

COMMENTARY: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ALPE-ADRIA COOPERATION

Peter Vodopivec

My contribution to today's discussion will not be a comment in the strict meaning of the word. As a historian, I find it very difficult to comment on ideas and programs which are still only at their inception, still being discussed, more of an abstract suggestion than a concrete reality. Therefore I wish to add a few remarks to the presentation of the historical background of interregional connections in this area, connections which (as we have been informed by Dr. Moritsch) have a history of over 150 years.

The first ideas concerning closer economic cooperation on this territory date from the first decades of the nineteenth century. Since the 1820s, the early years of Austrian industrialization, the idea was mooted in the hinterland of Trst/Trieste that, if the region wanted to keep up with the increasingly rapid development in the West of Europe, its separate regions should come into closer contact. In this respect two main concepts were formed. The first was discussed in Dr. Moritsch's paper: namely, the idea of "Inner Austria" as a special cultural, historical and economic unit, comprising Styria, Carniola, Carinthia and Trieste: a region which could be integrated into the economic trends of the time only as a whole. Its initiator was Archduke Johann, the younger and more liberally-oriented brother of the Austrian Emperor; Johann had lived in Graz because of his liberal orientation.¹ The second concept is connected with the work of Karl Ludwig von Bruck, later the Austrian Minister of Finance, who lived in Trieste in the years 1820-48, and who proposed—in collaboration with German liberals from Vienna and merchants from Trieste—the formation of a unified customs and commercial area in Central Europe (Mitteleuropa).² The Bruck plan, geographically, was clearly more ambitious than the "Inner Austria" concept: the Central European economic union was supposed to strengthen the Austrian position in the struggle for domination in Germany, and at the same time enable Austria to become an important economic, commercial and political presence, situated between Western Europe and the Balkans.

Let us for the moment disregard the political and ethnic motives that prompted the initiators of both of these concepts. Before 1848, and to some extent after 1848 too, the prevailing arguments stated in justification of both these proposals, at least in the area we are concerned with, were economic ones, and in this sense they found a great response, a positive acceptance among the population. As seen from an economic viewpoint, the aim of both concepts was an extremely rapid modernization, which should enable the area between the Alps and the Adriatic to withstand West European, and especially British, competition in the foreign markets. To be included in the industrialization process was, in the eyes of economic planners in Carinthia, Carniola and Styria, of vital importance for the entire South of the Monarchy: the fact that these regions were lagging fatally behind the more developed provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy had been acknowledged in Graz, in Ljubljana, and in Celovec/Klagenfurt ever since the 1820s, when information about the industrial revolution in the West of Europe, and about the technical and economic "miracle" in Great Britain, had begun to penetrate into Inner Austria. In 1838, in a speech at the inauguration of the Industry and Manufacturers' Association of Inner Austria, Archduke Johann spoke enthusiastically about the progress of science and industry, and loudly called for the imitation of foreign, particularly British, models. He warned against an uncritical looking back into the past, even when this past had been economically

favorable. What should be considered, he said, was what was useful at present; the examples of Britain and Western Europe should be followed, since "there is no alternative between destructive backsliding and fruitful progress." According to the Archduke, Inner Austria would be strong enough for the necessary modernization only if the "three sister provinces," Styria, Carniola and Carinthia, would unite in a common effort and, through Trieste—the keystone of Inner Austrian territory—come into contact with European and Mediterranean markets.³

In the second half of the pre-March period a number of educational, cultural and economic institutions were established, on the initiative and with the support of Archduke Johann, that were meant to serve common Inner Austrian interests.⁴ Economic exhibitions were organized; a common Export Association was founded in Trieste; and a common newspaper was published in Graz for distribution in Styria, Carniola and Carinthia. The last decade before the 1848 revolution was spent in polemics about the perspectives and future possibilities of domestic industry, especially ironworks. The actual results of these efforts were modest; after all, time was short—the economic plans of Inner Austria had been in place for little more than a decade; but from the viewpoint of the contemporary population they were, obviously, quite promising, since some of the initiatives were joined by other Austrian provinces: Lower Austria, Upper Austria, and Salzburg.

Already in 1848, however, with the ethnic polarization between Germans and Slovenes, Archduke Johann's concepts proved to be a failure. His supporters, who were mostly liberal German-speakers in Graz, had no understanding for Slovene (and, overall, for Slavic) national demands; and the Inner Austria concept came into conflict with Slovene demands for a "United Slovenia." The fact that ethnic autonomy was impossible without economic autonomy led inevitably towards this dichotomy. At the same time, the growing ethnic impatience made a unified identification of common economic goals and interests difficult. The process of ethnic separation in 1848 and later was an important step in ethnic development and formation; but right at the start it became clear that cooperation among the various ethnic groups, without acknowledgement of their ethnic particularities and differences, could not have long-term success.

Ethnic conflicts in 1848 and later in the nineteenth century hindered cooperation among the different regions of the Alpe-Adria territory; but they did not stop this cooperation altogether. It is true that on a political level there were no further common economic programs, after the model of Archduke Johann's Inner Austria; but as far as a practical evaluation of the economic interests of the individual provinces is concerned, there were no significant differences among the various ethnic groups. In Carniola, Carinthia, Styria and Trieste the prevailing conviction in the 1850s and 1860s was that their economic future depended mostly on the expansionist Austrian economic policy, which had to direct trade from Central Europe and Southern Germany through the Habsburg Empire and the hinterland of Trieste toward the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and Asia. Such a vision of their own economic future (and, of course, of the future of the whole Habsburg Monarchy) was based on the "Central-European" concept, already mentioned, of Karl Ludwig von Bruck; according to this idea, Austria was supposed to obtain, both economically and politically, a mediating role between Europe and the Balkans. The key point of these plans was Trieste, whose harbor was, for the hinterland regions as for the Monarchy as a whole, a window opening onto the world which could—in the opinion of the most optimistic prognosticators—become, by means of an efficient Austrian economic policy, one of the most important harbors in Southern Europe. The optimistic zeal of the 1850s and 1860s is illustrated by the opinions that, given its convenient geopolitical position, Trieste could

become a real Austrian Manchester. At the same time, the idea that Austria, following an expansionist economic policy, should try to obtain some overseas colonies was mooted even among representatives of the Slovene bourgeoisie. "Colonies—that is our slogan, our self confidence, the foundation of our industrial future," wrote Vinko Fereri Klun, the secretary of the Handels- und Gewerbekammer in Carniola, in 1856. In Klun's opinion, the industrial development of Carniola depended on the development of Trieste; and in the steamship company Austrian Lloyd he saw "the beginning of an Austrian Hansa."

As mentioned above, Bruck's "Central-European" plans had their own political and German-ethnic background. The purpose of these plans was the strengthening not only of Austria's economic position, but also of its international political position, and the preservation of its political presence in Germany. But, for the people of the Trieste hinterland, the area between the Alps and the Adriatic—especially, the economically active population—this political (or perhaps "ideological") dimension of Bruck's program had no great importance; for the majority of tradespeople and businessmen, be they Germans, Slovenes, or Italians, the idea of Central European trade and economic connections held in the first instance a practical economic value, since these connections ensured an expansion of markets and the opening-up of new economic possibilities. In the 1850s, the 1860s, and even in the 1870s—more than a decade after Bruck's death in 1859—we can read articles in the German press, the Slovene press, and (in Trieste) in the Italian press that insist upon the exceptionally convenient trading and economic position of the Habsburg Empire between Europe and the Orient, and the advantages of this position for Southern Austria. This opinion was gradually strengthened by the fact that industry in the South was unable to compete with developed Western countries, and by the illusion that the South could sell its products on the Eastern, Levantine and Asian markets at a favorable profit. In a situation of this kind the role of Trieste and the Adriatic became even more important; the construction of the Suez canal strongly excited people's fantasies; hence the disappointment in the 1870s when it became apparent that "good will" and an open door on the world were insufficient for faster economic growth.

We have as yet no detailed research that presents, on a comparative basis, the plans and projects discussed in Trieste and its hinterland during this period, but as far as is known the discussions revolved around similar problems and were aimed in similar directions. One of the open questions was the construction of a complex railroad network in the South of the Monarchy, connecting Southern Germany with the Balkans, Hungary and Italy. Proposals originating from the separate regions and national parties differed only in details. In this sense also the first Slovene program of railroad building on Slovene territory, which dated from 1872, emphasized the idea of a railroad junction in the South of the Monarchy that would connect Turkish Bosnia with Southern Germany, and the North-East of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with Northern Italy. Carniola would, according to this program, become a center of the new railroad system.⁵

The economic reasoning in Trieste, in its hinterland and in the region between the Alps and the Adriatic in the 1860s and 1870s must of course be understood in the context of its own time. Its main theme was the geo-economic position of this area in the South of the Habsburg Monarchy, its connecting role between Continental Europe and the Mediterranean, between West European civilization and the Orient. But at the same time the illusion that the hinterland of Trieste in particular could profit from this position, and that in this sense the provinces around Trieste had numerous common interests that could be realized only through a common effort, remained a component part of the economic planning and an important source of optimism. This kind of reasoning was interrupted only

by the great economic crisis of 1873, which very quickly revealed that progress was not just a matter of will and of knowledge, but also involved more complex geo-economic and financial factors: raw materials, capital, and infrastructure. In the following decades the formation of national-political parties and their programs in this area only added to the conflicts that reached their most drastic and senseless expressions in our own century. Trieste and its harbor were certainly still of interest to all the surrounding provinces, although now no longer just from an economic, but also from a national-political point of view.

In 1918, as is well-known, the situation changed completely. The major portion of Slovene and Croatian territory was included in the new Yugoslav state. Historical trends were halted, traditional ties were severed, and the formerly least-developed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire became (what a paradox!) the most-developed part of the new Kingdom of the South Slavs. Such a situation, in many ways, determined Slovene and Croatian social and economic development in the period between the two Great Wars, and to a certain extent still determine this development today.

The main purpose of this brief excursus into history has been to recall that the tendencies to promote economic and cultural cooperation in the Alpe-Adria area are not new. To a certain extent I agree with those who think that in planning future cooperation in this area we should not be looking behind us too much, and especially not back to the period of the Habsburg Monarchy. Nevertheless I believe that in spite of all its deficiencies the Habsburg Monarchy was not so bad that it may not serve as an example. The message of history—if we are ready to believe in the pragmatic value of such a message—can be the following: in the area under discussion there exist historically proven cooperative trends which were blocked by ethnic, political, and ideological conflicts. In this sense it seems clear that the cooperative tendencies may only be realized if at the same time all the differences in the area, all the characteristics of the components, are admitted. This presupposes a mutual admission of and respect for the different ethnic communities regardless of their size, their history, or their social structure. Interregional cooperation may only be internally justified with reference to its own time; it has no supranational or historically justifiable cultural identity that might serve as an obligation to its components. Moreover, the ideal of cooperation on the basis of common interests, but with the preservation and further development of all local features, is one of the basic assumptions of contemporary European regionalism.

From the contemporary Slovene, Croatian and even Yugoslav point of view, the planned cooperation in the Alpe-Adria area seems one of the few possibilities left for joining the economic and technological development of the Western world, and of avoiding isolation on the edge of the European community. The critical reproaches and protests from a certain part of the Yugoslav federation in opposition to the Alpe-Adria plans and programs should probably be explained and understood in the historical context too: but that is another subject.⁶

Univerza Edvarda Kardelja v Ljubljani

NOTES

1. On Bruck and the reactions to his plans in Trieste, see Arduino Agnelli, *La genesi dell'idea di Mitteleuropa* (Dott. A. Giuffrè Editore, 1973).
2. For Archduke Johann's ideas, see Gräfe Klingenstein, ed., *Erzherzog Johann von Österreich. Beiträge zur Geschichte seiner Zeit* (Graz, 1982), especially pp. 295-355.
3. A. Schlosar, *Der Steiermärkische Gewerbeverein (1837-1887). Eine historische Festschrift zu dessen fünfzigjährigen Bestande* (Graz, 1887), pp. 144-47.
4. On Johann's Inner-Austrian institutions, see Peter Vodopivec, "Odmev industrijske revolucije na Štajerskem v prvi polovici 19. stoletja," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 50.1/2 (1979) [1981] 264-77.
5. I. Mohorič, *Zgodovina železnic na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1968) 90-101.
6. Namely, a subject that would deal with the roots of the present Yugoslav crisis and the inability of the Yugoslav North and the Yugoslav South, after almost seven decades of life together, to find a really effective *modus vivendi* that will be valid for the future.

POVZETEK

ZGODOVINSKO OZADJE ALPSKO-JADRANSKEGA SODELOVANJA

Članek dopolnjuje razpravo, ki jo je načel Andreas Moritsch in se ustavlja pri dveh preteklih poskusih organizacije tesnejšega gospodarskega sodelovanja v okviru prostora, ki ga sedaj poznamo pod imenom Alpsko-Jadransko ozemlje: zamisel nadvojvode Janeza (Moritschev prispevek) in zamisel Karla Ludviga von Brucka. Kot je znano, je von Bruck sredi devetnajstega stoletja predlagal ustanovitev enotnega carinskega in trgovinskega območja v Srednji Evropi. Obe zamisli sta prikazani na ozadju faktorjev, ki so ju sprožili, in razlogov, zaradi katerih sta propadli. V razpravi se avtor dotika tudi kasnejšega razvoja von Bruckovih zamisli in njihovega odnosa do pričakovanj tržaškega prebivalstva.