

GERMANY AND ITS „MITTELEUROPA“ POLICY

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The „Mitteleuropa“ concept is, first of all, geographical in character, but even its territorial delimitation raises difficulties. In the mid-19th century, Freiherr von Bruk and Paul Lagarde were the first to broach the idea of a Central European order centered on Germany. However, this idea could not manage to penetrate the German policy-making sphere — not even in the second half of the 19th century. Bismarck founded his policy on hard facts that could be readily grasped, coupling this with the broad recognition of the existing powers.

Only during the First World War did a political „Mitteleuropa“ conception emerge among the leadership of the German Empire, but although it became the heart of the German program of war aims, it was never thought out in detail. The English blockade led leading figures in the German economic world to the idea of aiming at a Germany strengthened by „Mitteleuropa“, which would be capable of asserting itself alongside the Great Powers of Great Britain and Russia. Rathenau wanted to achieve a settlement with France, by which it could be included in the large-scale economic region that was to be set up. This economic community of Central Europe, whose

members were technically to be equal, was designed to establish German economic pre-eminence. Toward the end of the First World War, the economic „Mitteleuropa“ concept was included as far as the North Cape and Sicily, and also embraced Poland.

In 1915, the chief of the General Staff, General Falkenhayn, advocated — mainly as a tactical war measure — the creation of a Central European confederation, but was unable to get it adopted. The Austro-Polish solution, toward which the imperial leadership had inclined in 1915 was subsequently abandoned for fear of a Slavic preponderance in the Austrian monarchy.

Friedrich Naumann's „Mitteleuropa“ book, which appeared in the late fall of 1915, popularized the „Mitteleuropa“ idea among large circles of the population. Naumann's „Mitteleuropa“ was to be a supreme economic and military state whose members would retain their sovereignty. Despite the popularity of Naumann's book, the leadership of the German Empire held on to its vague „Mitteleuropa“ ideas, to which the Supreme Command associated itself with the national-political ideas of Ludendorff.

On the other hand, Naumann's book provided the Western enemies of the Central Powers with political ammunition. It was then the Western ideologies of Liberalism and the right of self-determination as well as the bolshevistic revolution which determined the final phase of the World War.

After the collapse of the Central Powers, the German government was for years impotent and incapable of pursuing any active policy of its own. The unification of all Germans and the protection of the German minorities in the new national states supplanted the „Mitteleuropa“ idea in the forefront of attention. Stresemann's foreign policy successes then enabled Hitler to make his *Volkstum* and minorities policies appear credible abroad. The Third Reich propagated no „Mitteleuropa“ idea of its own in the strict sense of the word.