

## Mitteleuropa – Origins and pertinence of a political concept

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“Mitteleuropa” is a multi-faceted concept and as such difficult to handle. Its complexity derives not only from its origin as a German expression that cannot be translated properly<sup>1</sup>, but rather from the fact that it contains implications on different levels – geography, economy and (geo)politics –, each of which is controversial and changing over time<sup>2</sup>. This has not prevented *Mitteleuropa* from cyclical resurgence until the present, even though contexts have changed: Unlike in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is no longer regarded an appropriate model for present political discussions. In fact, it appears to be a topic historians deal with in order to emphasize differences, especially in comparison with the European Union of today. Some good reasons account for this distanced treatment: first its amalgamation with power-politics and German hegemony, second its closeness to Friedrich Naumanns extensive concept of *Mitteleuropa* in the years before WW I and third its aggressive exaggeration and misuse by national socialism, the latter representing the peak of a development which took its

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<sup>1</sup> For example Peter Stirk, *The idea of Mitteleuropa*, in: Peter Stirk., *Mitteleuropa*, a.a.O., Jorg Brechtefeld, *Mitteleuropa and German politics*. New York, 1996; Bascom Barry Hayes, *Bismarck and Mitteleuropa*. London, 1994 or also Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German thought and action 1815-1945*. The Hague, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> Steffen Möller, in a conference paper to the 55. Deutschen Geographentag points out that the term *Mitteleuropa* cannot be understood as a standardized region?, but only in dependence on the context in which the term is used („(...) daß der Begriff ‘Mitteleuropa keinesfalls als einheitlicher Raum verstanden wird, sondern dass er in Abhängigkeit vom Kontext gewählt wird, in dem der Begriff fällt“); „Wo liegt Mitteleuropa? Eine Studie zur Abgrenzung eines Raumes in Abhängigkeit vom Kontext“, URL: <http://www.geotag05.uni-trier.de/pdf/poster/30moeller.PDF>, 21.03.2006, 17:45 p.m.); Jaques Le Rider, *Mitteleuropa*. Auf den Spuren eines Begriffs. Essay. Aus dem Französischen von Robert Fleck. Wien, 1994, p. 7, refers to the general variability of border-constructions; see also Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Der Erste Weltkrieg. Anfang vom Ende des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*. Frankfurt am Main, 2004., p. 95 and Walter R. Weitzmann, *Constantin Frantz, Germany and Central Europe. An ambiguous legacy*, in: Peter Stirk (ed.), *Mitteleuropa. History and prospects*. Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 36-60, here p. 37 and also Peter Stirk, *The idea of Mitteleuropa*, in: Stirk, *Mitteleuropa*, a.a.O., pp. 1-35, here p. 1. See also Michael Salewski, Jürgen Elvert, *Mitteleuropa! Deutsche Pläne zur europäischen Neuordnung (1918-1945)*. Historische Mitteilungen: Beiheft; 35. Stuttgart, 1999, p. 9. – The problem of border definition is also existing in the case of „Europe“; see Rene Girault, *Das Europa der Historiker*, in: Rainer Hudemann, Hartmut Kaelble, Klaus Schwabe (Eds.), *Europa im Blick der Historiker (= Historische Zeitschrift (HZ) Beihefte; Bd. 21)* München, 1995, p. 55. An overview on the different spatial concepts of „Europe“ and their historical genesis is provided by Hans-Dietrich Schultz, *Welches Europa soll es denn sein? Anregungen für den Geographieunterricht*. Überarbeitete, leicht gekürzte Fassung des Beitrags in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 25 (2003), H. 3, pp. 223-256. (URL: [http://www.geographie.uni-marburg.de/parser/parser.php?file=/deuframat/deutsch/1/1\\_2/schultz/kap\\_23.htm](http://www.geographie.uni-marburg.de/parser/parser.php?file=/deuframat/deutsch/1/1_2/schultz/kap_23.htm), 05.04.2006, 12:00 p.m.); see also the discussion within geographic sciences: Taras Vozniak, *Déjà-vu in Osteuropa*. Vortrag anlässlich der Eröffnung der "Centrelyuropdriims" am 22. April 2004 in Zürich. Übersetzt aus dem Französischen von Sabine Albrecht (URL: [http://www.geographie.uni-marburg.de/parser/parser.php?file=/deuframat/deutsch/6/6\\_4/vozniak/start.htm](http://www.geographie.uni-marburg.de/parser/parser.php?file=/deuframat/deutsch/6/6_4/vozniak/start.htm), 14.06.2006, 09:50 Uhr).

onset in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. Since then, all variants of *Mitteleuropa* have been discredited, and this holds also true for the idea as such, due to its potential to justify (or disguise) German supremacy on the continent<sup>4</sup>.

Given all that, it is hardly surprising that *Mitteleuropa* represents a kind of an infamous anti-blueprint to the peaceful process of European Integration after 1945<sup>5</sup>. In terms of scientific adequateness, however, this approach is not free from imbalances, since it underestimates the continuities arising from the idea of *Mitteleuropa*. It also tends to miss out some future-oriented elements within political concepts associated with this term. In order to illustrate these points, I will address the following three main aspects in this paper:

- the formation of *Mitteleuropa* as an idea and a political concept since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its rise to a central issue for public and political debates
- the implications (in terms of geography, economy and politics) of different concepts and interpretations of *Mitteleuropa*
- in my conclusion I will provide an overview and final evaluation of the unprogressive as well as future-oriented elements rooted in *Mitteleuropa*

### **The formation and rise of *Mitteleuropa* as an idea and a political concept since the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

There has never been a single, central discussion about *Mitteleuropa*, neither in the 19<sup>th</sup> century nor later. Rather, poets, intellectuals, journalists, geographers, economists and – of course – politicians developed various ideas in context of what they regarded as questions of their times and the future of the European continent especially. Given this variety of actors and their respective views it is hardly surprising that there is not –and has never been - a

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Jaworski, Zentraleuropa - Mitteleuropa – Ostmitteleuropa. Zur Definitionsproblematik einer historischen Großregion. Spezialforschungsbereich Moderne - Wien und Zentraleuropa um 1900: Vortrag in Graz, 16.06.1998 (URL: <http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/moderne/heft2j.htm>, 15.05.2006, 17:00 p.m.)

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Mitteleuropaidee, a.a.O., S. 114. vgl. dazu auch Jörg K. Hoensch, Nationalsozialistische Europapläne im Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: Richard G. Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, Arnold Suppan u.a. (Hrsg.), Mitteleuropa-Konzeptionen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhundert (= Reihe Zentraleuropa-Studien, hrsg. von Richard G. Plaschka und Anna M. Drabek; Bd. 1). Wien, 1995, pp. 307-325, here p. 309ff.

<sup>5</sup> The strongest critique regarding the inherent German hegemony within the idea of *Mitteleuropa* comes from Frank Pieper, 100 Jahre Weltmachtstreben. Deutsche Mitteleuropakonzepte vom Kaiserreich bis Joschka Fischer, in: Frank Pieper, Holger Kuhr, Christiane Schneider (eds.), Die EU, „Kerneuropa“ und Osterweiterung. Geschichte, Entwicklung und Perspektive eines imperialistischen Blocks unter deutsch-französischer Hegemonie. Hamburg, 2004, pp. 6-36. Pieper exaggerates the continuity of hegemonic ideas and underestimates the unique character of the EU's institutional setup and supranational character. At the same time, Pieper is unaware of the more tolerant concepts in context with assumptions about the future of the Austrian-Hungarian double monarchy.

shared, common and consensual concept of *Mitteleuropa* (not even -and especially not- in geographical terms). Therefore the question which and what kind of *Mitteleuropa* is in focus has to be answered *specifically* each time, taking various actors and their interpretations into account on the background of changing time and contexts.

At first sight, one could say that the most significant characteristic of *Mitteleuropa* lies in its inherent German perspective: Either in the sense that the 'belated German nation' labelled its demand for territory with *mitteleuropäisch* considerations before the stage of statehood was reached, or in the sense that it served directly as a guiding principle for politics that seemed to arise naturally from a favourable geo-strategic position. However during the 19<sup>th</sup> century we witness the coexistence of this concept with another one: the Slavic-influenced, Eastern- or Danube-*Mitteleuropa*, emphasizing a south-eastern perspective<sup>6</sup>. This "dualism" of concepts – one western-oriented, one accenting the eastern or south-eastern perspective – continued to serve as main reference points in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is self-evident that both concepts bared diverging implications for geographic definitions of *Mitteleuropa*.

In German language the term *Mitteleuropa* goes back to geographer Johann August Zeune (1778-1853), who used it in his book "Gea – Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Erdbeschreibung"<sup>7</sup> (Attempt for a scientific description of the earth). Published in 1808, Zeune tried to sketch a region between Europe's northern and southern part without at the same time emphasizing or insisting on a specific German role arising from its assumed central position on the continent. So in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Mitteleuropa* was as a term politically more neutral than ever after. But unlike Zeune, the awoken German national movement slightly began to transcend this neutral understanding. At this time, the German national movement was *in statu nascendi*, triggered and dialectically invigorated by the Napoleonic war of liberation (1813-15). Nevertheless, it set out to influence *mitteleuropäisch* thinking, even though a future German role and mission for Europe was still beyond the horizon of expectations

But soon there were other actors thinking more concretely about a future German nation state, its character, shape, size and relationship with the rest of Europe. Incorporated into these ideas was another aspect that became increasingly influential: the center position within Europe. It became difficult to distinguish between the function of the term as a neutral

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Cede, Dieter Fleck, Der Mitteleuropabegriff. Entwicklung und Wandel unter dem Einfluß zeitspezifischer Geisteshaltungen, in: Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Geographie der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Band 34, Oktober 1996 (URL: [http://www.uni-graz.at/geowww/geo/geoweb\\_magazin\\_artikel\\_detail\\_druckversion.php?recordID=113](http://www.uni-graz.at/geowww/geo/geoweb_magazin_artikel_detail_druckversion.php?recordID=113), 12.06.2006, 14:40 p.m.).

<sup>7</sup> Johann August Zeune, Gea. Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Erdbeschreibung. Berlin, 1811.

description and the deeper (normative) meaning of 'being in the middle'. In other words, while for Zeune *Mittleuropa* was primarily a term for geographical analysis and description, it contained for others a deeper and central meaning (in the double sense of the word). Given the fact of dispersed German settlements, regions and units on the continent, it was just a short way from here to a two-fold German 'mission' towards unification within Europe. Therefore the 'German question' was the core problem for any future concept of the continent, both in political and geo-strategic terms. Such interpretations became traceable soon after Zeune's book, in publications by e.g. K. Benecke<sup>8</sup> (1810) or J.C.F. Gutschmuths<sup>9</sup> (1821). The German publicist Ernst Moritz Arndt can be seen as one prominent representative for this position when he wrote:

"We are set by god in the centre of Europe, we are the heart of our part of the world. Because we are in the centre, all the other peoples of Europe try to put us aside and try to wash us away. All movements of the whole world seek to find their rest in our middle."<sup>10</sup>

In this statement we see the seemingly objective analysis of geographical features transformed into a kind of objective task handed over to Germany, even though this task is not clearly defined in all of its consistencies yet. But in its consequence, the territorial unification of Germany was only the first step towards a wider unification of the rest of the continent. This makes Arndt's position a telling example of the shift from an analysis to a concept with increasingly normative features.

Economist Friedrich List was another influential voice in this debate. List made concrete assumptions about the economical situation of the 'Deutscher Bund' (German confederation) in his *opus magnum* "Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie" (The national system of political economics), published in 1841<sup>11</sup>. Inot only did List envision Germanys future relations to the rest of the continent, far more, List saw an inevitable connection between economics and politics and its meaning not only for the formation of the German nation state, but for the continent and its position in the global competition for power

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Benecke, *Kleine Beiträge zur Erdkunde Deutschlands*. Lübeck, 1810.

<sup>9</sup> In 1821, Johann Christoph Friedrich Gutschmuths edited (together with J.A. Jacoby ) a historical ethnographical appendix to a geographical work on Germany under the titel „Deutsche Land und Volk“. In this book, Germany was described as „the middle of Europe“; see Rudolf Jaworski, *Zentraleuropa - Mitteleuropa – Ostmitteleuropa*, a.a.O.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Über Volkshass und über den Gebrauch einer fremden Sprache* (1813), in: *Schriften für und an meine lieben Deutschen*. Erster Theil, Leipzig, 1845, pp. 379-380 (cit. Michael Jeismann, Henning Ritter (eds.), *Grenzfälle. Über neuen und alten Nationalismus*. Leipzig 1993, pp.. 319-334.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich List, *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie* (zuerst Stuttgart/Tübingen, 1841).

Herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Günter Fabiunke (= Reihe ökonomische Studentexte; Bd. 9). Berlin, 1982.

and welfare. In this context, List very emphatically argued for a customs union among the German Confederation in order to set up against economical pressure of the British Empire. List was convinced that Germany first needed to consolidate, politically and economically. Protectionism was the main strategy for achieving this aim; taxes, customs and border controls served as appropriate means. However for List this was only a transitional period before an economical strong Germany would be prepared and ready for trans-border cooperation, which would also allow for integrative forms of cooperation. Behind these assumptions stood the wide-spread expectation of emerging world empires that were believed to determine the future in global dimensions: The British Empire, the US, and Russia. Only a consolidated and strong Germany, lying at the heart of Europe, could act as a uniting force in and for Europe. This was essential for entering competition with the other world powers. List wrote:

“As long as the centre of the continent has not reached its natural befitting position, a deeper unification of the European continent will be impeded (...) If Germany with its access to the sea, together with Holland, Belgium and Switzerland would constitute a strong commercial and political unit, this powerful national body would melt together all the institutions of the monarchist, dynastic and aristocratic interests and the institutions of the representative system (...). In this way, Germany could safeguard for a long time peace on the European continent and in the same moment constitute the centre of a lasting continental alliance”.<sup>12</sup>

What is remarkable in Lists argumentation is the close connection between economical and political aspects of a German leading role in Europe and Europe's position in the global context. The accumulation of German power was regarded a natural precondition for general prosperity in Europe. Arising from a perceived power vacuum in the heart of Europe was the urge to settle Germany's own affairs and those of the continent at the same time. In this context, List also supported the idea of establishing a system of economic (and later political) cooperation with Austria-Hungary. South-Eastern Europe was widely believed to be a natural hemisphere of German influence, and the implicit consequences of List's argumentation went into the same direction. Moreover, Lists similar proposal of a German-British alliance has to be seen in close connection with Germanys rise to power, because “Germany (...) would be able to fulfil its part of this agreement only if it dominated *Mitteleuropa*”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich List, *Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie*, a.a.O., pp. 415/416.

<sup>13</sup> William Otto Henderson, *Friedrich List: Der erste Visionär eines vereinten Europas. Eine historische Biographie*, übersetzt von Angelika Jäger. Reutlingen, 1989, p. 121.

Though List *expressis verbis* argued against open domination (and he was in fact an opponent to annexations or chauvinistic subjugation of Europe), he envisioned Germany as driving force behind the rise of Europe as a coming world power. In Lists eyes, a German leadership position would be the natural result of economic dominance, leading – though not directly projected but appreciated- to a kind of indirect hegemony ‘through the backdoor’. Especially the Balkans were seen as ideally suited for colonisation by Germany, and the cooperation with Austria-Hungary was the vehicle to bring about this silent domination by economical means.

Needless to say that List, even in his comparably moderate argumentation, did not recognize the inherent tension between the principle of cooperation on one hand and the central position of Germany controlling the process as a main actor on the other hand. With remarkable implicitness the question why other European powers should accept or tolerate Germany as *primus inter pares* was left open. Another blind spot –though not unusual at that time<sup>14</sup> – was the interpretation of the Balkan peoples as uncivilized, underdeveloped and incapable of self-administration: the sheer number and the (political as well as cultural) weight of Serbs, Bulgarians and Romanians was greatly underestimated, and with it the likeliness of urges and aspirations regarding national independence<sup>15</sup>. In his concept, List argued for general positive effects of trans-border cooperation that could help legitimizing Germany’s leading role- which is, in other words, *output-legitimacy*, arising from a moderate but nevertheless paternalistic approach towards the establishment of new economical and political structures.

The preconditions and consequences of German dominance – may it be benevolent or not – was seen more clearly by other central actors in the German national movement like Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. Jahn alluded to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation as a historical pattern when he wrote: “Our *Reich* may come!”,<sup>16</sup> creating a fusion of political, mythological and religious connotations in his plea for an extensive Germany - extensive in territory and power. With this perception of German speciality the existing ambivalence within *Mitteleuropa* – the inner tension between analytical and normative elements - became even more imbalanced: the rights of other nations for self-determination – still positively acknowledged by List – tended to be dwarfed by the almost objective German position and future role. Hardly surprising, chauvinism could connect with considerations such as Jahn’s

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<sup>14</sup> In 1849, Friedrich Engels described Slavic peoples as „lacking history“ and „Barbarians who are not able for self-government“; see William Henderson, a.a.O., p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Mitteleuropaidee und die Mitteleuropapläne im Deutschen Reich*, in: ders., *Der Erste Weltkrieg. Anfang vom Ende des bürgerlichen Zeitalters*. Frankfurt/M., 2004, pp. 94-117, here p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum* (1810), cit. Le Rider, *Mitteleuropa*, a.a.O., p. 49.

easily. An assumed cultural supremacy towards other nations, especially towards Slavic peoples in Europe, seemed to justify the cultural mission of Germans in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, which Jahn and others supported; needless to say that the economical and political side effects from which Germany would profit most were also much appreciated by them.

List and Jahn, different in their approaches but both arguing for a strong future position of Germany, either through/by indirect effect and, finally, hegemony by economic and political strength (List), or by acting out cultural and military supremacy directly (Jahn) were two sides of the same coin: the assumption of a German mission not only for itself but also for the better for the rest of Europe, due to its geopolitical position.

Vorschlag? List's and Jahn's approaches were two sides of the same coin: the assumption of a German mission not only for itself but also for the better for the rest of Europe, due to its geopolitical position. While List came up with /argued for an indirect effect and, in the end, hegemony by economic and political strength, Jahn was in favour of carrying out cultural and military supremacy directly. During the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "*Mitte*", middle, center - seemingly objective attributions at first sight- became constricted and tapered as a label for political programmes with distinct normative features.

This programme also found supporters in the German national movement and the parliament in the Paulskirche of Frankfurt in 1848/49. Liberals with *großdeutsch* aspirations still followed the *Mitteleuropa* narrative, since it seemed to go along well with a future (prosperous and powerful) German nation state: Before 1871, the *großdeutsch* concept combined the Habsburg Empire as well as the non-German parts of Austria, and this could be regarded obviously as a solution to the 'German question' beyond the concept of a single nation-state<sup>17</sup>.

As mentioned before, this understanding of *Mitteleuropa* competed with another concept in the same period. Czech Historian Frantisek Palacky<sup>18</sup> lobbied –without success- for a replacement of this German-centric view by an Eastern pendant, focussing on Austrian-Hungary and especially on the smaller nations within the double monarchy. Palacky argued for the transformation into a federative system that was respecting the rights of self-determination. Of course the main objective here was to concede Czechs the same rights as the other nations of the Habsburg monarchy, and its second direction of impact was protection

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<sup>17</sup> Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, a.a.O., p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Personal information about Palacky and his role can be obtained from a radio feature by Dana Martinova, Frantisek Palacky war Autor der Geschichte, der den Tschechen ihr Nationalbewusstsein zurückgab. Radio Praha, 20.05.2006 (Full text online: URL: <http://www.radio.cz/de/artikel/79072>, 14.06.2006, 11:10 a.m.).

against the thread of a future Germany becoming too powerful in Europe. However, neither its defensive nor its national and democratic implications could be realized under the given circumstances: Simply speaking there were no advocates amongst Europe's great powers of that time<sup>19</sup>, especially not for the democratic reforms this concept premised. So, for the time being, the German-centric view on *Mitteleuropa* prevailed.

But soon after the battle of Königgrätz (Hradec Králové) in 1866, this mental connection began to dissolve. Bismarck's realization of the *kleindeutsch* option for a German nation state (without inclusion of Austria-Hungary) put an end to any further considerations about *Mitteleuropa*. The political and societal elite of the Kaiserreich accepted more and more the realities of that time which left little space for changes on the European map. But even then a mental connection to *Mitteleuropa* stayed attractive, in that sense that it continued to serve as a reference point for intellectual justification of the Reich. Even though reality – in terms of German territory - was disappointing *großdeutsch* and *kleindeutsch* actors alike, the pre-existing idea of *cultural* hegemony and supremacy began to flourish anew. Hence, on a cultural level, the 'German mission' for Europe found supporters, especially among the academic and intellectual elites of the Reich, and in this interpretation the spacious imagination of *Mitteleuropa* was able to survive and be ready for new influences arising from political and societal developments during the Kaiserreich. In other words, the cultural-national elements as well as the dimension of emancipation, rooted within traditional national thinking, came under pressure and became more and more threatened by an ideological 'roll back'<sup>20</sup>.

Some of these developments can be briefly described with the term *imperialism*. The nation state began to be inflated to a mythological, if not religious, entity, and this opened up space for chauvinism towards other nations and peoples. The pre-existing idea of German cultural influence in Europe – still alive in the early years of the Kaiserreich – grew stronger on the background of European nation states entering a competition for power, prestige and supremacy. However, in practical terms, in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this had little effect on politics or economy, because the German industry did not concentrate on *Mitteleuropa* due to the transatlantic orientation of its trade relations (especially those of the new and powerful branches like the electrical, engineering or chemical industry).

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<sup>19</sup> By the Austrian-Hungarian balancing act (Österreich-ungarischer Ausgleich, 1866) the double monarchy emerged as a multi-ethnic state, in which in both of its parts differences continued to exist, e.g. in constitutional law, electoral law. The pre-existing problem of national and ethnic minorities and their role remained unsolved, creating centrifugal forces which –in the long run- undermined the stability of this political construction.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Mitteleuropaidee*, a.a.O., p. 98.



Nevertheless ideologically and culturally, the feeling of superiority gained influence<sup>21</sup>, and it was a question of political and economical circumstances if this would bring about changes on the level of official politics of the Reich as well. Until then, the debate about *Mitteleuropa* had close connections to an inner-German debate also, especially at the turn of the century:

„The German *Mitteleuropa* debate was becoming embroiled in a larger conflict over the future development of German society. The key question was: should Germany become an ‘industrial state’ or try to remain an ‘agrarian state’? It was a debate over Germany’s social and political structures as much as over its economic policy”<sup>22</sup>.

The government of the Kaiserreich therefore did not act as an official supporter of *mitteleuropäisch* concepts in order to keep its balancing position and to ease the existing antagonisms within the German society. This did not prevent *Mitteleuropa* from being increasingly associated with elements of imperialist thinking, and even for anti-semitism it served as an appropriate projection screen. When in 1904 the ‘*Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftsverein*’ (Middle European Economical Association) was founded, it acted as a pressure group towards informal imperialism in South-Eastern Europe by economical means<sup>23</sup>: in a step-by-step-approach, the Balkans, then the Near East and finally the Far East could be addressed as the next regions for silent domination, first in economical, later in political and military terms. However, this never reached the stage of official politics, besides concrete plans for the establishment of the Bagdad-railway. But it illustrates the continued popularity and publicity of *Mitteleuropa* in German public. The rise of publications dealing with *mitteleuropäisch* themes and topics reached its peak just before the First World War.

The infamous “Septemberprogramm” (September Programme) of 09.09.1914, which was a memorandum by the Reichkanzler (Chancellor of the Reich) Bethmann-Hohlweg, tried to answer public demands for German continental expansion in anticipation of a short and victorious World War. It sketched agreements on customs and trade between not less than the countries of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria-Hungary and Poland – all of them neighbouring countries of Germany, and eventually also Italy, Sweden, Norway. On the surface of this construction, each of its members should have equal rights, but – as the text declared in stupendous frankness – “actually [this union] should stand under German

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<sup>21</sup> See Roger Chickering, *We man who feel most German. A cultural study of the Pan-German League 1886-1914*. Boulder, Colorado, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Stirk, *Mitteleuropa*, a.a.O., p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Mitteleuropaidee*, a.a.O., p. 103. Agreements on customs and traffic, direct foreign investments were seen as the instruments, by which – over time – also a political and military dependence from Germany would surely follow. See also Volker Berghahn, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*. München, 2003, p. 57, who in this context also uses the term „informal empire“ in context with the Balkan region.

leadership and secure economical supremacy of Germany in *Mitteleuropa*”<sup>24</sup>. The status of this document is disputed among historians. It seems to carry defensive character in order to counteract the by far more outreaching and extensive plans for domination of the extreme right on the political spectrum (whose representatives argued for open and direct annexations by military force). Nevertheless, if it would have been realized, the ‘Septemberprogramm’ would have changed the map of Europe in the sense that Germany – being in a semi-hegemonic position already – would have become the dominating power in Europe. Again, a little echo of List’s conception can be perceived here: The indirect effects of economic influence were now used by intention as a strategic instrument in order to hide German ambitions for power. Other differences arose from the geographical focus of these plans and concepts: While List was more oriented towards South-Eastern Europe, the ‘Septemberprogramm’ put North-Western Europe into focus, partly as a reaction to assumed developments on the military level (frontlines etc.).

Another concept of this time was more related to a different geographical shape of *Mitteleuropa*. Liberal publicist Friedrich Naumann had a great success with his book “*Mitteleuropa*”, using the term prominently as a title. Published in 1914, it was – after the autobiography of Bismarck – in terms of publicity and sales the most successful publication during the Kaiserreich. Naumann envisioned a union between Germany and Austria-Hungary as forming a core, to which the smaller countries in the southeast should connect themselves, but based upon free will and motivated by the positive outcomes of economic cooperation. Even Poland and the Baltic states were in focus of this federation of states. Naumann was convinced that other countries should be won by conviction and free decision, not by force or indirect domination, and consequently equal powers of all of its members should truly be guaranteed and not just serve as a cover. Naumann’s model included the right for self-determination and religious tolerance - elements hardly to be found in other concepts, especially not in those of the extreme right. However, Naumann’s concept was based upon conditions that were neither given at that time nor likely to be established soon under present circumstances: Given the antagonisms in Germany, it was unrealistic to expect the development of a liberal policy from the authoritarian regime. Self-restriction was not the main pattern in which the Kaiserreich conducted its policies in the time of imperialism, and by its official ideology it rather raised than restricted public expectations towards German dominance and territorial expansion. Even in the unlikely event of the emergence of such a policy change it would have had negative feedback effects by the influential chauvinist and

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<sup>24</sup> Volker Ullrich, *Die nervöse Großmacht*, a.a.O., p. 421/422, see also URL: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/dokumente/hollweg> (01.08.2006, 14:30 p.m.).

imperialist groups within German society, which would lead to undermining the power basis of the German government. Taking into consideration all this detail, Naumann's proposal was highly unlikely to be carried out, because it presupposed not existing framing conditions. It can also be doubted if the inherent tendency towards a German role of *primus inter pares* could have been prevented in the long run – as Naumann's concept suggested it could be done –, due to the economic strength and the overall powerful position Germany filled already. However a unique feature of Naumann's concept was the untypical reflection about and the acknowledgment of other nation's rights along with the intended guarantee of cultural as well as religious tolerance. This demonstrated Naumann – with the beforementioned limitations – to be a moderate representative of a *Mitteleuropa*-conception in the last years of the Kaiserreich. Trans-border cooperation, beginning from the small field of economic cooperation, was in fact a future-oriented pattern, even though it took two World Wars until it served as a guideline for the establishment of a lasting peace order in Europe.

## Conclusion

*Mitteleuropa* is a historical-political term with spatial or geographical implications. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century it received influences from different sources, the German national movement as well as from assumptions made in context with the future of the Austrian-Hungarian double monarchy. In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term was widely undefined, undetermined in focus and function and therefore open to different uses and interpretations. Even at this time, it showed some ambivalent features that were decisive for its future transformation as a keyword in political discourses: Mainly the coexistence of analytical besides normative levels of meaning. This double characteristic served as a precondition for the peculiar use of the term and – finally – as a term used for disguising German ambitions for domination of Europe. During the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these two levels became increasingly undistinguishable. In context with the German national movement, *Mitteleuropa* represented an ideal orientation for the expected and yearned for German nation state. Since then, the neutral, descriptive side of the term was constantly becoming weaker, and with it the future-oriented elements like respect for other nation's rights (self-determination), religious and ethnical tolerance and all concepts of trans-border-cooperation beyond the traditional pattern of hegemonic structures that were also characteristics of *mitteleuropäisch* ideas of that time. A late echo of some of these future-oriented elements can be perceived in Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, but it is also a telling fact that it had no chance of being realized

due to contradicting framing conditions of that time. Another characteristic of *Mitteleuropa* is the difficulty to define its scope: Dependent on the concept dealt with (and with the different and always changing hierarchy of economical and political aspects within) and from the mode in which a cross-border-entity should be established (domination, hegemony and imperialism or - claimed (fictious/artificial/pretended?) or real - cooperation of equal parties), each author had a different region in mind in terms of geography. Answers to the question “What is *Mitteleuropa*” were at no time consensual, and this also accounted for the role Germany was supposed to play in these concepts.

What remains from this historical discussion? First of all, the long-lasting discussion about cooperation and –eventually- integration and unification of European states and regions. Implicitly, what we can perceive behind all these concepts is the conviction of numerous mutual interdependencies existing within Europe and determining its future. It is somehow tragic that it took two World Wars and the repeated devastation of Europe until those future-oriented elements were remembered and – in a changed context of time – carried out. Since then, *Mitteleuropa* as a term of art has lost its attractiveness, so it can no longer be used positively in order to lobby for an “ever closer union”<sup>25</sup> between European states, due to its inherent ambivalences and the distrust its use inevitably produces. The suspiciousness against this term by non-Germans is somehow justified by the dominating strategic use of the term especially in the public of the Kaiserreich. It is because of these ambivalences that *Mitteleuropa* continues to be associated only with its historically proved negative and destructive potential. Maybe it is time to become aware of its progressive elements as well. Thinking about *Mitteleuropa* may also help us to become aware of the close connection between economic cooperation and political and military power. Especially smaller nation’s present aloofness and fears would become comprehensible, and it would help us not to be blind towards the normative implications of political plans and actions in today’s process of integration. Historically well-informed self-reflection, therefore, seems to serve best as a protection against self-righteousness, paternalism and dominance of others, in its intended as well as in its unintended form.

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<sup>25</sup> Dinan, Desmond (1999). *Ever Closer Union?: An Introduction to European Integration*. Basingstoke, 1999.

