

THE STATE AUTO DETERMINATION FROM EUROPE 1918: CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND HER PLACE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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(Studiu metodic) Îndrumări metodice și metodologice pentru diplomați și conducători științifici. Chișinău: ULIM, 2000, 90 p.; Istoria Diplomației. Curs de lecții, P. I, Chișinău: AAP, 2000 (ed. a 2-a; ed. 1 - 1997); The management of high Schools Accreditation. Europai Regionalis Konferenciaja. Budapest, 17-19 october 2003; Zece oglinzi veridice pentru managerii din învățământ. Ghid pentru autoauditul managerilor învățământului. Chișinău, Ed. „Univers Educațional”, 2006 (Coautor: prof. univ. Gh.Rudic); Десять прямых зеркал для менеджеров образования. Гид для ауто-аудита. Изд-во «Univers Educațional», (coautor Gh.Rudic), 2006, 88 p.; Analiza comparativă a sistemelor educaționale din Republica Moldova și Japonia – În: Probleme actuale ale teoriei și practicii relații-lor moldo-japoneze. Mater. Conf. internaț. Chișinău, 2005 etc.

Abstract: *The article referred to some consequences of the end of the First World War represented by the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of new independent national states, among which was Czechoslovakia. In the territorial context, the Czechoslovakian state included the historical provinces Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, to which Slovakia and Ruthenia were added, having in total a surface of 140 394 square km. On 14 November 1918, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had become the first president of the country officially called Czecho-Slovakian Republic (RČS) in 1918 – 1920 period, and as a simplified form, it was called Czecho-Slovakia. During the period 1920 – 1938, the country was named as Czechoslovakian Republic (ČSR), and the short name Czechoslovakia. Becoming a subject of international relations, the interwar Czechoslovakia played an important role in assuring the regional security in Europe. The Little Agreement, initiated by the minister of foreign affairs, Edvard Beneš, as organization of regional security, had quickened its activity by periodical convening of those 10 Conferences, etc.*

Key-words: *the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, international geopolitical disturbances, independent national states, Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, the Little Entente.*

The big international geopolitical disturbances after the First World War were determined by the official recognition of the defeat in world conflagration by the great Austro-Hungarian Empire of Central Europe. It was an event produced in two years after the fall of the Russian Empire and four years before the dissolution of Ottoman one. This conglomerate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved

definitely leaving behind a myriad of independent national states among which was Czechoslovakia. This phenomenon represented the logical consequence of Austro-Hungarian capitulation on 3 November 1918 after its defeat in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. On 10 September 1919, at the palace of Saint Germain en Laye, near Paris, a delegation formed by the Austria representatives and those of the Entente states signed the treaty that led to the birth of new independent European states: Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Making a short retrospection of the main events on the international stage that led to the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolution we can notice that before the first world conflagration the given empire seemed to be a very strong state able to resist a war against the Serbian rebels that assassinated the heir prince Franz Ferdinand. This empire from the center of Europe was modern with a strong industry and very efficient governance. In this context, the role of the emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916) was obvious – he was one of the most remarkable representatives of the Habsburg dynasty, leaving behind 68 years of reign full of complex events in political, military, economic and cultural fields. In the European public consciousness, there were two well-outlined facets of the sovereign: one referred to the tough decisions of repressing the national aspirations manifested by different populations; the other revealed the economic and cultural welfare of the central-European space governed by monarch in the last decades of the XIXth century. The specialized literature mentions mainly the so-called “*happy years of peace*” that lasted from concluding the Austro-Hungarian dualist pact (1867) until the beginning of the First World War (1914)¹.

We have all grounds to point out that Franz Joseph reigned and modeled the destiny of millions of people that were under the Empire, including Czechs and Slovaks. His decisions (regarding society modernization or other dramatic ones as the involvement in the First World War with material loss and many human victims) should be analyzed in the context of the respective epoch. Thus, the last

¹ To consult: Moisuc Viorica, *History of international relations (Istoria relațiilor internaționale)*, Bucharest, ed. Foundation “România de mâine”, 2007.

decades of the sovereign reign represented a period of distinguished development. For example, according to the existent rich thematic historiography, “*between the XIIIth and XXth centuries, the dynasty generated leaders of empires, kingdoms, dukes and principalities in Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland and Hungary*”².

But the dualist empire were becoming more instable – the war was triggering disorders within component nations that opted vehemently to obtain national rights, autonomy and to form new states in case of Austria defeating by Entente. The president Woodrow Wilson managed the territorial cedes according to the principle of self-determinism that was considered as a guarantee of peace in the newly formed states. Nevertheless, the mixture of population and the ignorance, in some cases, of the people volition had created premises for further tension in society.

Other premise for national-state building was the mobilization of approximatively 1,4 millions of Czech soldiers that had fought in the First World War, from which 150 000 soldiers died, i.e. about 10% from the mobilized ones. Over 90 000 Czech volunteers formed the Czechoslovakian Legions in France, Italy and Russia where they fought against the Central Powers, and afterwards, against the Bolshevik armies³. Thus, after the empire dissolution,

² Sked, Alan. *The Decline and fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918. (Declinul și prăbușirea Imperiului Habsburgic. 1815-1918)* ed. 2nd, London: Longman, 2001.

³ *Radio Praha – zprávy cs.* According to many specialists, including the Romanian historian Alexandra Șerban, in the middle of July 1918, a Czechoslovakian legion of the White Army (that was supporting the temporary Government of Russia, overthrown by the Bolshevik revolt of the 1917 autumn) which approached Ekaterinburg – where the dethroned Russian emperor Nicolai the IInd with his family were kept captivated, would speed up their barbarian assassination. According to Pavel Medvedev, one of the guardians of imperial family kept here, the group of Czechoslovakian soldiers (from Astro-Hungarian prisoners) was so close to the city “*that the weapons thunder was heard even in Ipatiev house*” where the family of dethroned Russian emperor was kept. It’s not known exactly if the Czechoslovakian legion had the intention to release the tsar from captivity, but the Bolsheviks didn’t wait the outcome and took the sudden decision to execute the Russian imperial family. The historian Alexandra Șerban had published a study where she cited the testimonies of the former guardian P. Medvedev. According to him in the night from 16 to 17 July the commander of the Bolshevik guards Iakov Iurovski together with two members of Extraordinary Commission of the Soviet of Ekaterinburg killed meanly the whole imperial family (consisted of 7 persons: the tsar and his wife, 4 daughters and the son Alexei of 13 years old – the throne heir that was carried in arms by his father, being seriously ill from birth, as well as the doctor Botkin, the cook and two servants). The guardian Medvedev remembered that the execution was realized by “*commander Iurovski, his assistant, two*

the Czechoslovakian republic was formed, proclaiming the independence on 28 October 1918, at Prague. It represented a political expression born in War, when a part of Slovakian and Czech representatives⁴, by their free will, had decided at 30 May and 30 October 1918, at Pittsburg, to create a nation joining the two nationalities that were living compactly. In the process of state organization of Czechoslovakia, the Conference of Peace at Paris had combined more principles including the principle of nationalities, the principle of self-determination, the principle of historical right and that of the economic right, etc. The ethnical aspect

members of Extraordinary commission (CEKA) and seven Latvians” (all 11 persons being shot and their bodies thrown in an abandoned mine, their remains were found 8 decades later, Nicolai the IInd being sanctified. (Apropos, precum consideră mulți specialiști, inclusiv și istoricul din România Alexandra Șerban, la mijlocul lui iulie 1918, o legiune cehoslovacă a Armatei Albe (ce susținea Guvernul provizoriu al Rusiei, debarcat de la putere de revolta bolșevică din toamna anului 1917), care se apropia de Ekaterinburg, unde se aflau în captivitate împăratul rus detronat Nicolai al II-a cu familia sa, ar fi urgentat asasinarea lor barbară. Precum își amin-tea unul din paznicii familiei imperiale deținute aici, Pavel Medvedev, grupul militarilor cehoslovaci (care provenea din rîndul prizonierilor austro-ungari) era atît de aproape de oraș „*încât bubuietul armelor se auzea și în casa Ipatiev*”, unde era ținută familia împăratului rus detronat. Nu se știe exact dacă legiunea cehoslovacă ar fi avut și intenția eliberării țarului din captivitate, însă bolșevicii nu au așteptat deznodămîntul și au luat decizia subită de a executa familia imperială rusă. Istoricul Alexandra Șerban a publicat un studiu, în care citează mărturiile fostului gardian P. Medvedev, precum că în noaptea de 16 spre 17 iulie comandantul gărzilor bolșevice Iakov Iurovski, împreună cu doi membri ai Comisiei Extraordinare a Sovietului din Ekaterinburg, au asasinat mișesește întreaga familie imperială (ce consta din 7 persoane: țarul și soția sa, 4 fiice și fiul Alexei de 13 ani – moștenitorul tronului, ce era purtat în brațe de tatăl său, fiind grav bolnav de la naștere, precum și medicul Botkin, bucătarul și două servitoare). Gardianul Medvedev își amintea că la execuție au participat „*comandantul Iurovski, asistentul său, doi membri ai Comisiei Extraordinare (CEKA) și șapte letoni*” (toate 11 persoane fiind împușcate și corpurile lor aruncate într-o mină părăsită, iar rămășițele au fost depistate peste 8 decenii, Nicolai al II-lea fiind sanctificat).

⁴ Previously, in May 1917, 222 Czechoslovakian intellectuals address a memorial to the Parliament of Vienna referring for the first time to a “*Czechoslovakian nation*” which they conceive within a democratic Europe of the future. After that at 6/19 October the American note comes regarding the independence of Czechoslovakian and Yugoslavian people accepted by the Austro-Hungarian government at 15/28 October 1918, when the Czech National Committee proclaimed the state independence, and after two weeks, at Prague, the National Assembly was opened (1/14 November) which proclaimed the Czechoslovakian Republic independent. (Anterior, încă în mai 1917, 222 de intelectuali cehi adresează un memoriu Parlamentului de la Viena referindu-se pentru prima dată la o „*națiune cehoslovacă*” pe care ei o concep în sînul unei Europe democratice a viitorului. Apoi la 6/19 octombrie parvine nota americană privind acordarea independenței cehoslovacilor și iugoslavilor, acceptată de guvernul austro-ungar la 15/28 octombrie 1918, când Comitetul Național Ceh a proclamat independența țării, iar peste 2 zile, la 17/30 octombrie, și Consiliul Național Slovac a adoptat Declarația de autodeterminare, separare de monarhie și unire cu Cehia. La doar 2 săptămîni, la Praga, s-a deschis Adunarea Națională (1/14 noiembrie), care a proclamat Republica Cehoslovacă independentă.)

of Czechoslovakia showed that the principle of nationalities could not produce a “pure” national state without minorities. Thus, they solved the situation regarding the state formation by recognizing the right to self-determination of the majority of people⁵.

In the territorial context, the Czechoslovakian state included the historical provinces Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, to which Slovakia and Ruthenia were added having the total surface of 140 394 square km. The population majority – « (66,9%), *from ethnic point of view, was formed of Czechs and Slovaks, counting 8 760 907 people, as well as Germans (22,3%); Hungarians (500 000), Ruthenians (461 849) and Polish (100 000), that formed in total 10,8%. The populations of Slavic origin formed the majority (68,9%). The Germans were established in Bohemia, around the border, in Moravia and in other regions. After the census of 1921, Germans number constituted 3 123 568*”⁶.

The essential element of national unity was the Czech will to live in their national state. It was performed from Slovakian side by the manifesto of Juriga in the Hungary Parliament (October 1918), the declaration of the National Council of Pittsburg etc. In the international context, the National Committee of Czechs was recognized as the only authorized body. The new formed state, Czechoslovakia, had about 14 million of citizens, including: 7 million of Czechs, 2.5 million of Slovaks and over 3 million – Germans from Sudetes region, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Polish.

We would like to mention that among the Slovakian personalities (after Slovakia became part of Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1918) was one that had contributed the most to the creation of world image of the new republic. This was M. R. Štefánik the diplomat in France service. He helped T. G. Masaryk and E. Beneš to establish contacts with allied powers. Soon, on 14 November 1918, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk became the first president of the country officially called

⁵ Sofronie, George, *The principle of nationalities... (Principiul naționalităților...)*, Bucharest, Ed. Albatros, 1999, p. 80.

⁶ To consult: Seișanu, Romulus, *The principle of nationalities (Principiul naționalităților)*, Bucharest, Ed. Albatros, 1996, p. 294

the Czecho-Slovakian Republic (abbreviation: RČS) in 1918 – 1920 period, and as a simplified form it was called Czecho-Slovakia⁷. During the period 1920 – 1938, the country was named as Czechoslovakian Republic (and the abbreviation ČSR replaced the previous one RČS), and the short name Czechoslovakia.

Becoming the subject of international relations the interwar Czechoslovakia had played an important role in assuring the regional security in Europe. In this context, since 3 August 1919, Romania was announced about the boarder with Czechoslovakia, traced by the Supreme Council of the Allied and Associated Powers that maintained the Tisa river course as line of the border. The article 53 of the Peace Treaty with Austria stipulated the following: “*Austria recognizes, as the Allied and Associated Powers did, the full independence of the Czechoslovakian state that will include the autonomous territory of Ruthenians from the south of the Carpathian*”.

The main objectives of the foreign policy came from the treaties of Saint Germain and Trianon that recognized the international legal existence of Czechoslovakia⁸. The approach between Czechoslovakian, Romanians and Yugoslavians was realized during the common travel to Trianon at 4 June 1920. The formation of a regional alliance was opportune considering the attempt of restauration made by Karl I of Habsburg, as well as on the French plane, of founding a Danube confederation to weaken the national sovereignty of those three states. A revanchist spirit of neighboring countries persisted that period, namely it was in Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria. The first step was realized by signing on 14 August 1920 the Convention of Czechoslovakian-Yugoslavian alliance. In the same month, the minister of foreign affairs, Edvard Beneš, went to Bucharest where Romania gave its principle agreement towards a possible alliance with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Then, all treaties of Romanian-Czechoslovakian (April 23, 1921) and Romanian-Yugoslavian (June 7, 1921)

⁷ Cârstea Marusia, Buzatu Gheorghe. *Europe in the powers balance (Europa în balanța forțelor)*, v. I, 1919-1939, Bucharest, Ed. Mica Valahie, 2007.

⁸ Campus, Eliza, *The little agreement (Mica Înțelegeră)* 2nd ed., Ed. of Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1997, 247 p.

defensive alliances were concluded, fact that formed the bases of a regional alliance. The minister of foreign affairs opted for a larger alliance – a desiderate sustained by Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the project of alliance that was starting had the support of France, Great Britain and Italy. However, the project of alliance of five neighboring states broke by Czechoslovakian-Polish misunderstandings between which existed also a territorial dispute.

Thus, the Conventions of Romanian-Slovakian and Romanian-Yugoslavian defensive alliance agreed to create the Little Agreement, called also the Little Entente (the expression „*Little Entente*” was used for the first time in the Hungarian newspaper *Pesti Hirlap*), as political regional organization⁹. Being an international structure, this defensive political organization represented an alliance between Czechoslovakia, Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Kingdom of Romania, that had as the main goal the maintenance of territorial integrity of those three states despite of the revisionist pretensions and restorative tendencies of Habsburgs. Built on democratic principles, the Little Entente was effectively the fifth European power and had a strong federal power¹⁰. Thus, in its foreign policy, the Czechoslovakian diplomacy oriented its efforts to defend the status-quo and respectively, the regional security.

The practical activity of the organization *initiated by the minister of foreign affairs of Czechoslovakia, Edvard Beneš, as organization of regional security*, as well as the bi- and trilateral relations of member-states started in the beginning of the '20s of the XXth century. Thus, on 4 February 1920, Bohumil Čermák became the first accredited diplomat as Czechoslovakian minister at Bucharest. On 15 September, Constantin Hiott became the first Romanian diplomat with minister title at Prague. These events were considered as the establishment of diplomatic

⁹ Campus, Eliza, *The Little Agreement (Mica Înțelegere) (2nd ed.)*, 1997, p. 128.

¹⁰ In comparison with the concept that prevailed until after 1989, Eliza Campus, in the revised edition of the work *The Little Agreement* of 1997 claims that the organization had a federal character (p. 9-15). The historians Florin Constantiniu, Ion Chiper, Cristian Popișteanu, as well, consider it as a “*federal alliance*”. (Spre deosebire de concepția care a prevalat până după 1989, Eliza Campus, în ediția revizuită a lucrării *Mica Înțelegere* din 1997 susține că organizația a avut un caracter federal (p.9-15). Istoricii Florin Constantiniu, Ion Chiper, Cristian Popișteanu, la fel, o consideră o „*alianță federală*”.)

relations between these two countries. A positive contribution was brought by many official contacts, among which there were the visit of the prime-minister Ion C. Brătianu in Czechoslovakia (September 1923), the visit of the king Karl IInd at Prague (1936), etc. The activity of the Little Agreement was performed by organizing periodically Conferences: Prague (27-28 August 1922), Sinai (July 1923), Belgrade (January 1924), Timisoara (19 February 1926), Bled (June 1926), Ioachymov (3-15 May 1927), Strbske Plesso (25-27 June 1930), Belgrade (May-June 1932), Geneva (14-16 February 1933), Bled (21-22 august 1935).

The economic cooperation deepened once with creating the Economic Council of the alliance in 1933. Among the main priorities were the preferential taxes applied in those three states, as well as a system of quota, the collaboration in industry and agriculture, the mixed chambers of commerce, the joining of the railway fees, the collaboration in air and maritime navigation, the quick circulation of supply stuff and weapons. Czechoslovakia proposed the creation of an industrial cartel in order to face the big international cartels. Romania for example offered to Czechoslovakia a free port zone at Galati, as well as taking measures to improve the navigation on Danube, the railway, aerial, post, telephone, telegraph and wireless communications. Afterwards, Czechoslovakia signed the Convention of defining the aggression, at London, in July 1933. In the context of interstate relations, it established diplomatic relations with Soviet Union (9 June 1934), as well as Romania, signed the Treaty of friendship, alliance and mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia (16 May 1935). Czechoslovakia traditionally was developing bilateral benefic relations with France representing a continuity of the alliance treaty signed between Czechoslovakia and France since 24 January 1924. In '30s of the last century, a Pact of mutual assistance was negotiated and concluded between the Little Agreement and France¹¹.

¹¹ Georgiana-Margareta Scurtu, *Negotiations between France and the Little Agreement to conclude a pact of mutual assistance (Tratative între Franța și Mica Înțelegere pentru încheierea unui pact de asistență mutuală) (1936-1937)*, SMIC, 2003, 2, p. 25-44.

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