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*G. Csepeli***COPING STRATEGIES OF THE CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPEAN SMALL STATES
IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE DOMINATED BY GREATER STATES
IN THE WEST AND EAST**

Following World War I the empires ruling East-Central Europe were replaced by a conglomerate of small nation-states inexperienced in navigating themselves in the turbulent waters of foreign policy. The paper will deal with the different coping strategies of the individual small nation-states in the newly established international scene dominated by greater powers such as Germany, France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Four strategies will be discussed, such as national autism, parasitism, opportunism, and realism.

Keywords: national sovereignty, nation-state, international relations, cooperation.

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Introduction

If we look at the map of the countries of Europe of 1914 and that of 2020, we can see significant changes. The changes are particularly pronounced in Central and Eastern Europe. The region of small peoples in Central and Eastern Europe has historically always been bordered by two large polities. The region was bordered on the west by the Holy German-Roman Empire and on the east by the Byzantine Empire. Over time, some peoples of Central and Eastern Europe came under the rule of the Holy German-Roman Empire and then of Austria, which replaced it. The small peoples of Central and Eastern Europe were forced to accept the rule of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, which replaced the fallen Byzantine Empire. Many new small nation-states were established in the territories occupied by the Ottoman Empire still before the First World War. After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disappeared. Germany lost territories in the east. In the place of the Russian Empire the Soviet Union was formed, which could no longer prevent the creation of the Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish nation-states that broke away from the Russian Empire. In the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Austria became the state of the Germans and Hungary became the state of the Hungarians. The Czechs and Slovaks as well as the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed federal states. The existing Romanian state expanded with significant areas.

The number of small states in Central Europe did not change significantly after World War II. The Baltic states were coercively incorporated into the Soviet Union, whose members were the nation-states of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, which formally existed as states. It was after 1989 that the number of small nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe increased significantly. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Eastern European member states became independent one after the other. Following the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, the former member states chose the same path as the former Soviet member states. Two new nation-states appeared on the site of Czechoslovakia. Kosovo has emerged from Serbia – its independence has not yet been universally recognized by the countries of the world.

Most of the small countries in the Central and Eastern European region became members of the European Union and NATO after 2004, which significantly changed the geopolitical situation in the region compared to the previous situation. German influence intensified, Russian influence weakened. The future will decide whether this trend will continue, stop, or reverse.

In 1946, István Bibó, a classic of Hungarian political science, wrote an essay on the historical hardships of the small Eastern European states. Following Bibó's thoughts Jeno Szucs in 1983 formulated his theory of the three evolutionary regions of Europe. According to Szucs, to the East of Western Europe two regions can be distinguished. Closer to the western regions is Central Europe, while Eastern Europe comprises the more distant regions [2].

According to Bibo and Szucs, in Western Europe, social organization has been determined by the continuous expansion of the freedom of individuals and communities, i.e. by integral modernization. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the states have exercised dominance over individuals, and modernization came about from above, from the will of the state. In the Central European region, however, patterns of Western and Eastern social organization have been present at the same time.



Figure 1. European countries in 1914

There was no difference between the Central European and the Eastern European regions in that each of the peoples of the two regions had been forced into a foreign, imperial state framework since the Middle Ages. The separation of nations in the political sense was made significantly more difficult by the imperial framework and the national independence aspirations were successively overthrown by the imperial forces. In the absence of political frameworks (borders, capital, national bureaucracy, government, money), only the path of national development in a cultural sense remained viable for the small peoples of Central and Eastern Europe [4].

Bibo described this path as “linguistic nationalism,” the essence of which was to identify the members of each nation according to their mother tongue. The reality of the nation was created by a culture, based on the semantic universe created by language. The national categorization based on the mother tongue also included descent in the process of nation-building. This gave rise to ethnic nationalism, which considered descent, not a personal choice, as the basis of national affiliation, although narratives of descent were not unique in Europe [3]. This model of nation-development was adopted by the small peoples of Central and

Eastern Europe from the Germans, whose nation-state was created in 1871, late in comparison with the formation of nation-states in Western Europe. The important difference is that the Germans did not have to break free from anyone, they created their state, which immediately became one of the great powers of Europe. In contrast, the nation-states of Central and Eastern Europe following the German model of national development were small.



Figure 2. European countries in 2020

The system of states mutually recognizing each other's sovereign existence was established by the Westphalian peace treaties that ended the very bloody Thirty Years' War in Europe between 1618 and 1648. Sovereignty means unlimited and unconditional power over the territory being under the jurisdiction of a given state, which no one and nothing can question [6]. Carl Schmitt adds to this classic conception derived from Jean Bodin that "sovereign is he who decides on the exception," which endows the sovereign decision with the power of creation [7, P. 1].

Critics of the theory of state sovereignty rightly point out that very few states can meet the absolute conception of sovereignty, which sees a sovereign decision as an act overriding all other legal and moral considerations by invoking the people's right to exist who make up the state.

The small states of Central and Eastern Europe undoubtedly acquired all the necessary attributes of state existence during their creation, the most important of which is the provision of a position enabling the exercise of sovereign power, and occupying it, the holder of the position acquires a direct right to exercise power. However, the economic, social, and cultural resources of small peoples necessarily fall short of those available to large peoples, which makes the realization of a co-ordinate relation indispensable to the ideal functioning of the Westphalian system illusory. The sovereignty of small peoples is consequently fiction.

Although there were periods when the gap between Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe was smaller, and there were periods when it was larger, Central and Eastern Europe as a whole has never been able to keep pace with the socio-economic and cultural development of Western Europe.

The backwardness of Central and Eastern Europe was also characteristic when the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe lived within the framework imposed on them by empires, and the backwardness persisted even when these small peoples were liberated to form sovereign states.

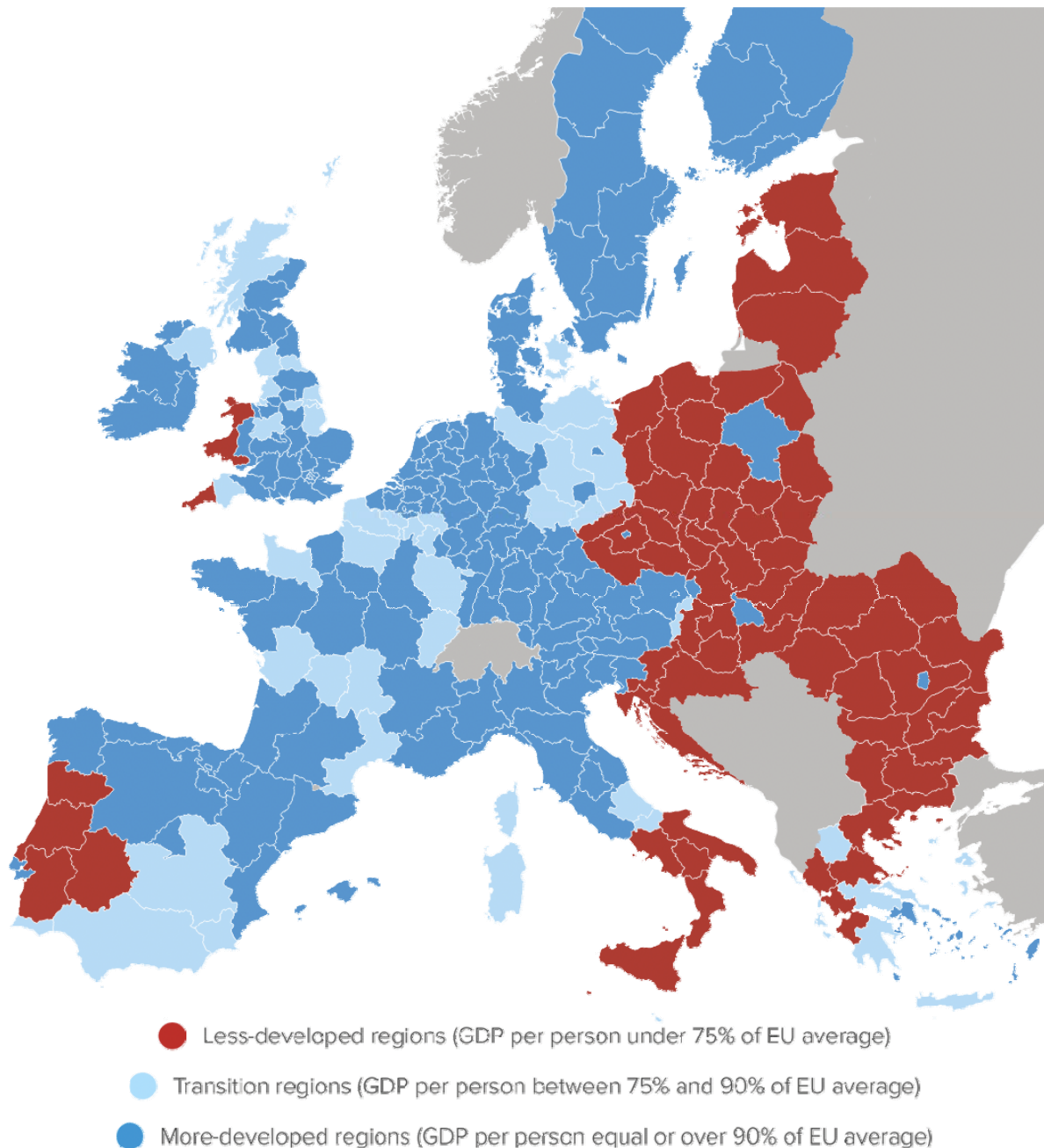


Figure 3. European countries by level of development (European Regional Development Fund (2007–2013))

Figure 3 shows that, using GDP per capita as an indicator along the former borders of the Frankish Empire, Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe are still sharply separated today.

Andrew C. Janos showed, following the example of Hungarian society, that chronic economic backwardness makes it impossible to develop the liberal institutions necessary for the functioning of civil societies, prevents the widespread development of personal and community autonomy and its transmission from

generation to generation. Backwardness, by stifling an innovative and free spirit favors an anxious, conforming, authoritarian spirit that resists change.

Capitalism reached these peoples in the 19th century but their value system, being rooted in feudalism, made it difficult to adapt to market conditions. Yuri Slezkine describes how quickly and effectively Jews living in Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of the 19th century were able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by germinating capitalism, resulting in fierce and unabated anti-Semitism [8]. István Bibó rightly observed that the political culture of each small nation was deformed by being trapped in backwardness. Nationalism lost its original liberal and democratic character and became a means of xenophobic and anti-Semitic exclusion for all peoples.

Bibó mentions, among the signs of a distorted political culture, “exaggerated self-documentation and inner insecurity, oversized nation vanity and sudden self-humiliation, the constant mentioning of achievements and the obvious decline in the real value of achievements, meal demands and moral irresponsibility. Most of these nations discuss, over and over, former, or potential, great power positions and the same time apply to themselves the ‘little nation’ designation with a dejection that would be incomprehensible to a Dutchman or a Dane.” [2, P. 46].

National independence gained after the First World War did not help to overcome the negative consequences of backwardness and those of the peripheral situation. After the small peoples of Central Europe entered the international space defined by the great powers, a long shadow was cast on their foreign policy by the exclusionary, anti-democratic ethnonationalism, which distorted their foreign policy vision by blurring the boundaries between the existing and the possible. Following their existence for centuries in an imperial setting, the national imagination of the small peoples of Central and Eastern Europe was bounded by no-one and nothing. Each small nation imagined a larger area for itself than it had ever lived on. There was a “mega” version in the memory of all the small peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, compared to which the area gained during nation-state independence was smaller.

The foreign policy strategy of the small Central European states, which were trapped among the great powers, was determined by how they faced the discrepancy of desire and reality. The national autism strategy does not consider external constraints. In the enchantment of the “mega” version, the small nation blindly follows the great power that promises to fulfill its territorial demands, not suspecting that the great power will offer the same territories to other small states as well. Subordination becomes compulsive over time, which the autistic nation hopes to get rid of only through rebellion. However, rebellion is usually unsuccessful and it is followed by lethargy, subjugation to the dominant superpower, and the deepening of defencelessness.

The opposite of national autism is national opportunism, which follows the example of the chameleon. The chameleon detects and adapts to its environment. To suit the surroundings, it changes appearance. In the foreign policy space of the small states that choose the chameleon strategy, every great power is there, and these states always choose the great power that is the most advantageous to them.

National parasitism makes the best of the situation, settles into the unchangeable, accepts the close and unconditional alliance with the great power, but in return expects constant and continuous financial support, unilaterally exploiting the economic resources of the great power.

The strategy of national realism is cooperation and concentration of forces, the aim of which is to weaken and counterbalance the influence of great powers. The existence of small nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe does not seem to have been long enough for them to have discovered the benefits of cooperation through which they would be able to counter the ‘divide et impera’ strategy imposed on them by the great powers. In the past, even if some small states joined forces, their cooperation was not complete, one or another of them was always pushed out.

Conclusion

The vast majority of the small states in Central and Eastern Europe are now members of the European Union. Sooner or later, the remaining few small states will also belong to the Union. Going back to a medieval initiative, on 15 February 1991, the leaders of four small Central European states, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, signed a cooperation agreement in Visegrád. The aim of the regional organization, known as V4, is to jointly represent the economic, political, and cultural interests of the participating states, which took on a new meaning after 1 May 2004, when these countries became members of the European Union.

The existence of the European Union has radically changed the room for maneuvering of the small states of Central Europe, in which the trajectories of movement have traditionally been determined by Germany from the West and Russia from the East. Germany is part of the European Union, together with the small nation-states of Central and Eastern Europe, which, if they cooperate within the Union, cannot be played off against one another. The foreign policy of the European Union is based on the consensus of the leaders of the Member States, which in most cases prevents united action in the world outside the Union. For Russia, the lack of a unified foreign policy strategy of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe offers a good opportunity to build on the historical reflexes of the small states of Central and Eastern Europe and, where possible, a good opportunity to build exclusive relations.

The time may be ripe for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe to free themselves from the psychological shackles imposed on them by their past and realistically assess the possibilities of their prosperity, which can only be exploited through the search for joining forces, cooperation and mutual benefit.

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**СТРАТЕГИИ ВЫЖИВАНИЯ НЕБОЛЬШИХ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНО-ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ ГОСУДАРСТВ
НА МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ АРЕНЕ ПРИ ДОМИНИРУЮЩЕЙ РОЛИ ВЕДУЩИХ ГОСУДАРСТВ
ЗАПАДА И ВОСТОКА**

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После Первой мировой войны империи, правившие Восточно-Центральной Европой, были заменены конгломератом небольших государств-наций, не имеющих опыта выживания в бурных водах международной политики. В статье будут рассмотрены различные стратегии выживания отдельных малых национальных государств на международной арене, где доминируют такие великие державы, как Германия, Франция, Великобритания и Советский Союз. Будут обсуждены четыре стратегии – это национальный аутизм, паразитизм, оппортунизм и реализм.

Ключевые слова: национальный суверенитет, государство-нация, международные отношения, сотрудничество.

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