



# CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

## 1000 YEARS OF POLISH–GERMAN–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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# A draft for the theory of affiliation with Middle Europe as an example

**Key words:** geopolitics, Baltic states, European Union

## 1. Introduction

The question of affiliation is one of the basic problems of geopolitics as it is comprehended nowadays, i.e. taking into consideration the conditioning of inter- and beyond state networks and the need to define by a state its own entity as an actor of international relations.

Affiliation can be defined as the presence in the friendly political environment, which creates conditions favorable for the development of a state's potential.

In other words, for the entity of a state the following are of significance, firstly its own resources associated with five dimensions of modern geopolitics-demographic power, which means human resources and their quality, political power resulting from the institutional efficiency, economic power which derive from the national resources of property including self-sufficiency of natural resources, military power as the guarantee of safety and stability as well as the power of image associated with influence within soft power; at the same time relative resources are of significance as well, i.e. this is what results from relating the state's potential to its surroundings and answering the question to what extent the surrounding creates positive environment of the development of own resources, and on the other hand to

what extent it blocks these resources (e.g. by creating the threat of instability, which results in the need of permanent investment in military power at the expense of other dimensions, raises the cost of investments due to "the imposition of insecurity" etc.) or simply reduces them (by the drain of human resources of taking over economic resources).

The surroundings should also be understood taking into consideration modern conditioning of the world politics, which has undergone the phase of intense globalization and network integration. Therefore, this term will comprise not only the direct closeness in geographic terms but also the whole set of subjects-state, economic or social, influencing the policies of a given state by various channels of intervention of network character (stock exchange, corporations, investment funds, international organizations, climate agreements, etc.) In such a meaning the surroundings of every modern state is nowadays much more complex than ever. While constructing the strategy of a state a wide range of intervenig factors should be taken into consideration.

## 2. Affiliation, relative resources, and surroundings from the Polish perspective

The three terms: affiliation, relative resources, and surroundings, are in my opinion crucial while answering the question: why, from the Polish perspective, it is worth dealing with the Middle Europe?

Summing up, the Middle Europe, as an independent stable geopolitical area is valuable for Poland since it creates the surroundings which is advantageous for our relative resources, which means that it is the surroundings where our affiliation is located.

These issues might be presented simultaneously in dynamic and normative dimensions. Then we could state that every state should aim at appropriate affiliation, which means that the political leaders' task is to settle such relations with the surroundings that will result in strengthening relative resources and avoiding disadvantageous situations referring to them. The dynamics of affiliation derives nowadays from the phenomenon of deepened networking of integrating character, whose depth and character are diversified (amongst them the European one in the shape of the European Union being the most advanced).

Two situations, which should be considered disadvantageous from the geopolitical point of view, are the opposite of affiliation.

Firstly, it is isolation, i.e. solitude, which these days cannot be sustained without potential loss, even by the states considered theoretically the strongest according to traditional geopolitics (large area, large population, suitable geographical location, and strong army), because of the transformed character of the definition of surroundings. One cannot sustain self-imposed isolation without loss, and on the other hand one may be isolated when there is no appropriate affiliation.

Secondly, there is subordination. It means the situation in which surroundings acquires the stratification dimension, there appear the centre and peripheries, and in extreme cases the influence zones are distinguished in which some states have the right to influence the decisions concerning policies of the others. The phenomenon of domination/subordination is disadvantageous for every side of such an arrangement, since it results in the phenomenon of non-optimal development of relative resources in the whole surroundings, and sooner or later leads to instability ending eventually in the break-out (an uprising, war, collapse).

Hence, the second basic thesis for consideration over the significance of Middle European politics for

the Polish politics is the statement that the Middle Europe as the community of our affiliation has the point only as the part of a larger set of network connections opening it for the global politics and only provided it doesn't become the area of political or economic subordination.

The issues of affiliation in considerations concerning the place of Poland in Middle Europe may be also referred to the question of auto-definition, i.e. self-denotation of this area.

In my view, defining Middle Europe as the modernizing community is of biggest significance. The states of our region are in no way sentimental and anachronistic community. Middle Europe is not a granny's knick-knack neither is it just the memory of occupation of these areas by Austria-Hungary, as sometimes it is defined. In my opinion, defining our part of Europe by its modernizing achievements, which were strictly connected with entity and emphasising own identity, is much more interesting and useful. States and nations of Middle Europe frequently undertook splendid and efficient modernization efforts, which situated them among the rightful actors of the international order. One may even state, that historically the border of modernity beyond which there were regressive ruling and retarded social culture, made the Middle European limes. It might be a paradoxical statement, since in the majority of historical narrations our part of Europe was pointed at as "the core of regress and retardness". However, I would like to underline clearly that there is a difference between objectively determined distance, e.g. economic, in relation to more developed economies, and the effort to overcome it and constant readiness to face challenges associated with catching up. It seems that it is this attitude that can be perceived as the element of political and social Middle European identity: we are poorer (weaker), but we will do anything to change our position, and prove that we can win. Middle Europe is of aspiring, not resigning character. It never accepts its fate, when it places it on the second position. Of course, such a situation causes a special complex amongst some elites of Middle European countries. They perceive other states and nations as the centres, which should be mimed in clumsy way, and such an attitude was, and still is, a threat for the entity identity of our nations, and luckily at the same time we have enough examples to prove that the modernization meant in this part of Europe building up own strength and competitiveness. The period after the Great War was a special example of the entity modernization as

the synonym of establishing Middle Europe. At that time in all the newly established countries of this part of the continent broad programs of creating modern public institutions, infrastructure, industry, were undertaken, as well as the ones concerning architecture and art that were, on the one hand, to emphasise entity affiliation to the most developed world, and on the other create the holistic vision of own identity described with the use of modern technique<sup>1</sup>. So it wasn't merely copying central patterns, but searching for its own ways leading to creation of own competitive advantages and idea for itself using modern language, visual expression and technical thought. After 1989 when the need for rapid modernization in the countries of Middle Europe appeared again after over throwing the Soviet bondage, the major part of elites accepted the attitude of miming modernization embedded peripheral status<sup>2</sup>, according to which "native" meant "retarded", and independence was understood as a burden rather than an asset.

Therefore Middle Europe as an area of Polish affiliation should be constructed, in historical context, by referring to a great program of freedom and 'aiming at entity', as the effort after gaining independence in 1918 was, which for some countries happened when they acquired sovereignty after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The assessment and comparison of these actions, the analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, critical reference to modern times is the best way to look for the roots for Middle European identity, standing out against other parts of the Old Continent.

Looking at the Middle European politics from the perspective of our affiliation, we need to emphasise that Middle Europe is within the interest of Poland as the regional system of close cooperation between national states that are strong and capable of entity activity. The appearance of "geopolitical vacuum" in this part of the Old Continent is in opposition to our interest, and so is reducing us to the role of imitational development peripheries depending on impulses coming from the main central source. Since vacuum requires filling. The situation in which there are no clear guarantees of the entity of the region and there is the impression that it may be in the "grey zone", or more specifically in the sphere of somebody's interest ("close abroad") is an existential threat for Middle Europe especially that it shares borders with aggressive players characterized with ex-

pansion tendencies. Each of them fulfills them with instruments characteristic for it. Imitational peripheral status doesn't threat the existence, yet is equally disadvantageous, since it permanently deprives of entity and produces the bonds of dependence which tend to self-consolidate and expand from one of the fields (e.g. economic dependence) to the others (cultural, development, mental dependence).

The regional system of cooperation can be constructed under certain conditions.

Firstly, it is necessary to guarantee relative safety in the region of Middle Europe.. It means that taking into consideration the conditioning of today's global politics, apart from the need for the return to the construction of own defensive skills (e.g. by Poland) it is also necessary to preserve the transatlantic connection with the significant military presence of the Treaty in this area, and with, confirmed and operationally possible, guarantees of ally assistance in the situations of crisis. It is possible only when the Middle European region regains its political significance for the world safety as the area of freedom and democracy confronted with the imperial authoritarian rule spread just beyond its eastern borders<sup>3</sup>. The continual attempts to violate the sense of safety of, e.g. Baltic states, are today the test for the ability of ally and regional reaction. They shouldn't be left without political response.

Secondly, it is necessary that the states of the Middle Europe are capable of cooperation in other fields of safety, especially economic one (including the energetic one) and environmental one, in order to create the system of mutual assistance and exchange guarantees in case of threats. The regional network of solidarity when it comes to safety is indispensable.

Thirdly, the entity of regional community will not come into existence without breaking the obstacles of cooperation, which are associated with both historical issues, the problems of national minorities resulting from the complex national-state mosaic in Middle Europe, as well as the current economic competition. The obstacles deeply divide these states and nations which, from the perspective of theoretical system model, should cooperate closely with each other due to the neighboring location or sharing common resources. Today the most vivid example of such difficulties in building up the political community are Polish-Lithuanian relations, which, so difficult at the beginning, have

<sup>1</sup> Compare with A. Szczerski, *Modernizacje*, Łódź 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with Z. Krasnodębski, *Demokracja peryferii*, Gdańsk 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Compare with G. Friedman, *Następna dekada*, Kraków 2012.

been demolished throughout the last years by manifest errors in bilateral politics.

The awareness and working out the catalogue of common interests is the fourth element of the Middle European network. Middle Europe cannot be “a political spell” but it has to become political reality. It is easy to discuss the need of cooperation, but without the community of interests this won't be a real unity. One may state that the states of Middle Europe are connected with one indefeasible common interest: it is the common fate, i.e. in our case it is the group of states associated with each other with the thread of existence – the destruction of the independence of one of them means an automatic threat for the others. This fragile construction of the Middle Europe edifice cannot be stable without all its elements. It is clear today, e.g. the lack of free Belarus disturbs the order of this part of Europe. Nevertheless, the statement that the common fate seen as the basis for the strategic alliance is the only Middle European binder, would narrow the rationing, and what is more cause that the regional unity could become real only in extreme situations. What is necessary, however, is ‘the community of everyday life’, i.e. programs of common investments and complex network of contacts, which will attract our states and nations. Breaking through infrastructural barriers as well as educational and cultural ones based on stereotypes should be a significant part of these activities. The nations of Middle Europe know surprisingly little about each other and relatively seldom visit each other (e.g. during holidays surely less frequently than they visit other parts of the world and Europe). Difficulties in communication are a significant obstacle. When we look at Poland today it is practically cut off the whole region when it comes to motorways or railways: in the north there is no Rail Baltica or Via Baltica, in the east there isn't even a good road along our border (S-19), the southern motorway West-East doesn't reach the Ukrainian border, and towards the south there is an incomplete in Muszyna and the shortage of ideas referring to so called Zakopianka to the border with Slovakia. To get to Budapest or Prague it takes so long that one has enough time to recall the 19<sup>th</sup> century standard of railway, when you could get there in a stylish way or the mid-war period, when the journey was faster. This way the Middle European community cannot be established. As long as it is easier to get from Warsaw to Berlin than to Prague, Vilnius, Lwów or Budapest, it will be Mitteleuropa rather than Middle Europe. Another element of significance when it comes to creat-

ing real regional bonds is education. Middle European youth must be taught our community and acquire the knowledge about each other, otherwise there won't be any interest and need of contacts. Finally, there should be mutual support of investments and economic cooperation, getting rid of barriers in this field and encouraging, by economic stimuli, establishment of common business enterprises.

At the same time, the sole effort of states and nations of Middle Europe is not enough to create here the entity community.

From the Polish perspective, as a member state of the European Union, using union tools, in positive sense, is equally important in creating the entity of Middle Europe region, and in negative sense, blocking all these initiatives that could threaten this entity.

The first group includes most of all using by Middle European countries such tools as macro-regional strategies in the European Union (now the active ones are the Baltic Strategy and the Danube Strategy; neither of them, however, is of Middle European character) as well as taking over the responsibility and control of the Union activities towards the Middle European neighbours beyond the Union: the states eastwards and southwards. In the first case the Carpathian Strategy, also presented in this issue of “Zeszyty”, is a meaningful suggestion. When it comes to the second element, it is especially important for the states of our region to be efficient in striving for the open character of the Union, creating opportunities to expand it eastwards by tightening the formal bonds connecting the EU with its neighbours in the East and South (to Georgia) along with the clearly declared political perspective of the membership, as well as controlling by them in practice the financial and help instruments, which are directed at these states, even if they are as handicapped as the Eastern Partnership.

At the same time the states of Middle Europe cannot be indifferent towards the general tendencies in the evolution of the European Union. Therefore, it is in the regional interest to make the transformations in the European system lead towards the coherent and common order based on decentralized centres of cooperation, rather than let them evolve towards the hierarchical quasi-federal structure with centralized decision patterns at the same time breaking the European solidarity and community bonds.

## Conclusions

In other words: the European Union managed by the narrow group of the “central states” is disadvantageous for us, especially when it is clearly divided into the inner circle around the euro, acting selfishly according to its own needs, the mid circle depending on it (without any influence, but acting in the subordinate system) and finally the outer circle, without any responsibility towards the others, loosely associated by economic cooperation. As a result, the Middle European countries would tend to either make attempts to acquire the membership in the inner circle, even at the cost of breaking regional bonds, or would stay in the mid circle in the disadvantageous position of political and economic deprivation as peripheries.

On the other hand, Middle Europe has the interest in the Union, which preserving the treaty coherence: common institutions, budget, law, evolves towards decentralized form of “regional communities”, which have equal rights, but can individually shape a particular model of its activities within homogenous norms

and marginal conditions. It creates the opportunity for the Middle European model of integration within the Union, focused around the coordination core, whose natural fulcrum would be Poland. In this way the problem of entity and integration could be solved- through the modal forms of unity while preserving the basic guarantees of coherence and solidarity.

Therefore, Poland should act consistently and strictly towards establishing the advantageous surroundings, which it could be the part of, and at the same time enlarge its geopolitical potential by taking advantage of its own and relative resources. Middle Europe is for us a natural environment to create such surroundings. Hence, when we ask: whose should it be, the answer is: ours, meaning common.

## References

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