal manhood suffrage. The Magyars of Hungary were in the minority, at least in number. The political advantage of the Magyar ruling elite was unnaturally preserved by limited suffrage, so they were scared of franchising the lower

classes, since it might only benefit the Social Democrats or non-Magyar people. Franz Ferdinand, more radical than Franz Joseph, tried to “revive” a mightier, integrated empire. He was even able to join hands with non-Magyar members of the elite, such as Hodža, the Romanian reformer Aurel C. Popovici (1863–1917), and others, in order to intimidate the Magyars. This group around Franz Ferdinand was called the Belvedere Circle, after the archduke’s residence in Vienna.

According to Hodža’s reminiscences, the archduke had three acceptable options for reorganizing Hungary.⁹ The first was to introduce universal manhood suffrage to the Hungarian parliament and to redress inegalitarian representation in parliament for non-Magyar nationalities. The second was to abolish the dualism between Austria and Hungary by building a centralized Great Austria. The third was to compromise with non-Magyar nationalities besides Magyars and to make stopgap reforms such as trialism (not the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, but a triple Monarchy of Austro-Bohemia-Hungary, for example), and so on. Ferdinand focused particular attention on the second choice. Popovici’s plan gained recognition.

In his best-selling book *United States of Great Austria*,¹⁰ published in 1906, Popovici insisted that the Habsburg Empire should be federalized into fifteen semi-sovereign states while maintaining the inviolability of the throne. The principle of demarcation was to be ethnic geographical distribution. For example, Germans should compose three separate states, that is, German-Austria, German-Bohemia, and German-Moravia. Since it was not possible to prevent the emergence of so-called national enclaves, every state would be obliged to respect the rights of minorities within each state. Popovici did not oppose “organic” assimilation of minorities into majorities as a result of a “natural” process, but he adamantly refused “coercive” assimilation, as in the style of Magyars against non-Magyars. Popovici’s reform plan was highly welcomed by Austrian-Germans and conservatives, who wished for a centralized Austria and hegemony of Germans. However, the Magyars were very hostile to the idea of abolishing dualism, whereas non-German or non-Magyar minorities could not tolerate German centralism.

Hodža also praised Karl Renner (1870–1950) and Otto Bauer (1881–1938),

⁹ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 50–51.

¹⁰ Aurel C. Popovici, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Gross-Österreich* (Leipzig, 1906). On Popovici’s reform plan, see Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1918*, vol. 2: *Empire Reform* (New York: Octagon, 1964), pp. 197–207; Victor Neumann, “Federalism and Nationalism in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Aurel C. Popovici’s Theory,” *East European Politics & Societies* 16 (2002), pp. 864–897.

prominent leaders of the Austrian Social Democrats.¹¹ Renner put forth a theory of dualistic national autonomy at the beginning of the twentieth century that attracted much attention even from outside the Empire. He combined territorial autonomy and personal autonomy in order to defy the boundaries of territorial demarcation. He prescribed constitutional units based on nationality without relation to territories. Thus, every citizen in the Empire should be able to select their representatives both for the territorial parliament and the national parliament. The latter was to be necessarily concerned only with its national culture. On the other hand, Bauer tried to theoretically explain the origins and developmental sequence of nations within the framework of socialism. According to him, the national community would not lose its *raison d'être* with the advent of socialism. While enjoyment of national culture in capitalist societies is limited to the propertied classes, that in socialist societies would be accessible to all, including the proletariat. Regarding national autonomy, Bauer basically agreed with Renner's framework.

Hodža himself did not clearly articulate his vision for the future, at least before the First World War. He supposedly wanted to keep a free hand; however, his real aim was to realize democratization for the Slovak people and land reform throughout Hungary. When he submitted a memorandum with a colleague to the archduke in December 1911, he insisted that the "development of political forms in the modern era is headed for empire [Großes Reich] or great power [Weltmacht]. Small countries [Reiche] have no future."¹² One could argue that his stance at that time was in keeping with the archduke's, or concretely speaking, with Popovici's plan.

Hodža's strategy seemed on the verge of bearing fruit in the spring of 1914, when Emperor Franz Josef I fell critically ill.¹³ A "workshop" of the Belvedere Circle was immediately convened to discuss measures to be taken in the event of his demise. Regarding Hungary, the federal system and universal manhood suffrage would be introduced. If the Hungarian parliament were to be against the next emperor, Franz

¹¹ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 44–45. Renner and Bauer's primary works are Synopticus [Karl Renner], *Staat und Nation* (1899); R. Springer [Renner], *Der Kampf der österreichischen Nationen um den Staat* (1902); Renner, *Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen in besonderer Anwendung auf Österreich* (1918); Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und Sozialdemokratie* (1907). On Renner's historical significance, see Akira Taguchi and H. Fukuda, "Comment and Bibliographical Notes for Abridged Translation of Renner's Works" (in Japanese), *Hokkaido Law Review* 53, no. 2 (2002), pp. 459–471.

¹² Dušan Kováč, "Milan Hodža: vom Belvederekreis zum Föderationsgedanken im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in R. G. Plaschka, et al., eds., *Mitteleuropa-Konzeptionen in der Ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), pp. 165–170, esp. p. 165.

¹³ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 51–53.

Ferdinand, then the “reform” would be realized by imperial decree. According to Lukáč, non-Magyar leaders including Hodža would become cabinet members in Hungary.¹⁴ However, Franz Josef recuperated. So, a kind of coup d’état by the Belvedere Circle misfired. It was an episode a few weeks before the Sarajevo. In the summer of 1914, the situation was completely changed by the assassination of the archduke.

2. *The Agrarian Movement and Central Europe in the Interwar Period*

2.1. The First World War and the birth of “nation-states”

Friedrich Naumann’s best-selling book *Mitteleuropa* (Middle Europe), published in 1915, reflected the new atmosphere prevalent after the outbreak of the Great War. Naumann, a German politician, insisted on Central European integration of the German (Hohenzollern) and Habsburg Empires from the perspective of German “imperialistic” liberalism. Although the book was read avidly by intellectuals in Austria-Hungary, most (but not all) non-Germans were strongly opposed to this German-oriented plan.¹⁵ Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937), the first president of the newly founded Czechoslovakia after the war, was at the forefront of the anti-Naumann campaign.

By contrast, Hodža maintained a low profile in the dispute, since he had been placed under observation by the Hungarian authorities throughout the war years. During this period, he did not politically commit himself to either cooperation with members of the Belvedere circle for reform within Hungary nor to independence with the Czechs.¹⁶ The Slovak independence movement finally declared its intentions by the “Mikuláš Resolution” on the 1st of May, 1918. It was only in the last stages of the war that most Slovak leaders, including Hodža, finally emerged from their “passive waiting game” and committed themselves to the creation of Czechoslovakia.

One could argue that the postwar reorganization of Central Europe was ultimately along the national basis depicted by Masaryk in his book *The New Europe*. In it, he advocated that the Allies undertake “the restoration of the Czecho-Slovak state” with “an independent united Poland,” “an independent united Jugoslavia,” and so forth.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hodža, *Federácia v Strednej Európe*, p. 347, n. 22.

¹⁵ Itabashi, *Chūōron no keifu*, pp. 115–130; Tadeusz Kopyś, “Die Haltung der Tschechischen und Polnischen Politischen Eliten zur Mitteleuropa-Konzeption Friedrich Naumanns,” *Bohemia* 41, no. 2 (2000), pp. 326–342.

¹⁶ Suzanna Mikula, *Milan Hodža and the Slovak National Movement, 1898–1918* (Ph.D thesis: Syracuse University, 1974), pp. 146–158.

¹⁷ Tomáš G. Masaryk, *The New Europe (The Slav Standpoint)* (For Private Circulation) (London, 1918), p. 58. On Masaryk’s idea, see Tadayuki Hayashi, “Masaryk’s ‘Zone of Small Nations’ in his Discourse during World War I,” in T. Hayashi and H. Fukuda, eds., *Regions in*

However, painful demarcation disputes with neighboring countries awaited the new nation-states. Especially in the Slovak area, which comprised part of the “historical territory” of Hungary, there was no clear border between the states. Since the Slovak area was *de facto* under the rule of Hungary even after the war, Hodža was sent to Budapest as an emissary, the “plenipotentiary minister and ambassador,” from the newly-formed Czechoslovak government, in order to secure the withdrawal of the Hungarian army. However, Hodža and Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), who attended the Paris Peace Conference as a representative of the new Czechoslovakia and was foreign minister for the majority of the Interwar period, were at cross-purposes.¹⁸ Beneš thought that demarcation should be discussed at the Peace Conference and not through bilateral negotiations. Despite this, Hodža was negotiating single-handedly with Hungary and came to a temporary arrangement with Hungary. Hodža didn’t know Beneš’s intentions, while Beneš failed to acknowledge Hodža’s efforts in Budapest, which perhaps contributed to the future disagreements between the two politicians.

As a result, Hungary’s new border was fixed by multinational not bilateral negotiations. Regarded as a defeated country, Hungary lost two-thirds of its historical territory and three-fifths of its population by the Trianon Treaty with the Allies. It should be understood that Hungarian irredentism became the gravest threat to neighboring countries in the Interwar period. Little Entente was established in this context among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Austria’s “glory” also became history. Bereft of its industrial zone (Czech lands), agricultural zone (Hungarian plains), and so on, Austria seemed to collapse into a relic of a country. Though a large majority of German-Austrians wanted the *Anschluss* (annexation) with Germany for their own survival, it was flatly rejected by the Allies, which feared Germany’s revival. It was also therefore essential for countries seceding from the Habsburg Empire to contain the growing frustration that was emerging in Austria and Germany.

The nation-state model was “universally” applied after the First World War, and Central Europe became a testing ground for “small” nation-states. The “feudalistic” Habsburg Empire had gone, and emancipated nations got their own states and should have been able to realize democratic regimes. However, the reality was not that simple. Firstly, it was not easy for new nation-states to act harmoniously, because of territorial disputes or

Central and Eastern Europe: Past and Present (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2007), pp. 3–20.

¹⁸ Marián Hronský, “Budapeštianske rokovania Milana Hodžu a prvá demarkačná čiara medzi Slovenskom a Maďarskom,” in M. Pekník, *Milan Hodža: štátnik a politik*, pp.157–181, esp. p. 172.

minority issues. Secondly, almost all new states, except for Czechoslovakia, were politically unstable and had trouble introducing democracy. Thirdly, the large economic zone of the Habsburg Empire had been destroyed, and each nation-state adhered to its own fragmented “national economy.” So, what did Hodža think about the new order of Central Europe in such a situation? His handling of this situation is explained in the next subsection.

2.2. Agrarian democracy and Green International

In the Interwar period, Hodža became one of leading members of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party¹⁹ and held ministerial posts including Minister for the Unification of Laws and the Organization of Administration (1919–20), Minister of Agriculture (1922–26, 1932–35), Minister of Education (1926–29), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1935–36), and Prime Minister (1935–38). The Agrarian Party, headed by Antonín Švehla (1873–1933), became the biggest party in the country, and Agrarians were members of all governmental coalitions in this period. The party received relatively broad-based support that transcended the differences among classes and nationalities. Although the core of support from small farmers was secured by land reform, Agrarians succeeded in expanding their support base throughout the entire middle class. Regarding nationalities, they received not only the Czech vote, but also those of the Slovaks and other minorities. In that sense, the Agrarians functioned as a “hinge party,” which contributed to the stabilization of democracy in Czechoslovakia.

As was clear from Western democracy in Britain and the USA, as Hodža wrote, a strong middle class would be required for setting democracy in place.²⁰ Generally speaking, Central European states lacked a strong middle class, i.e. the bourgeoisie, but abounded in “fellow-fighters,” i.e. peasants. According to Hodža, rural dwellers accounted for 64.5% of the Central European population, much higher than the figure for Western Europe.²¹ Based on a book by American sociologists Sorokin and Zimmerman,²² Hodža insisted that peasants could also be fighters against feudalism and the bearers of liberty and

¹⁹ Its official name from June 1922 was Republican Party of Agriculturalists and Small Farmers (Republikánská strana zemědělského a malorolnického lidu). On the Agrarian Party, see Daniel E. Miller, *Forging Political Compromise: Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party, 1918–1922* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

²⁰ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 195–200.

²¹ See also George D. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe 1919–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 3–25.

²² Pitirim Sorokin and Carle C. Zimmerman, *Principles of Rural-urban Sociology* (New York, 1929).

progress. In that sense, the urban population was not the sole contributor to democracy.

Hodža wrote that Czech and Slovak peasants could be a model for democracy of the Central European type.²³ Its historical roots lay in the Hussite movement of the 15th century. According to his understanding of Czech history, the ideological elements of the movement were not only freedom of creed and conscience, but also the rights of the Czech language and its defense against “strangers,” i.e. Germans. As a matter of fact, the rank-and-file members of the movement were peasantry and some gentry. Since the Slovak area then belonged to Hungary, it was only influenced by the movement to a limited extent. However, Slovak peasants had “traditional” ties with Polish people, and gave refuge to them as well as to Czech “protestants.” During the 17th century, when the Ottomans occupied the old Hungary, the Slovak area also became a refuge for many intellectuals in that country. Thus, according to Hodža, Slovak people had been already prepared for democracy in the mid-19th century, as Czechs had. He insisted that the Czech and Slovak cases could provide a model for agrarian democracy in the whole of Central Europe.

Besides democracy, common economic interest was an acute problem in the region. During the First World War, numerous agricultural commodities began to flow into Europe from North America, and this trend did not change even after the war.²⁴ Central European countries lost their position as a supply base for food, despite output expansion, and crop surpluses and overpopulation in rural areas became highly visible, especially after the mid-1920s. Hodža already mentioned in 1919 the necessity of economic cooperation among Central European countries, in other words, a kind of “Central European Union.” However, it was not his original idea. The International Agrarian Bureau (Mezinárodní agrární bureau), the so-called Green International, was established in Prague in 1921, on the initiative of agrarian leaders like Švehla (Czech), Wincenty Witos (Polish, 1874–1945), Aleksandar Stambolijski (Bulgarian, 1879–1923), and Hodža. At first, membership was limited to Central European agrarian parties; other Western parties began to join from the mid-1920s. In 1927 and 1928, the Bureau flourished, enlarging its membership to 18 agrarian parties from 14 countries.²⁵

²³ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 204–232.

²⁴ Alena Bartlová, “Medzinárodné agrárne bureau: pokus o nadnárodné a nadštátne združenie agrárnych politických stran v medzivojnovom období,” in J. Marušiak, et al., eds., *Integračné a dezintegračné procesy v strednej Európe v 20. storočí* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2008), pp. 68–81, esp. pp. 68–70.

²⁵ Member parties were from the following 14 countries: Czechoslovakia (Czechoslovakian and German), Germany, Austria, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian), Netherlands, Switzerland (Bern, Aargau), and France. On European agrarian movement, see Heinz Haushofer, “Die

However, the Great Depression hit the agriculture-oriented economy hard in Central Europe as well as hitting highly industrialized Western countries.²⁶ The collapse of agricultural prices in only a few years was disastrous. For example, the prices of most grains in 1932 and 1933 were one third to one half of the 1929 prices. As a result, agricultural income decreased by 57.6% in Romania, 51.8% in Bulgaria, 58.8% in Poland, 35.8% in Hungary, and large percentages in other states.²⁷

In such a situation, various coping methods were devised by various actors from various motives; however, almost all of them disappeared without tangible results. It may be worth mentioning, for example, a plan of the Austro-German Customs Union in 1931, the so-called Tardieu Plan, for economic cooperation among the Little Entente, Hungary, and Austria with the support of France in 1932, or the Rome Protocols of agreements among Italy, Austria, and Hungary in 1934.

Also Hodža, who finally took the seat of Prime Minister at the end of 1935, tried to realize his own project, the so-called Hodža Plan, in which he wanted to build a cooperative relationship between the Little Entente and Rome Protocols.²⁸ His final target was to create “a Central European economic unit provided with a customs union and common currency.” Regarding farm products, some *economie dirigée* (directed economy) would be introduced,²⁹ and a permanent Agricultural Bureau of Central Europe would be set up in order to ensure the normal disposal of the cereal surpluses and facilitate the marketing of these surpluses in Western Europe.³⁰ According to him, for democracy in Central Europe, it was necessary to protect peasants’ interests first and foremost. Peasants in those countries would form a bulwark against revolution or other disturbing trends. Therefore, the social problems concerning them must have been resolved. In his speech in 1931, he mentioned that Central Europe was charged with a civilizing mission between “two grinding millstones,” i.e. Germany and Soviet-Russia.³¹ In that sense, the

Internationale Organisation der Bauernparteien,” in H. Gollwitzer, ed., *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Gustav Fischer Verlag, 1977), pp. 668–690, esp. pp. 675–676; Angela Harre, “Demokratische Alternativen und Autoritäre Verführungen: Der Ostmitteleuropäische Agrarismus im Wechselspiel zwischen Ideologie und Politik,” in H. Schultz and A. Harre, eds., *Bauerngesellschaften auf dem Weg in die Moderne: Agrarismus in Ostmitteleuropa 1880 bis 1960* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 25–39.

²⁶ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 104–108.

²⁷ I. T. Berend and G. Ránki, *Economic Development in East-Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 244–245.

²⁸ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 107–108, 125–139.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 201–203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³¹ Milan Hodža, “Československo a Středná Európa,” in *Federácia v Strednej Európe*, pp.

Agro-economic and Agro-democratic bloc should emerge in the Central European “corridor.” However, his dream was not realized. Though Hodža eagerly tried to persuade each country and served as an intermediary for other countries, there was no positive result.³² The biggest stumbling block was the emerging Nazi Germany.

The Nazi’s *Neuer Plan* (New Plan) in 1934 was designed for mastery of the difficulties of rearmament and foreign trade simultaneously.³³ On the basis of bilateral trade, Germany could export its own industrial goods to, and import farm commodities from, eastern countries by barter transactions. This meant that Germany could stimulate its economy while simultaneously building foreign currency reserves for its own rearmament. On the other hand, agriculture-oriented countries in Central Europe needed a market for their own food products. Regarding Bulgarian exports to Germany, the figure was 29.9% in 1929, but 43.1% in 1937. Regarding Bulgarian imports from Germany, the respective figures were 22.2% and 54.8%. It was the birth of the German *Grossraumwirtschaft* (large economic zone), on which Central European countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia became highly dependent.

3. Hodža’s “Testament” during the Second World War

3.1. Struggle with Edvard Beneš and his final concept of Central Europe

After the Munich Pact in September 1938, both President Beneš and Prime Minister Hodža emigrated to Western Europe. However, it was extremely difficult to form a government in exile, because of discord between the Czechs and the Slovaks. To put it briefly, the Czechs associated with Beneš in London insisted on the indivisibility of Czechoslovakia and wanted to avoid a debate about the framework of their state until the end of the war, whereas the Slovaks associated with Hodža in Paris required their own autonomy as a

37–52, esp. pp. 48–49. See also Hodža, *Články, řeči, štúdie*, vol. 4: *Cesty stredo-evropskej agrárnej demokracie 1921–1931* (Praha, 1931), pp. 369–393, esp. pp. 387–388. A volume in honor of Hodža on his fiftieth birthday and seven-volume collected edition (volume 6 did not come out) were published around 1930: A. Štefánek, F. Votruba, and F. Sed’a, eds., *Milan Hodža: publicista, politik, vedecký pracovník: spomienky, úvahy, štúdie* (Praha, 1930); M. Hodža, *Články, řeči, štúdie* (Praha or Bratislava, 1930–1934), 7 (6) vols. Although these works are substantial historical documents even now, it is necessary to keep in mind that they were published under a fierce power struggle. Conflicted with Beneš and concerned about a succession race after Švehla in the Agrarian party, Hodža temporarily went out of the office because of his illness in 1929 (he was also involved in a scandal at that time). After returning to the political arena in 1931, he carried on seeking the post of foreign or prime minister.

³² See László Gulyás and István Tóth, “Maďarská percepcia prvého stredoeurópskeho plánu Milana Hodžu,” *Historický časopis* 57, no. 3 (2009), pp. 551–563.

³³ Berend and Ránki, *Economic Development in East-Central Europe*, pp. 266, 281–282.

prerequisite to organizing a government in exile.³⁴ As concerns postwar visions of Central Europe, Beneš preferred the independent status of sovereign states including Czechoslovakia. In contrast, Hodža regarded a federalized Central Europe as essential for the stability of the region. Although Beneš won the political battle against Hodža, Britain brought pressure to bear on Beneš to reconcile with the Hodža group. London preferred a stronger, larger political entity to the disaggregated, weak nation-states of Central Europe, and therefore needed the federation-minded Hodža. But Hodža had chosen to go to the USA rather than to join the Beneš team.

After arriving in the USA in October 1941, Hodža tried to recapture the initiative from Beneš, while the refugee government in London launched an intense negative campaign against Hodža, for example, portraying him as a fascist, an anti-Semite, and a reactionary. As concerns reactionism, the Beneš government even publicized the misinformation that Hodža had tried to revive the Habsburg Empire with Otto von Habsburg (1912–2011),³⁵ the last crown prince, who was lobbying for a Danubian federation in postwar Europe at that time in the USA.

According to his personal assistant, Michal Múdry (1909–1978), Hodža handed in a memorandum titled “Europe at a Crossroads,” to the Department of State at the beginning of 1944.³⁶ Since he died from a disease in June of the same year, this memorandum became his last political statement. Focusing on preventing the Soviet Union’s “thrust towards the West [Drang nach Westen],” he insisted that the USA and Britain would have to restrain the penetration of Communism into Central Europe. Central Europe should have been federalized, but under the framework of the United Nations, that would be done after the war.

Hodža’s federation would consist of four Slavic states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia) and four non-Slavic states (Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Greece), for 110 million people in total. This composition was not static; it might include

³⁴ On the political struggle between Hodža and Beneš in exile, see Jan Kuklík and Jan Němeček, *Hodža versus Beneš: Milan Hodža a slovenská otázka v zahraničném odboji za druhé světové války* (Praha: Karolinum, 1999).

³⁵ Lukáč, *Milan Hodža v zápase*, pp. 93ff. On Otto von Habsburg’s strategy in the USA, see Otto of Austria (Otto von Habsburg), “Danubian Reconstruction,” *Foreign Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1942), pp. 243–252.

³⁶ Milan Hodža, “Európa na križovatke ciest,” in *Federácia v Strednej Európe*, pp. 296–305; Michal Múdry-Šebík, “Milan Hodža’s Efforts to Federalize Central Europe,” *Bohemia* 20 (1979), pp. 97–136, esp. pp. 128–130. Múdry also noted Hodža’s activities and statements in the USA in *Milan Hodža v Amerike: medzi americkými slovakmi, články, reči, štúdie: Hodža a Stredná Európa* (Chicago: Geringer Press, 1949).

also Albania or Turkey, if necessary.³⁷ Hodža regarded the federation as a step toward complete European integration and thought it would consist of a larger framework, like the Pan-European movement of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972).

According to his primary work, “Federation in Central Europe,” the federal government should be headed by a federal president, elected first by a conference of national prime ministers and subsequently by the Federal Congress.³⁸ The president should appoint a federal chancellor and members of the government. The federal government should have Ministries of Finance, International Trade, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Communications & Posts, Federal Law, and so on. All federated nations should be represented in the federal government by ministers of their nationality without a special portfolio.

Members of the Federal Congress should be appointed by a two-thirds majority in each national parliament, at a proportion of one member per million inhabitants, though each national state has to be represented by not less than ten and not more than fifteen members. Since national states have very different electoral systems, including non-democratic ones, members of the Federal Congress would not be elected directly by the people. Hodža regarded this indirect representation as a tentative measure to prevent a radical change of public opinion and maintain consistency between the Federal Congress and each national government.

3.2. Various perspectives for postwar Central Europe

Hodža’s federation plan was not an exceptional one; rather, it was one of numerous plans during the Second World War. In the Allied countries, especially Britain, and subsequently also in the USA, many realignment plans were discussed.³⁹ For example, the Federal Union, established in London in the summer of 1939, increased its membership at an astonishing pace. Quite a lot of analysts thought that excessively strong national sovereignty would inhibit peace and that some sort of federation or integration would be necessary. In this context, various concepts were worked out, like a “British-Dutch Commonwealth,” the “United States of Fennoscandia,” “Czechopolska,” a “Balkan Union,” and so on.

³⁷ Lukáč, *Milan Hodža v zápase*, p. 99.

³⁸ Hodža, *Federation in Central Europe*, pp. 171–178.

³⁹ Walter Lipgens, ed., *Documents on the History of European Integration*, vol. 2: *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939–1945* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 1–20; Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 199–202.

As concerns Central Europe, the International Peasant Union in London and the Central and Eastern European Planning Board in New York were important institutions.⁴⁰ The former had a membership consisting of eminent political leaders, like the Czech Ladislav Feierabend (1891–1969) and the Pole Stanisław Mikołajczyk (1901–1966), from seven states of Central Europe, and it publicized the “Peasant Program” in July 9, 1942. The latter was composed of four refugee governments, those of Czechoslovakia, Greece, Poland, and Yugoslavia, and it issued a declaration expressing “special feelings of sympathy” for the USA, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China.

As far as I can see, Hodža did not seem to be directly concerned with the two abovementioned organizations, whereas he collaborated with Coudenhove-Kalergi, who continued his Pan-European movement in the USA from August 1940. Coudenhove-Kalergi succeeded in gathering about five hundred people to the Fifth Pan-European Congress at New York University in March 1943, and Hodža helped its preparation with other eminent leaders like Fernando de los Ríos (1879–1949), the former foreign minister of Spain.

One of the most feasible plans during the Second World War was that for the Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation.⁴¹ Negotiations between Beneš and Władysław Sikorski (1881–1943), prime minister of the Polish government in exile, began shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, and came to fruition as the Polish-Czechoslovak Agreement of January 1942. However, it was a product of compromise. The Polish side wanted a “federation,” which suggested “supra-national” integration, while the Czechoslovak side adhered to the idea of “confederation,” which suggested “inter-national” integration. Poland had a kind of nostalgia for the Jagellonian “golden age,” that is, the time when it covered the broad area from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and it had the ulterior motive for taking control of the new political entity. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia, less than half Poland’s size and population, preferred economic rather than political integration.

However, the negotiations were stopped midway. The principal obstacle was the Soviet Union. Although remaining a silent observer at first, the Soviet Union began to show its presence as bearing the main brunt of the war against Hitler, especially after Stalingrad from 1942–1943. The USSR had been consistently nervous of any kind of

⁴⁰ Feliks Gross, *Crossroads of Two Continents: A Democratic Federation of East-Central Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 109–117.

⁴¹ Lipgens, *Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile*, pp. 353–362, 754–759; Piotr S. Wandycz, *Czechoslovak-Polish Confederation and the Great Powers, 1940–43* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1956).

cooperation among Central European states in the first place, since it evoked the memory of the *cordon sanitaire* against Communism proposed by France shortly after the First World War. And besides, the Soviet Union saw the shadow of Britain in various reorganizing movements, since Britain seemed to be expanding its influence in Central Europe. Beneš himself, disappointed with the Munich Pact in 1938 and with Western countries, also placed his hopes on the Soviet Union. He developed sensitivity to the Soviet Union's reaction to federal plans, and he brought the negotiations with Poland in November 1942 to a virtual halt, when the Soviet Union clearly expressed a negative attitude toward a confederation plan. In any case, all realignment plans in Central Europe were mooted by the Cold War.

Preliminary Conclusion

Just after the Second World War, the British historian, Hugh Seton-Watson (1916–1984) insisted that the fundamental problem in Danubian countries was the condition of the peasantry, which facilitated the collapse of democracy.⁴² As previously mentioned, Hodža also understood this as the crucial issue. According to him, it was necessary to cultivate the peasantry as the core bearers of democracy, since they formed the majority of the population in Central European countries.

This issue was to some extent resolved in Czechoslovakia. The country was an exceptional case which succeeded in stabilizing democracy in Central Europe, and the key factor behind this stability was the Agrarian party. It expanded its support base across ethnic differences and class divisions, and as a result was able to play the leading role in almost all of the governing coalitions during the Interwar period. This was despite over twenty parties being engaged in fierce political competition in this period. Paradoxically, the population engaged in farming was comparatively small in relatively industrialized Czechoslovakia, but the Agrarian party became the strongest one in Central Europe and provided a successful model for agrarian democracy.

Bolstered in his beliefs by events in Czechoslovakia, Hodža tried to disseminate the notion of peasant democracy to other countries in the region, and to forge strong partnerships with them for both political and economic cooperation. To do this, he utilized his own international network of connections built up during the Habsburg era or through forums such as the International Agrarian Bureau based in Prague. At long last becoming

⁴² Hugh Seton-Watson, "The Danubian Satellites: a Survey of the Main Social and Political Factors in the Present Situation," *International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (1946), pp. 240–253, esp. p. 240.

Prime Minister towards the end of 1935, he attempted to realize his long-awaited “Hodža plan” in short bursts. However, it was too late; even members of the Little Entente like Yugoslavia and Romania were already under the influence of Nazi Germany, and the “Hodža plan” did not have a good chance of success.

One could argue that Hodža would have to cope with many difficulties in order to realize his concept of Central Europe in the first place. These include; (1) The territorial disputes and minority issues after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire that had stood in the way of friendly relations amongst newborn states of the Versailles system; (2) The deep cleavage between the “defeated” countries (Austria, Hungary) and the “victorious” countries, i.e. the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia), which was still marked by the 1930s; (3) The large economic zone of the Habsburg Empire had been fragmented, and the states oriented towards agriculture in Central Europe faced falling prices and a crisis of overpopulation; (4) Hodža’s disagreements with Beneš, who held the post of Foreign Minister for almost the entire Interwar period. This fractious relationship constrained Hodža’s activity to a significant degree in the diplomatic arena and led to leadership struggles even when trying to organize a government in exile after the Munich pact.

Hodža ultimately died in frustration during the Second World War with his political project in tatters. As Mastny noted, his “testament,” i.e. *Federation in Central Europe*, was ignored, and “its fate augured ill for the future of federalism in Eastern Europe once the German New Order had passed.”⁴³ However, his basic strategy for Central Europe from the Habsburg era until his death was coherent, although marked by tactical flexibility and political shifts.⁴⁴ According to him, only Central Europe as a whole, not the sum of individual nation-states, would be able to stand on an equal footing with Germany and Russia or the USSR. Obviously, the feasibility of such a vision for Central Europe would be completely eliminated by the Cold war. Examining the external politics of European empires, however, requires more consideration of the strategic possibilities for “small” nations such as Hodža’s.

⁴³ Mastny, “The Historical Experience of Federalism,” p. 81.

⁴⁴ Kováč, “Milan Hodža,” pp. 165–170.