

Summary

The (Dis)Integration Power of Central European Nationalism: A Study of the Visegrad Group Countries

Juraj Marušiak, Ivan Halász and Mateusz Gniazdowski

The topic of this publication is the influence of nationalism in Central Europe. Developments in the region since 1989 have confirmed that expectations of the time in which the spirit of social solidarity and ideals of civic equality would weaken the effectiveness of nationalism as a constructive principle of the functioning of political communities and countries have been less than accurate. Immediately after the fall of the communist regimes, the perceived broader region of Central and Eastern Europe was undergoing a reconfiguration that resulted in a significant change in its map. But nationalism repeatedly confirmed its power and ability to establish emotional ties and relationships of solidarity across social, ideological and often even the ethnic and cultural fractioning of the society. Nationalism or its absence in the form of an integrating state idea, stood at the fall of multinational federal states in Central and Eastern Europe but at the same time nationalism has shown its integrative function in the newly-established countries.

This publication consists of five chapters.

The first and largest one (**Central Europe and the Issue of the Right of Nations for Self-Determination**), authored by **Dr. Juraj Marušiak**, an associate scientist at the Institute of Political Sciences from Bratislava (Slovak Republic), focuses on the interpretation of the right to national self-determination in the 20th century and currently, but mainly on the scope to which it is acknowledged by decisive players in international politics and to whom this right is or is not granted. It also points out that there were attempts also in the past, e.g. under the conditions of Hungary prior to 1918, to objectively define what was and was not a nation. The author contemplates the definition of the term “self-determination” or the right of nations to self-determination while analysing what can be understood by the term “nation” as the holder of this right and its application in the context of history from the 19th to 21st centuries.

The right of nations to self-determination is interpreted as a natural right conveyed not to an individual but to a group. At the same time, it has often been interpreted as a third-generation human right, i.e. a right that as a rule cannot be exercised within the borders of a single country. However, if such rights are to be materialised, there must be mechanisms in place through which they are applied. Thus, they must be defined as a positive right. Their holder must be defined, and finally, the conditions and scope of their application must also be defined. Specifically, after the World War II the issue of the right of nations to self-determination was discussed not only in international documents of a human rights

nature but also in international legal documents. Nevertheless, interpretation of this issue still stirs discussions and conflicts because there is no consensus on what the consequences of its application are or can be. Practically, during the whole “short 20th century”, the period that Eric Hobsbawm described as lasting from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 until the fall of communism in 1989, and with a new intensity then after 1990, there were attempts to regulate the right to self-determination but these did not always lead to new solutions or to generally accepted rules.

The text focuses on the issue of what is referred to as the “external right of nations to self-determination”, i.e. on the issue of acknowledging the right of nations to an independent statehood. Accepting this right, however, often depends on acceptance of a particular ethnic community as a “nation” itself, which is not only a result of success or failure of emancipation processes within these communities but also a result of the position of ruling elites of the country where that particular community lives. From specific examples of the developing interpretation of the right of nations to self-determination, the author focuses mainly on Central and Eastern Europe. According to the author, it is not possible to objectively define criteria for affiliation to a specific nation since various criteria, values and symbols (language, religion, history, territory) have been applied in individual cases in the process of constructing national identities, though in the case of Central and Eastern Europe the criteria of language has been applied most frequently.

The author comes to the conclusion that from the aspect of international law on the right of nations to self-determination it is not possible to talk about a positively-defined right as a generally accepted principle of international relations. In the context of the most recent developments in the former Yugoslavia (the case of Kosovo) and the former USSR, the author states that the application of the principle of the “right of nations to self-determination” has been, similar to the past, a result of political decisions. The recognition by a significant number of European Union countries and the United States of the unilaterally-declared independence of Kosovo in 2008 contradicted the spirit of political decisions that had been taken during the fall of the USSR and Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s. In spite of the declared aims of those who initiated this recognition, it served as precedence for further decisions concerning changes of state borders, namely in the region of the former USSR. The term “the right of nations to self-determination” is a means of constructing national identities and consolidating political communities as well as a tool in world-power politics.

In the next chapter (**National and State Symbols in Countries of Central Europe after 1989**), an associate scientist of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, **Prof. Ivan Halász** from Budapest (Hungary), examines the role of national and state symbols in consolidating the already-formed political communities and their role in nationalisation. The chapter offers a comparison of the role of state and national symbols in the integration of societies of Central Europe, specifical-

ly after 1989, while pointing out the link between national and state symbols and political decisions in various periods of the most recent history of the region. He analyses ideological disputes and the influences of different historical memory of national symbols. He also documents the process of a renaissance of nationalism in the region after 1989 through the example of developing state and national symbols; at the same time he points out the open nature of this process, in which there is an ongoing discussion in individual Central European societies about their national symbols, often using parallel and alternative symbols (sometimes depending on the ideological orientation of individual political players). But there have also been new systems of national symbols created by communities that did not have a standardised set of symbols in the past (e.g. Slovenia).

The next chapter (**The Issue of the Right of Minorities in Central Europe. Comments on the History and Current Status of the Minority Issue in the Region**), authored also by **Prof. Ivan Halász**, deals with the topic of integrating ethnic minorities into the majority society and with the possibilities of their political participation. The chapter describes the qualification (definition) of ethnic minorities and covers their legislative status in individual countries of Central Europe and at the same time seeks to define common elements in relationships between the minority and majority population within this region. The author concludes that minority legislation in countries of Central Europe is based on similar rationales. Attention is focused mainly on the area of language rights in official government functions, on the relatively generally-designed school rights, and on the protection and promotion of cultural activities of minorities. After the change of the system in 1989, Central Europe did not show greater creativity or inventiveness in the field of minority rights, with the exception of the model of non-territorial minority self-governments applied in Hungary. According to the author, minority legislation within Central European countries has not responded to the increasing tendency toward immigration or to the issue of integration of migrants – such as immigrants from other parts of the world or to the issue of Roma communities. The author also states that in defining rights of minorities, the legislation of Central European countries shares some common basic characteristics. In the long run, not even political powers focusing on regionalism have been successful in Central Europe after 1989.

The publication concludes with two chapters by **Dr. Mateusz Gniazdowski** from the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw (Poland). The chapter titled **Historical Memory and Polish Foreign Political Thought after 1989** focuses on the influence of historical memory on the conceptual definition of Poland's foreign policy priorities. The characteristic of elites in post-communist Poland (but as well for dissenters prior to 1989) has been the search for permanent elements, its types of referential points in the past and the attempt to find these in well-verified facts and well-founded information about the past. According to the author, it was the historical experience of Poland, namely the outcome of the Yalta Conference in 1945, but also the attack by its neighbours in 1939 that have

influenced Poland's decision to actively participate in the work of European and Euro-Atlantic bodies and to actively co-decide about their policies. One of key principles of the Polish foreign policy is "Nothing About Us Without Us", i.e. ensuring that Poland is presented not only as an object of foreign policies but also as a participant. However, discussions about the "historical policies" are a subject of internal Polish political debates. It is also the country's historical experience that has significantly influenced what is referred to as the "Eastern Policy of Poland", i.e. the relations between Poland and Russia as well as the policy of Poland to countries on the eastern EU border (i.e. to Ukraine, Belarus and Moldavia).

The last chapter (**Central Europe in Polish Foreign Policy**, also by **Dr. Mateusz Gniazdowski**) deals with the role of a national state in Central Europe after 1989 but also within the situation of European integration. Nationalism is shown here in a new light, not only as one of factors that can represent a destructive, disintegrating force, but as one that can also positively contribute to deepened sub-regional cooperation within the Visegrad Group and to strengthened European integration. The author points out the growing role of Visegrad cooperation in the foreign policy of Poland, influenced by both political and economic factors. This applies even though in the period prior to the country joining the European Union in 2004, the Polish elite did not see convincing evidence that the V4 gained permanent significance, meaning and perspectives, though its results were positive for all countries of the region. According to the author, Visegrad cooperation is important for Poland despite several unsuccessful attempts of a joint approach, e.g. in the institutions of the European Union. Visegrad cooperation plays an important role from the aspect of energy security of the participating countries as well as from the aspect of their relationships with countries of Eastern Europe. It also affects cooperation in the area of defence and security, though exactly in this area Poland's perception of sources of security risk differs from the opinions of the other countries of the Visegrad Group, as was shown during the Ukrainian crisis after 2013.

The term "Central Europe" is primarily perceived by the authors as the current community of the Visegrad Group countries. In the past, however, these countries were parts of other state bodies and therefore the process of forming modern nationalism as *longue durée* also affects neighbouring countries to this current sub-region of Europe. Thus, the issue of Central European nationalism is monitored in a broader context, referred to as "Central and Eastern Europe", i.e. the territories of the former Republic of Both Nations (The Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), the Kingdom of Bohemia and Hungary, and Austria and the Balkan countries.

From 2010 to 2014, the authors of these studies led a class in Comparative Policy of Central Europe at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of Comenius University in Bratislava. After the lectures this publication was developed as part of the Visegrad University Studies Grant (VUSG) programme funded by the International Visegrad Fund (Grant No. 60900014 – Visegrad Group – Poli-

tics and Society). At the same time, the team of authors would like to thank the International Visegrad Fund and the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of Comenius University, specifically the Institute of International Studies and International Relations of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of Comenius University, without whose support the present publication would not have been possible.