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Inhaltsverzeichnis

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A View from Mitteleuropa, or, Is There a Chance for Cultural Diversity Between Nationalism and the Brave New World?

1. Introduction

Not many years ago (1993), Trent hosted a large interdisciplinary conference on "Universality and Difference: Cosmopolitanism and Relativism in the Relationships between Social Identities and Cultures", whose keywords were the couplets universalism/relativism, globalization/ differentiation, cosmopolitanism/localism, and so forth. In that meeting I contributed some reflections of a rather global scope[1]. It seems to me that the present conference, as outlined in the call-for-papers by Dr. Glass, deals with much the same issues; only the geographical frame of reference, East/Central Europe, is more bounded. Thus, some of those arguments will inevitably reappear in the present paper. But I will frame them in the peculiar perspective of someone who is rooted in a particular place – Gorizia, Friuli – and who has invested some energies in the development of cultural relations with East/Central Europe.

Basically, my problem is the following: Is there a chance, in a Western Europe extended to the East, for a humane form of cultural pluralism? Is there a third way, between state-nationalism and capitalist uni-dimensionality? Can local/regional cultural diversity really survive the onslaught of postmodernism? Can Central/Eastern Europe draw, from her history, some indications on how to best steer her integration into the European Union?

I am not sure that such questions can be answered at all. Inevitably, the paper will end in a more normative and optative than theoretical vein. However, to that

[1] R. Strassoldo, "Prospettive di fine millennio" in: G. de Finis, R. Scartezzini (eds.), *Universalità e differenza. Cosmopolitismo e relativismo nelle relazioni tra identità sociali e culture*, Milano: Angeli, 1996.

conclusion we shall arrive by way of some conceptual and historical reconstructions, which make up most of the paper.

2. West and East in Europe

In the history of Western culture, the opposition between West and East is no less ancient and important than the one between North and South[2]. Some of its meanings have changed in the course of centuries, but a core has remained. As most very deep categories, the East-West dichotomy is marked by ambivalence and contradiction. To ancient Europeans, the East was the source of light, enlightenment, civilization, and progress; but also of religion and culture. The highest cultural values, the truest and deepest wisdom come from there. The most popular and long-lived Greek Gods, like Venus, Dionysus, and those of later cults like Isis, Sibyls and Mithra, came from the East; and so did most early philosophies, such as Stoicism. Searching for inner liberation in religion, Oriental man was considered less interested in building free political institutions. Therefore, corruption and "despotism" was the other character the Greeks found typical of the Orient. On the other side, the West (beginning with Greece) was the world of rationality and freedom, of technical domination of nature and of political liberation of the individual.

But there is more than just an Orient. To the Greeks, it started on the Aegean shores of Anatolia, and stretched southeast to Mesopotamia, Arabia and India; all lands of acknowledged high civilizations. To later Europeans, the Orient comprised also those lands which were northern to the Greeks, and which stretched from the Danube to what was known as Sarmatia and Scythia, i.e. the endless plains of modern Russia and Central Asia. And this was the land of barbarians. This was the Orient from which, for more than thirteen centuries (410-1683 BC) came wave after wave of terrifying assaults on Europe: the Huns, the Magyars, the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks. European civilization survived by a hair's breadth, and the fear of the East was imprinted in her depths. The idea of the "yellow peril" is just its more modern expression.

This deep-seated stereotype (archetype) has been transferred, in the modern era, from the Mediterranean to Continental Europe. The dawning of national consciousness among German peoples was couched in the late fifteenth century in terms of opposition, on one side with the corrupt Latins of the South, and on the other with the uncivilized Slavs (now mistakenly identified with the Scythians and Sarmatians of antiquity) of the East[3]. Later, since the eighteenth century, another

[2] I have dealt with the cultural meanings of these geographical categories in: "Nord-sud: riflessioni socio-ecologiche" in: *Annali di Sociologia- Soziologisches Jahrbuch*, 3, 1987; "The social construction and sociological analysis of space", in B. Hamm (ed.), *The social nature of space*, Warsaw: Panstowowe Wydawnietwo Naukowe, 1990; and "Tra ovest e est: l'Europa centrale" in: M. Ferrazzi, *Itinerari di idee, uomini e cose tra est ed ovest europeo*, Udine: Aviani, 1990.

[3] S. Shama, *Der Traum von der Wildnis*, Munich: Kindler, 1996: 109.

opposition became more relevant, that between French (and English) *civilization* and German *Kultur*. Civilization was rational, technical, material, individualistic; *Kultur* was moral, emotional, spiritual and collective. Politically, civilization led to the institutions of formal democracy; *Kultur*, to the authority principle. It goes without saying that in early sociology the same archetype was expressed in the opposition between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*. In our century, the opposition was subsumed in the clash between Western capitalist democracies and continental totalitarianism, either German or Russian. In Western propaganda during both World Wars the Germans were pictured as the latest embodiment of that archetypal Oriental monster, the Hun; while the Germans projected the same image on the Russian "hordes".

When Russia joined modernity and the geopolitical theater, Russian nationalists adopted the positive side of the East-West archetype. To them, the Germans represented essentially the same Western rationalistic, technical and material civilization as the French and the English; and claimed for themselves the privilege of being moral, spiritual and collectivist. The opposition was also framed in religious terms of Roman (and Protestant) vs. Byzantine Christianity. The peoples in between, from Finland to Romania, found themselves on the "conveyor belt" between the European West and East; and the middle section, from Poland to Hungary (Croatia and Transylvania included), came to be known as Central Europe or *Mitteleuropa*, the area of confrontation between the German drive to the East and the Russian drive to the West, between pan-Germanism and the symmetrical pan-Slavism. Dynastic, religious, geopolitical, economic, and military factors intertwined in complex and often painful ways in this area for a few centuries, pulling these countries toward either of the poles. The outcome of the great European Civil War, 1914-1945, seemed to have put an end to this story: the East, now garbed in Socialism, conquered the whole (almost) of Central Europe. But the Iron Curtain could not sever all of the ties attaching this area to the West, and after some convulsions, history presented us in 1989 with the most extraordinary *coup de theatre*. The West is once again the great attractor; and again, the old archetype is surfacing. The West – Germany, the European Union, and the North-Atlantic block – is admired and desired for its technical achievements, its economic efficiency and prosperity, the liberty it grants individuals, and the institutions of liberal democracy; but many fear its lack of deep, moral values, its cultural "uni-dimensionality", and of course, the more brutal side of the "animal spirits" of capitalism.

The relationship of archetypes – like stereotypes and ideologies – to reality is complex. They cannot be said to be simply true or false, because they have the peculiar quality of self-fulfilling prophecies; they tend to force people to behave in a way that makes them come true. So it is useless to dispute about the truth of the East-West archetype. It is there and many people believe in it; it is deep-seated in cultures and elaborated in philosophy and literature; it is embedded in national

ideologies and it shapes identities and behaviors. It works, as we can see – unfortunately, I might add.

3. Central Europe and *Mitteleuropa*

As is well known, the idea of *Mitteleuropa* is an endlessly debated one[4]. Three main conceptions seem to be the most popular. One has been most forcefully propounded by Friedrich Naumann and Karl von Haushofer: *Mitteleuropa* is Germany, broadly understood, plus the various countries of mixed and diverse ethnicity, but influenced by German culture, economy and politics, that lie between Germany and Russia (and, formerly, the Ottoman empire). The opposite concept limits Central Europe to these latter countries, excluding Germany: Central Europe then is the set (the conveyor-belt) of smaller countries between the German and the Russian empires. The third concept is intermediate, admitting some German-speaking regions (Austria), but not the bulk of Germany. Essentially, it identifies Central Europe with the area formerly ruled by the Habsburg empire, conceived as a multinational entity where the German element provided the political rigging and the lingua franca, but where dozens of ethnic-national cultures could thrive (more or less) equitably and peacefully.

The first concept was equated with pan-Germanism, and of course fiercely opposed both by the Western powers and by the other Central European nations. Since the times of Francis I de Valois, France has spun ties with these nations in Germany's backyard in order to keep German powers in check. This ancient tradition has been going on up to our own times, ranking as one of the most enduring geopolitical trends.

The second concept is understandably more popular with those "lesser" countries, and has been revived in the 1980s by authors like Milan Kundera and György Konrad[5]. The third concept was upheld by the ideologists of the Habsburg Empire, in order to stress the difference with (Prussian) Germany, and to claim a separate destiny. This concept however had many enemies both within and abroad and ended with the dissolution of the empire.

These two last ideas of *Mitteleuropa* had a difficult life in the inter-war period. They lingered on, like ghosts, in some small elite circles of the concerned countries, as muted nostalgia for the good old days but were loathed by the Nazis as ideas that would recall the Austria's separate identity and thus question the unity of the whole German people. On the other side, the reference to the old Habsburg empire was

[4] Besides the voluminous production of the Istituto per gli Incontri Culturali Mitteleuropei, and the other works cited in following notes, the reader can be referred here to two "voices from outside": from the Anglo-Saxon world, the classic work of H. Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German thought and action, 1815-1945*, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1955; and from the French world, the divulgative synthesis of J. Le Rider, *La Mitteleuropa*, Paris: PUF, 1994.

[5] M. Kundera, "The Tragedy of Mitteleuropa" in: *New York Times Review of Books*, April 1984; G. Conrad, *Antipolitik: Mitteleuropäischen Meditationen*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985

unsavory both to the Western powers that had brought about its dissolution, and to the successor nations. Attempts to restyle it as a model for a European federation of nations (Paneuropa), as Coudenhove-Kalergi proposed[6], did not meet much success. And of course, it became anathema, reactionary and criminal to the new Soviet rulers after the Second World War. It must also be stressed that up until the eighties it did not find much currency in the new, small, republican Austria, which simply did not want to have anything to do with her past (except in terms of folklore targeted at the tourist industry).

One source of problems is the very term. The prefix *Mittel-* is German, and thus implies a German cultural dominance in the area. That is why other terms are sometimes used, such as Central Europe or Central-Eastern Europe, or the Danube area, and others. Also in German discourse there are variations, such as *Zwischeneuropa*. Every lexical choice in this subject has its pros and cons. We shall indifferently use Central Europe and *Mitteleuropa*; in the latter case, emphatically purged of any pan-Germanic connotations.

4. The *Mitteleuropean* revival in Italy since the sixties

A new lease on life for the idea of *Mitteleuropa* came, of all places, from Italy, in three different temporal, spatial and causal contexts.

The first concerns the national cultural higher circles. Interest in Danubian literature and history was revived by Claudio Magris' book on the *Habsburg Myth in Modern Austrian Literature* (1963). Among the more refined intellectuals, *Mitteleuropa* and Vienna became fashionable topics of discussion.

It can be recalled at this point that this Italian development was paralleled by a similar one in the Anglo-American world, starting with Carl Schorske's dazzling *Fin de siecle Vienna* (1961), followed by William Johnston's *Austrian mind* (1971), Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973), and Edward Timms' *Karl Kraus* (1986) to mention only the most famous. Given the reverence of Italian culture for anything Anglo-American, this wave of studies further helped to legitimize and spur interest in *Mitteleuropa*.

Basically, there were two main reasons for interest in *Mitteleuropean* culture. Firstly, this area was acknowledged as a source of major innovations in science, art, literature, and philosophy: Freud, Boltzmann, Klimt, Mahler, Loos, Kafka, Musil, Wittgenstein, to mention but a few such innovators. Most of them where Jewish, and Jewish culture was recognized at the same time as a fundamental component both of *Mitteleuropa* and of Western twentieth century culture.

Secondly, *Mitteleuropa* was seen as the place where the crisis of modernity and the decline of European civilization were first experienced: the end of *Mitteleuropa*

[6] On the Paneuropa movement inspired by R.N. Coudenhove-Kalergi see e.g.: M. Kayma, J. de Launay, V. Pons, A. Zurcher, *Coudenhove-Kalergi, le pionner de l'Europe Unie*, Lausanne: Centre de Recherche Europeenne, 1971.

as the epitome and laboratory of the end of Europe; *Mitteleuropa* as a concentrated rehearsal of the "last days of humanity", as Kraus wrote.

Claudio Magris had done his work in Turin and published his book in Milan, but he was from Trieste, the son of Friulian immigrants. This links him also with the second context: the socio-political-economic aspirations of the North-Eastern corner of Italy in the sixties. Here the two (mostly) Italian towns of Trieste and Gorizia, which had belonged for many centuries to the Habsburg empire, found themselves cut off their traditional hinterland following the improvement of Italy's relations with their shoulders to the Iron Curtain. With the improvement of Italy's relations with Austria and Yugoslavia, and after the resolution respectively of the South Tyrol and the Venezia-Giulia conflicts, contacts with the Danubian countries across the border could be resumed. They cautiously developed at different levels: from private commercial deals to "good will" initiatives between local authorities (the "*jumelage*" movement, favored by the Council of Europe) to meetings of professionals, artists and intellectuals, to the emergence of a true "petty foreign policy" between regional governments in this area ("Alpe-Adria").

The third context is that of the "times of troubles" that plagued Italy in the seventies. Here, the ideas of Austria and of *Mitteleuropa* were vested with quite different, even opposite meanings. In contrast with their tragic role as the last outbursts of European intellectual creativity and critical rationality in face of the end of European civilization, they were seen as dreamworlds of the good life, the worlds of wise, paternal authority, honest, efficient and equitable administration, of loyal citizens and peaceful co-existence between many different peoples and nations; and, finally, as a world of elegance, taste and romance. In contrast to the intellectual's *Kakania*, in some sections of Italian moderate middle-brow public opinion, Austria and *Mitteleuropa* evoked the world of Sissi and of operetta.

This change of meaning has to be set against the background of the Italian scene in the seventies. Student unrests of '68 had soured into political terrorism (the "Red Brigades"); social and cultural changes (sexual liberation, secularization, etc.) seemed to degenerate into the collapse of all established values; crime rates soared (Mafia wars, kidnapping industry, a wave of bank robberies); the economy was in shambles (strikes, inflation of up to 24 % per year); and finally, the Communist party was about to defeat the Christian-Democrats and seize government power. There were many, grounds for moderate Italians to despair of their own country; and in the North some were led to envy peaceful and well-ordered contemporary Austria and to think back with nostalgia to the times when Italy was wisely, honestly, and efficiently (or so it now seemed in comparison) governed by the Habsburgs. In the event of a communist take-over, some fantasized about seceding from Rome and "going back" to Austria.[7] Books on the "revisionist" history of Austrian rule in Italy, and on old Austria in general, sold briskly. Some local administrations allowed cultural initiatives in

[7] G. Piazzesi, *L'Italia spiegata al popolo*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1977.

recognition, after more than a century of *Risorgimento* rhetoric, of the merits of the *ancien régime*. In Mantua the boulevard around the Palazzo Ducale was given back its old name, Viale Maria Teresa, and in Pavia the grand full portraits of the same Maria Theresa and Joseph II were reinstated in the Main Hall of that famous university. Some of Italy's most popular conservative opinion makers, like Gianfranco Miglio and Indro Montanelli, wrote articles in this vein; Marshal Radetzky and Emperor Franz Joseph, formerly only loathed as the henchmen of Italian patriots, were rehabilitated. The "*Mitteleuropean*" cultural activities in Gorizia drew interest and sympathetic comments in the Northern Italian press.[8]

5. The "*Mitteleuropean cultural meetings*" in Gorizia

Magris' legitimization of the concept of *Mitteleuropa* prompted a group of intellectuals and politicians in Gorizia to establish in 1966 an institute (ICM, Institute for Mitteleuropean Cultural Meetings) to promote meetings of scholars from the countries of the area. Gorizia would present herself as a bridge between Italian and Central-European cultures, across ideological and national barriers. It was felt that high culture would be the more opportune, and perhaps the only possible, avenue to try to re-build the web of relations that once tied this town, and this region, to Central Europe, and which had given them meaning and function, identity and prosperity.

The first meeting was dedicated to poetry. Poets and literati came from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Germany, Hungary and, of course, Italy. The star guests were Giuseppe Ungaretti, the dean of Italian poets who had composed some of his more famous verses right in these places while serving as a soldier during the Great War; and Mario Luzi, who chaired the meeting. In the following years, the meetings dealt with other cultural genres: narrative (1967); "Values and Functions of 'Traditional Culture'" (1968); "City Planning in Mitteleuropa" (1970); "Architecture and Society in M.E." (1971); "Theater in M.E." (1972); "Philosophy in M.E." (1974); "Painting in M.E." (1975); "Music in M.E." (1976); "Human Values and Humor in M.E." (1977); "Psychoanalysis and Culture in M.E." (1984); and "Linguistic Themes in M.E." (1987). In these meetings, as a rule, each contributor would speak of recent developments and of the state of the art in his own country; less frequent were the attempts to delineate trends common and specific to *Mitteleuropa*.

Other meetings were dedicated to eminent historical figures: "G. I. Ascoli: The Present Relevance of his Thought in the 150th Anniversary of his Birth" (1979); "Maria Theresa and her Times" (1980); or to specific themes: "Jewish Culture and

[8] I have described in more detail this "Habsburgic revival" in Italy in my "Grenzen und Systeme: soziologische Gedanken über Mitteleuropa" in: H.A. Steger, R. Morell (eds.), *Ein Gespenst geht um...Mitteleuropa*, Munich: Eberhard, 1987.

"M.E. Literature" (1982); "Educational Systems as a Factor of Cultural Unity in Alpe Adria and the Danube Basin" (1983); "The Vienna School in Art History" (1986); "Minorities in M.E." (1987); "M.E.: 1900-1945: Identities and Confrontations" (1990); "The Christian Fabric of M.E.: 1919-1989" (1992); "Border Culture" (1995); "State, Nation and Federalism in M.E." (1997); and "Mutual Knowledge and Representation among the Peoples of M.E." (1998). Finally, a number of meetings dealt with the very idea of Mitteleuropa: "Myth and Reality of Mitteleuropa" (1969); "Mitteleuropa through the Times" (1973); "For an Image of M.E.: Documents and Perspectives" (1981); "Mitteleuropean Culture: Studies and Reflections" (1985); "M.E. in the Twenties: Culture and Society" (1989).

The proceedings of most of the meetings have been published either by the Institute or by national publishing houses.

The Institute also organized other activities, such as conferences and exhibitions, both in Gorizia and in other countries (mostly Austria). In the first years, its activities generated a widespread interest, and even excitement, in the local community and attendance of these events was strong. Local state authorities were a bit upset by this show of interest in foreign cultures and in the concept of Mitteleuropa; "Austriacantismo" (sympathy for Austria) was still a bad word in Italian nationalist circles and the opening to cultures of Slavic or communist countries aroused all sorts of suspicions. In the earlier years, the meeting venues were guarded by a row of policemen with machine guns, and secret service agents would mingle with the audience. Probably, some of the "foreign delegations" also had their own covert agents. Since some time, all this is gone: both the authorities' suspicions and the public excitement. Meetings have turned into normal scholarly seminars, with little appeal for the general public.[9]

However, the Institute managed to make the term Mitteleuropa, and the openness to cultures beyond the border, a widespread feature of Gorizian life. Libraries in town are well-stocked with books on these subjects, and a small specialized publishing house (Editrice Goriziana) is thriving.

6. Grassroots Mitteleuropa in the Gorizia and Trieste area

A curious consequence, or concomitant, is the spread of the Mitteleuropa idea at the grassroots. In 1974 an association called "Civiltà Mitteleuropea" was established in Cervignano del Friuli, a small town lying on the former Italian-Austrian border, where some memories of the old regime had quietly survived sixty years of annexation to Italy. In a few months it spread to the whole of the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, with many hundreds of affiliates. Its main activity is the

[9] A synopsis of the activities of the ICM up to 1986 has been published by R. Tubaro (ed) *Cultura Mitteleuropea. Vent'anni di lavoro, di studi e ricerche*, Gorizia: ICM, 1986. For information on later activities and a catalogue of publications the reader is kindly referred to the Institute, Via Mazzini 20, Gorizia, tel. 0481-535085. The institute also publishes a bulletin, *Cadmos*.

organization of a yearly festival in the town of Cormons. In the first years, it was called the "Festival for the Imperial Anniversary" (Franz Joseph's ascent to the throne); later, the "Festival of the Peoples of Mitteleuropa". First seen with disdain by good Italian patriots and with suspicion by public authorities, and then accepted as harmlessly folkloristic, the festival had growing success, drawing crowds from the whole region and then also from neighboring countries. Its posters are printed in five languages: Italian, Friulian, German, Slovene, and Hungarian. On the festival grounds there are kiosks selling curios, stickers, souvenirs and all sorts of merchandise relating to the "good old times". For a long time, this was the only place in the former Habsburg territories where Franz Joseph was celebrated. Since the Eighties, it is officially endorsed and attended also by local public authorities, and by official delegations of other countries. Understandably, Austrians - from the Imperial Family to governmental authorities from the higher level down to busloads of common people - are the most numerous and hailed guests. After twenty-four years, the festival is still going strong, drawing several tens of thousands people. With the income from the festival, the Association "Civiltà Mitteleuropea" supports many other activities. Among the first was the reinstatement of the bronze monument of Emperor Maximilian I in the center of the town of Cormons. The leaders of the association are often invited to several Central European capitals (especially Vienna, Prague and Budapest) for conferences, ceremonies and consultation. The president, Dr. Paolo Petiziol, has been named Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic. Chapters of the association have been established in some Italian and Danubian towns.[10]

7. Mitteleuropa on a small scale: The Alpe-Adria working community

In the sixties, the steady improvement of relations between Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia; the growth of the economy of the neighboring regions of Friuli-V.G., Slovenia, Croatia, Carinthia; the increasing mobility of people and goods across the borders; the need for common policies in the field of infrastructures; and similar phenomena made it necessary for local and regional governments to develop their own small-scale "foreign" policies. Since the sixties, they would meet to discuss common problems, to cooperate in some fields and to express their friendship. They joined the "Movement of European Trans-frontier Regions" which was already flourishing along the Rhine axis and which was receiving keen attention and endorsement by the Council of Europe and, a little later, by the EEC itself. The ideology of this movement was that: national borders are the "scars of history" which must be overcome; that often national borders separate regional communities which share very similar histories and cultures, and which therefore aspire to re-establish

[10] The Association publishes a quarterly journal, *Mitteleuropa*, Via Predicort 21, Cervignano del Friuli tel. 0431.32904. See also R. Strassoldo, Marlies Kufnal, "Civiltà Mitteleuropea: Geschichte und Soziologie einer Bewegung und der nordöstlichen Grenze Italiens" in: K. von Bonin (ed) *Mitteleuropa*, Evangelische Akademie Hofgeismar, 1981; idem, "L'associazione culturale Mitteleuropa" in: *Studi Goriziani*, n. 89, 1995.

some sense of unity; thus, it is from here that the most effective, popular pressure for European integration would come; but that this very process entails special problems for frontier regions so that they deserve special attention from national and Community centers; that what is needed is not just the Europe of the markets, economy and capital, or the Europe of the Patries, but a Europe of the Regions.

Armed with such precedents and ideology, the regions between the Alps and the upper Adriatic signed in 1978 in Venice a protocol establishing the Working Community Alpe-Adria. Founding members were two Italian regions (Friuli V.G- and Veneto), two Yugoslav republics (Croatia and Slovenia), three Austrian Länder (Carinthia, Styria, and Upper Austria), plus two "active observers", Bavaria and Salzburg. It is widely held that one of the driving forces in the initiative was Bavaria's energetic governor, Franz-Joseph Strauss, and that the basic motive was Bavaria's interest in securing an infrastructural corridor to the Adriatic sea and an expansion axis toward the Balkans. But these geopolitical and geo-economic interpretations belittle the importance of many other actors and scopes. For the Socialist regions, the Alpe-Adria provided a very interesting institutional environment within which to explore the workings of the capitalist, liberal-democratic system and to establish ties with it. Conversely, for the western regions, Alpe-Adria was an instrument for spreading their values. For all of them, it was an opportunity to promote mutual knowledge, sympathy, and good will.

More regions joined in the following years, notably several Hungarian counties. Alpe-Adria stretched from Milan to Pecs, from Linz to Dubrovnik. Quite clearly, it looked more and more like a junior Mitteleuropa. For about ten years it produced meetings, resolutions, studies, projects, publications, protocols, and some cooperation in practical fields. The name Alpe-Adria acquired some popularity. In the Friuli region, it was given to the main motorway, the largest shopping center, a radio station, a bank, and many other institutions and associations.

It is hard to assess the practical effects of all this, but at least two indicators can be cited. First, in the Austrian constitutional revision of the Eighties, the Länder managed to obtain some competencies in the field of foreign, especially cultural, relations. Secondly, at the time of the Yugoslav breakdown in 1991, the regional Government of Friuli V.G. expressed itself strongly in favor of Croatia's and Slovenia's bid for independence in opposition to the Italian central government's position which was much more cautious, not to say hostile. The sympathy built in so many years of cooperation had become very effective[11].

[11] For some recent summaries on the Alpe-Adria see R. Strassoldo, "Perspectives on frontiers: the case of Alpe Adria", in M. Anderson, E. Bort (eds.), *The Frontiers of Europe*, London and Washington: Pinter, 1998; and "Cross-border cooperation from the perspective of the ARGE Alpe Adria: empirical findings" in: G. Brunn, P. Schmitt-Egner (eds.), *Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in Europa. Theorie, Empirie, Praxis*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998.

8. The Mitteleuropa debate in Germany and Austria in the eighties

In the eighties, interest in the Mitteleuropa concept was revived in Austria and West Germany, in the context of new political developments in the area. On one side, it was clear that in countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the socialist system was faltering, the attraction of the West was mounting, and the regimes survived only thanks to the Russian tanks. The possibility of very cautious, gradual opening and loosening of their satellite status was resumed. On the other side, the confrontation between NATO and the USSR climbed to new peaks of tension, with the deployment of a new generation of missiles on both sides (the SS-20 and Pershing missile crisis).

Against this contradictory general background, Austria and Germany showed different developments as regards our theme. In Austria, the traditional policy of strict neutrality, of refusal to accept any inheritance from the past, and of abstention in meddling in short-range European problems, was giving way to the moral necessity of playing a more active role in the dynamics of Central European politics – plainly said, in helping the neighboring peoples to develop and free themselves. In this, the strengthening of cultural relations, and thus the re-evaluation of historical-common ground, provided a first operational space. To cite an example from our own professional field, in 1987 the Austrian Sociological Association invited sociologists from all neighboring countries to actively participate in its general congress and other activities, and the idea of an Association of Central European sociologists was aired. The concept of Mitteleuropa, emphatically purged of former Naumannian and imperial connotations, was again used – in addition to synonyms like Central Europe and the Danube region – in symposia, publications and institutions. One of the driving forces in this development was former Vienna Mayor and federal vice-chancellor Erhard Busek[12]. And it can be noted that the role of the Gorizia meetings in bestowing a new legitimacy to the concept of Mitteleuropa – the "Gorizia spirit" – was acknowledged by these people in Vienna.

In West Germany, the idea of Mitteleuropa was again taken up in the context of the debate on Ost-Politik and on the chances of German re-unification. One such chance was seen in the loosening of both German states' ties with their respective blocs, and the building of a de-militarized, neutral area in Central Europe, from the North Sea to the Balkans. This course was favored by pacifists and neutralist movements, generally of leftist leanings, but also with some support of religious groups in both Germanies. Symmetrically, it was rabidly opposed by the dominant pro-NATO forces (the "American party") and those determined to proceed towards the full integration of West Germany in the European Union. The idea of the two German states joining a neutral Mitteleuropa, as a third party between the West and the East, was seen as a dangerous utopia, whose sole effect would be to undermine

[12] E. Busek, G. Wilfinger (eds.), *Aufbruch nach Mitteleuropa: Rekonstruktion eines versunkenen Kontinent*, Vienna: Atelier, 1986.

the German will to stay in Atlantic Europe, and therefore to weaken the whole Western block[13]. In this general context, some debates on the historical roots and the perspectives of Mitteleuropa were held, in the mid-eighties, also in Germany[14].

However, the situation changed completely with the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and of the socialist regimes in all satellite countries. There was no longer a need to elaborate complex strategies for the gradual liberation of Central European countries from the Russian empire, for the re-emergence of a Third Europe between West and East. Now everybody in the East just claimed to be integrated in the prosperous, free West and hoped to join both NATO and the European Union.

9. The latest try: the Central European Initiative (INCE)

As a geopolitical concept, Mitteleuropa appeared to be dead for a second time. Also its junior, the Alpe-Adria Working Community, underwent some soul-searching. Now that all the states in the area could freely and eagerly cooperate at the central levels, and all of them shared the same liberal-democratic, market system, it seemed that the grass-roots, regional level of cooperation had become less strategic. Croatia and Slovenia, now upgraded to full statehood, had some formal problems in continuing cooperation with mere regions, Länder, etc. of neighboring states. They resolved to remain, but to be represented only by foreign ministers, and not by heads of state[15]. At any rate, the activities were resumed on many levels, as can be seen by this very conference.

An attempt to revive, with another name, the idea of Mitteleuropa started in the days of the breakdown of the Soviet empire in 1989, largely at the initiative of Italian Foreign Minister, de Michelis, who had already shown great interest in the idea of Mitteleuropa[16]. It was clear that the dominant economic power in Central Europe was, once again, Germany, and that the newly-liberated countries would orient themselves in that direction. The idea was to build a structure of cooperation among the countries in the area in which also Austria and Italy would participate; a sort of renewed Little Entente. This time however, France is not in the picture, although it is well known that the ancient geopolitical instincts of favoring any counterweight to German power in Central and South-Eastern Europe have surfaced again. At Italy's insistence, an initiative called "Quadrangle" was set up in 1989 between Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Hungary and then extended to a "Pentagon" and to a "Hexagon", with the accession respectively of Czechoslovakia and Poland; and it was finally christened

13 An example of this debate is the colloquium edited by the noted French-Hungarian political analyst F. Fejto in *Documents*, 1987.

14 See the Hofgeismar and Regensburg meetings of 1981 and 1986 respectively, whose proceedings are cited in notes 8 and 10.

15 G. delli Zotti, *Dentro il triangolo di Visegrad*, Gorizia: Isig, 1994.

16 De Michelis had promoted the publication since 1986 of a glossy magazine *called Mitteleuropa - la rivista di Alpe Adria*, edited by his brother Cesare, a noted Italian publisher.

Central European Initiative, INCE. It now comprises sixteen states, some of which from the former USSR. A standing secretariat, almost entirely at Italy's expense, was created in Trieste. It is too early to tell what will come out of this third version of Mitteleuropa. Personally, we do not expect much: firstly because a spread in space is usually accompanied by a dilution in contents and by operational difficulties; secondly because the INCE seems to remain a basically Italian initiative, and this country does not seem to command enough stamina to counterbalance the dominant German position in the area.

10. Final remarks

Most analyses of the concept of Mitteleuropa revolve around two questions. The first is: Is Mitteleuropa a reality, or has it ever been?; the second: If Mitteleuropa is only a myth, a state of mind, a Utopia, is it nevertheless worth cultivating and pursuing? Does it have a meaning and a function in our society?

Our personal answer to the first question is: Yes, Mitteleuropa has been a reality; it was indeed the complex world between Germany and Russia, a world of many smaller nations, inextricably intertwined, overlaid and scattered, diverse by ethnicity, religion, and political allegiance, but united by many ties developed in a long common history. Most of them were, for some centuries, part of the Habsburg Empire. Like all empires, this had its bloody, repressive side; but it undoubtedly also exerted a pacifying and civilizing influence. In its last few decades, it had serious chances of evolving into a genuine, multinational federation of peoples, a United States of Central Europe. Such evolution was not allowed to progress, due to the nationalist frenzy within, and the geopolitical pressures from without. It is widely held that its suppression, mainly due to the ancestral hostility of France, had been one of the most tragic mistakes of this century. The attempt to carve out of a set of homogeneous, viable nation-states has faltered because of the complexity of ethnic structure. The successor states, pretending to be nationally homogeneous, proved often less tolerant of their "minorities" than the Empire had been of its "peoples". If a Central European Federation had come into existence, one of the causes of the Second World War – the Nazi drive to annex all territories inhabited by Germans – would have been missing. After the Second World War, this cause of conflict has been removed by the forced transfer of about ten million people, mostly Germans: the fourth (after the Greek-Turk exchange of populations in 1921-2, the Jewish tragedy and the Stalinist resettlement of some peoples, like Volga Germans and Crimean Tartars, during the War) and largest ethnic cleansing operation to take place on European soil. The conflicts over other minorities and territorial claims in the successor states were forcibly muted under Soviet rule, but they kept burning, nourishing rabid nationalism and repressive policies which are still in force in some countries. The outburst of nationalist emotions in Central Europe after 1989 has been a surprise only to those who were ignorant of the realities of this area.

Mitteleuropa has been a political reality which had many shadowy sides, as all human constructions, but which, compared to the horrors that have swept this area after the fall of the Empire, can be judged as relatively humane and positive.

Moreover, it has been a cultural reality of incredible richness. The complexity of its ethnic structure seems to have been extremely conducive to engagement in intellectual pursuits and to creativity in the arts and sciences, especially in the 1870-1930 period. The contributions to human culture and civilization that have sprung from this relatively small area, and in particular out of its larger cities – Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Graz, Trieste – is incredible.

Generally speaking, history is written and taught from the perspective of nation-states, especially of the conquering ones, and thus both the potentials of Habsburg Mitteleuropa to become a liberal, democratic, progressive federation, and the collective achievements of this area as a whole in the cultural realm have been overlooked until recently. But history should also tell the truth. The truth about Mitteleuropa has been suppressed for too long by her historical enemies and by the nationalist historiographies of the successor states. Thus it is a moral imperative to redress the injustice and to tribute Mitteleuropa with the honors it deserves.

As we see, historical studies of the real Mitteleuropa of the past certainly have full legitimacy. But what about the second question? Does Mitteleuropa represent a meaningful, functional ideal in present and future society?

Present society seems dominated by two main mega-trends. The first is modernization and post-modernization, the spread of capitalist economies, economic development, consumerism, technological innovation, mass-communication, cultural industries, and so on. The second is the persistence, or even exacerbation, of deep-seated emotional needs, such as the need for identity and identifications and for roots; the "quest for community"; and perhaps also the symmetrical need for an enemy. The historical success of the nation-state is due not only to its capability to bring about modernization, development, and prosperity, but also to its ability to provide a sense of community within, and often, an enemy without. Nationalism is the political expression of very simple, basic instincts.

There has been much talk among intellectuals in the last decades about the demise of the nation-state, but most people continue to live in a world shaped primarily by it, and it cannot be denied that the state is still both powerful and functional. Thus, state-nationalism is still one of the main driving forces in present society; and still one of the great dangers.

There is a political doctrine that tries to minimize the negative aspects both of modernization/globalization (or capitalist development, as the Marxists would put it) and of parochial state-nationalism; it is federalism: the idea that it is possible to build political systems where a plurality of lesser units learn to cooperate and build ever larger units without losing their identity and autonomy. It is a complex, difficult doctrine that does not easily arouse popular enthusiasms; it requires a high degree of rationality, and tolerance, which are not easily found among the masses. It does not

appeal to basic instincts like nationalism or, on the opposite extreme, angelical one-worldism.[17]

The European Union, despite the common currency, market, and so on, is far from being a federation. It is still a confederation of sovereign nation-states, which shows very clearly in its inability to have a serious common foreign policy and its scrupulous respect for sacrosanct national autonomy in cultural affairs. In our view, the degree of genuine cultural integration (as different from homogenization to mass, global culture) in Europe is still very low.

There was a time in Central Europe when more than two dozen different peoples managed to live more or less peacefully in the framework of a single political organization. Each could develop its own culture and identity, but there was also a strong sense of loyalty and pride in a common citizenship. Perhaps that historical experience can be of use in the further development of a United Europe.

The federal model can be visualized as a set of ever-larger and higher circles of territorial communities (horizons, identities, levels, etc.) surrounding the individual: family, village/neighborhood, town, province/district, region, state, supra-national entities, continent (international region), world. Europe is today certainly a very relevant horizon which draws much attention and efforts; and it is one of the main historical missions of our generations to make it stronger and ever more real. But Europe is also a highly differentiated cultural area. Its regional peculiarities should be harmonized, but certainly not effaced. "Region" is used here with a very general meaning, in conscious opposition to nation. Nation-states may be, in some rare cases, homogeneous cultural regions; in most cases, they are made up of smaller such regions. But there are obviously also European supra-national regions, such as Scandinavia, the Baltic states, the Iberian peninsula, the Balkans, the Francophone countries, and the British isles. Mitteleuropa (or Central Europe, or the Danube basin), is one of them; and it can be one of the legitimate cultural horizons of people living in it, both as a tribute of what it has been and a model of fruitful coexistence between widely different ethnic/national communities.

The Mitteleuropean identity is thus an expression of a more general federal/regional outlook. This attitude posits itself as a third alternative to the two objectively stronger ones: the drift into faceless and rootless global modern culture

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[17] The literature on federalism is enormous; in the last few years also in Italy, as a consequence of the rise of the Lega Nord. My views on it were shaped much earlier, especially by the works of a French and Swiss group of doctrinaires of European federalism, such as: Denis de Rougemont (*Lettre ouverte aux européens*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1970, and many other books and essays); B. Voyenne (*Histoire de l'idée fédéraliste*, Paris: Presses d'Europe, 1976, and many others); Y. Foucre (*L'europe aux cent drapeaux*, Paris: Presses d'Europe, 1968; also by some German sources, such as F. Esterbauer, G. Alexandre Marc, Guy Héraud, F. Kinsky, and others; also Héraud, P. Pernthaler (eds.), *Föderalismus als Mittel permanenter Konfliktregelung*, Vienna: Braumüller, 1977.

(that is, in large part, American culture) and the persistence of old-fashioned, parochial state- or ethnic nationalism[18].

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[18] A fuller elaboration of these themes can be found in the essay cited in n. 8. There is also a Slovene translation of it, as "Meje in Sistemi: Socioloske misli o Sredni Evropi" in: P. Vodopivec (ed.) *Srednia Europa*, Ljubljana: Zalozba Mladinska Knjiga, 1991.