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CONCEPTS OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN ATTEMPTS TO STOP RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM IN THE THOUGHT OF WŁADYSŁAW STUDNICKI

Abstract: The aim of the article is to highlight and confirm the validity of Władysław Studnicki's concepts regarding the geopolitical security of the Central and Eastern European region. It seems particularly useful to pay attention to the strategic diagnoses of this thinker regarding the constant threat to the geopolitical order from Russian imperialism in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The intellectual achievements of one of the most famous creators of Polish geopolitical thinking can, therefore, be perceived as a valuable key to gaining orientation in the dynamics of contemporary international relations. As part of this article, I focused on presenting the issues of the centuries-old Polish-Russian rivalry about gaining strategic control over the region of Central and Eastern Europe, which Studnicki called the "core of Eurasia" due to its geopolitical importance.

Keywords: geopolitics, country, idea, power, territory, Central and Eastern Europe

1. Introduction

Władysław Studnicki believed that the permanent stabilization of Central and Eastern Europe would be ensured by the creation of a unified political organism composed of states implementing common political and strategic concepts. The basis for the existence of such a bloc should be the participation of Poland, which, owing to its political and cultural influence, would play the role of a regional leader. Taking into account the importance of demographic and economic data, which is rare among political thinkers, led Studnicki to a conclusion that, in order to ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned concept, the Republic of Poland should ally with Germany. Warsaw was supposed to be protected from Berlin's domination by the Baltic countries participation in the bloc, which would look for Poland's support to pursue their interests (Studnicki 1935, 232 et seq.; 2019).

Contemporary researchers of Studnicki's thought (Gzella 1990, 67-86; 1998, 256-259; Strządała 2004, 26-32) agree that the creation of the mentioned bloc of Central and Eastern European states was undoubtedly anti-Russian. The common

theme that was to unite the interests of its various participants in the interwar period was the threat of Soviet expansion. Studnicki rightly warned against the USSR's desire to destroy the weaker countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The existence of those post-Versailles buffers, in practice, made it impossible to spread the Bolshevik revolution to Western European countries.

At the same time, the Polish-German alliance was to secure Eastern Europe by breaking up Russia and creating independent Ukraine and other state entities on the territory of the USSR. Germany's support for the implementation of those concepts was also supposed to create antagonism between Moscow and Berlin, the uprising of which was believed to secure Warsaw's interests and strengthen its international position (Studnicki 2019d, 283f.; 2019e, 288f.; 2019d, 208f.).

This article discusses comprehending the threat to Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe from Russian and Soviet imperialism. The main attention is paid to understanding the essence of this geopolitical challenge within the thought of the conservative thinker and publicist Studnicki.

Apart from referring to Studnicki's texts, the basis for the research conducted in this article was also reaching for contemporary interpretations of his intellectual achievements. The growing number of publications in recent decades (also mentioned in this article) devoted to the political concepts of this outstanding thinker fills us with optimism. This also seems to demonstrate the appreciation of Studnicki's contribution in formulating the foundations of the geopolitical security of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Certainly, the validity of the Vilnius conservative's concept should be appreciated, especially in the era of the aggression of Putin's Russia against Ukraine. The assumption of recognizing the above-mentioned achievements for the orientation in the dynamics of the contemporary international relations could be an inspiration for presenting the issue of the centuries-old Polish-Russian rivalry for the influence in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Russia's policy is a proof that the words of one of the most profound analysts of great politics, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, have still been valid. He said that just like tsarism in the past, the Soviet Union is now suffering from the unsatisfied imperial ambitions again: "it is a voracious crocodile, [...] which will swallow and devour without digesting everything it can reach anyway" (Mitkiewicz 1971, 110).

2. A Centuries-Old Threat to Central and Eastern Europe from the Russian Empire

As a result of the prolonged onslaught and consistent imperial policy of conquest, Russia has managed, over the course of several centuries, to assume a strategic position in the centre of the Eurasian supercontinent. It has become a power not only in Europe, but also in Eurasia. This enabled it to compete in Asia for the scope

of influence with Great Britain, which had numerous colonies on this continent. It is worth emphasizing that, in the opinion of the famous geographer and political scientist H. J. Mackinder, having the so-called Heartland would in fact constitute the geopolitical key to ruling the space of virtually all of Eurasia (Ashworth 2011, 279ff.; Kearns 2004, 337ff.; Mackinder 1904, 421ff.; Venier 2004, 330ff.).

Participation in the partitions of Poland in the 18th century enabled Tsarist Russia (Niesiobędzki 2012, 497ff.), tainted by Asian despotism by threading to the West of Europe, to gain a strategically important transport corridor through the territory of Eastern Europe. Its proximity to the territory of Austria and Germany created a balance of international forces that determined the shape of European geopolitics throughout the 19th century (Nowak 2021, 11).

In Studnicki's opinion, ruling over the lands of the pre-partitioned *Rzeczpospolita* was the key to achieving rule over the entire European continent. It made it easier to gain geopolitical control over the Balkans and, as a result, over the lands of Central and Eastern Europe. In his opinion, both Napoleon and his most important geopolitical rival, the Russian emperor Alexander I, were aware of the strategic importance of these conditions. Therefore, before 1914, Studnicki postulated that the territory of the Russian partition should be included in the Habsburg monarchy as an important step towards Poland regaining its independence. In his opinion, the above-mentioned area should go beyond the Polish ethnic area, and a reliable criterion for its separation should be the domination of the Roman Catholic religion in the given territories (Danek 2021, 32ff.). The noble *Rzeczpospolita* covered not only the territory of ethnic Poland, but also the area of today's Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and most of Ukraine. As a result of the partitions, Napoleonic wars and decisions taken at the Congress of Vienna, the vast majority of the territorial core, which was to decide about the future of Eurasia in the 20th century, was under the rule of the Russian tsars.

Studnicki attached great importance to the geostrategic importance of the aforementioned conditions, treating them as the basic challenge on the way to regaining Poland's independence. Recognizing the essence of geopolitical concepts that were formulated by his mentor, S. Mackiewicz-Cat pointed out that:

> Eighty percent of our state territory is owned by Russia. [...] The issue of Poland's independence is the issue of defeating Russia. All our uprisings were directed against Russia. The Polish state cannot be established without the territories that Russia has (1992, 69).

It is worth noting here that Studnicki, like hardly anyone before the outbreak of World War I, had hoped for Poland regaining independence in the armed conflict between the Japanese and the Russians, which took place in the Far East in 1905. For the first time since the 16th century, when Russia, by seizing the Kazan Khanate,

closed the eastern front that was dangerous to it and, through it, gained strength for expansion into the west, the Russian empire was again threatened from the east. The partitioner's difficulties (intensified by the increase in its financial needs) were to lead to a change in the balance of international forces. In this changed geopolitical situation, Studnicki predicted that it would be possible to "cut Russia in the East", which, in his opinion, opened up prospects for Poland's independence (Studnicki 1910, 569).

Despite the Bolshevik revolution and a completely different state structure or ideological foundations, the Soviet Union continued the policy of expansion of the former tsarist Russia. The Soviet empire pursued such a policy especially in those territories where it could expect the least resistance to its aggression, which posed certain threats in Eurasia. Its conquests in Asia were the basis for the expansion of this country on the European continent (Studnicki 1930, 69ff.; 1935, 155ff.).

In the 1930s, the possessiveness of the Soviet empire was to move towards the control of Tibet, Mongolia, Sin-kiang or Manchuria. Studnicki recognized the area of the Far East as the junction of world politics, where the influence of the major powers intersected (1932, 8).

The progressing threat from its eastern neighbour and the increase in its military potential were to force Poland to strengthen its own force urgently. The efforts to avert the aggression of the USSR was also to induce the authorities of the Second Republic of Poland to accept the arms of Germany. According to Studnicki, it was the only country capable of ensuring the necessary balance in the region and to stop the Soviet expansion (2019a, 107ff.).

3. Polish-Russian Rivalry for Control over the Eastern European Region

Studnicki, a columnist for the Vilnius "Słowo", attempted to strengthen his theses in geopolitical and geostrategic terms. His analyses focused in particular on the elements of the geography of Central and Eastern Europe, showing their strategic importance for the Polish-Russian rivalry. Throughout his life, he wondered how the proper foreign policy pursued by the *Rzeczpospolita* could permanently deprive its eastern neighbour of not only the status of a superpower, but also push his influence away from the European continent. At the same time, Studnicki tried to locate Poland in the permanently structured international systems, which was to bring it power and global significance. In an attempt to respond to the threat of Bolshevik aggression, the researcher noted, in particular, the importance of empire's eastern access to the Baltic ports for maintaining their status as a great power. Therefore, he proposed to bind Lithuania and Latvia with *Rzeczpospolita* and, thus, paralyse the possibility of extending the influence of the eastern empire

in the Baltic Sea basin. Poland was to become the guarantor of the security of the Baltic system, while gaining convenient access to the port facilities of its allies. This could be particularly useful in terms of obtaining supplies of weapons and ammunition in conditions of both peace and war (Studnicki 1924, 232-233).

For these reasons, Studnicki saw the need to counteract the possible creation of a federal union of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with Soviet Russia. Such a form of actual territorial expansion of Moscow would threaten Poland with a direct loss of the north-eastern part of the state. He accurately predicted that the aforementioned federalisation process would end with the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union (which in fact took place in 1939-1940) (Danek 2021, 49). This is why this leading Polish Germanophile even advocated waging a preventive war by *Rzeczpospolita* in order to paralyse the Soviet plans. In practice, the Polish military offensive was to create a cordon that would cut off the Soviet Union from not only Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but also from the Baltic Sea itself (Studnicki 1924, 234ff.).

Analysing the policy of the eastern empire on the Asian continent, Studnicki drew attention to the total indifference of Europe to the imperial pressure from the White and then the Red Russia. The European countries did not notice that danger at all, and yet for them "the fate of Poland should have been very instructive" (Figura 2008, 77).

Meanwhile, the growing forces (also demographic) of the eastern empire meant that

> it is in the interest of Europe to cut off Russia in the west and east, thus tearing off Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Crimea, the entire Finnish north, as far as Pechora in order to give it to Finland, and to move Poland's borders to gain support at least at the Berezina River (Studnicki 2019f, 292).

The main idea of Studnicki in terms of international relations, however, was the geopolitical integration of Central and Eastern Europe as an area that was really threatened by the expansion of Soviet imperialism. In this respect, he outlined a broad vision of the transformations of European integration, which would initiate the union of Austria and Germany within one state organism. This was to open up the possibility of the Central European countries establishing a broad economic and political bloc. The implementation of this vision would, in particular, ensure the durability of Polish borders, both eastern and western (Studnicki 2019b, 165).

In Studnicki's opinion, the political and economic reorganization of Central and Eastern Europe in agreement with Poland was better for the realization of the German raison d'état than a division of this area in agreement with Russia. At the same time, the pursuit of a common Polish-German policy was to secure the existence and independence of *Rzeczpospolita*. Only then would Poland become

a strong geopolitical player in the region which would be able to create a relationship with the Baltic States or effectively implement an alliance with Romania (Studnicki 2019c, 188-189).

The columnist for the "Słowo" also believed that Poland, as the largest country in the region, should not only act as a petitioner or vassal towards its western neighbour. In his opinion, by undertaking the implementation of the above-mentioned idea of broad international cooperation, Warsaw could and should become for Berlin a partner and valued ally. *Rzeczpospolita*, thanks to its political and cultural influence, would constitute the main entity and element that would unite the alliance of many states. It is owing to the deepening of cooperation with its western neighbour that Poland, ranked second in the aforementioned strategic alliance, would have a chance to pursue its vital geopolitical interests. Its great power status would also be strengthened thanks to the implementation of German economic investments at the Vistula River. Considering the problem of rebuilding Central Europ, the Polish geopolitician accepted the expansion of the German influence in Europe and in the world, but only peacefully. Studnicki pointed out to the Germans the benefits that could bring them the reconstruction of the Polish state and the creation of the Central European Bloc. With the greatest military, economic and population potential, our western neighbours would assume political leadership in this alliance. In addition, Germany would gain a wide market for its machines, technology, or a convenient area for exporting its own capital and making investments (Studnicki 1935, 232ff.).

The essence of the agreement with Germany was to use it as an instrument to strengthen the geopolitical position of *Rzeczpospolita*, and to prevent it from being dominated by a strong western neighbour. As a result, in the area of Eurasia, Poland would become a reliable guarantor of the independence of the Baltic States, and a desirable partner for Japan. In Studnicki's concept, this would make it possible to undertake a civilization mission in the East and defend Europe against the threat from Moscow (Sadkiewicz 2012, 175ff.).

4. The Concept of an Anti-Russian Bloc of Central and Eastern European Countries

When creating his integration project, Studnicki took into account, above all, the community of interests, the existence of mutual connections of various kinds, and threats that connected the countries of the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The concept of Central and Eastern European unification was also close to the views of the German geopolitical doctrine, which noted the existence of a broad community of aspirations of these nations (Cenckiewicz 2000, 64; Gorowska-Puchała 1996, 37ff.; Pajewski 1959, 112ff.). However, the emphasis here was on the continental direction of Germany's expansion through the creation of an area that

signifies political, geographical and economic unity, which was to be a necessary stage on the way to the creation of the German empire (Wolff-Powęska 1979, 43ff.).

On the other hand, owing to the expansion of German capital, the backward or peripheral members of the group of countries postulated by Studnicki would have a real chance to catch up with Western Europe, which had been leading for centuries. On the other hand, thanks to the German capital expansion, the backward or peripheral members of the Central European Bloc would have a real chance to catch up on their development backlog in relation to Western Europe, which had been leading for centuries. Studnicki assumed that economic contacts and economic ties, in practice, bind states more strongly than their political interests (Sadkiewicz 2012, 163).

According to the above-mentioned concept, after the reunification of Austria and Germany, Poland was to join the newly created alliance, followed further by the Czech Republic (created as a result of the territorial truncation of Czechoslovakia in favour of Poland, Germany and Hungary), Romania, Hungary, as well as the Baltic and Balkan states (Studnicki 1932, 183).

The economic benefits of participating in the Central European and Eastern European Bloc (especially in the event of achieving economic self-sufficiency) (Studnicki 1932, 184) were, in turn, to attract more members (e.g. Turkey). According to the columnist for the Vilnius "Słowo", this would enable this organization to conduct political and economic penetration in Asia (Studnicki 1935, 263).

After all, an alliance of 200 million people would constitute a significant (today we would say on a global scale) economic and military power. Recognizing this perspective, the visionary wrote about a creation of a geopolitical "great space" in the Central and Eastern European under a joint leadership of Germany and Poland. They were the largest countries in terms of the territory they possessed and the population inhabiting them (Studnicki 1935, 232 i n.).

The result would then be a land power that would be difficult to defeat from the sea, and which would be able to compete with great maritime powers for world domination. It would be capable of opposing Soviet aggression, on the one hand, and American domination, on the other hand. Over time, the Central and Eastern European Bloc was to become the basis for the unification of the entire continent and the emergence of a world power in the form of Pan-Europe (Gzella 1990, 67ff.).

The implementation of this concept would ensure that Germany would gain "the world hegemony it rightly deserves". The achievement of European supremacy by this state (so visible in our times) would provide Poland with a "first-class position in the world" (Studnicki 1932, 184).

In the name of these assumptions, one of the most consistent supporters of the Polish-German agreement was in favour of waging a preventive war with Soviet Russia by the aforementioned coalition. It was supposed to destroy this mighty colossus due to the cooperation of the alliance of anti-Soviet states with Japan.

As a result, a number of territories previously conquered by the tsars would be severed from the eastern empire. Studnicki primarily meant Ukraine, Turkestan, Crimea, and the Caucasus, which is rich in resources. In addition, the victorious course of the preventive war was to lead to the Japanese taking over the lands of the Far East as far as Lake Baikal. The Polish geopolitical visionary also drew the prospect of shifting the borders of both Poland and Finland to the east. The state created by the Bolsheviks was consistently regarded by Studnicki as the main threat to the foundations of the European civilization (Studnicki 1935, 213ff.).

Therefore, the territories located east of the Dvina River and to the mouth of the Pripyat River, which had belonged to *Rzeczpospolita* before the partitions, were to be in its possession again (Studnicki 1935, 180ff.).

In such an imagined arrangement, Poland would be of great importance for Germany as a partner, as the former would be able to defend its neutrality towards the latter and at the same time would not be virtually able to really threaten its stronger neighbour.

> Poland, allied with Germany against Russia for its halving through the reception and emancipation of Ukraine and by cutting off the Caucasus with its kerosene and manganese iron, is of greater importance to Germany than all other Central and Eastern European states (Studnicki 2018, 180f.).

Studnicki saw the need to separate Ukraine from Russia and create an independent Ukrainian state. However, organizing and maintaining a separate statehood of Ukraine would be a difficult challenge as, over the course of many centuries, certain ties had developed between Ukraine and Russia. In addition, the Soviet policy brutally destroyed the civilization and cultural distinctiveness in the subordinate areas. As a result, it was always possible to combine the two organisms according to the Pan-Slavism concept due to the common Eurasian elements. The researcher was also aware that this threatened a geopolitical breakdown of Central and Eastern Europe in order to strengthen the forces of the eastern empire significantly. He was also aware of the power of the Soviet propaganda. For their own purposes, the Bolsheviks were able to skilfully fuel the national conflicts existing in this area (especially between Poles and Ukrainians) (Studnicki 2019d, 282ff.).

The separation of Ukraine from Russia was, therefore, to be a key element of the programme to break up the Russian colossus. According to Studnicki, it was only possible as a result of a concerted Polish-German cooperation, so the Ukrainian issue should be a factor of an additional rapprochement between the two countries in this respect. By cooperating on these issues with Germany, Poland was able to secure their transit to Ukraine, without the need to create a German-Ukrainian border (Studnicki 2019d, 284).

A consequence of such a process was to create permanent rifts between Russia and Germany, the maintenance of which was so important for the security of Poland and for maintaining the inviolability of its territory. Thus, the German intention to create Ukraine detached from the eastern empire not only carried any danger to Polish interests, but, on the contrary, served to secure Germany (Studnicki 2019e, 289). Moreover, the existence of independent Poland and Ukraine was to lead to a further separation of Russia's borders from the German territory. The foundations of the Franco-Russian alliance would thus be destroyed (Studnicki 2019f, 294).

The aforementioned participation of Japan in the alliance planned by Studnicki was supposed to result from that country's vital interest in preventing the Soviet expansion and expanding its influence in East Asia. The Japanese were to be interested in the inviolability and in not weakening Poland in order to build a counterbalance to Soviet Russia and, thus, distract it from its involvement in the Far East (Studnicki 2018, 198). Studnicki hoped that the Soviet-Japanese rivalry for influence in Asia would end in a war, and the final defeat of the Bolshevik regime (Gzella 2011, 128).

5. Conclusion

This article presents the views of a well-known Polish geopolitician Władysław Studnicki on the Polish-Russian and Soviet rivalry over the core of Eurasia. In his opinion, the course of these processes in the future was primarily to ensure the security of Poland and define its international position on a global scale.

As a result of many years of his reflections, Studnicki managed to present an extremely suggestive and coherent vision of using the importance of capturing the territory of Eurasia to build a multinational power that could dominate the world. This was to be possible thanks to the creation of an extremely broad coalition of anti-Soviet states (including Turkey and Japan) in the Eurasian space. The overriding goal of his ambitious project was, above all, to destroy the Eastern empire and completely eliminate its influence from Central and Eastern Europe.

Consequently, *Rzeczpospolita* was then to replace the eastern empire as the political organizer of this area. The vision of Poland becoming a great power and reaching a dominant position not only in the eastern part of the continent, but also on a global scale, was to be possible thanks to a close alliance with Germany. According to Studnicki, the secondary nations rise to power by being a satellite of the prime nations. The aforementioned assumption was to form the basis for the construction of the anti-Soviet Central European and Eastern Bloc, and ultimately for a victorious game against the Bolshevik empire that threatened the world peace.

In the era of today's military, economic and integration challenges, it is probably worth paying attention to the projects proposed by the discussed author,

who saw the need for Poland to create a great geopolitical unit together with Germany. Studnicki argued that the economies of both countries were balancing in terms of their structure and complemented each other. In his opinion, that forced Warsaw and Berlin to undertake the integration process and to institutionalize their cooperation. The timelessness of those judgments underlines the significant "anchoring" of the contemporary Polish economy in the process of globalization, largely due to its economic cooperation with Germany. Studnicki's comments on the threat posed by the Russian imperialism and the risk of its expansion in the Eurasian area seem to be equally valid at the time of the present invasion of Putin's Russia of the neighbouring Ukraine.

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