НОВІТНЯ ІСТОРІЯ

Alexandr Sych

Some remarks on the problem of political system evolution in the Central-Eastern European countries in the interwar period

From the author's viewpoint, the principal question for the peoples of the Central and Eastern European countries in the twentieth century was the problem of so called "historical choice". Under "historical choice" the author means the difficult problem for the nations of this region to choose the most optimum way of their further development. The case is that at the beginning of the 20th century the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe had to do away with their "civilization lag" comparatively with advanced countries of the Western world. It seemed that some of them obtained such chance after the First World War that drastically altered the map of Central and Eastern Europe. Nine new independent states appeared or reappeared. The peoples of these states had to choose the most optimum way of their social, economic and political development.

As it is generally known, according to the intentions of so-called the Versailles Peace System initiators, the post-war settlement grounds in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in establishing the right of nations to self-determination (or Wilsonian "principle of nationality". Proclaiming this principle, however, the "Versailles architects" primarily pursued

Сич Олександр Іванович *- доктор історичних наук, професор, завідувач кафедри історії нового та новітнього часу Чернівецького національного університету імені Юрія Федьковича.*

their own geopolitical interests, and that is why this right was enjoyed only by those, who were supposed to 'deserve' such honor. It is worth taking into account that the Baltic States, Finland, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were created as a barrier to the westward expansion of the Soviet Communism and as a threat in the rear to deter German revival. On the other hand, the Western leaders repeatedly violated this right by themselves or turned a blind eye to others' encroaching, for example, restored Poland.

Furthermore, the great powers' leaders reached the postwar settlement in this region absolutely disregarding the whole complex of complicated circumstances, determining its specifics: confessional, national, social and others. As a famous historian Eric Hobsbawm noted at the time, "This brief glance immediately reveals the utter impracticability of the Wilsonian principle to make state frontiers coincide with the frontiers of nationality and language"[1]. For Hungarians, for example, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the status of the Trianon Treaty (1920) represented the crippling of historical Hungary, a disaster that has lessened the geopolitical status of Hungary in the region, and has also physically divided many families[2].

The treaties of the Paris Peace Conference, in fact, violated the principles of national self-determination by leaving significant pockets of minorities outside the borders of their national homelands. At a fast pace, such - rather mechanical - application of self-identity principle reproduced ruined empires in a miniature in almost each state of Central and Eastern Europe, where their population was either oppressed or unequally treated. Now, having occupied the position of the title nation, it came to dominate but saving a position unequal to other ethnic minorities. The governments of these newly-established states refused these minorities in the right to self-identity, which was guaranteed to their own nations.

Therefore, the ethnic minorities' situation aggravated because of the leaders' nationalistic frenzy of these newly formed states. The nationalist euphoria succumbed to the representatives of different political forces, including those who declared their commitment to democratic values. For instance, Stanislaw

Grabski, while serving as a chairman of the Sejm Foreign Affairs Committee, delivered a speech in Poznan in October 1919, which expressed the National Democratic vision of Western Poland future, "We want to base our relationships on love, but there is one kind of love for countrymen and another for aliens. Their percentage among us is definitely too high. The foreign element will have to consider whether it will not be better off elsewhere; Polish land for the Poles!"[3].

Accordingly, the post-war peaceful settlement sowed the seeds of ethnic enmity, rivalry and entrenchment between the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, it should be noted, that this ethnic strife, generated by ethnic nationalism, gave their poisonous fruits in the form of mutual atrocities and even later on. For example, the Hungarians and the Serbs committed mutual atrocities during the Second World War. There were massacres committed by the Hungarian army in Novi Sad in 1942, and there was bloody revenge on behalf of the partisans of Tito in 1945[4].

The victors in the First World War believed that the application of the principle of national self-determination would not only guarantee peace among the states of Central-Eastern European region but would allow, in an area previously ruled by authoritarian governments, the functioning of democratic political institutions[5]. Really, the terms of peace settlement did unambiguously promote democracy and provided advance of democratic institutions and thus these conditions had spurred the establishment of representative regimes throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

After WWI the modernization reforms along Western lines (industrialization, an introduction of democratic procedures, basics of parliamentarism, etc) began in the countries of the mentioned region. However, the period of modernization was minimized by a number of reasons such as monarchism, government centralism, tough social control, corporatism, clericalism, commitment to social stability and order, negative attitude to innovations, traditionalism. These phenomena of specific political and legal culture were inherited by so called Successor States as a result of disintegration of Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian empires, moreover, their peoples were as

a part of which, during some centuries. This imperial legacy (in fact, the legacy of agrarian or traditional society) was one of the major reasons, having caused the evolution of their political system from democracy to authoritarian dictatorships in the interwar period.

The nationalism became another reason of such evolution and it had negative impact on the fate of democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the interwar period. Moreover, since the First World War nationalism had essentially become the composition and even the basis of ideology in newly formed countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It had become a factor of both internal and external instability of these states.

Firstly, nationalism influenced the national problem aggravation and actually preserved and even intensified ethnic minorities' discrimination by the title nation representatives. As an example it is worth mentioning the oppression of the Ukrainians, the Jews and the Germans in Poland, the Hungarians and the Ukrainians in Romania, etc.

Secondly, the nationalism posed the continuous threat to democratic institutions, as democracy is inherently incompatible with nationalism of the twentieth century's sample, because it magnifies only its nation and it is often hostile to people of other nations. For that reason nationalism became an important factor that contributed to the failure of democracy in Eastern and Central Europe and to their transition to authoritarian and even pro-fascist dictatorships with nationalist overtones.

Thirdly, nationalism as the part of the state ideology and social life influenced Central-Eastern countries' foreign policy making, which often led to a deterioration of bilateral relations, territorial claims, etc. Thus, the unsolved problems of ethnic minorities and so called 'unfair' borders became the source of permanent instability both in the countries of the aforesaid region and between them. This fact was used by aggressive fascist powers in the 1930s.

So, the ferocious nationalism was one of main reasons for long-lasting uncertainty in the states of Central and Eastern Europe, added to armory of the national movement's leaders, who happened to come to power in these countries.

As it turned out, nationalism of small nations, which established their statehood after WWI, was equally intolerant and aggressive, as well as great-power chauvinism of collapsed empires, in which they were in oppressed position. In author's opinion, the «nationalistic flavor» of the new states formation in Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War is largely predetermined by the democratic regimes and institutes' decline and the establishment of the authoritarian pro-fascist dictatorships.

Consequently, the end of the First World War brought many changes to political system in Central and Eastern European countries. A democratic form of government had been established, but conflicts between various parties and their leaders kept it from being very effective. Moreover, the old aristocrats and landowners still had power and opposed to the modernization process in numbers of these countries. Regrettably, new democratic governments could not solve the problems, faced during the modernization reforms.

In 1926 general Joseph Pilsudski led his armed followers on Warsaw and factually made the coup d'état. Within few days, Pilsudski was in control of the government. Although from time to time he held various offices in the government, he was really the dictator of Poland until his death in 1935.

Much the same thing was true in the other countries of Central-Eastern Europe. There were various kinds of dictatorships - both military and royal dictatorships. Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia were all monarchies in which the king set up a royal dictatorship. In Romania, the government was menaced by the Iron Guard, a fascist party which had the support of Nazi Germany. As a result, many of these authoritative regimes were close to fascism and may be called as pro-fascist or semi-fascist. After fifteen years since the First World War ended, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, not one of the states created or reorganized at the Paris Peace Conference remained a democracy[6].

The rulers of these authoritative regimes involved their countries in the Second World War on side of Nazi Germany and by that had put the peoples on the edge of national catastrophe. Therefore, after WWII the nations of this region had to choose again the most optimum way of their social development and the model of political system.

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Олександр Сич

Деякі зауваження до проблеми еволюції політичної системи в країнах Центрально-Східної Європи в міжвоєнний період

На думку автора, перед народами Центральної та Східної Європи, які здобули свою державність по закінченню Першої світової війни, постало питання історичного значення, а саме: яку модель суспільного розвитку обрати та яка політична система буде найбільш оптимальною для їхніх молодих держав?

Велику роль як у створенні цих держав, так і у їхній подальшій долі відіграв зовнішній чинник в особі країн-переможниць у світовій війні, передусім провідних країн Антанти та США. У статті зазначається, що непродумане, часом механічне застосування останніми так званого «принципу національності» (тобто права народів на національне самовизначення) при визначенні

кордонів між новоутвореними державами, яке ігнорувало історичну специфіку центрально-східноєвропейського регіону, призвело вже незабаром до зростання міжетнічної ворожнечі, посилення напруги у міждержавних стосунках, виникнення низки територіальних конфліктів.

Також провідні західні політики - «архітектори Версаля» - були зацікавлені в ліквідації авторитарної спадщини імперій, що зазнали краху внаслідок світової війни, та здійсненні процесів демократизації в країнах, які виникли в Європі після війни. Тому із наданням і міжнародним визнанням їхньої національної державності народам даного регіону була запропонована й модель суспільної системи західного зразка. У статті вказано на причини, чому спроби демократизації політичної системи в цих країнах (крім Чехословаччини) виявилися невдалими, і, зокрема, на таку, як імперська спадщина в суспільно-політичному житті народів Центральної та Східної Європи.

Автор привертає увагу до такого явища, як націоналізм, вважаючи його вельми важливим чинником, який значною мірою зумовив еволюцію політичної системи від демократичних інститутів і процедур до встановлення авторитарних режимів і згортання демократичних порядків. Дана обставина зіграла неабияку роль у зовнішньополітичній орієнтації цих режимів на нацистську Німеччину, сателітами якої вони стали в роки Другої світової війни, що, зрештою, поставило їх народи на межу національної катастрофи.

Ключові слова: принцип національного самовизначення, етнічні меншини, модернізація, демократія, націоналізм, авторитарні диктатури.