

## THE FACE OF CENTRAL EUROPE SINCE THE PARIS TREATIES OF 1919

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Departing from the changes in East-Central and Southeastern Europe which followed the First World War, this lecture examines the consequences of both the elimination of the great powers which up to then had dominated this area and of the formation of a number of small and middle-sized states there. The age of the policy of alliances, of the policy of the European balance of power was supplanted by a system of collective security. When Germany and Russia had regained their strength, however, there was a shift in the scale of forces. The French security system was called in question by the German-Polish pact, and the relations of both Yugoslavia and Rumania with France cooled perceptibly. The Little Entente, planned by Beneš as a universal pact against every aggressor, was limited to the traditional task of keeping Hungary in check and preventing a return by the Habsburgs. The collective security system was seriously undermined by the Rome—Berlin Axis, and a division of Europe into blocs began to take shape. There was no longer any question of preserving the *status quo*; „peaceful change“ was the order of the day. Thus in the years 1933—36, developments of later years were being prepared.

The creation of a new order in Europe after the Second World War did not proceed according to the plans laid by the Allies at the outbreak of the war or, in part, even earlier. The USA and Britain wanted to prevent Europe from once again being fragmented into a collection of small and miniature states. Churchill, who considered the collapse of Austria-Hungary to have been a tragedy, called for the creation of federations. But the Soviet Union managed to attain the restoration of the sovereignty of all the East-Central European states — except in the case of the Baltic States and parts of Poland, Finland and Rumania which had been incorporated into the USSR.

Thus on the surface, the situation created by the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919 had to a considerable degree been restored. The structure, however, had become an entirely different one.