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Milan Hodža's Federalism in Central Europe: A Zone of "Small" Nations and Agrarian Democracy

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This article draws focus to Central Europe as a zone of "small" nations between Germany and Russia (or USSR). Especially, Milan Hodža's (1878–1944) ideas and activities will be discussed here. According to Hodža, a Slovak statesman, "small" nations located among the Great Powers would not be able to survive, unless they did not develop a cooperative relationship with each other. During the Second World War, Hodža even proposed a federation plan for Central Europe, though his idea had never actualized.

The concept of Central Europe itself is an extremely elusive concept, as Jacques Le Rider pointed out. 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 *Mitteleuropa*, published by Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919) in 1915. The German word *Mitteleuropa* was eventually used as a legitimizing term for the expansion of Germany into Eastern European countries during the Nazi era, so *Mitteleuropa* became something of a taboo after the Second World War.

This article, however, focuses on the latter type: the non-German concept such as Hodža's. In

general, the Czech historian František Palacký (1798–1876) is regarded as 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 empires of Germany and Russia. 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 the 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 USSR.

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, as a statesman in exile, he formulated a postwar plan for the formation of a Central European federation, though he eventually lost the struggle for power.

The second reason is that Hodža has been lost to oblivion from two perspectives. 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. 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. Establishing an independent sovereignty 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.

In this article, I 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