

Janusz Żarnowski

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL STATES IN CENTRAL EUROPE (1918)

THE CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL MAP OF CENTRAL EUROPE

The subject of the present study is closely connected with the problem of the origin, functioning and estimation of the "Versailles Order" in Central Europe.¹ When using the term "Versailles Order," we have in mind the political situation as a whole in the territories of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The emergence and persistence of a situation which, for the sake of simplification, we call the "Versailles Order" was due to a number of factors; among them, the debates of the Paris Conference were but one of many elements. The above term seems correct and justified, however, in view of the fact that the situation at issue was largely the outcome of the defeat sustained by the Central Powers in World War One, and the Treaty of Versailles sealed that defeat.

The purpose of these remarks is to answer the question what main factors contributed to the formation of the Versailles Order with regard to Central and South-Eastern Europe. The Versailles Order can be recognized as an all-European phenomenon (although, of course, not all the European states were signatories of the treaties of Versailles, St. Germain-en-Laye, Trianon and Neuilly). In Central and South-Eastern Europe, however, national states were established or expanded upon the

¹ The historical bases of the peculiarities of Central and South-Eastern Europe are discussed by the same autor in the article: *W sprawie genezy systemu państw narodowych w Europie Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej* [On the Origin of the System of National States in Central and South-Eastern Europe], "Kwartalnik Historyczny," 1970, No. 3, p. 585 - 603, and in the article: *Stan i perspektywy polskich prac badawczych nad najnowszą historią Europy Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej* [The State and Prospects of Polish Research on the Contemporary History of Central and South-Eastern Europe], "Przegląd Historyczny," 1970, No. 2, p. 297 - 326.

ruins of the multi-national monarchies of Russia, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Turkey. Bulgaria was alone to have her territory reduced. The Hungarian and Austrian states which emerged after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, were only to a certain extent a continuation of the latter; otherwise they constituted new national states (we shall revert to the matter later). In Western Europe, on the other hand, only Ireland acquired in 1921 independence within the British Empire as a result of several decades of struggle for freedom, and Iceland proclaimed her independence in 1918. This justifies the fact that we discuss separately the events in Central and South-Eastern Europe within the above-defined scheme.

Besides, the ulterior history of the various countries of this region in the two inter-war decades and their internal structure showed great resemblances; without invoking other arguments, we can therefore consider the establishment and functioning of the Versailles Order in this part of Europe as a separate region.

The factors that brought about the establishment of the Versailles Order in Central Europe, can be divided into two basic categories: 1) the plans and calculations of the big powers connected, among other things, with the changes that occurred in the course of the First World War in the proportion of forces and in the war situation, and 2) the revolutionary movements and the national-liberation struggle of nations totally or partly subjugated. The question of the relative importance of either of these two groups of factors cannot be irrelevant to the problem whether national states emerged there as a product of fortuitous circumstances brought about by the necessity of setting Central Europe in order after the defeat of the Central Powers—or whether their emergence was a historical necessity, the natural result of the progress of nations, the growth of national consciousness, the national-liberation struggles and the revolutionary struggles (especially, of the Russian Revolution of 1917). The national states of Central Europe have already existed for a half of a century in their present geographical shape but the problem is occasionally still being advanced as an allegedly controversial one. In his book *L'Europe Centrale*, Jacques Droz wrote in 1960: "*Seule la fédération danubienne pouvait préserver l'Europe centrale d'une domination extérieure;*" he argued that thanks to Austria, the peoples of the Monarchy had been brought into world culture and repeating the words of Grillparzer, he concluded that the fall of Austria had been "*la route fatale qui de l'humanité conduit à la bestialité en passant par la nationalité*".²

² J. Droz, *Europe Centrale. Evolution historique de l'idée de Mitteleuropa*, Paris 1960, pp. 245, 273.

Likewise, Jacques de Launay maintains that the disintegration of Austria and the formation of Czechoslovakia were "*le premier pas vers la balkanisation de l'Europe centrale qui fut gros de conséquences vingt ans plus tard en créant des États faibles et divisés qui devaient s'opposer lors de la crise de Munich en 1938, prédisposés déjà à la démocratisation populaire.*"³ It is therefore worthwhile to investigate the circumstances of the emergence of national states in our part of Europe half a century ago.

It goes without saying that the answer to such questions as the relative importance of the factors named above is based on a more or less intuitive appraisal. The historian, however, has at his disposal as useful and important an instrument as the comparative method. In this case, we can compare the processes that resulted in the establishment of national states in Central Europe, with the national and unification movements in the countries of Western Europe and, above all, observe the concurrences in the historical destinies of nations which regained or consolidated their independence after World War One.

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As a result of changes which occurred in the above-named period, Central and South-Eastern Europe saw the establishment of seven national states: the Baltic States — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia; Albania which before the outbreak of World War I, in the years 1912 - 1913, actually became a separate state — under the authority of the powers, though — can also be included in this number. This latter country, however, acquired its independence (formal and incomplete, it is true) under circumstances remindful of those under which the other countries named above regained theirs, and namely as a result of the disintegration of the Turkish Monarchy and thanks to the national-liberation movement (the Albanian uprising of 1909 - 1912). It is true that the establishment of the Albanian State, its continued independence, and its inclusion among the generally recognized states took place in the years 1913 - 1922 and were the result of various schemes of the powers, and the creation of that state was itself a product of the anti-Serbian plans of Austro-Hungary and of her rivalry with Italy. None the less, the circumstances cited above justify the inclusion of Albania among the national states established in connection with the First World War.

Those seven states had a total area of about 975 thousand sq.km. (about 376 thousand sq. miles) and a total population of about 71.4 million

³ J. de Launay, *Histoire de la diplomatie secrète de 1914 à 1945*, Bruxelles 1966, p. 106.

(in 1938), or about 14% of Europe's total population at that time. The regaining of independence by nations so numerous, by such a mass of population, could not but exert a very material influence upon the destinies of Europe and the world, irrespective of how one would assess that influence. One is bound to see there an analogy to the liberation, after World War Two, of the colonial and subjugated peoples outside of Europe, and to its effect upon the destinies of the world.

One should then name Rumania which existed as an independent state prior to World War I but came out of war enlarged, her main acquisitions consisting of territories that had previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, above all Transylvania. These territories, inhabited predominantly or to a considerable part by Rumanians were, prior to World War One, the scene of a national movement striving for unification with Rumania (the problem of Bessarabia and that of Dobrudja were separate matters with which we do not propose to deal here). The regions acquired as the result of the disintegration and partition of the Habsburg empire accounted for 38% of the territory and for 39% of the population of postwar Rumania.

We have listed Yugoslavia (under this name, we also include the period when this state was called the Kingdom of S.H.S. i.e. Serbs, Croats and Slovenians) among the countries that regained independence after World War I. Actually, however, independent Serbia (as well as Montenegro) had already existed earlier. At that time, the plans of Serbian statesmen did not envisage the creation of a federated state of three south-Slavic nationalities but the creation of a Greater Serbia where the Serbs would be the ruling nationality. In a modified form, the same aspirations animated the influential circles of Serbian politicians, also after the establishment in December 1918 of the Kingdom of S.H.S. in its final shape. In the interwar years, these aspirations were widely realized for long periods of time, and the domination of the Serbs was a fact; to a certain extent, therefore, the Yugoslavia of that time can be considered as an extended Serbia and, in this sense, one can point to her similarities to Rumania. Territories which had previously made part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, accounted for 58% of Yugoslavia's total area.

Belonging to the group of states defeated in World War I, were Bulgaria, Hungary and Austria. However, only of Bulgaria can it be said that it has retained the continuity of statehood and of political system; having lost parts of her territory to Greece and Yugoslavia, Bulgaria retained the main body of her lands, the same constitution and even the same dynasty. Hungary, on the other hand, lost certain provinces, traditionally considered an integral part of the country's national patrimony (Transylvania, "Upper Hungary" i.e. Slovakia), as well as vast territories

inhabited by Southern-Slav population; the latter had constituted a separate and autonomous administrative unit as the Triple Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia (however, only Croatia and Slavonia made part of Hungary while Dalmatia was an ordinary province of Cisleithania). It is known that the aboriginal population of the "Upper Country" were Slovaks while a great part of Transylvania's population were Rumanians. Thus the multinational Kingdom of Hungary which, by means of subtle argumentation, had constructed and promoted the fiction of a homogeneous Hungarian nationality prevailing over actual ethnic differences, was in fact transformed into a state largely new, nationally homogeneous — indeed a typical national state.

The Austria of the interwar period, within the boundaries approved in St. Germain-en-Laye, seems to have been to an even lesser extent than Hungary, the heir of the Habsburg Monarchy based on the dynastic principle — or even of its Cisleithenian part. Incidentally, the attempts at the restoration of the monarchy, undertaken by the Habsburgs in the early 20s, originated from Hungary and not from Austria. It is true that one can hardly consider the Austrian Republic as a typical national state since only the vigorous protest of the Allies prevented the incorporation of the "Republik Deutsch Österreich" into the German Reich which was formally proclaimed by the Parliament in November 1918 and in March 1919. Yet, the consciousness of the political separateness of the Austrians was gradually developing. About the nationality problems in the Habsburg monarchy, R. W. Seton-Watson wrote: "An 'Austrian nation' exists solely in the imagination of a few thousand a-national bureaucrats".⁴ The German population of Cisleithania was bound up, above all, with the dynasty; there existed, however, among that population pan-Germanic nationalistic movements for unification with the Reich.⁵ At any rate, the new Austria was basically different from the old one inasmuch as it was a state based on the modern principle of nationality and not on the feudal dynastic principle. This permits to number Austria among the national states established after the First World War.

Thus, in the territory under consideration, there were 11 national states after World War I. Out of those eleven, three states — Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria had been among the defeated Central Powers, two — Serbia and Rumania had been in the victorious Coalition camp, and the remaining six were new states, established as a result of the war and of national movements. Among these various states, there existed

⁴ R. W. Seton-Watson, *Europe in the Melting-pot*, London 1919, p. 51.

⁵ See: O. Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Chicago 1929, p. 448; R. A. Kann, *Das Nationalitätenproblem der Habsburgmonarchie*, vol. I, Graz-Köln 1964, p. 63.

basic differences, not only in the stage of their economic and social development but also in the history of their national movements and in their political and constitutional past. In his lecture from 1932,⁴ Marcell Handelsman divided these states into three groups in this regard: 1) countries which had lost their independence in modern times: Poland, Hungary and Bohemia; 2) nations which had lost their independence in the Middle Ages up to the 16th century — Lithuanians, Ukrainians, the Balkan nations — especially Serbians and Bulgarians; 3) nations which had never been independent states — Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Byelorussians, Albanians. Handelsman's classification gives rise to doubts and lacks precision e.g.: was Lithuania's union with Poland tantamount to the loss of her independence? How should one approach the problems of independence of the Ukraine, say in the 15th or 16th century? If the Hungarians in the 19th century lost independence (which, apparently, they had previously had), then must they not have soon regained it under the dualist system? It is accepted, for the rest, that the battle of Mohacs in 1526 marked the end of Hungary's independence. With all these reservations, Handelsman's classification reflects the existence of the above-mentioned differences in statehood traditions. Most of the national states which were established after World War I and which had not existed before 1914, had a more or less remote tradition of statehood broken up by foreign conquest — Turkish, Austrian, Prussian or Russian. Yugoslavia had not one but several traditions of statehood, above all Serbian and Croatian. Only some nations of the area under consideration — Slovaks, Latvians and Estonians — did not have such traditions; Albanian tradition in this respect was also rather poor and ephemeral. States which already existed in 1914: Serbia, Rumania and Bulgaria, also regained statehood or obtained it for the first time (like united Rumania) rather recently — in the 19th century, and the formal recognition of their independence and the elimination of the remnants of Turkish rule came even later, after the Congress of Berlin or in the beginnings of the 20th century. It seems evident that the liberation of these nations and the establishment by them of independent states was due, above all, to the same factors which brought about the emergence of the other national states in Central Europe — those which did not yet have their own statehood at the outbreak of the First World War. We have in mind the development of national consciousness followed by the development of national-liberation movements; the establishment of the national state was the natural goal of those movements even if they

⁴ M. Handelsman, *Le développement des nationalités dans l'Europe Centrale-Orientale*, "L'Esprit International," 1932, No. 24.

did not proclaim it in the first stage. In the modern world, the national state is indeed the natural form of a nation's existence and, in principle, the only safeguard of its proper development. The above proposition is not belied by the cases where federative states are created; the latter constitute a common national-state form of more than one nation. Pointing to these self-evident facts is alone enough to demonstrate the groundlessness of theories, still advanced now and then (mainly in the German and Austrian historiography but elsewhere, too) about the alleged artificiality of the system of national states established in Central Europe after 1918, and about the harmfulness of the so-called Balkanization of that part of Europe.

THE POLICY OF THE BIG POWERS AND THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL STATES

In the 19th and early 20th century, three empires — Russia, Germany and Austro-Hungary, held a position of predominance in Central Europe and in the Balkans, especially in the face of the progressing disintegration of the Turkish State. All three of them, but Russia and Austria in particular, were based on the dynastic principle and were ruling over vast territories inhabited by subdued nations. The process of national development, however, did not leave out these monarchies — especially the Russian, Habsburg and Turkish empires. Not only did the national movement of the subjugated peoples develop within those empires but nationalism was also growing among the ruling nations. Dynastic monarchies were becoming transformed into national states of the ruling nations. The unification of Germany in 1871, a victory of the so called small-German idea, as opposed to the great-German idea of unification of all German States, Austria included, under the authority of the Austrian Emperor, was after all a result of aspirations dating back from the beginnings of the 19th century, the reactionary character of the Prussian-German Monarchy established in Versailles notwithstanding. The transformation of the Habsburg Monarchy into a dualistic state with two privileged nations — the Austrian Germans and the Hungarians — was also, to a large extent, a result of the necessity of basing the previous conglomerate of the dynasty's possessions upon the interests of definite nationality groups. Modern nationalism, formulating its expansionist aspirations in a modern way, was also developing in Russia. Making great strides, parallel to it and at an even faster pace, was the revolutionary process which was eventually to bring about the October Revolution. All these monarchies were undergoing transformations tending towards the ascendancy of the national factor over the dynastic factor; among the

results of this process, one should note the fact that conflicts between these powers were now arising on a new basis: the transformation of dynastic imperialisms into nationalistic ones was giving rise to conflicts which were more difficult to overcome, to reconcile and to liquidate and which frequently called for the only settlement possible under the conditions prevailing at that time: namely, by armed force.⁷

One should recall at this point that when Russia on the one side and Germany and Austro-Hungary on the other, stood face to face in Central Europe, the principal area of conflicts between those powers were the countries of South-Eastern Europe; they were not only themselves the object of imperialistic appetites but they were also a stage on the way to Constantinople and the Middle East for the inheritance after the decaying empire of the Sultans. To strengthen her position, Russia was taking advantage of the national movements of the Southern Slavs; Austro-Hungary, on the contrary, was interested in curbing those liberation and unification movements, especially in view of the national movements of the Slavs within the monarchy. The Hungarians were particularly apprehensive of Croatian and Serbian irredentism in Transleithania. Russia's influence among the Slavs in the Balkans was also a threat to German imperialism for it not only stood in the path of German expansion along the Berlin-Baghdad line but also hampered the realization of the concept of subordinating Central and South-Eastern Europe to Germany. Irredentism and, more generally, the increase of Slav influence in Austro-Hungary, did not suit Germany also for this reason that they were reducing the German predominance in Cisleithania and, quite naturally, drawing Austria away from Germany, and thus made it impossible to incorporate the Habsburg empire into a system organized by Berlin and remaining under its domination. The conflicts that brought about the First World War were thus closely connected with the development of national-liberation movements.

The above factors determined the war aims of the big powers as they joined the war in 1914. We have in mind the problems of Central and South-Eastern Europe which were, of course, but a fragment of the conflict between the Coalition and the Central Powers and their allies.

The objects of Russia's war aims were situated, above all, in the South since Russia wished to gain control over Constantinople and the Straits. Strategic and economic considerations (the problem of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) combined with historical and moral ones which made Russia — the "third Rome" — reach for the heritage of Byzantium.

⁷ See also: R. W. Seton-Watson, *Race Problems in Austria-Hungary and Turkey*, in: *Europe in the Melting-pot*, pp. 26 - 31.

Russia also wanted to gain supremacy in the Balkan Peninsula, through a protectorate over Serbia or Bulgaria, to become the nucleus and the head of a great Slav camp, to abridge the power of Austro-Hungary and possibly tear away from it certain Slav territories, and finally to incorporate into her empire a part of the Polish territories annexed by Prussia. In the conversation with the ambassadors of England and France on 14 September 1914, Sazonov envisaged the preservation of Austria composed of German, Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian territories, while Serbia was to acquire Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Northern Albania; there existed, however, other opinions, too, envisaging a complete liquidation of Austro-Hungary — the Tsar's statement in his talk with Paléologue at about the same time (21 November 1914) could be an indication of that.⁸

The programme of German imperialism for Central Europe was connected with the concept of "Mitteleuropa" formulated by Fr. Neumann, A. Ritter, G. Schmoller and Fr. v. Liszt on the threshold of the war. That concept assumed that Central and South-Eastern Europe would be subordinated to Germany's domination through the creation of a system of vassal states depending both economically and politically on Germany. This system should also include Austro-Hungary where the German national element would be reinforced. Berlin's influence in Austria convulsed by internal contradictions, was growing ever stronger for a long time before World War I, and the course of the war brought about a complete dependence of the Habsburg monarchy on the powerful ally. One of such vassal states could consist of a scrap of Poland carved out from territories that had fallen to Russia under the partitions — after, however, considerable frontier rectifications in favour of Germany; the scope of these rectifications was still under discussion but at any rate they were to affect purely Polish territories.

The internal situation of Austro-Hungary accounted for the fact that the ruling circles needed "a small victorious war" to mend the impaired morale of the monarchy; this "small war" was expected, above all, to curb or destroy Serbia which was supposed to be the main source of the movements of Southern Slavs within the monarchy, and the relations with which were definitively aggravated after the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary. A war victory would have opened up for Austria the possibility of annexation of further Slav territories; there were also ideas of transforming these territories in such

⁸ V. S. Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe 1914-1918*, Princeton 1957, p. 37; A. J. Mayer, *Political Origins of New Diplomacy*, New Haven 1959, pp. 1-20; H. Batowski, *Rozpad Austro-Węgier [The Disintegration of Austro-Hungary] 1914-1918*, Wrocław 1965, p. 81.

a case into a new part of the Habsburg monarchy (to which, for the rest, the Hungarians probably would not have consented). A military victory over Russia would have also made possible further annexations of Polish territories (raised, perhaps, to the status of another part of the monarchy) or opened the road to other political combinations undertaken together with Germany in Polish territories.

Russia's plans enjoyed, in principle, the support of her Western allies. "Unfortunately, — Clémenceau wrote in *The Glory and Misery of a Victory* — we must have the courage to admit that our programme, when we were entering the war, was not a programme of liberation." As late as 1915, the French Government acceded to the Tsar's request that Russia be guaranteed a free hand in the problem of the Straits, and just before the March revolution in Russia, on 10 March 1917, Briand sent to the Russian Government a letter containing the requested consent of France to letting Russia have a free hand in the West which in practice was tantamount to the free annexation of Polish territories and, possibly, of East Prussia. Renouvin maintains that Briand did it without the consent of the Cabinet, and the matter stirred up a storm, especially after the publication by the Soviet Government of the secret treaties concluded by the Tsarist Government. This does not alter that fact that France supported the Russian aims and aspirations. Renouvin qualifies this agreement as "renunciation of the defence of interests of the Polish people."⁹

The states of the Coalition and the United States did not at all expect the break-up of Austro-Hungary and the liberation of peoples under its rule, let alone the liberation of nations oppressed by Germany and Russia. Generally speaking, the war aims of either side were not clearly precised at the beginning, and one avoided any steps that could make a return to the *status quo* impossible, should this prove necessary. A good illustration of it is to be found in the attitude of the Central Powers towards the Polish Legions which, after all, were fighting on their side. While there were some, like R. W. Seton-Watson, who anticipated and propagated the break-up of Austro-Hungary,¹⁰ the general attitude of the British press, for example, towards Serbia was extremely cool at the beginning of the war.¹¹ As late as 1917, Lloyd George still declared

⁹ P. Renouvin, *Les buts de guerre du gouvernement français (1914 - 1918)*, "Revue Historique," vol. CCXXXV, 1966, pp. 1 - 38.

¹⁰ See: R. W. Seton-Watson and others, *The War and Democracy*, London 1915 (1st edition 1914), by the same author: *Europe in the Melting-pot*.

¹¹ T. L. Stoddard, *Present-day Europe. Its National States of Mind*, New York 1917, p. 8.

that the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy did not make part of the British war aims,¹² and that there could only be question of a self-government or autonomy for the nations subjugated by Austria. The position of the ruling circles in the United States was similar. Wilson, "in common with the leading statesmen of Western Europe, believed that the political union of Austro-Hungarian peoples was a necessity, and he seems to have felt that, once freed from German domination, the Habsburg Monarchy would prove a beneficial force. Colonel House was of this opinion".¹³ France which almost to the last moment conducted secret negotiations with Austria aimed at drawing her away from Germany and at concluding a separate peace with her, was prepared, of course, to see the Monarchy remaining on the list of European states. As late as 3 December 1917, in a conversation with Col. House, Clémenteau said that Austro-Hungary should be left there in order to counter-balance the power of Germany.¹⁴ As it is known, Wilson's Fourteen Points did not envisage the break-up of Austro-Hungary. National movements within Austro-Hungary were looked upon unfavourably by the Americans until 1918 because a victory of these movements would have ruled out the chance of a peace with Austria. It goes without saying that neither the West-European Powers nor the United States envisaged the liberation of nationalities oppressed by Tsarism. The problem of Poland looked somewhat different. In 1914, the three partitioning Powers issued proclamations addressed to the Polish population and containing vague promises. The most precise were the aims of Russia which wished to conquer the rest of Polish territories; with this in view, the proclamation of the Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolayevitch was promising in the future to Poles, unified and subordinated to Russia, "freedom of faith, language and self-government." The public opinion in the West accepted this declaration as the announcement of a satisfactory "settlement of the Polish question." Even Romain Rolland wrote in 1915: "In the early stage of the war, Russia made magnanimous promises. They were recorded by the conscience of the world."¹⁵ The 13th Point of Wilson postulated the creation of an independent Poland "with free access to the sea" but this took place already after the February and the October Revolutions and after the Act of 5 November 1916. That Act was another step that, irrespective of the will of its authors, compelled statesmen to put the

¹² Ch. Seymour, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, 1926, vol. III, pp. 345 ff.; J. Mayer, op. cit., p. 325.

¹³ Ch. Seymour, op. cit., p. 345.

¹⁴ J. de Launay, op. cit., pp. 98 ff.

¹⁵ R. Rolland, *Au-dessus de la mêlée*, Paris 1915, p. 113.

problem of Poland's independence on the international plane. But in its origin, the Act of 5 November lay on the line of Germany's and Austria's war aims. These powers tended towards a solution of the Polish question through a new partition of Poland, with a small Polish buffer-state and the rest of Polish territories incorporated into a German *Mittel-europa*.

The Anglo-French programme — formulated at the end of 1916, at a conference held on 26 - 28 December 1916, in answer to Wilson's peace note — was rather limited as far as the problems of Central Europe were concerned. With regard to Poland, it referred to the Tsar's proclamation to the Army (of 25 December 1916) where mention was made of "free Poland." At the time, Balfour said to the representative of France that the programme should provide (apart from the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and of Italian territories to Italy) for the incorporation to Serbia of the Serbian territories belonging to the Habsburgs, and the incorporation to Rumania of territories inhabited by Rumanians, that it should include "doing something to comply with the Polish aspirations," as well as the liberation of Christians from Turkish rule.¹⁶ At the request of France, the Czechoslovak question was also included into the declaration of demands of the Entente; the relevant point of the Allied note of 10 January 1917, answering Wilson, was worded as follows: "The liberation of Italians, Slavs, Rumanians and Czechoslovaks from alien rule." The term "Yugoslavs" was not used because of the protest of the Italians who wished to grab vast Slav territories and were therefore hostile to the Yugoslav programme. In his analysis of Wilson's policy, V. Mamatey maintains that such a declaration by the Entente which took up the Czech and Slovak problem and thus naturally brought into question the future of the Habsburg Monarchy, did not please too much the leaders of the American policy. Wilson believed that self-government would be enough for the nations of the Monarchy, he had a very vague idea of their national movements, and wanted — for a long time to come — to reach agreement with Austria. After all, it was only on Germany that the Congress declared war in April 1917. In 1917, and later as well, "the President apparently still thought of the Austrian problem in terms of the old 'states rights' issue."¹⁷ He even contemplated the access of Austro-Hungary to the Aegean Sea without violating the integrity of Serbia! Thus the Powers taking part in the war determined their war aims and strove to attain them with no consideration whatsoever for the rights of the nations, along the lines of old

¹⁶ D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, London 1934, vol. III, p. 63.

¹⁷ V. S. Mamatey, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

diplomacy. This was true not only of the Central Powers and Russia but of the Western powers—England and France—as well. An example of this policy was the London Treaty of 26 April 1915 concerning the remuneration for Italy for taking part in the war on the side of the Coalition. Trieste, Gorizia, the whole of the Istrian Peninsula, Northern Dalmatia and Valoná (Vlora) in Albania were to fall to Italy, along with Trent. One should also recall here the Bucharest Treaty of August 1916 under which Rumania was to receive Transylvania and Hungarian territories up to Debrecen and Szeged, as well as the Banat—not because of the composition of their population but as a reward for Rumania's neutrality; the Central Powers, on the other hand, offered to Rumania—for having sided with them—territories previously belonging to Russia (Bessarabia) and to Serbia (Negotin). Similar bargaining went on with Serbia and Bulgaria. The Allies coerced the Serbian Government into consenting to award Macedonia to Bulgaria lest the latter should join the war on the side of Germany. In return, Serbia was to receive Bosnia and a part of Southern Hungary. The Pasić Government consented to this despite strong opposition but the matter soon became out of date when the Germans stepped in, Bulgaria entered the war, and the Serbian authorities sought refuge on the Corfu.

It is worth noting that the Provisional Government in Russia, while declaring that it was renouncing annexations, upheld the Tsarist policy with regard to war aims; this found expression e.g. in Milyukov's circular of 17 March and in his note of 1 May 1917. The Provisional Government was promising Poland what Arno Mayer qualifies in his book as "limited independence."¹⁸

In the years 1917-1918, the evolution of the war situation was inducing Austria, the weaker link of the Central Powers, to think of a peace on the principle of *status quo*. The German partner, however, did not consent to suggestions of this kind put forward by Tschernin, e.g. during his conferences with Bethmann-Holweg on 26-27 March 1917. Besides, at that time the Austrians also had in readiness a maximum programme which, while leaving to Germany a free hand in the East, envisaged a settlement of Balkan problems in such a way that would suit Vienna, and even new acquisitions in Rumania: the annexation of parts of Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania and the placing of these countries and of Albania under the economic domination of Austria (the Austrian-German agreement in Kreuznach of May 1917).

The years 1917 and 1918 opened up new prospects in the East for the Central Powers. The Germans occupied the Baltic countries which they

¹⁸ A. J. Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

intended to tie directly to the Reich. This applied not only to Latvia with her German class of barons but also to Lithuania which was to receive a German ruler and, together with the other Baltic states, become a part of Germany's arm reaching up to the Finnish Bay. The Ukraine was also to remain within the orbit of German influence, and to become a German Hinterland and colonization area. The Kingdom of Poland, after cutting off its territories which were of strategic importance and could be the object of colonization, was to become a small state dependent on Germany or be incorporated into the Habsburg system, perhaps together with Galicia, as a new part of the Monarchy, within the framework of one of the possible trialist concepts. An expression of that policy in the East was the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In another region of Central Europe, the defeated Rumania had to pay for having sided with the Coalition, with territorial concessions in favour of Hungary and Bulgaria (the Bucharest Treaty, of 7 May 1918). Yet, as the Monarchy grew weaker, the aims of the ruling circles of Austro-Hungary were getting more and more reduced to the maintaining of the *status quo* and to preventing the disintegration of the Monarchy. This was the background of the secret peace negotiations which England and France conducted with Austria in spite of their declaration of 10 January 1917. In his talks with the Austrian delegate in December 1917, Lloyd George's emissary, Gen. Smuts, called the Entente note of 10 January 1917 a bluff.

Let us recall the principal facts demonstrating to what extent the order established in Central Europe after 1918 was remote from the original programme of both belligerents — not only of the Central Powers but of the states of the Entente as well.

The latter did not modify their programme until 1917, and mainly in 1918, at a moment when the defeat of the Central Powers already became manifest. Even at the moment, however, according to de Lauray, "the decision to destroy the Turkish and Austro-Hungarian empires was not yet taken and even encountered opposition."¹⁹ Yet, in the middle of 1918, hopes for a separate peace with Austro-Hungary collapsed in view of Vienna's dependence on Berlin, and of Emperor Charles's personal loss of face after his negotiations with the Coalition came to light. On the other hand, the Allies in the summer of 1918 did not realize the extent of Germany's weakness, especially in the face of the latest German offensive. Under these circumstances, one adopted a course aimed at the liquidation of the old Austria. The first to pronounce in this sense was Secretary of State Lansing (30 May 1918). This took place

¹⁹ J. de Lauray, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

already after receiving information on the results of Emperor Charles's visit with Emperor William in Spa on 12 May 1918. The United States Government was also under a strong pressure of the Republicans who insisted that the war should be continued up to unconditional surrender of the enemy. The Congress had previously, in December 1917, declared war on Austria, and there were no longer obstacles to advance the cause of liberation of the nations of Central Europe. A key role was played, of course, by the Russian revolutions of 1917, especially by the October Revolution. They practically rendered impossible a return to the old order, also with regard to the liberation of nations. The revolutions placed on the agenda the problem of liberation of the peoples subjugated by Russian Tsarism. On the other hand, however, the Coalition powers beware of making any promises to the nations subjugated by Tsarist Russia, were still nourishing hopes that a pro-Allied régime would be established in Russia. The conference of Russian ambassadors that took place in Paris in December 1917, upheld all the demands of the Tsarist government and limited itself to recognizing the independence of Poland. Wilson and the Allies continued to consider the cause of peoples of the former Empire as an internal issue of White Russia.²⁹ Meanwhile, however, the Coalition recognized the Polish and Czechoslovak national committees; Polish and Czechoslovak military formations were also organized on the side of the Coalition. All this advanced the cause of liberation of Central-European nations.

We should now draw attention to the situation at the moment of the defeat of the Central Powers and immediately afterwards. The Central Powers were making desperate efforts to keep their possessions as intact as possible. The Manifest of Emperor Charles, envisaging a possible union of Galicia and a part of the Kingdom under Habsburg rule, proclaimed the reconstruction of Austria along federal principles and announced the establishment of German, Austrian, Czech, Ukrainian-Galician and Yugoslav kingdoms. It was obviously too late. It was characteristic, however, that the Hungarian Prime Minister Wekerle came to the Crown Council in Vienna on 15 October with a sharp protest against the Manifest and with the reservation that it could not apply to Hungary. A short few weeks later, Austro-Hungary disappeared from the map of Europe! The danger of the Czechoslovak problem being settled in a way unsatisfactory to both nations was still imminent, however, and it was for this reason that the Czechoslovak statesmen promptly issued the declaration of Czechoslovakia's independence. The agreement between the Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee was also con-

²⁹ Ch. Seymour, *op. cit.*, pp. 202 ff.

cluded sooner than anticipated (6 - 9 November 1919) in the face of threat on the part of Italy, of the occupation by that State of Slav territories, and of even farther-going Italian appetites. The Coalition recognized these *faits accomplis* although the recognition e.g. of Yugoslavia (i.e. the State of S.H.S. united with Serbia) did not take place until the Peace Conference. Rumania, not without difficulty, achieved the recognition by the Coalition of the Rumanian population's right to unite with the Regat. The special situation of Poland recognized by the Western States and, above all, the fall of Tsarist Russia, excluded the possibility of Poland's independence being questioned — all that remained was the problem of recognition of the government.

Germany endeavoured not only to preserve the *status quo* but also — in spite of the defeat — to retain a part of her acquisitions in the Ukraine and in the Baltic countries. The situation that was created — among other things — by the approach from the East of revolutionary armies, compelled the Allies to attend to these countries, to the gradual recognition of national states established there — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, — and even to direct military intervention. The official American comment to Wilson's Fourteen Points (dating, however, from as late as October 1918), anticipated the recognition *de facto*, and then *de iure*, of the Finnish, Lithuanian and Latvian governments (Estonia was not mentioned).¹¹

The debates at the Paris Conference were also marked by the contradiction between the principles of self-determination and of ethnographic frontiers — officially recognized and contained in Wilson's Fourteen Points — and the tendency to cut out frontiers arbitrarily, according to the interests of the victorious powers. Suffice it to mention the decisions on the Polish-German frontier unfavourable to Poland and changing the original decisions, or the acute conflict over the boundaries of Italian possessions on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. It is known, for the rest, that England and France consented most reluctantly to accede to the Wilson principles — among other reasons, because of their commitment under the London Treaty with Italy. Besides, Secretary of State Lansing also expressed disfavour for the principle of self-determination. He said: "The more I think about the President's declaration as to the right of 'self-determination' the more convinced I am of the danger of putting such ideas into the minds of certain races [...]"

¹¹ A. J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking. Containment and Counter-Revolution at Versailles, 1918 - 1919*, New York 1967, p. 287.

The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite [...] What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered. What misery it will cause!"²²

Thus, the war situation itself, the disintegration of the Central-European empires, of the Ottoman Empire and of Russia, compelled the states of the Coalition not only to recognize the *faits accomplis* but also to work out a political system that would suit their interests. It is known that France wanted to have in Central Europe allies depending on her who would counter-balance the power of Germany, and that all the Allies also wanted to establish political organisms that would protect that part of Europe against a communist revolution. These goals could be attained by various possible combinations, though. Is it not true that almost on the eve of the capitulation of the Central Powers, one still contemplated the idea of preserving Austro-Hungary as the factor of order in Central Europe?! It appears therefore that the above-cited calculations alone would not provide a sufficient explanation of the origins of the new order in Central Europe.

THE FACTORS DETERMINING THE SHAPE OF THE VERSAILLES ORDER IN CENTRAL EUROPE

"The new nations of East Central Europe were not created by the Paris Peace Conference; they created themselves, by their own efforts."²³ It is rightly emphasized in the literature that the Conference and its leaders were not omnipotent in the matters of Central Europe. Among other things, they had no possibility of a military occupation of that area after the defeat of the Central Powers. Besides, their own people demanded quick demobilization and one could not keep armies numbering millions under arms.

It was the liberation and unification movements of the nations of this region that gave the Versailles Order in Central Europe its actual shape. Yet, these movements could attain their goals only after the defeat of the Central Powers and, above all, after the Russian Revolution and its effects. The Revolution advanced the idea of self-determination which was taken up by Wilson and supported by the European liberal Left.

The idea of self-determination combined with the concept of plebiscite, appears in the period of the Great French Revolution as an expression of the conviction that the will of the people is superior to the will of the monarchy and the aristocracy. This idea was later taken up

²² V. S. M a m a t e y, op. cit., pp. 80 - 81; See: W. Wilson: *Kształtowanie losów świata* [*The Shaping of the Destinies of the World*], vol. I, Warszawa 1924, p. 37.

²³ V. S. M a m a t e y, op. cit., p. 384.

and developed by the Social Democrats who made of it the basic principle of their nationality policy. It was propagated particularly by Lenin as the main principle in the settling of nationality conflicts. In the first period of World War One, the forces of the Left in Europe — certain groups of Social Democrats, radical liberals in various countries — weak at first, gathering strength as the burdens of war were growing greater, advanced the programme of peace without annexations and contributions which in practice would have meant a return to the principle of the *status quo*. Wilson's initial efforts also went in this direction. Things had already gone too far, however, and a return to the *status quo* was no longer possible. One had to seek a new principle of territorial and state order, and that could only be the national principle. Yet, a decisive turn towards the adoption of the principle of self-determination of nations would not have been possible without the October Revolution. The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia and other acts of the Soviet Government exerted an immense influence upon the world public opinion. It would be an over-simplification to see in Wilson's programme only the influence of the Revolution or, inversely, only the desire to oppose its attractive force. Wilson and the radical-liberal circles in the countries of the Coalition felt the need of opposing to the annexationist programme of Germany, an idea based on grounds more justified morally, and taking into consideration the imponderables which, for the rest, were gathering weight as the national-liberation movements grew stronger. The proclamation of Wilson's Fourteen Points was nevertheless largely motivated by the necessity of answering the declarations of Lenin and the Bolsheviks on putting an end to the war and on the liberation of nations. Of great importance, too, was the publication by the Bolsheviks of the secret treaties concluded by the Tsarist Government which now discredited England, France and the whole reactionary diplomacy.

The Peace Inquiry Bureau appointed by Wilson, in a Memorandum which House submitted to the President on 4 January 1918, called attention to "the universal longing for peace [...] the almost universal feeling on the part of the common people of the world that the old diplomacy is bankrupt [...] the menace of social revolution all over the world [...]. In a war fought for democratic aims, these fears should be made to fight on our side."¹⁴ On one hand, the programme of self-determination and the national principle were an expression of the views of liberal and democratic circles in the United States, and of the democratic-liberal and radical minority in Europe (including Social Democrats). On the other hand, they were an expression of the separate state interests of

¹⁴ A. J. Mayer, *Political Origins...*, p. 339.

the United States. That country was particularly interested in the freedom of the seas and in the freedom of trade, and its representatives strongly insisted on the relevant points of the Wilson programme. Having so far no immediate interests in Central Europe, or even precise information on Central-European countries and their national movements, the United States was free to come out as an advocate of the liberation of nations. An important role was also played there by the national groups in the U.S.A. originating from the countries of Central Europe, including the Polish group. Thanks to the statements he made in the years 1916 - 1917, and especially thanks to his Fourteen Points and to the support shown for the aspirations of subjugated nations in 1918, President Wilson became identified with the idea of self-determination of nations to a greater extent than he had at first anticipated himself. The enthusiasm of the broad masses for him was immense as was revealed e.g. during his stay in Europe in 1918 - 1919. And yet, his original programme envisaged only an autonomy for oppressed nationalities rather than their independence. The official comment to Point 10 (of October 1918) stated that now — only now! — this point was off the map and that Austria was to be annihilated. Thus, the decisive change occurred in the year 1918.²⁵

In the early stages of the war, the radical and liberal opposition in West-European countries, demanding that the war be put to an end and calling for a peace without annexations, was weak. The Social-Democratic Right which was — especially in the Coalition countries — the more moderate wing of nationalistic public opinion, in principle lent its support to the ruling circles and to the war waged by them. The extreme Left of the International, with Lenin and the Bolsheviks at the head, was alone to remain on anti-war positions. Anti-annexation positions were also maintained by small groups of leftist intellectuals. A decisive turning point came with the national and anti-war declaration of the Petrograd Council of Delegates containing the demand for self-determination. The instructions of the Petrograd Council for Mikhail Skobelev, delegate to the Allied Conference in Paris, envisaged, apart from the general principle of self-determination and peace without annexations and contributions, the specific right of self-determination for Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, i.e. territories that made part of the former Russian Empire. On the one hand, the action of Social-Democrats became more animated (the Congress in Stockholm in June 1917), although they continued to support their governments. On the other hand, the governments of the Coalition states — while not renouncing secret treaties —

²⁵ Ch. Seymour, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

also began to use a more “democratic” language, to mention the rights of nations, etc. Conducive to that was the entry into war of the United States with its peculiar political language. A secret memorandum of the American intelligence recommended that the political language be brought closer to the terminology used by leftist circles (“calculated as accurately as possible to allure the groups of the Allied Left [by approaching] more and more the verbal form of their war aims”).²⁶ All this was done under the impact of the Bolshevik declarations following the October Revolution, the Declaration of Rights of the Nations of Russia and the Decree on Peace, of the statements made by the Soviet delegates in the course of peace negotiations with Germany and Austria in Brest-Litovsk, as well as of the above-mentioned publication of secret treaties.

These factors, favourable to national-liberation and unification movements in Central Europe, could have opened up the way to the establishment and extension of national states in that area. Everything indicates, however, that the factors cited above were but a catalyst while the thing of basic importance was the development of the national movements themselves. It goes without saying, for the rest, that without the will of the masses in the various ethnic groups, the new states could not have been established and, if created, would not have lasted for 50 years. The above considerations could thus be called redundant, were it not for the fact that the role of nations and national movements in our times is not always properly understood — and yet at present we have to do with national-liberation and state-building movements, especially in post-colonial territories. When investigating the Versailles Order in the interwar period, it is impossible to omit the problem of the origins of the system of national states. The acute conflicts dividing the newly-established national states, the incessant disputes and threats of war, the far-going political blindness of the leaders in certain states rendering any common action impossible — all this made stabilization in that part of Europe difficult and facilitated the Nazi aggression. These negative phenomena, instead of being charged to the ruling classes and circles, are sometimes unjustly attributed to the more fact of the emergence of national states in Central Europe in connection with the alleged so-called “Balkanization” of that part of Europe. Actually, however, the establishment of national states was a historical necessity and a true peaceful stabilization in that part of Europe was not (and, indeed, is not) possible without the existence of independent national states based on the ethnic principle.

²⁶ J. Mayer, *Political Origins...*, p. 270.

In spite of the very complex distribution of the population belonging to various national communities in the area under consideration, the political map of Central and South-Eastern Europe in the years 1918 - 1939 was more in accordance with the ethnographic map than ever before in history. A similar process had already taken place earlier in general outlines in Western Europe.

We cannot go here into the history of national movements. Let us state, however, that the nations of our region of Europe can be classified into several groups. One of them is made up of nationalities with an uninterrupted national and cultural tradition. It includes, first of all, Poles, also Hungarians and — to some extent — the Austrian Germans. With others — Czechs, Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Albanians, Slovaks, Slovenians, the Baltic peoples, Ukrainians, this continuity was either seriously impaired or even broken up, and the stage of their independentist movements or even movements for national autonomy was preceded by the stage of national cultural revival, from the end of the 18th century and through the 19th century; some of these nations did not have a developed and homogeneous cultural tradition and they started to build their modern national culture almost from scratch. The differences between the historical destinies of the various national cultures were very great. On the one hand — the highly developed and continuously developing Polish culture — on the other hand Albania where the alphabet was not worked out until 1908! The national revival initiated by the Croats or Czechs at the end of the 18th century, took place later e.g. in Bulgaria where the first Bulgarian school was established in Gabrov in 1835 and where the reviving national movement had to struggle not only against Turkish oppression but also against the Greek Church organization. In Lithuania, national and cultural revival manifested itself in the second half of the 19th century, in the struggle against Tsarist oppression but also against the deep-rooted influence of Polish culture.¹⁷ In Latvia or Estonia, the struggle for national liberation had to be directed not only against Russia but against German barons as well, etc., etc.

Differences in independence programme should also be stressed. Independence was, in principle, the demand of Polish national movements in the 18th, 19th and 20th century although there also existed, especially

¹⁷ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Rise of Nationality in the Balkans*, New York 1966 (1st ed. 1917); H. de Montfort, *Les nouveaux États de la Baltique*, Paris 1933; P. Łossowski, *Gazeta "Ausra" i początek narodowego ruchu litewskiego 1883 - 1886* [*The Newspaper "Ausra" and the Beginning of the Lithuanian National Movement 1883 - 1886*], in: *Studia z dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej* [*Studies in the History of the U.S.S.R. and of Central Europe*], vol. I, pp. 81 - 128.

after 1864, deep-rooted tendencies that sought a more or less provisional solution of the Polish problem in the spirit of autonomy within the partitioning powers or in unification under the rule of one of them — Russia or Austria. Such programmes were motivated by the fact that the power of the partitioning empires sometimes seemed indestructible, especially when one did not take into account the prospects of a social revolution. To some other national movements, however, especially in countries with no tradition of statehood, the matter was not so obvious. In Bohemia, before 1914, the groups demanding full independence were weak and few, and disbelief for the ability of a separate Czech state to endure was general, in spite of the fact that the struggle against Austrian oppression was in full swing. In 1908, the future minister and president Beneš argued in his work *The Austrian Problem and the Czech Question* that the disintegration of Austria was as impossible as the survival of a Czech state. Kramař advanced in 1914 the proposal for the establishment of a Czech state united with Russia. In Lithuania, in 1905, when the revolution aroused national movements, especially in the territories of the Tsarist Empire, plans were put forward envisaging only autonomy and language liberties. The Croatian problem looked rather complex because the idea of creating a Slav state within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy reconstructed along trialistic lines, had considerable attractive power. On the other hand, however, the Serbian, Rumanian and Bulgarian national movements had already achieved the creation of independent states before World War I. Thus, national movements were developing at a very fast rate, the movements that sprang up later were frequently passing the various stages of ideological evolution with lightning speed, some of them achieved independence already before 1914, some others practically did not advance such demands at all before that date (e.g. Latvians, Estonians).

The peculiar Hungarian problem is worth noting here. The Hungarian people had their national state within the dualistic Monarchy where the development of Hungarian nationalism and a stronger emphasis on the state separateness of Hungary met with resistance. An example of this can be found in the controversy between the opposition and the Crown in the years 1903 - 1906 over the demand that a separate Hungarian national army be formed — to which Vienna would not give consent.

The development of national movements depended, of course, on the specific historical conditions of the various nations. The dynamic quality of those movements was influenced by many factors. They certainly did not develop at a rate parallel to the economic and social growth of the given nation. Thus, for example, the Czechs who were Central Europe's

economically most developed nation, had only a small fraction of their national movement declaring itself for independence, while much less developed nations like Bulgarians, Serbians and even Albanians had already behind them partly victorious liberation uprisings. In different countries, different social classes were the leaders and the mainstay of national movements. In the more backward countries, these movements were led by small groups of intelligentsia, mainly of peasant origin (the Baltic countries, Ukrainians, Slovaks), elsewhere — by the bourgeoisie (Bohemia); the situation was still different in Poland where a particular role was played by the intelligentsia springing to a large extent from the propertied classes. The degree of participation of the working masses in the national movement was also very much differentiated. To pronounce general judgments on these matters would still be premature. The content and wording of the programme proclaimed by political leaders were surely also influenced by the greater or smaller numerical force of the given nation which determined its prospects and its ability to endure historical cataclysms.

The years of the First World War saw a rapid development of all national movements in the area under consideration. They gradually grew — towards the end of the war in particular — to become the main factor determining the political geography of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The successive turning points in this regard were: 1) the outbreak of war and the possibilities and calculations connected with it, the first — if only tactical — moves of the Powers on the political scene (e.g. proclamations addressed to the Poles by the partitioning powers, the Serbian declaration of 1914); 2) the March Revolution in Russia; 3) the October Revolution; 4) the American programme and the Fourteen Points of Wilson; 5) the crumbling of the Central Powers and the immediate preparations for the creation of national states; 6) the first steps of the newly-established states, the first conflicts, and the debates of the Paris Peace Conference.

Let us begin with the Polish problem. The war waged on Polish territories resulted in the fact that the Polish question soon assumed an international character; consequently, the national movement in Poland achieved a high degree of development. The promises made to Poles by the partitioning Powers were an expression of the necessity of securing an adequate political basis among the Polish people, upon which those Powers would settle the Polish problem in a manner suitable to themselves. In turn, however, those promises — irrespective of the will or lack of will to keep them — forced both belligerent sides to outbid each other on the Polish problem. Meanwhile, the national consciousness developed

very considerably and aspirations for independence spread onto groups which previously had not been fully participating in the national movement (e.g. peasants in the Kingdom of Poland). On both sides taking part in the war, numerous military organizations, secret or open, were formed. It became impossible to ignore aspirations for independence any longer. The Russian Revolution raised new hopes and overthrew one of the partitioning Powers, apparently making the situation easier for the remaining two. The Polish people, however, decidedly opposed the German and Austrian rule; at the moment of the war defeat of the Central Powers, there emerged several centres of authority, established quite spontaneously, without any interference of the Coalition whose armies were at that time thousands of miles away from Poland. The Poles disarmed a part of the occupation troops, they liberated the province of Great-Poland themselves, they fought for Silesia themselves, and they formed their national state themselves.

The greater part of Poland had previously been under Russian domination. Completely subjected to Russian rule were also the Baltic nations which came out with demands of independence only in the course of World War I, and especially after the Revolution of 1917. As time went by and the war events developed, as awareness was growing that the war must bring about a change of the old political structures — demands of autonomy turned into demands of independence. Thus, e.g., the first political conferences of the Lithuanian emigrés in 1915 confined themselves to demands of autonomy but at the Conference held in February-March 1916 one already demanded independence. This demand was upheld by the subsequent conferences and congresses of the emigrés. The Tariba, established in September 1917, in its declaration of 16 February 1918 proclaimed the establishment of an independent state; under German pressure, however, the Tariba consented, both in its earlier declaration (of 10 December 1917) and in the later ones, to Lithuania's complete dependence on Germany. The programme of a fully independent Lithuanian State could thus be developed and implemented only after the defeat of the Central Powers. However, the Lithuanian national movement was a factor sufficiently strong to achieve reorganization after the fall of Germany and of the calculations for a connection with Germany; this came in November 1918 when the Voldemaras government was formed.

In 1905, the demand for autonomy was also advanced in Latvia. In the years of World War I, the Latvian territory had to be defended against the Germans and the Latvian regiments within the Russian Army distinguished themselves in those battles. German barons played so great

a role in Latvia that the occupation of the country by the Germans would have led to transforming it into an ordinary German colony. These fears proved well-grounded after the occupation of Latvia by the Germans when the barons established the "Duchy of Kurland" and were Germanizing the country forcibly and, after the war defeat in 1918, attempted to restore their domination with the help of von der Goltz's troops. The Latvian national movement which advanced the demand for independence in 1917, was active both in the country and in emigration; it established in Russia a Provisional National Council and, after the defeat of Germany, proclaimed independence on 18 November 1918. In the case of Latvia, the problem of the national movement was rendered more complex by the presence of strong pro-communist and pro-Soviet tendencies. Undoubtedly, the republic emerging as a State of bourgeois democracy did not have the undivided support of the entire population of Latvia. Of some importance was certainly the fact that only a very short time elapsed between the advancing of the programme of independence and its implementation.²⁸

Certain similarities are to be noted between Latvia and Estonia where the demand of independence also appeared only after the March Revolution in Russia and where the German nobility also held strong economic positions.²⁹ At the time of the Provisional Government, the Estonian National Council was established through elections. On 28 November 1917, in the face of the disintegration of the Empire and under the impact of the Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia, the Council proclaimed the independence of Estonia. There, too, the national movement had to fight against the Germans who intended to create a small vassal state in Estonia. In this struggle, the Estonian movement had the distant support of the Entente (France recognized the National Council already in March 1918). With the help of the Coalition, Finland, Sweden and Denmark, the Estonian forces routed the Germans and dislodged foreign troops from Estonia. While Latvia managed to convene the Constituent Assembly only in 1920, Estonia did the same already a year earlier and gave the country a remarkably democratic constitution.

In the case of the Baltic countries, the actual range of the independent movement in the years 1917-1919 may in some cases be subject to doubts; one should note, however, the very rapid evolution of the national movements from timid demands of autonomy to the active and

²⁸ See: H. de Montfort, op. cit., A. Bilmanis, *A History of Latvia*, Princeton 1951; J. v. Hehn, *Lettland zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas," München 1957, Beiheft 3.

²⁹ M. W. Graham Jr., *New Governments of Eastern Europe*, New York 1927.

armed defence of independence. In those countries, the direct influence of the March and October Revolutions upon the growth of the national movement, revealed itself with particular force.

In the case of Czechoslovakia, the national movement played a basic role in the creation of the state. Although in the early phase of the war the programme of independence was far from spreading over the whole population, it soon gained approval both at home and abroad, thanks to the activity and political abilities of the leaders; the most prominent among them was Masaryk who formed the Czech Committee Abroad as early as 1915.

As a matter of fact, already at that time the passive resistance of the Czechs and the desertions of those drafted in the Austrian army, left no room for doubts as to the feelings of the Czech people towards Austria. In the initial period, one could also note attempts to link the Czech cause to Russia (the above-mentioned Kramař proposal, the audience of the Czech delegation with the Tsar on 20 August 1914, the organization of Czech military formations on the side of Russia).

1916 saw the establishment of the Czechoslovak National Council and already in the beginning of 1917, the Allies — undoubtedly under the influence of the propaganda and endeavours of the Czech emigrés — included the liberation of the Czechs from alien rule into the declaration of their war aims. In spite of the efforts of the anti-Austrian resistance movement (the Maffia), the calculations for a union with Austria were in 1917 still strong enough among the Czech political leaders to make possible pro-Austrian resolutions of the Reichsrat deputies, demanding only a separate status for Bohemia within a reformed Monarchy. However, the evolution was quick. Already on 6 January 1918, the representatives of the Czechs declared that they no longer recognized the Reichsrat as a representation of their people. Meanwhile, the growing weakness and, then, the disintegration of Russia definitively ruled out calculations for Russian assistance and for a union with Russia. The emergence of independent Czechoslovakia was chiefly due to the efforts of the national movement. In the face of the disintegration of Austria, its representatives managed to unite, to reach — already in May 1918 — agreement with the Slovaks (the Pittsburgh agreement), and to organize military formations abroad. In 1918, the Czechoslovak National Council obtained recognition by the Entente. While Emperor Charles was trying to tack about to save the Monarchy, the emigré leaders formed the Provisional Government, and on 28 October the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed in Prague. Its army had to suppress

German irredentism and fight the Hungarians in order to incorporate Slovakia. At the time, the armies of the Entente were far away.

The growth of the Croatian national movement before 1914 was bringing about ever sharper clashes with the Hungarian Government. The latter's policy of reprisals which found expression, among other things, in unlawful violations and suspension of the Croatian Constitution, merely increased the struggle against Hungarian oppression. The clumsy Hungarian policy and, then, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina contributed a great deal to the growth of the Serbian movement in the Monarchy and to its merging with the Croatian movement to form a Yugoslav movement (the declaration of Rijeka and Zadar in 1905), aiming at the liberation of the Southern Slavs of the Monarchy. The course of war events resulted in the fact that unification tendencies on both sides of the Austro-Serbian border prevailed over separatist tendencies. Already at the outset of the war, the Serbian Skupshtina declared that it was struggling for the unification of Southern Slavs; there still persisted, however, the misgivings of Croats and Slovenians about the possible domination of Orthodox Serbs in the united state, and the animosity of Serbs against Catholic Croats and Slovenians; still alive were also plans for a Great Serbia on the one hand, and for a Great Croatia on the other. The defeat of the Serbians and the flight of their Government to Corfu, the ensuing necessity of strengthening Serbia's position, the apprehensions of the Slavs in the Monarchy in the face of Italy's growing appetites (expressed also in the London Treaty of 1915), led to the issuing of the joint Serbian and Yugoslav declaration in Corfu on 20 July 1917. In 1918, the Yugoslav National Council was established in Zagreb. Upon the fall of Austria, it created the organs of the "State of the S.H.S." (within the territorial boundaries of the former Monarchy). However, even after the fall of Austria, the understanding between the Serbs and the Yugoslavs of the former Monarchy encountered difficulties and it was only the Italian aggression against the Dalmatian territories that compelled the two sides to reach agreement and to proclaim the Kingdom of S.H.S. on 1 December 1918. In this case, the national movements brought about the liberation but the final statehood was shaped by external factors and by the fact of foreign invasion. The unification tendencies were, no doubt, very important and the joint action of the Croats and Serbs within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy also contributed to the success of the unification ideas; they failed, however, to prevent acute conflicts which dragged on throughout the two interwar decades, and later.

We are not dealing here with all national movements, of course. It is well known that the action of the Transylvanian Rumanians and of

the organizations representing them — the Rumanian National Committees in Transylvania and Bucovina, and the Rumanian National Council — contributed to the unification of Transylvania with the Regat, in spite of the misgivings about the reactionary régime in Rumania and in spite of the manoeuvres of Hungary's ruling circles (the Resolution of the Assembly in Alba Julia on 1 December 1918). It is well known that the Ukrainian national movement in Galicia, which had been developing from the 19th century already, led to the establishment of the West-Ukrainian State supported by a considerable part of the Ukrainian population. It is well known that the Albanian national movement played a major role in preserving the independence of the Albanian state which was hanging by a thread (the Peace Inquiry Bureau recommended in 1917 that Albanian independence be abolished and, at the end of 1918, Wilson's advisers were still envisaging Italian protectorate over a part of Albania).⁴⁰ We do not touch here upon the complex Macedonian problem. We do not go into the specific features of the Slovak national movement. We do not even mention the minority problems in newly-established states or the movements of minorities living in dispersion, such as the Jews and the Germans. One should mention, however, the importance of joint actions undertaken by a number of subjugated nationalities; in the years of World War I, the most conspicuous such undertaking was the congress of nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, held in Rome in April 1918, with the participation of Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Yugoslavians, Transylvanian Rumanians and a delegation of the Serbian Skupshchina; at that Congress, a declaration of agreement was adopted, called the Pact of Rome. Another venture was the meeting of "Oppressed Nationalities of Central Europe," held in Carnegie Hall on 15 October 1918, a manifestation of common action in the United States. It was characteristic that on this occasion, the delegates of Poles and Czechs, until then remaining in a state of conflict, Paderewski and Masaryk, came out with eulogies of each other. These manifestations reflected the growing intensity of the national-liberation movements and their role in that decisive period.

The events of the years 1914 - 1919 were thus a stage on the road of emancipation of the nations of Central and South-Eastern Europe. It seems that nothing could have held back this process; however, had it not been for the war and the events connected with it, and in particular for the Russian Revolutions, above all, the October Revolution — the realization of national aspirations could have dragged on for a very

⁴⁰ A. Simonard, *Essai sur l'indépendance albanaise*, Paris 1924.

long time to come. On the other hand, the outbreak of the war was itself connected with the intensification of the aspirations for national liberation and for unification; they were, among other things, at the base of the Austrian-Serbian conflict. The programme of the Bolsheviks with regard to the national problem, containing the declaration of the right of nations to self-determination, and the first decrees of the Soviet authorities springing from that programme, which played so fundamental a role in the development of national-liberation movements throughout Central Europe, were nothing else, after all, but a realistic formulation of the role and importance of national movements which had not been properly appreciated either by the imperialistic circles or the rightist Social Democrats. The multi-national monarchies collapsed not only because of their defeat in war but primarily because they were an anachronism in the era of national liberation. What emerged in Central Europe as the result of the war, was by no means an artificial system, not based on the national principle. The states created within the framework of the Versailles Order survived through the interwar period and have existed to the present day in only slightly modified territorial shape, within the system of people's democracies (in the case of three Baltic states — as Union republics in the U.S.S.R.). Major changes have only occurred in the Western and Eastern frontiers of Poland, in a small part of the Eastern frontier of Czechoslovakia, in the North-Eastern frontier of Rumania and in a section of the Rumanian-Bulgarian frontier. Remaining with no major changes are all the frontiers of Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia (with the exception of her frontier with Italy) and Albania, as well as the overwhelming part of Czechoslovak and Bulgarian frontiers. Thus the stability, not only of states but of frontiers, too, has been very great — and this in spite of the turmoil of war, the occupations and international conflicts. This is a result of the influence exerted by the national movements and of the ethnic principle connected with it; these factors not only gave shape to the Versailles Order but contributed decisively to the formation of the system of national states in Central and South-Eastern Europe. It would be dangerous, of course, to overlook the weakness and negative aspects of the Versailles Order, particularly in Central and South-Eastern Europe. By excluding the world's first socialist Power, that order was from the outset built on a frail foundation, especially in the area under consideration. Another weakness consisted in the absence of an effective barrier against German imperialism. Neither was a way found to assuage the nationality conflicts, incessantly threatening with an explosion. The new states were not capable to develop ties of solidarity against an aggressor. Finally,

most of them were backward countries, shaken by social conflicts, with unstable political structures—and, therefore, weak. That is why the Versailles Order collapsed and only some, more durable, elements of it have been adapted by the new system of political relations in our part of Europe.

(Translated by Jan Aleksandrowicz)