CONSERVATISM AS A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC CHANGES IN CENTRAL EUROPE STATES

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Abstract

Geographical-political term Central Europe is not strictly defined neither in time nor in space. The states and the groupings of states that have ever occurred in this region are typical for some significant qualitative distinctive characteristics comparing to those states of Western Europe. Even though these Central European states account for conglomerates of nationalities, ethnics, and religions, in fact, there is no destructive war that might have been waged among them by the end of 20th century. Central Europe, on its way to a new perception of the internal and foreign policy of states on the threshold of the 21st century, had to overcome two enormous barriers. The first one concerned ideological change, the second one was related to the change of economic rules in national economies. From time to time, theoreticians differ in their opinion on which of those barriers was more preeminent to be overcome first. Logically, the political changes and the acceptance of a new ideology were a high priority, thus a base for the transformation of economies had to be formed, which has been proved, especially from a time perspective.

Keywords: conservatism, Visegrad Group, economic transformation, person-property-society, economic interests, laissez-fair

1 INTRODUCTION

Experts on the economy are right in that respect that the economic systems of the socialist Eastern

Bloc had already started to malfunction during the period of one-party political system governments (Kazansky, 2002). Particularly economic failures and less and less effective dynamics of their economies accounted for the source of local citizens' dissatisfaction, which could not have been solved by then available political means. The states of a narrowly defined Central Europe, now co-existing and integrated in the Visegrad Group,

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as well as the states of a so-called larger Central Europe region, including the Balkan states, have found themselves on the above-mentioned threshold of 21st century in the situation that might be termed as a 20-year old cure¹ or as a long-term hybrid revolution (Vlcek, 2014). Such transformation process encompassing minor or major departures from standard socialist models, democracy, the socialist way of states' governance, a change of the communist regime into another model form – a democracy based on a multiparty political system, market economy, as well as the observance of human rights, took for 20 years. At the same time, it also required a transformation of the existing security and defense models of those states, which were formed from the 50s to 90s of the 20th century, e.g. the Warsaw Pact (Usiak, 2009).

The analysis of states' development, taken into consideration both either the Central European states of a lesser scope or a larger scope, have become a subject of the research of many theoreticians on political science and international relations. There exist many complex works on this issue. From our perspective, the analysis of the discussed issue's development lacks processing of the impact resulted from various economic concepts of how the respective states have managed to cope mainly with the economic barrier mentioned in the introductory paragraph. An economic transformation of the political system is always demanding in as much as it requires a complex approach once introduced, e.g. in the Copenhagen criteria², an approach that might be implemented only by theoretically and practically proficient politicians, with thorough propaedeutic at an expert level. Otherwise, there, in a transforming state, occur apolitical accidents (corruption, budgetary and financial crisis, the failure of the private sector as the main part of the state's transformation).

This ambition of this article is to analyze the selected concepts of conservatism that played

the most significant role in the successful transformation of the former socialist states, the wherein economy was primarily based on central planning. The methods applied for preparation and realization of the articles' content itself have been determined by the character of the given issue. These are, primarily, analysis/synthesis, also comparison, as well as security synergetic, simply put, those methods that are commonly used when dealing with possible threats and cures resulting because of economic transformation in a modern society. The term modern society itself is a polyfunctional term with several meanings used, in fact, since the 17th century. This means that modernity expresses itself via the change of human's mindset (the birth of modern liberal and conservative theories), via the change of ways of production (feudalism was replaced by the capitalist way of production), even via the change of social relations. These symptoms of modernity are, in their essence, transformed into new models from the 18 and 19th century to the 20th century where the most important sign of modernity, typical mainly at the end of the 20th century, is merging of various theoretical models of development into one hybrid concept. At the turning point of the 20th and 21st century, it is not possible to talk about the so-called pure liberalism or conservatism. A modern society cannot be segregated the way an economic theory only manages it. States enter multinational groupings – sub-regional, regional, supra-regional ones at the various level of economic and political integration. For the research of this social reality are more suitable hybrid theories such as functionalism, neo-functionalism, or social constructivism. Although a theoretical basis utilized by these theories is ever present. A recent development, of the last twenty years, points to such basis that is represented by conservatism in as much as it contains a guaranteed stability of terms, causal relations, and the direction of development trends in economy as well as in political systems, which

¹ The term "20-year cure" was coined by the well-known English liberal thinker E. Carr. "Long-term hybrid revolution" is a *modern terminus technicus* expressing those factors that are rather difficult to define, and which, at the same time, account for the sources of contemporary revolutions, and when compared to historical revolutions of the past, they lack a common ideological platform as well as the masses of

a particular social class traditionally supporting a rigid revolution. (Authors' note)

²The Copenhagen criteria account for the accession procedure the states must conform to become an EU member. The EU Summit in Copenhagen in June 1993 decided to open EU membership to the Central and East European countries, the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

has been proved via the spectrum of political parties in the European states. (Puslecki, 2013)

2 CONSERVATISM AS A FACILITATIVE APPARATUS FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF STATE

The Latin term *conservatore* refers to the activity that aims to preserve something from decay. From the beginning of civilization, human communities formed instruments in order to preserve the real value of humankind's activities related to the production of food, weapons, buildings, ships, etc. Probably since the Middle Age, the term *conservatore* relates to peace maintenance as a universal human value heralding peace and welfare. European states started to invoke it in connection to the Enlightenment movement that was in direct opposition to monarchism and clericalism, which applauded conservative ideas. In fact, philosophy concurs with the opinion that the project of conservatism had from the beginning of its language frequency a significant political accent, though accompanied with criticism that conservatism had always been a dogmatic or skeptical doctrine. (Skutova, 2014) This objection was mainly related to the fact that conservatism, in general, does not support sudden and abrupt social changes, it mainly aims at the preservation of existing *status quo*. Radical and abrupt changes are considered to be dangerous for the stability of the state. A broadly taken conservative thinking cannot just be taken as a political doctrine. Conservatism, if adequate, impacts social ethos and morality, determines priorities in the sphere of social values (preferring traditional, confirmed ones), it also attempts to preserve the legislative and legal order of a state via ever present *inertia* models. Conservatism strengthens even the cult depiction of national, or tribal, ethnic as well as regional symbolism. It can also function as a permanent part of the national pride, but in its overblown form, it turns into a cliché, allusion, sentiment, and nostalgia, phenomena that had already been criticized by the German Enlightenment philosopher J.G. Herder (Dejiny

filosofie 2, 1961). Supporters of conservative thinking claim that the criticism of conservatism is mainly driven by *nescience* of the real parameters of conservatism, which are rather broad and are directly interconnected with economic development.

One of those parameters tends to lean towards a right-wing political ideology, it supports the existence of social elites and their affluence, paternalism, and partially, it is also in support of liberalism on condition that it serves to national economic interests. This kind of conservatism is derived from the classical perception of a doctrine under which authority, social hierarchy, and power, are natural and inseparable in every society in a similar way as it is rather natural that there are those who govern and those who are governed by a government in every society. As such, social and economic fruit is allocated and enjoyed within society.

The basic idea of conservatism related to the economic development has two praxeological bases. Traditional conservatism, especially the paternalistic lineage, is typical for its significant skepticism towards the influence of market economy. Then, conservative alternatives, which are closer to liberalism and mainly to the New Right, consider the free market system as fundamental. Both lineages agree that *private* property ownership creates a basis for an effective working state. Here arises a parallel to the philosophical conception by Thomas Aquinas, regarding private possession as a right to decide³ and make use of it, and, viewing it as an inseparable part of human (Christian) society. Humanly, this alternative is extremely useful for man mainly because of moral reasons. A person who possesses their own property could socially be very beneficial in the sphere of charity or humanitarian aid, as it is evident in the contemporary period of time from the side of NGOs, states, and various movements. (Passmore, 1968)

Conservatism also points to another ethical dimension of private possession that disappears in social collectivization: the way of running a

³ *Ius procurandi ete despinsend* - this theory was developed by Aquinas in his book *De ciuitate Dei*.
Authors 'note

business, respect to possession and labor. It works also when an individual personally participates in an enlargement of private possession, while attempting to preclude its devaluation, and, at the same time, society effectively enjoys the same possession. Particularly, this causal relationship, i.e. person-property-society, has lost its value during the existence of one-party political systems.

Conservatism as an independent economic doctrine is mostly perceived as opposition towards Enlightenment philosophy in France, especially towards its part accentuating rationalism. The Enlightenment was materialized in the French revolution at the end of 18th century. For the European nations, this revolution was a concept that abolished feudalism in situ, and it established a tradition of accepting human and citizen rights by the motto *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. Less known is the economic dimension of the French Revolution, which enormously changed the economy of the country, internal and foreign policy, and two decades later, also the design of Europe during the Napoleonic Wars. (Macha, 1968) Aristocracy, the most affluent social class in France, after the reforms of Jean Colbert became an element of the societal stagnation heading forward but lacking a strategy how to secure economic development. Social economic welfare completely lacked its utility function, there was no increase in social product, the structure of industry and agriculture compared to that one in England, and thanks to some backward feudal concepts, it was obsolete, including the means of production, the exploitation of natural resources, as well as the human dimension of economic production. Financial sector structurally did not catch up with other three European states – Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal. Their pursuing of “El Dorado” overseas voyages and expansions, made them modernize financial sector and implement various economic reforms. France failed to keep the pace in those processes. Soon after this course of events took, a different direction thanks to the French revolution took place. J.B. Colbert was no long a doctrinal guru of economic reforms, and the financial situation improved due to the increasing number of taxpayers. New forms of political representation took precedence over aristocracy. In a newly proposed centralized Jacobin democracy, the state was no longer governed by

a monarch and his ministers, but by the elected National Assembly. France with its 28 million citizens became the biggest European state, the state of a new sort termed republic. From an economic perspective, a new social class – bourgeois, at that time a very flexible and progressive part of the society, was not limited by feudal restrictions and could fully enjoy a new economic phenomenon - the free market economy. Many theoreticians dealing with modern ideologies explain the occurrence of conservatism as a need of aristocracy, and its feudal values completely lost in the revolution events during the decade.

A similar situation also occurred in other European countries. The 19th century with its permanent bourgeois revolutions, encompassing various different features (nationalism, the unification or division of a common territory into several smaller states, also religious and language connotations) produced two relevant social-opposing entities. They were represented by traditionalism (aristocrats, toppled monarchs, clergy), and, on the other hand, liberalism (mostly bourgeois representatives from industry, construction industry, and agriculture) supported by less prosperous social groups, intellectuals, and very often, with the army. Liberals were considered as tradition breakers, citizens lacking patriotism, cosmopolitans, heretics. (Kopal, 1949)

Political, mainly liberal political parties, started to be formed particularly in that. Their continuity, especially in the conservative domain, has been preserved by this period, especially in Great Britain, also in France, Spain, Italy, as well as in the states that were formed at the end of the 19th century. Interpretations of conservatism vary. The first one and the most frequent has already introduced in previous parts of the article. The second interpretation has historical connotations. The American political scientist Leo Strauss makes use of history to point out that conservatism is not completely independent from other modern ideologies. Conversely, he stresses the interconnection between conservatism and liberal state theories as being the main actor of international politics, while in contrast with liberalism, conservatism accentuates the paternalistic and protective role of a state. (Strauss, 1953)

3 EXPLANATORY POSSIBILITIES OF CONSERVATISM

Conservatism is adaptable. As an example might be mentioned today's neo-conservatism, as well as various right-wing, people's parties, which within political spectrum belong to conservatism.⁴ An increasing number of conservative parties are then reflected in the composition of the European Parliament and its leadership.⁵ The opposition in this particular case radicalizes on a national as well as regional (EU) level. Conservatives have also adopted the traditional conception of a family as a basic economic unit of a state, claiming that a traditional family - bisexual one, guarantees orientation towards patriotism and religion, as well it acts as a guarantee of traditionally proved morality. Particular values, patriotism, the maintenance of economic stability, the cultivation of economic behavior, etc. are considered by conservatives as a man/citizen's duty. They criticize liberals who take these values as optional. (Sutor, 1999)

Essentially, the third interpretation is sociological, and it dates to the second half of the 19th century - since the period when August Comte started to be ideologically influential. (Macha, 1968) Due to this fact, conservatism is not ideology, it is only an attitude motivated by fear of the future of those social classes and groups which view unavoidable changes, and despite warnings, they are not able to reverse this course. For this reason, they attempt to present feelings as to be political postures. The economic dimension of the first interpretation is based on the fact that conservatism strived to oppose unavoidable changes that impacted through altering the way of production and distribution of material possession the economic status of a country, then the social status of citizens, and finally, political awareness. An uncontrollable economic boom in Western Europe as well as in the USA as being an emerging superpower, caused a fear of an economic collapse if a *laissez-fair* principle was to be fully applied in the financial, market production sphere. K. Marx, though not being a conservative,

considered this fact as a crucial, fearing a potential collapse of modern capitalism. (Marx, 1965)

Within this interpretation, conservative proponents did not oppose technological scientific changes, as it was interpreted from the side of their critics. In contrast, technological and scientific development was considered to be decisive though not that much as to change social life in a radical way. Science and technology enhance state's power, a state is more respected on an international scene, having a higher prestige, scientific and technological inventions are highly appreciated. Such high a conservative tolerance to scientific and technological development was supposed to confirm the political correctness of conservatism and its positive impact on a state's economy.

According to the second interpretation, conservatism is not "an ideology *per se*". Today, after two centuries of the development of political parties, it has been proved that "ideologies *per se*", do not exist. Concerning the wealth of a state from a perspective of geographical conditions, natural resources and energy potentials, conservatism thanks to its structure encompassing an important economic dimension, has managed to integrate itself purposefully in part with liberal or socialist ideas and doctrines. Conservatives in the economy always prefer acceptance and maintenance of their own rational concept in a project form. But means for the realization of this project could be liberal or *sic* totalitarian since conservatives are fully aware of the experience from the past that "the end justifies the means".

In the 19th century, Britain was termed as "an industrial workshop of the world". Thanks to the industrial revolution: the invention of steam engine, textile industry technologies, modern shipbuilding, railroads building, etc. Britain transformed into a country where conservative political elites gained a strong position.

The third interpretation lacks the essence. A person can think conservatively in a way to be in

⁴ Russian United Democratic Party – Yabloko, Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia, Movement for a better Hungary-Jobbik

⁵ 17th January 2017 Centre-right politician Antonio Tajani was elected the new president of the European Parliament

accord with self. But that person wants to be socially active they have to transform their own opinion into a political form. If people want to impact a society, they have to get involved in conservative party politics, while differentiating between economic and social conservatism. This selection often takes place in states' electoral campaign where strong conservative political parties participate. But this situation might lead to an undesirable repercussion. If a voter separates the economic agenda from the social one, there is a threat that the state will not provide security in that sphere where such voter wants to see it. Therefore, conservatism has its flexible strategy to integrate with Liberals into a coalition which is able to transfer a state's protectionists policy from its source to a sphere where needed. A phenomenon called social-democratic consensus emerges as a certain kind of verified strategy which tended to appear and disappear in many periods of European and American political history. (Oakeshott, 1962)

In a larger Central Europe and the Balkans, conservatism has taken a form of strong political parties of right wing, clerical, people's character, already in a period when the transition process initiated a boom in the rising number of political parties. Very influential were mostly national and clerical parties with active existence for more than two decades while contributing to the economic rise and the stability of values and identity. On the other hand, an opposition to left-wing parties was

formed. The failure of the conservatives in this period was caused by not having shared a common euphoria of candidate states to integrate into the blocks such as EU and NATO. Electoral concepts are mostly influenced by a situation from outside, the rising number of migrants after abolishing borders, free movement of capital, labor force, the increasing liberal ignorance towards nationalism, patriotism, religion, and traditionalism. Even today such situation worsens common-interparty coalitions, which is dangerous not only for security but also for aspects of a state.

4 CONCLUSION

Political conservatism is not a homogenous ideology. In practical politics, there are still differences between those who favor either economic or social conservatism. This is a result of the economic integration of Europe which suppresses national sovereignty in favor of transnational "supra sovereignty". If we know as an inseparable part of conservatism work also affairs which are deeply embedded in citizen-religious believers' minds, then there are two possible ways of further development. The first one is the subsequent building of narrowing the gap between conservatism and liberalism. The second one – the degradation of liberalism as a form a relic, might completely stop to completely exist in the future.

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