

The Development of Integration Theories in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

Since the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the idea of integration has been on the agenda in Hungary, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. It materialized in the formulation of various federation and confederation plans. Even though these ideas were generally far removed from political reality and therefore, had little chance of being realized, they were nevertheless reformulated. In the 19th century, the federation ideas of the Habsburg Empire were dominant, which also meant preserving the territorial unity of historic Hungary. Between the two world wars, the most influential and resonant ideas were those of the Pan-European movement and those from the Germans in various forms of Mitteleuropa. After the Second World War, Soviet-style forms of integration prevailed. Following the political transitions, the so-called Visegrad concept gained new momentum and is now dominant in the region.

KEYWORDS

federation, confederation, Hungarian integration ideas, Habsburg Empire federalization, Mitteleuropa plans, Pan-European Movement, socialist integration, Comecon, Visegrad concept

1. The Concept of Integration in the 19th century

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, during the era of the French revolution and the Napoleonic wars, modern national ideologies, along with nation-states, started to blossom. This not only brought about a change in the history of ideas, but also had major political consequences. From the beginning of the 19th century, the creation of nation-state frameworks became the dominant idea and political aspiration of national movements for approximately two centuries. This was accompanied by significant and continuous territorial rearrangements in Central and Eastern Europe. Consequently, the territorial framework of states and empires, which were previously considered stable, became precarious. This continuous challenge had to be faced by Hungarian politicians, thinkers, and the entire politicizing public in the 19th century.

Uncertainty spawned constant fears, in which the territorial integrity of the Habsburg Empire and Hungary within it was seen as a threat based on the development of ethnic-religious relationships. No ethnicity in the Habsburg Empire comprised more than 20% of the population, which was divided into seven religious denominations. By the 1800s, the number of ethnicities overtook the Hungarians, largely due to the settlements after the Turkish era. Without Croatia and Slavonia, the Hungarian population represented only 44% of the total population; after the assimilation during the dualist era, this ratio had risen to 54% by 1910. However, the nationality question remained the most significant domestic political issue. In Transylvania, which played a key role in the Hungarian national consciousness, the Romanians were already an absolute majority by the early 19th century. The unfavorable development of ethnic proportions for Hungarians made surviving historical Hungary volatile. From the early 19th century up until the end of the Great War, representatives of the idea of integration and federation wanted to ensure the stability and continuity of Hungarian statehood.

Similar to Central and Eastern Europe, the integration plans formulated in the 19th century showed many general features in Hungary. However, the nature of most of these was such that they predicted the necessary fall of the concepts. By accepting that history is, among other things, the science of thinking about the past, the integration plans, by their alternative nature, are an equally important part of the past, regardless of whether the political environment provided opportunities for them to materialize.

In the case of the Hungarian representatives of the idea of integration, the substantial question arises as to what motivated the formulators of newer concepts, given the failure of previous plans. The ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the region was a motivational factor, as it clearly inspired these plans in parallel with the idea of the nation-state. Contemporary theories and works, especially the enlightenment and its impact, influenced the contributors, but Alexis de Tocqueville's (1805–1859) momentous work on the American system was a reference point, as were the integration plans of the Polish emigrant in Paris, primarily referring to Adam Czartoryski (1770–1861) and his circle. The cantonal system of Switzerland also served as an example. Many thinkers in the federation and confederation saw the possibility of solving internal conflicts and issues by creating a kind of a historical compromise between the peoples.

From the mid-19th century, the thinking of many peoples in the region, especially the Hungarians, was ruled by another factor: fear and uncertainty. The establishment of German unity and its form and the increasing Russian expansion kept the need for the smaller nations' security on the agenda. A conception emerged around this time, which continued into the 20th century, especially its first half, that only an organization or federation of the peoples along the Danube could provide an alternative and security against German and Russian expansive efforts.

Plans formulated in both the region and Hungary carried certain continuity and uniform features, but these also apply to the failure and non-realization of the

concepts. Among them, lack of partnership, fear, suspicion, and distrust toward each other's plans and Hungary should be emphasized. This was further fueled by the fact that many of the plans were too broad, too sketchy, and often stuck at a general level, which created opportunities for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Another significant factor was the lack of support from the great powers or the contradictions of it. Western powers tended to support the existing systems of the 19th century, which were often criticized by those very same powers and were considered obsolete and conservative, rather than the dubious federation concepts that created an uncertain and unknown future. Social and economic prerequisites for laying the foundations of integration were missing, such as social class or citizenship and a certain level of economic development, which would create the socio-economic embeddedness of integration by unfolding the international division of labor. The drafters were unable to win over the public, as they existed on the periphery of political life. The developers of the integration ideas were mostly emigrants, opposition or marginalized political circles, intellectuals, and social scientists. This is especially true for the Hungarian plan formulators. The drafts were generally far from political reality.

As Hungary was part of the Habsburg Empire in the 19th century, the Hungarian drafters of integration plans started with an analysis of the general state of the Empire. Chancellor Metternich (1773–1859) himself, as the dominant Central European politician in the first half of the 19th century, was aware of the danger of the nation-state idea for the future of the Habsburg Empire. He envisioned control and management of national movements by broadening the imperial framework, which, however, meant only postponing solving problems. “The competence of Metternich allowed Austria to control the course of events through a lifetime ... However, the result could only be delayed, but not avoided.”¹ According to other theories, the pre-1848 era of the Habsburg reign was the period of missed historical opportunities from the point of view of consolidating the region. “The great tragedy of Austria was that the necessary compromise between the unity and diversity was not realized in time: such a compromise that would have been the balance between historical and national federalism.”² In contrast to this solution, ‘for Metternich, Central Europe meant only the unchanged existence of the Austrian Empire, the rule of Italy and Hungary and the hegemony within the German Confederation.’³

In the first half of the 19th century, among the Hungarian representatives of the idea of integration, Miklós Wesselényi's (1796–1850) idea should be mentioned; it preceded many similar drafts formulated in the region.⁴ Wesselényi, as a determining politician of the Hungarian reform era, originated his theory from the previously mentioned factors that threatened Hungary's integrity, that is, the movements of nationalities and the Russian and German expansive threats.

1 Kissinger, 1996, p. 79.

2 Häusler, 1995, p. 229.

3 Lendvai, 1995, p. 36.

4 Ibid. p. 26; Wesselényi, 1992.

He warned of the danger of Pan-Slavism and Orthodoxy in his pamphlet 'Szózat a magyar és a szláv nemzetiség ügyében' (Speech on the Matter of Hungarian and Slavic Nationality).⁵ The work was published in Hungarian in 1843 and in German a year later. He also recognized the historical situation that determined the approach of most 19th century political thinkers, that is, that the future and integrity of Hungary and the Habsburg Empire were closely linked. 'It was clear to the main leaders of the reform movement that this Hungary could only be maintained within the framework of the Habsburg Empire.'⁶ Wesselényi's work was the first in Hungary prior to 1848 that urged reorganization of the empire under public law. However, it is a fact that among the writings of the Hungarian Jacobins (1794–95), there had long been the idea of organizing the parts of the absolutely controlled Habsburg Empire belonging to the Hungarian crown into a federal republic adapted to linguistic borders'; however, we do not know exactly what sources or samples the drafters based their plans on.⁸ At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the republican system seemed completely unacceptable, since it would evoke the very dangerous happenings in France.

Wesselényi saw the greatest danger concerning Hungary to be the Russian foreign policy, which consciously sought to 'weaken the states and their governments where Slavs live, so as to alienate them from those...'⁹ He believed this effort threatened not only the integrity of the states inhabited by the Slavs, but also European peace. Therefore, he urged that the confrontation with Pan-Slavic ideas be raised to a Pan-European issue. Wesselényi recognized precisely that the Habsburg Empire was not only threatened by the Russians, but that its conflict with Prussia over the German question was also intensifying. The empire could disastrously weaken under this dual burden, which would also have a serious effect on Hungary's domestic politics. The German threat itself is not detailed, but only the consequences of the German national movement for Austria. In this double grip, Wesselényi felt that a forced community of fate and interdependence had developed between Hungary and the Habsburg Empire. Russophobia, the fear of Pan-Slavic ideas, became a constant element of the Hungarian political public opinion. Where's the way out? asks Wesselényi. The answer is: 'The Slavic nations cannot and shall not remain oppressed and without a national constitution.'¹⁰ The opinion of the historian who edited Wesselényi's work also harmonizes with this idea, according to which the essence of Wesselényi's program is that 'the remedy against the barbaric expansion exploiting the constitutional rights of the Slavic can only be the constitutional liberty,'¹¹ which has to lead to a new 'state alliance.' This would consist of five units: Austria's German inhabited territories with the Slovenians; Lombardy with the Italian part of Istria, Czechia, and Moravia;

5 Gergely, 1985, pp. 35–42.

6 Niederhauser, 1995, p. 29.

7 Gergely, 1985, p. 36.

8 Ibid. p. 37.

9 Wesselényi, 1992, p. 51.

10 Ibid. p. 148.

11 Ibid. p. 5.

Galicia; and Hungary together with Croatia and Dalmatia. Considering the national effort of Balkan peoples, the independent Romanian and uncertain South Slavic state would be linked to the resulting formation. Undoubtedly, despite its progressive nature, the draft ‘reflected the downsides of 19th century Hungarian nationality and national political thought ... the distinction of other nationalities as political entities, their territorial separation, or even their language considered its use intolerable in the administration ...’¹². As Wesselényi puts it: ‘... all official works and documents, for which the law does not provide otherwise, shall proceed and be edited only in Hungarian.’¹³

Multiple drafts appeared beginning in the early 19th century from Hungarian politicians, citing medieval examples of more active southeastern Europe and Balkan foreign policy, referring to the states of Louis I (1342–1382) and Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490).¹⁴ Anti-Russian sentiment also served as a basis for these ideas, which was further complicated by the great dilemma of the possible solution of German unity, according to which the German inhabited parts of the Habsburg Empire would go to united Germany. What happens to the non-German territories in this scenario? Lajos Batthyány (1807–1849), Hungarian prime minister, said in the spring of 1848 that the ‘Hungarians would be able to form a great empire, becoming a fine bastion against the Russian expansion.’¹⁵

The experience of the revolutions of 1848–49, the reactions of the great powers, and the anti-government actions of the Hungarian nationalities confirmed the decades-long concern of politicians and the public that Hungary’s territorial unity and independence should be rightfully feared by the nation-state movements along with the German and Russian aspirations. After the fall of the revolution, a significant emigrant movement appeared in Europe and in many overseas countries, primarily the United States. The movement was led by the most influential intellectual and political leader, Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894), governor-president and the most significant politician of the 19th century. Kossuth was not only the best-known Hungarian politician in Europe but also among overseas countries. A contact was established with other emigration groups, including the still most prestigious and organized Poles, who were greatly influenced by their federal drafts. The earlier statement that emigration movements were particularly receptive to integration ideas also applies to Hungarian emigration after 1848. The high degree of susceptibility to various federal plans in the period after 1849 is also justified by the fact that, until the adoption of the 1867 Compromise, the future of Habsburg-Hungarian relations and the structure and state structure of the Habsburg Empire were completely uncertain. Everyone could see clearly that the absolutist (Bach era) regime that emerged after the defeated war of independence would not be sustainable for long. In this transitional state, the federal

12 Romsics, 1997, p. 27.

13 Wesselényi, 1992, p. 251.

14 Romsics, 2007, pp. 319–352.

15 Ibid. p. 338.

plans offering the alternative solution already mentioned were not accidentally given more leeway.

In his draft, Lajos Kossuth considered the internal causes and international lessons of the fall of the Hungarian revolution. The great tragedy of 1848–49 was that the Hungarian government and Hungarian political interests confronted the will of most nationalities and, as a result, the nationalities became the instrument of the Austrian counter-revolutionary efforts; this was also recognized by the Hungarian emigration. According to many, the only alternative to the Habsburg Empire in this region could be a federation. However, this realization had already been formulated after the defeated war of independence. Previously, the federation system and territorial autonomy for the nationalities was totally unacceptable to Hungarian politicians and most of society. The Nationality Act, drafted on June 28, 1949, in the final days of the war of independence, would have given the nationalities broad rights in language usage, but it was too late.

Among the emigration, the first prominent representative of the federation plans was László Teleki (1811–1861), the Hungarian government's ambassador in Paris. Learning from the years 1848–49, he wrote the following to Kossuth on March 14: 'It is not only Austria that is dead, but also St. Stephen's Hungary.'¹⁶ Doubts and uncertainty about the Habsburg Empire's sustainability were also shared by others. Whereas a few years earlier, Miklós Wesselényi could only envision the successful territorial unity of Hungary with the Habsburgs, in 1849, he no longer believed that the Habsburg Empire would continue for long. In the spring of 1849, he spoke of a Budapest centered new Central Europe.

As previously mentioned, the most prestigious leader of the emigration was Lajos Kossuth, so his plans for the future settlement of Central Europe attracted the most interest.¹⁷ In Vidin, immediately after the emigration in October 1849, he formulated a confederation idea consisting of Hungary, Poland, Serbia, and the Romanian principalities. In 1851, he drew up a more detailed draft constitution, which was further developed in 1859. It adopted many elements of the American draft constitution and many existing European ones. It also built on Hungarian historical traditions while respecting the individual and communal rights of nationalities.

This was developed further in his 1862 proposal for a confederation of Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia, called the 'Danube Confederation.' Common affairs—foreign policy, foreign trade, customs, military affairs—would be managed by the federal parliament and common government. The joint government bodies would meet in different member states each year, and this venue would provide the next head of the confederation. The question of official language would be settled with mutual agreement between the member states; not surprisingly, Kossuth suggested French. Despite Kossuth's original intentions, thanks to a Milanese newspaper, the draft was published too soon, causing concern and opposition regarding

16 Romsics, 2007, p. 317.

17 Pajkossy, 2002, pp. 931–957.

territorial issues in many of the countries potentially affected. Thus, Kossuth was forced to explain both himself and the plan, which damaged the draft.

Between 1849 and 1867, not only great politicians like Lajos Kossuth formulated integration plans, but so did Mihály Táncsics (1799–1884), who could not be compared to Kossuth in his statesman abilities. He was a writer and publicist who was particularly sensitive to social questions, including the peasant problem; thus, many consider him one of the first socialist politicians. He is inseparable from the revolution in Pest on March 15, 1848, as the release of Táncsics, who had been sentenced to prison for press offenses, became one of the defining events of this famous day of the revolution. He wrote his work ‘Hét nemzetiség szövetsége’ (The Union of Seven Nations) in 1857; however, for several reasons, it did not find the same resonance as did Kossuth’s integration plans, either among his contemporaries or posterity. According to a prominent historian on the subject, Táncsics’s work can be ‘listed among the well-intentioned but naïve and in many respects illusionary utopias.’¹⁸ Táncsics took the historical principle into account in the question of borders. He drafted a European confederation, where foreign policy would only partially be common, but units of measurement customs and the monetary system would be. He did not mention military matters. His conception is, in many ways, underdeveloped, contradictory, and incomplete. Therefore, Táncsics’s idea remained completely unheeded.

The Compromise of 1867 placed the Habsburg-Hungarian relationship on new foundations. It ended a long period of conflicts with mutual concessions. Contrary to the federation plan drafts, the Compromise was supported by a broader scope of Hungarian public opinion. Many recognized that no other real alternative could be achieved in that time. Initially, there was criticism, but one had to realize that to be a political actor in Hungary after 1867, the fact itself and acceptance of the Compromise had to be the starting point. Kossuth expressed his concerns in his so-called ‘Cassandra letter’ to Hungarian society, but he remained in the minority. In the long run, he saw clearly that the Compromise bound the fates of Hungary and the Habsburg Empire together. He was firmly convinced through the lesson of 1848/49 that the future dissolution of the empire was inevitable. With the Compromise, the unity of historic Hungary depended on the fate of the Habsburg Empire. History has proven Kossuth’s prediction to be right in the long run, as the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire after the First World War brought with it the disintegration of old Hungary. However, no other feasible solution was possible in the last third of the 19th century. It is also important to point out that stabilizing the Habsburg Empire through the Compromise was welcomed by Western powers. Predictability in the Central European region was necessary for European balance.

Since both the Austrian and Hungarian political forces and public opinion supported the Compromise, the dualist state structure itself was stabilized. Western politicians welcomed this solution, so there was no chance of any realistic alternative to compromise, such as plans for federation or confederation, for decades after 1867.

18 Romsics, 2007, p. 317.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were concepts of a Hungarian expansionist aspiration toward the Balkan, with aligned economic arguments, such as opening new markets.¹⁹ This was the birth of the so-called ‘Hungarian imperial’ idea of Turanism, which called for building a common future between Asian people or people with Asian roots, including the Hungarians from Central Europe through Southeast Europe to Central Asia. The Turan Society was established in 1910 with their own journal, the *Turan*, first published in 1913. Their long-term goals were the following:

The Hungarian nation has a great and bright future ahead of it, and it is certain that the heyday of Germanism and Slavism will be followed by the heyday of Turanism. We Hungarians, the western representatives of this great awakening power, have the great and difficult, but glorious task of becoming the spiritual and economic leaders of the Turanian nation of 600 million people.²⁰

The movement is undoubtedly important in terms of ideological history, but it had no significant impact on Hungarian foreign policy.

The First World War brought a radical change both in the relationships between great powers and the fate of the Habsburg Empire, including the territorial integrity of Hungary. Since the Entente had no official or approved concept about the future of the Habsburg Empire, representatives of Hungarian political and intellectual life were mostly concerned with the German concepts of war, which received a lot of publicity. From the mid-19th century, German political and economic actors saw the central- and south-eastern European region as a target area for their economic expansion. Multiple theories in connection with the realization of the German *Mitteleuropa* came to life even before the First World War.²¹ At the start of the war, the *Mitteleuropa* plan became a permanent feature of German war aims. This is illustrated by Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg’s (1856–1921) letter to Secretary of State Clemens von Delbrück (1856–1921) on the German policy guidelines at the beginning of the war:

The creation of a Central European Customs Union with France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria-Hungary, Poland, Italy, Sweden and Norway through common customs treaties seems feasible. This alliance, without a common institutional leadership, with ostensible equality of its members, but in reality under German leadership, should ensure the domination of the German economy over Central Europe.²²

19 Ibid. pp. 328–334.

20 Ibid. p. 324.

21 Meyer, 1955.

22 Németh, 2001, p. 172.

Delbrück himself formulated concepts about the exemplary economic objectives, similar to the representatives of German industry.²³ Lively debate was stimulated in connection with the envisaged customs union with the Monarchy since the different interests and potential of the German industry and agricultural sectors were apparent. No concrete form of economic cooperation was clear. either. The possibilities of a customs union, customs alliance, and a traditional trade agreement were all raised. The book *Mitteleuropa* by the liberal and Lutheran pastor Friedrich Naumann (1860–1919), which was published in 1915, fit into this line of thought. It is undoubtedly the most significant work in terms of its impact and resonance. It sold 100,000 copies in just a year, becoming the most successful publication after the memoirs of Bismarck in pre-1918 Germany.²⁴ After its publication, it was also published in Hungary, which sparked lively debate among economists, politicians, and intellectuals.²⁵

In 1916, the leading newspaper of the Hungarian bourgeois radicals, the ‘Huszadik Század’ (20th century), organized a debate on the issue. Participants were divided on the concept. Oszkár Jászi (1875–1957), a renowned social scientist and the most respected figure among the bourgeois radicals, supported a concept that would effectively achieve trade, the dismantling of customs borders, and general economic and cultural development within a larger political framework rather than in an isolated small state, regardless of his disagreement with the German ideas of great power and world domination. However, other leading politicians in the debate, such as the social democrat Zsigmond Kunfi (1879–1929) or Christian socialist Sándor Giesswein (1856–1923), opposed the plan precisely because they saw the realization of the German expansionist ambitions in them. Along with Jászi, many believed that peace and free development could only be achieved by creating the United States of Europe, for which *Mitteleuropa* could become a solid basis. However, he did not envisage its creation for the same purpose and in the same way as the already cited German aspirations for world domination. To sum up the debate:

Neither the Austrian nor the Hungarian ruling powers were able to come up with a constructive, historically viable counter-idea to the idea of Central European integration, and if they did attempt it, they were drowned in a whirlpool of nationalism or even in the shallow kelp forest of national nihilism.²⁶

In 1917 and 1918, the aggressive German ambition for great power, its plan for creating a German-led *Mitteleuropa* in which the dualist Monarchy and Hungary within could only play a subordinate role, discouraged Jászi from supporting the creation of *Mitteleuropa* in this form. Pál Szende (1879–1934), another bourgeois radical

23 Elvert, 1999, pp. 35–44.

24 Fröhlich, 1996, p. 179.

25 Irinyi, 1973.

26 Ibid, p. 266.

economist writer, warned of the dangers of the increasing dependence on Germany in an emotional article in the ‘Világ’ (World).

Hungarian statesmen are competing to offer Germany all that is valuable and important for the future of the Hungarian state. István Tisza²⁷ wants to send the Hungarian infantry to the front in Flanders, while Wekerle²⁸ is sacrificing Hungarian industry and trade on the altar of allied loyalty. We know from the statements of the prime minister that he is preparing a long customs alliance with Germany. The matter is urgent, immensely urgent.²⁹

At the end of 1918, with the defeat of Germany, the Mitteleuropa plans were off the agenda; furthermore, the defeat of the Central Powers also meant the radical dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and Hungary with it. Jászi drafted a plan in October 1918 to ensure the future cooperation of the peoples by the Danube. The Monarchy would have been reorganized on a federative basis, which would have kept the historical borders of Hungary without Croatia. The name of his conception was the ‘United States of the Danube.’³⁰ In the autumn of 1918, Jászi became the Minister of Nationalities in the Károlyi bourgeois democratic government, but he had no real room to maneuver. His concept of federalizing the Monarchy was not welcomed by the neighboring nations or by the Entente powers, as it was too late. In the spring of 1918, it was decided that instead of any reform of the Monarchy or a more moderate territorial dismemberment, radical dissolution and creating a small state framework would determine the new power structure in Central and South-Eastern Europe. With this, the Hungarian state of St. Stephens was torn into pieces. As the government that came into power in the autumn of 1918 did nothing to prevent this (although it could have done very little), it was often held responsible for the territorial losses.

2. Between the world wars

By signing the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Hungary found itself in a highly controversial situation. After nearly four centuries, it regained full state autonomy, but suffered conditions of territorial loss that it had never before experienced. In Central Europe, the imperial framework was replaced by a small state system. After creation, the successor states sought to completely abolish former economic relations, pursuing a so-called import-substitution industrialization, which seemed almost impossible and wasteful in the small state framework.

27 Tisza István (1861–1918) Hungarian politician, prime minister 1903–1905, 1913–1917.

28 Wekerle Sándor (1848–1921) Hungarian politician, prime minister 1892–1895, 1906–1910, 1917–1918.

29 Szende, 1918, p. 1.

30 Hanák, 1985.

The treaties closing the First World War brought neither political nor economic security and stability. The victorious powers were constantly forced to obtain new guarantees to enforce the peace.

The negative consequences for the European economy of the great restructuring of the world economy after the First World War were the basis for the efforts to promote closer economic cooperation and economic union between European states, i.e., these efforts were intended to fulfil a basically defensive function, the task of halting and reversing unfavorable developments.³¹

In the 1920s, the new Central European order, which appeared to be politically durable and viable, required constant corrections and crisis management in the economic field. The dissolution of the Monarchy helped France's political aims, but 'made the economic reconstruction of the region very difficult.'³² These circumstances also motivated the plans, which not only formulated the idea of European integration, but also considered economic rapprochement between the successor states as possible and necessary.

In the 1920s, European integration was not part of the official foreign policy initiatives of individual countries; its proponents sought to win adherents and exert pressure on the leading European powers primarily through social and political movements and organizations.³³

Among them were many Hungarian economists and economic writers.

According to the Reformed pastor Miklós Makay (1905–1977), who regularly published in various economic and foreign policy publications,

The present system of nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe is both an obstacle to the capitalist trend of socio-economic development, which, as it advances, calls for the realization of ever larger economic units, viable in the light of prevailing conditions, and an imperfect solution to the modern nation-state structure of modern state development.³⁴

While rejecting the current situation, he was also aware that there can be no return to pre-war political conditions. He suggested such a Central and Eastern European Confederation as a way out that would be the first step toward creating Pan-Europe.³⁵ However, he did not elaborate on how to do this.

31 Kövics, 1992, p. 37.

32 Ránki, 1985, p. 4.

33 B. Bernát, 1989, p. 683.

34 Makay, 1928, p. 599.

35 Ibid. p. 600.

The international association experts were aware of the dangers of trade policy restrictions on the successor states. The Finance Committee of the League of Nations on Hungary's report on December 20, 1923, states that 'It is of utmost importance that the free exchange of goods and trade treaties between Hungary and its neighbors be restored.'³⁶ This criticism was not only made against Hungary. Previously, another committee of the League of Nations noted that the trade policies of most European countries were not consistent with Article 23 of the Charter, which states that dismantling barriers and obstacles to trade is the responsibility of member states.³⁷ The fact that the United States was not a member of the League of Nations prevented it in the first place from acting as the organizer of world trade. Therefore, most economic issues were resolved outside the framework of the League of Nations.

Between the two world wars, the most significant integrational movement by international standards was the Pan-European movement. In Hungary, the Pan-European idea evolved after 1924, when the initiator of the movement, R. N. Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972), wrote a letter asking Pál Auer (1885–1978), renowned international jurist, to start the organizing work. Auer himself took the job from Antal Rainprecht (1881–1946), a member of parliament, former *supremus comes*. Many politicians from the opposition, economic journalists, artists, writers, and poets joined the movement. In Hungary, however, they were less active than in other countries because of the constant distrust surrounding them due to the stoic aloofness of official Hungarian politics. The organizers were aware of this. Auer wrote of their ambitions:

We were striving for a unified, institutionally organized economic community of the Danube, and at the same time we had the idea that the agricultural products of this economic community should be bought up by the countries of Western Europe at a preferential rate to those of overseas countries. Yet we also hoped that close economic cooperation would not only ensure peace between the Danube states and the resolution of minority problems, but also our greater independence from Germany.³⁸

Elemér Hantos (1881–1942) was the most active, internationally recognized, and best-known representative of the integrational idea between the two world wars. He was an economist, a university professor, and State Secretary of Commerce between 1916 and 1918, and, during this period, he was also an expert for the League of Nations. The main thrust of his activities was economic rapprochement between the successor states. For his extensive organizational and academic work in favor of integration, he was known by his contemporaries as the 'Central European Coudenhove-Kalergi.'³⁹

36 Gratz, 1925, p. 88.

37 Kövics, 1992, p. 44.

38 Auer, 1971, p. 160.

39 Németh, 2019.

Elemér Hantos agreed with the Pan-European idea but envisaged it as a gradual process, linking together the regional economic communities. The establishment of a Central European Economic Bloc could serve as the first step in this process.⁴⁰ He saw the realization of Pan-Europe as a process, the first element of which would be the organization of Central Europe; the second, the Franco-German reconciliation; and the third, the institutionalization of a united Europe.⁴¹ Hantos's insight proved correct, since the basis of the Western European integration that unfolded after 1945 was also the Franco-German rapprochement, the so-called historic reconciliation. He saw the victory conditions of the two ideas as identical. 'Economic opportunity and necessity are the realpolitik touchstone of the concept of pan-Europeanism.'⁴²

In the 1920s, Elemér Hantos propagated his economic policy program in the framework of the Mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftstagung (MWT), alongside the League of Nations and other organizations.⁴³ The MWT was founded in 1925 at the instigation of the Viennese wholesaler, Julius Meinel (1869–1944), an internationally renowned advocate of free trade. The founders' vision was to provide an institutional framework to formulate and support European economic convergence in Central Europe. As in 1924 and 1925, the integrational idea seemed to gain new momentum. The founding meeting in Vienna, on September 8 and 9, 1925, was attended by economists and economic and financial actors from all around Europe who condemned the exclusionary economic policy. The main participants joining the association were bankers, traders, and financial experts such as Richard Reisch (1866–1933), president of the National Bank of Austria, who had realistic perceptions in their own fields about the harmful effects of economic isolationism and autarkic economic policies. Hantos was constantly the most active person on the Hungarian side. The organization's main practical achievement was creating a public and international forum for economic issues affecting Central Europe. It could not have done more. The organization embraced Hantos' concept that the Central European question could only be solved if one element of economic life was not arbitrarily singled out, but a comprehensive cooperation was formulated, while recognizing its complexity. Accordingly, in the second half of the 1920s, the MWT's practical work focused on possible forms of convergence in transport, monetary, and customs policy. In October 1926, transport was the main topic of international discussion; in 1927, it was tourism; in 1928, the focus was the Danube question; in 1930, it turned to current trade policy issues; and in 1931, it was the agricultural question. The conferences explored the roots of certain economic problems but could not achieve more than formulating general expectations and proposals, as they had no political authority. According to Hantos, from an economic point of view, Germany was part of Central Europe, but it was not desirable to have it involved in creating the economic integration between the successor states,

40 Hantos, 1928, p. 23.

41 Ibid. pp. 26–27.

42 Ibid p. 27.

43 Schwarzenau, 1974.

since the whole region would then fall under such a German influence that it would provoke opposition from the Western powers.

The MWT set up a series of institutions to raise awareness of the interdependence of Central European states, to work on specific concepts, and to formulate concrete programs and plans. As part of this process, the Vienna Institute was set up in March 1929 to primarily deal with transport and monetary issues, the Institute in Brno in 1929 to study cooperation between the various production sectors, and the Central European Institute in Dresden in 1929–30. In May 1930, the Hungarian institute, with a focus on agricultural issues, was also set up under the leadership of Gusztáv Gratz (1875–1946), a politician, publicist, and economic journalist. Between the two world wars, Gratz, along with Hantos, was the most active member of the economic integration movement of Central Europe in Hungary.

The global economic crisis meant a new era both in political and economic relations. These circumstances were also Elemér Hantos's starting point. He thought the concept he created in the 1920s was still relevant. The only change was that market issues had become the main problem in international economic relations. The old financial problems—exhaustion of funds and unfavorable exchange rates—were still relevant, although in a new light. The basic elements of his idea had not changed substantially. He saw proof of upsetting the balance between supply and demand in the Monarchy's economic fragmentation, which was not only a mistake in terms of the 1920s economic processes. He also saw the root of the Central European States' economic problems in the 1930s in the territorial changes brought along by the peace treaties, in addition to the adverse effects of the world economy. The negative effects of the new borders on economic life could not be mitigated in the 1920s. He saw that creating an economic balance in the region could be achieved by solving this issue.

In his 1933 memoirs, published in several languages, he explored the roots and effects of the global crisis on the successor states.⁴⁴ The identified causes were the unfavorable economic effects of the new political borders, the question of reparations, the economic policy practices of the successor states, the adverse development of exchange rates, and the mistrust that made normal economic contacts difficult. He also stressed that the crisis in the region had complex roots and that possible solutions should reflect this complexity.

Because the crisis in the Danube region is not simply an imprint of the world economy, it is not a temporary, changing cyclical crisis, but a long-lasting, permanent structural crisis, which requires different instruments than those prescribed for general crises.⁴⁵

The least thing to do for economic rapprochement would be a trade agreement, while the maximum would be a customs union. Hantos saw serious obstacles in achieving

44 Hantos, 1933.

45 Ibid. p. 5.

both. “The political impossibility of a customs union is matched by the inadequacy of trade agreements.”⁴⁶ However, the idea of a customs union was so politically burdened that even the very idea would discredit the rapprochement. According to Hantos, there was a middle ground:

If, on the one hand, liberal trade treaties and simple preferential customs are not enough, and, on the other, a more radical form of customs union is unfeasible, there is no other alternative but a middle ground in trade policy leading to a customs and economic alliance.⁴⁷

Official Hungarian politics distrusted the integrational efforts, as exemplified by the Hungarian government’s view on the Pan-European movement. When Pál Auer organized an international meeting on the rapprochement of the Danube states in February 1932, it had to be prepared partly in secret. Later he recalled:

I was aware that this initiative was not compatible with the policy of the Hungarian government of the time, and that if official circles had known about it in advance, they would have tried to prevent the meeting from taking place.⁴⁸

The atmosphere was well indicated by the fact that while many former politicians appeared, active ones tended to stay away. The aloofness of official Hungarian politics was also caused by the range of the movement’s domestic supporters. They included many liberals, freemasons, and intellectuals of Jewish origin, that is, representatives of ideologies and ideological trends that were less in line with the official political course of the time.

Leaders of the Little Entente made it clear that embracing certain integrational plans could not lead to a change in borders or in Central Europe’s political structures. The most important elements of Hungarian foreign policy between the two world wars were a peaceful revision and protection of minorities. In his parliamentary speech on February 22, 1932, Beneš (1884–1948), reacting to the Tardieu Plan, said that if the proposals were to

entail any political commitment, if their aim or consequence were to be some international organization, confederation, or other similar political organization by any other name, then I think that we must reject such cooperation from the outset. The States of the Little Entente are united on this question.⁴⁹

46 Ibid. p. 79.

47 Ibid. p. 80.

48 Auer, 1971, p. 158.

49 Auer, 1971, pp. 160–161.

French Foreign Minister André Tardieu (1876–1945) proposed that the five agricultural states on the Danube grant each other customs preferences to provide a mutual market for their products to solve the agrarian crisis and prevent German foreign economic ambitions in the Central European region. Many of his contemporaries thought they had discovered the concepts of Elemér Hantos in this plan, as it was also known as the Hantos Plan.

In the Hungarian Parliament, the debate on economic integration plans, including the Tardieu proposal, broke out during the discussion of the 1932 budget. On this occasion, István Bethlen (1874–1946), expressed his views in greater detail, although not as prime minister but as one of the leading figures in the foreign policy principles and methods of the period.

Indeed, whatever the merits of the plan, however much it may have served to put Central Europe back on its feet, its defect is that it has a somewhat Danube Confederation flavor and that the preference it offers is somewhat expensive. I therefore ask the Hungarian Government, since it is in our interest to have a free hand toward other markets, since it is in our interest to be able to contract on equal terms with Italy, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia, not to give up any of their free hand in this respect, to work to amend the Tardieu plan in a direction that suits our interests.⁵⁰

The plan was defended by the aforementioned Gustave Gratz. He provided data to justify the reality of the concept and saw it as a means for Hungary to regain its old markets and thus remedy the crisis. I am firmly convinced that through economic cooperation we can regain, at least in part, the natural advantages of the larger economic areas, the advantages we enjoyed economically in the old monarchy, in the old common customs territory.⁵¹ His view was shared by few. The official Hungarian foreign policy, against all plans for integration, was first to revise, then create economic or any kind of rapprochement, and not vice versa.

Many of the active politicians could identify with the integration as a necessary and inevitable trend. In 1931, Pál Teleki (1897–1941), politician, two-time prime minister and internationally renowned geographer, wrote:

Everything that brings the peoples of Europe closer together, whether in the economic or cultural field, is intended to overcome customs duty and transport difficulties (sic), the protection of European production and the organization of any aspect of it, the grouping or organization of certain branches of production for the whole of Europe, agreements between or among European agricultural and industrial states, similar agreements between countries

50 *Az 1931. évi július hó 18-án meghirdetett országgyűlés nyomtatványai. Képviselőházi Napló VI. kötet.* 1932. p. 440.

51 *Ibid.* VII., p. 74.

which are geographically —virtue of economic complementarity—related, the frequent contact of European politicians within and outside the League of Nations, European conferences... all this is a very good and important step toward development.⁵²

Although Bethlen and the official Hungarian foreign policy saw realization of any kind of integration in the region only after achievement of the Hungarian revisionist goals as in line with the general features of integration ideas, he himself, as an influential personality but no longer an active politician, outlined a federation idea toward the end of the war.⁵³ On February 3, 1944, he wrote a letter to Tibor Eckhardt (1888–1972), a leading figure in Hungarian emigration in the West during the Second World War, with the aim of presenting his ideas of federation to the powers. The integration plans of politicians who were forced into opposition or emigration, like those of Bethlen, were far removed from real political processes and opportunities. The post-war fate of Hungary and its neighbors had already been fundamentally decided. The future scenario was starting more and more to be written by Moscow.

From the second half of the 1930s onward and especially during the Second World War, Hungarian politicians and intellectual leaders became increasingly preoccupied with fear of the great power relations and the consequences. Feelings and phobias that had been present since the mid-19th century, the fear of German and Russian expansionism now posed an even more realistic challenge. Many voiced concerns about the threat to the independence and national existence of the small peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The great power ambitions in the region of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had become timelier and more palpable than ever. The question rightly arose whether small statehood still had a chance along the Danube. These concerns were also confirmed by western, and especially British, statements. An article in the *London Times* in March 1943 shocked society throughout the region.

There will be security in Eastern Europe only if that area is dependent on the military power of Russia... The events of the inter-war period have proved that neither any group of small states nor any group of Western powers can provide security for any nation.⁵⁴

László Németh (1901–1975), one of the most influential writers and thinkers of the period, painfully and disappointedly declared: ‘so that’s how we are bought and sold—little peoples to hordes.’⁵⁵ It was not by chance that Hungarian intellectual life in these years was preoccupied with the future of small statehood and the relationship

52 Teleki, 1931, p. 220.

53 Urbán and Vida, 1991, pp. 32–38.

54 Juhász, 1983, p. 222.

55 *Ibid.* p. 223.

between small nations and great powers. As an alternative, they again thought of some kind of integration solution.

In this crisis and uncertainty, the so-called ‘Szárszó Meeting’ took place between August 23–29, 1943, near Lake Balaton, with the participation of nearly 500 writers, poets, sociologists, and social scientists. The main slogans—questions of fate, search for a way forward, community of values—in themselves show the fear of the future, whatever the outcome of the war might be. Several of them also expressed the need for interdependence, rapprochement, some interconnection, integration, or creation of a new identity among the peoples of Central Europe.⁵⁶

3. Integration theories 1945 to present

The fact that the Second World War ended with the presence of Soviet troops in Central and Southeastern Europe had a profound impact on the history of these countries for decades. Nevertheless, for a brief period between 1945 and 1947, the idea of integration in these countries was revived. Each side, however, used the idea of rapprochement for different political ends.⁵⁷ The most active negotiations took place in the Hungarian-Romanian-Yugoslavian relationship. Although the Soviet presence was clear, even the politicians were not clear about their future: what the great powers wanted from the region or to what extent the western victors would interfere in the region’s political life. The use of the positive message of the idea of federation for current political purposes is well illustrated by a passage from the September 1945 election program of the Hungarian Communist Party:

The main goal of Hungarian foreign policy is to ensure the peace and harmony of the Danube peoples, to pave the way for the idea of Kossuth, the Danube Federation. To this end, efforts should be made not only to intensify trade but also to establish a Romanian-Yugoslav-Hungarian customs union.⁵⁸

Many territorial issues were still open until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, concluded by the anti-fascist powers with Germany’s small European allies. The most important of these was the status of Northern Transylvania. As it turned out in hindsight, the Soviets were completely unfounded in their attempts to persuade the Hungarian government of the possibility of a limited territorial revision of Transylvania. Nor did the Romanian side clearly know that all of Transylvania would be theirs. In this period of temporary uncertainty, Romanian Prime Minister Petru Groza tried to reassure both the Hungarians in Transylvania and the Hungarians in mainland Hungary

56 Ibid. pp. 268–324.

57 Gyarmati, 1986.

58 Ibid. p. 71.

that there was no need for any territorial correction of Transylvania, since the future establishment of the Federation would automatically resolve all territorial disputes. After concluding the peace, when Romania regained all of Transylvania, the Bucharest government tended to talk less and less about the possibility of a federation.

After 1947, during the period of the Cold War and the sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe and after the deterioration of Yugoslav-Soviet relations (1948), the idea of federation was dropped from the agenda. Moscow rejected all attempts to achieve this, and multilateral cooperation between the socialist countries was replaced by a system of bilateral treaties, with the agreements with the Soviet Union being the most important for every country.

For Hungary, too, membership in the Soviet bloc, the Warsaw Pact of 1955, and the Comecon of 1949 determined the possibilities and direction of its political and economic life and foreign relations. The Comecon was originally a framework for economic integration but was in fact a political response to the Marshall Plan. It did not do any real work until the early 1960s since the typical autarkic economic policies of the 1950s and the international division of labor were in themselves a contradiction.

The 'New Economic Mechanism' that unfolded from 1968 onward, increasing corporate autonomy, widening of the scope for foreign trade, and opening up of a freer reflection among economists on socialist economic integration, put a possible reform of the Comecon on the agenda. It is important to stress that this did not affect the basic relations with the Soviet Union. There was nothing to rethink in political and foreign policy relations, except in the field of economic governance. The government of Prime Minister Jenő Fock (1967–1975) created a favorable political climate for technical discussions, one of the aims of which was to improve the international division of labor within the Comecon.⁵⁹ On a theoretical level, a so-called 'little-Comecon' solution emerged. This would build closer cooperation within the Comecon between Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the GDR, countries that had a greater historical precedent and rationality in economic cooperation. The suppression of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968 and the change of direction in Hungarian and Soviet domestic policy after 1971 put a stop to any idea of reform and made it impossible to rethink economic relations between the socialist countries.

Since the early 1980s, a debate has been developing among writers, poets, philosophers, and historians in several socialist countries, especially Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, on the conceptual, substantive, and spatial possibilities of interpreting Central Europe. This led to rethinking the possibilities of cooperation between the small nations of Central Europe. 'By denying the line that divided Europe, the proponents of the idea of Central Europe were in fact proclaiming the unity of Europe, and Central Europe meant Europe.'⁶⁰ Central Europe was increasingly saturated with positive emotional content. György Konrád (1933–2019), writer and sociologist, clearly stated that 'Central Europeans are those who are offended,

59 Feitl, 2008.

60 Heiszler, 1993, p. 64.

disturbed, anxious, and tense by the division of our continent.⁶¹ Advocates of Central Europe had to face up to the negative legacy of the German world domination of the concept of Central Europe or Mitteleuropa. The ‘discovery’ of Central Europe, so often referred to, was thus also a demand for purifying Mitteleuropa, that is ‘The peoples of the region were here long before Naumann and Hitler and will remain here after them.’⁶² Since many thinkers saw the Monarchy as the embodiment of the Central Europe that had once existed, there was a marked nostalgia in the public mind for dualism. At the time of the bipolar world order, the debate about the nature of Central Europe was received by western public opinion with a certain lack of understanding. For them, ‘Central Europe is nothing but a phantom concept born of nostalgia.’⁶³

After the collapse of the bipolar world order and the regime changes in Eastern Europe, all political forces in Hungary made it clear that they saw their future in Euro-Atlantic integration, that is, in NATO membership and accession to the European Union. In 1999, Hungary became a full member of NATO. In the early 1990s, the idea of joining European integration and the institutionalization of regional cooperation in Central Europe were parallel issues.⁶⁴ There have been several attempts to achieve the latter. In November 1989, the ‘Adriatic-Danube Programme’ was launched with the participation of Italy, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. Czechoslovakia joined in 1990, and it was now called the ‘Pentagonal.’ Poland joined in 1991, and it was renamed the ‘Hexagonal.’ In 1992, the Central European Initiative was created, with 16 members by 2006. These attempts at cooperation have failed to produce any significant results and have not been able to solve the basic economic problems of the post-socialist countries, such as capital poverty and infrastructure backwardness. The Member States wishing to join have negotiated individually with the European Union. Hungary, along with 10 other countries, became a member of the European Union on May 1, 2004, in the largest enlargement process in the history of the EU.

In 1991, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland launched the so-called ‘Visegrád Group,’ the historical precursor of which was the meeting of the three Central European rulers in 1335. On March 2, 2017, the ‘Visegrad Four,’ which grew from three to four after Slovakia’s independence, adopted a declaration that forms the basis for the closer cooperation between the ‘V4’ that still exists today. The 1992 idea of the internationally renowned founder of Central European cooperation is still relevant today: ‘Central Europe today is not a reality, nor a utopia, but an alternative.’⁶⁵

61 Konrád, 1988, p. 5.

62 Hanák, 1988, p. 190.

63 Hanák, 1993, p. 294.

64 Illés, 2002.

65 Hanák, 1993, p. 301.

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