

# MILAN HODŽA – ONE OF THE GREATEST PERSONALITIES OF SLOVAK POLICY

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## **Abstract**

In submitted article the authors will present one of the most important Slovak politician – Milan Hodža. Even if we describe him as an excellent statesman we will focus mainly on his strategic and geopolitical thinking. His idea of Central Europe federation is one of the most influential theories of Slavonian geopolitics. In our analysis of his political career and thinking we present Milan Hodža as politician who saw the necessity of creation an independent state of Czechs and Slovaks. On the other side, under the influence of German expansion in Europe he was free to the idea of a state federation in Central Europe as better defense against this influence. Although he was in first line pretender of an independent national state, from the international relations point of view he was realist and preferred to lose some part of sovereignty in name of stability and peace in Europe.

**Key words:** *Hodža, Slovak policy, Central Europe, federation, movement Hlas, Agrarian Party*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Slovak politics remained less active in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was created as a result of Compromise between Austria and Hungary in 1867. There were specific problems, especially in the Hungarian part of Monarchy. Hodža realized the situation and he wanted to change it. His political career begun in the movement called Hlasist<sup>1</sup>. The movement showed the basic

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<sup>1</sup> The movement was named for the newspaper Hlas. It has been published since 1898 till 1904. The first publisher was Pavol Blaho. The ideological background of the movement came from T. G. Masaryk, he was

problems of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise. They also did not agree with the conditions of minorities in the Monarchy. Milan Hodža was strongly supporting the idea of the Monarchy reform. The idea came from the Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire Franz Ferdinand de' Este. It was planned to give more rights to the minorities and Franz Ferdinand realized difficulty of the situation. The plans were broken up by the First World War.

After the First World War, Hodža started to present his own conception of foreign policy. The Republic of Czechoslovakia gave him the place to fulfill his ambitions in field of foreign policy. The main contribution was situated in the field of Central Europe. Hodža knew the importance of this geographical unit and he was also beware of economic benefits including Central Europe. The Central Europe should have been transformed to the strong economic unit which would be capable to compete with states of the West Europe. The most specific character of the unit should be the strongest in exporting of agricultural products. Hodža tried to make the planes real when he was a prime minister of the Republic of Czechoslovakia from November 1935 till September 1938. He made some visits around the neighbouring countries, in which he wanted to introduce the plan of integration of Central Europe. The plans ended with escalating fear coming from Germany in September 1938. Definitely, the attempts were failed by signing the Munich treaty. After that, Hodža escaped to the emigration to United States where he wrote his book – Federation in the Central Europe.

### **THE BEGINS OF MILAN HODŽA'S POLITICAL CAREER**

Milan Hodža was one of the greatest personalities of Slovak politics. Vladimír Zuberec describes his character and his political behavior. *“During the longtime political career he stepped as “a strong man”. With his political erudition, great meaning of every possibilities of political fight – for compromise, lobby also tactical back offs”* (Zuberec, 2003, p. 215). In the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire began his long political career. In Hlasist movement he belonged to younger members. Matej Beránek described this movement as *“movement influenced by the idea of czechoslovakism, works of T. G. Masaryk and L. N. Tolstoj, and ideas of agrarianism. They had very critic position against situation in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy. They didn't agree with pressure of Magyarization, and the election passivity of the Slovak National Party.”* (Beránek, 2013, p. 474) In 1898, he wrote: *“The time is ticking and with our passivity we haven't done nothing. We didn't achieve only a small attempt of the national activity. Nowadays, the political thing of ours is abandon as it was before years and years. We didn't try only a small excitement of thoughts...”* (Hodža, 1898, p. 227) During this time his first thoughts about international policy appeared. Hodža wanted to reform dualistic system of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Hungarian part of Monarchy was not ideal environment for others minorities. Fukuda Hiroshi says: *“The Magyar elite preferred*

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given to it a basic view on politics. Many of Hlas members stayed active in Czechoslovak politics during the Republic of Czechoslovakia. The most of them became the members of the Agrarian Party. To Hlas movement (or Hlasist) belonged such personalities like Vavro Šrobár and also Milan Hodža. – authors note.

*the Magyarization of all citizens in Hungary, rather than respect for the individuality of each nationality. Also in Slovak areas, three Slovak-language gymnasia and the Slovak Foundation (Matica slovenská), an institution championing Slovak culture, were forcibly abolished in the 1870s. Magyar leaders felt that the modern Hungarian nation should have a Magyar character.”* (Hiroshi, 2012 p. 38)

A resistance against the old system was formed around Archduke Franz Ferdinand de´ Este. The Belvedere Circle, as the Archduke and his followers came to be known, was deeply convinced that the Habsburg Monarchy would go down and in Hungarian political elite and its nationalism posed the biggest threat to the Monarchy’s existence according to them. Although we could not describe Franz Ferdinand as a Slavs protector, his conception had a strong support from Non-Hungarian nations and Milan Hodža also supported it. (Zuberec, 1991, p. 173–174) Franz Ferdinand had said about this topic: *“I realize that Non-Hungarian nations are in bad position in Hungary. I also realize that the time of their rule will come.”* (Hodža, 1997, p. 72) The Archduke had three possibilities of reforming an old Empire. The first was to give more representation for Non-Hungarian nationalities. The second was to cancel the dualism and create the Great Austria. The last possibility was to establish instead of the Dual Monarchy the Triple Monarchy (for example Austria-Bohemian-Hungary), in which Non-Hungarian nationalities should have more rights than before. Franz Ferdinand supported the second choice. (Hiroshi, 2012, p. 39) After assassination of the Archduke all plans of federalization were ruined. The Belvedere Circle had a great influence on Hodža’s thinking that he put in the ideas of integration of the Central Europe.

The realization of plans including foreign policy was difficult in the Monarchy environment. His activities escalated during the First World War (WW1). The contact with the Czech resistance movement – Maffia became important and he started to call for the ideas of the Czechs and Slovaks unification. (Zuberec, 1991, p. 175 – 177) The origin of the Czechoslovak republic is connected with activities of the international Czechoslovak resistance group. We could not forget the activities of home resistance. During WW1 Milan Hodža became a part of the Slovak Vienna Group. Miroslav Pekník claims that Hodža had been part of this group since August 1915. He worked in Croatian censorship department in Vienna. The group put strong emphasis on the implementation of framework of Slovak policy, building contacts and cooperation with other nations. After 1917, Hodža and others members were attending a conference of Czech’s politics in Vienna. (Pekník, 2010, p. 51 – 53)

The First World War meant the end of integration attempts. The members of Czechoslovak resistance movement started to talk about disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The main personality of the Czechoslovak International resistance movement, Tomáš Garrique Masaryk spoke about future of this state. According to him: *“Austria, being an aggregate of nine small nations, is quite an artificial State, as it was called by an Austrian politician (Plener, the younger), no nation in Austria is so populous that it would have the ruling majority. The dynasty, therefore, tries to maintain its absolutistic position by the principle of divide etsend\*impera, by little concessions now to one nation, now to another, the Germans (the dynasty is German) and Magyars are the favorites.”* (Masaryk, 1915) The same or similar imagination was also represented by Milan Hodža. He understood that

monarchy had to divide. At the place of Monarchy new states should come, one of which the Republic of Czechoslovakia. The Slovak politicians in Vienna managed breaking up monarchy. The Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR) was established by effective, successful activities and cooperation of home and international resistance groups. The new state provided new possibilities for Milan Hodža. He started to build an Agrarian Party and think about next integration of the Central Europe.

### **FIRST'S ISSUES FOR MILAN HODŽA**

Immediately after establishing the Republic, he started to realize foreign policy of ČSR. He stayed as emissary of Czechoslovak government in Budapest. New Hungarian government sent the troops for a military intervention to Czechoslovakia. In Budapest, he was between the end of November 1918 and the end of 1919. The subject of negotiation was a deal about withdrawing Hungarian troops and fixing some financial and administrative matters of the break-up of a monarchy. The main point concerned building the Southern boundary of ČSR which was not established at that time. (Hronský, 2006, p. 58 – 60)

During the negotiation, Hodža had to face lots of problems. One of them came after building the Hungarian Republic Rad. The head of this Bolshevik Republic was Bela Kun. The government of Republic Rad stopped negotiations between ČSR and Budapest. (Hronský, 2006, p. 58 – 61) Marián Hronský points, that Hodža appeared in the situation in two ways of appearance, first, as a member of elimination committee, second, as an emissary of Czechoslovak military mission. In the second case, there was a need to gain information about situation in Hungary. This information was needed for politicians and army. Evidently, the Czechoslovak government saw the complications and changes of political system. (Hronský, 2006, p. 62) Moreover, they knew Milan Hodža was the best candidate for negotiation. He did not realize his vision about reorganization of Central Europe yet. There was no place and no time for that. The new Republic had to clear up the issues associated with administration, finance, and of course, own territory after dividing the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

### **FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

Foreign policy represented important part of First Czechoslovak Republic. According to Richard Vašek *“foreign policy became Alfa and Omega in Czechoslovakia’s life between two world wars.”* (Vašek, 2008, p. 52) Foreign policy of ČSR was divide in two geographical aspects, first, was the Western Europe, second, was the Central Europe. According to a former minister of Foreign Affairs ČSR Edvard Beneš, the Western Europe was the most important. He remained in a position of minister of Foreign affairs for 17 years. (Vašek, 2008, p. 52) Edvard Beneš did not reject the second conception, but at first place placed the cooperation with Western Europe. (Dejmek, 2002, s. 246) Beneš put strong emphasis on unification of ČSR foreign policy. *“Our foreign policy can be the only one. Czechoslovakian, there is no place for other. Our relation to foreign countries is the most specificity manifestation of state*

*sovereignty and unity. We can only talk about Slovak participation in foreign policy.*” (Beneš, 1928, p. 244) The evolution of ČSR was influenced by a conflict between czechoslovakism and autonomism. Hodža stood between these two ideas.

After WW1, Czechoslovak foreign policy had strong inclination to cooperate with France and Great Britain. Beneš belonged to main supporters of this inclination in the field of foreign policy. France should be a strategic partner of ČSR. Jiří Dejmek claims that orientation of ČSR toward France was established after Paris peace conference. (Dejmek, 2002, p. 16) The cooperation of the Central Europe states was the second possibility in foreign policy. Hodža saw a great potential in this area. He used his ideas about agrarian democracy, which were formed during hlasistic’s era. After the birth of ČSR, the visions got the international character. (Holec, 2008, p. 32 – 51)

According to Ferenčuhová, Hodža was building his own opinion about foreign policy. *“According to him, it shouldn’t be only about diplomacy, Hodža was at first place economist. He was interesting himself in prices, tariffs, international business and influence of home economic on living standard of people.”* (Ferenčuhová, 2006, p. 67) We could understand the diplomacy as building cultural, economic or political relations. For Hodža the most important was economy. Before WW1, he saw an importance of agrarian ideology and it was also important in realizing their political program. The members of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party gave agrarian ideology the international context. Hodža with Antonín Švehla started to build the International Agrarian Bureau. There were the United States of Central and Southeastern Europe. The main aim of the Bureau was to create strong agrarian policy across all the members of the Bureau. Milan Hodža was considered to be a new successor of Antonín Švehla. He put emphasis on agrarian demands in his conception of foreign policy. His conception wasn’t better alternative to Beneš’s conception supported by the president Masaryk. (Kubů – Šouša, 2006, p. 37 – 38) The International Agrarian Bureau was called as Green International. The membership was among agrarian parties of Central Europe. It was established in Prague in 1921. At the end, the Bureau was wide to 18 agrarian parties from 14 countries of Europe. (Hiroshi, 2012, p. 44)

According to Hodža, Central Europe area was stretched from Balt to Jadran, where should be agrarian production at first place. A typical sign of Central Europe was the number of nation and nationalities located there in this area. He didn’t agree with Mitteleurope of Fridrich Neumann. (Ferenčuhová, 2006, p. 69) Peter Lukáč reflects a birth of ideas about Central Europe in thinking of Milan Hodža. Central Europe began appearing in his mind at the end of WW1. Neuman’s conception gave him a fundament of Central Europe in his thinking. But, he did not admit some things in Mitteleuropa. According to Hodža it should be only a tool for German military ambitions in Central Europe. (Lukáč, 2005, s. 27 – 29) Because of that, there was still a potential fear of German military invasion. It should not be good for creating a new federation in this area.

The first plan was called a Donau federation. *“A new Central Europe is in Czechoslovakian treaties with Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, and Austria. After end of Yugoslavian-Bulgarian misunderstanding, it will include Bulgaria, maybe Greece.”* (Hodža, 1922, p. 227) The origin of Federation should be made in three steps. The first step was in creation of trade treaties, the second step was represented by

political agreements. At the end, it should be created a custom union. (Hodža, 1922, p. 227) Hodža claims that: *“Recalling international agreements, it will be created a new International unit based on trade, infrastructure and monetary policy from Gdansk to Split and Constance.”* (Ferenčuhová, 2006, p. 71)

## **LITTLE ENTENTE**

The creation of Little Entente was the first step of Hodža's integration aspiration. The treaty was signed by Czechoslovak Republic, Kingdom of Serbs, Romania, Croats and Slovenes on 14. August 1920. Little Entente protected these states against potential enemies. It was built with agreement of France and its interests in Central Europe. The members of treaty feared of Hungarian military invasion and territorial right of Germany and Italy. (Letz, 2002, p. 262 – 263) This international unit became one of origins of Hodža's Federation in Central Europe. Although, the treaty had a military-political character, Hodža promoted an agrarian character of the unit. According to Hodža: *“Little Entente was only the defensive answer to Hungarian revisionist claims. Political activities of treaty weren't successful done, but its economic activities were strengthen. The basic sing of economic cooperation was development in way of agrarian products.”* (Hodža, 1997, p. 184 – 185)

The states of Little Entente wanted to make the treaty wider. There should be states of Donau basin. Hodža had ambitions to cooperate with Austria and Hungary. The main Aims of plan had seven points. Firstly, Hodža talked about cooperation of these states. The conception had its advantage in economic benefit, primarily in agrarian production. The plan counted with transformation to custom union. After the transformation, Central Europe should be a strong economical unit. Other states stood against attempts of unification, the main opponent was Germany. Germany considered it as a step against itself. (Hodža, 1997, p. 190 – 192) Hodža talked about Central Europe as unstable unit since 1922. Against these unit stood strong USA and Japan. According to him, it could be dangerous for Europe. His vision of Central Europe unification falls during the 30<sup>th</sup>. (Goněc, 2005, p. 55) The Central Europe became unstable, the main reason were in Versailles Treaties. Germany never agreed with condition in Versailles treaty. This was only a little reason of unstable Central Europe.

## **THE GOVERNMENTS OF MILAN HODŽA**

Milan Hodža became first Slovak who was the prime minister of ČSR. His first steps were not easy; he was the prime minister during the tough time. For Czechoslovak Society it was tough time during the late thirties. The Parliament election took place in 1935; the winner was the Party of Sudet Germans. It was a possible danger for the Czechoslovak political and party system. (Výsledky voleb, 1935) The party of Sudet Germans called for interest of Germans minorities living in the Czechoslovak Republic. They made a strong pressure toward Czechoslovak government. A new government had to cooperate with this party. The members of government had no choice and they found themselves in crises.

In program statement of government Hodža told: *“I am standing as the prime minister before decision of president republic from 5. November 1935. I am coming to you, ladies and gentleman, in the name of the government and also in my name, with request for the support. The support of parliament is the main condition and the source of executive power of the democratic state. Previous government didn’t deliver its resignation, its continuity didn’t stop. The new prime minister will keep on with previous program from 18. June 1935. It means the coordination with current interest of domestic policy and foreign policy.”* (Hodža, 1935) As the Prime Minister, Hodža made up three governments from 5. November 1935 till 22. September 1938. He was also the Minister of foreign policy and Minister of agriculture in short time. During the prime minister period, he did not forget the integration of Central Europe. The integration was very important during the rising of German aggression, which feared other states near its borders. In 1936, it strove to persuade Austria of the Centraleuropean cooperation. Negotiations with Austrian Prime Minister Suschnigg planned to show him importance of the cooperation with ČSR, also with Little Entente. They were only patrolling situation. The cooperation between Central Europe states had its enemies such as Italy and Germany. Hodža visited the Great Britain in May 1937, where he had a meeting with Minister of Foreign Office Anthony Eden. The Great Britain had own attitude to situation in the ČSR, after meeting, Hodža came back to ČSR with optimism, that the Great Britain will help. He strongly believed that his work could be successful and he was going to make a strong unit in Central Europe, in which should be also Hungary and Austria, and it would be made with agreement of Germany and Italy. At the beginning of 1938, the first charges from Germany came. The Sudet crisis escalated in September 1938, it meant also fall of Hodža’s cabinet. (Dejmek, 2002, p. 245 – 256) Milan Hodža realized the unstable situation in Central Europe and he build up his conception against that German. The German geopolitical conception had aim to rule in Europe. In the works of Fridrich Ratzel and Karl Haushoffer the term Lebensraum appeared, it meant the living space for Germans. They also included the space of Central Europe in the living space. The cooperation of Central Europe states was more peaceful than German vision.

According to Hiroshi: *“Hodža tried to disseminate the notion of peasant democracy to other countries in the region, and to forge strong partnership with them for both political and economic cooperation. To do this, he utilized his own international network of connections built up during the Habsburg era or through forums such as the International Agrarian Bureau based in Prague.... He attempted to realize long-awaited “Hodža plan” in short bursts. However, it was too late, even members of the Little Entente like Yugoslavia and Romania were already under the influence of Nazi Germany, and the “Hodža plan” did not have a good chance of success.”* (Hiroshi, 2012, p. 50 – 51) This meant the end for Hodža’s attempts in the field of integration Central Europe. He had to move himself to a foreign exile to the United States and there he wrote a book – Federation in Central Europe. All his ideas about integrations and experience were published in this book.

## CONCLUSIONS

The authors presented Milan Hodža as one of the greatest Slovak politicians in the history of our independent state sovereignty. For our analyses his positions and functions in the government of Czechoslovak Republic were not important, even if they also influenced his political thinking and visions. From our point of view Milan Hodža is very important because of his geopolitical perceptions of movements in Europe. His conception of Central Europe federation is considered as a realistic one, built up on rational analyses of German strengthening and threat before world wars. His rationality was based on economic reasons; major states community is stronger and could better oppose the German influence in this area. The vision of economic union in Central Europe was very modern and progressive in those years and prognosticated the best way how to manage the relations in Europe. On the other side, we think he was also idealist in some ways of thinking, for example in his reliance on the help from side of Great Britain.

The Central Europe federation is from some points of view very up-to-date also these days and could be applied to forms of cooperation between the states within the European Union, first of all the states from Central European region. These states may cooperate more intensively within the European Union in promoting their specific interests resulting from their geographical, historical, cultural position. Only with cooperation and common policy could these states adequately fulfil their interests.

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