

## IS CENTRAL EUROPE RESTORABLE UNDER THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EU DANUBE REGIONAL STRATEGY?

### 1. Hypothesis

According to Hungarian governmental politicians, the most important outcome of the EU Danube Regional Strategy (EDRS) will be the restoration of Central Europe. The main aim of my research is to find out whether this statement is relevant. In my work, first, I introduce briefly the different concepts created on Central Europe. Secondly I present the short history and the most important features of the EDRS, after that I highlight the pros and cons which can enhance or hinder the implementation of the Strategy. Finally I draw the conclusion concerning the relation between the EDRS and the hypothetically enhanced Central Europe.

### 2. Central Europe

I only deal with those concepts for Central Europe whose aim was the establishment of a closer cooperation among the nations lying between the Western and Eastern European powers. In this sense we can talk about significant concepts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century based on historical-political tradition; on the German idea of Mitteleuropa; on the pan-Slavic approaches; and on federalist views of the philosophers of smaller nations. Due the fragility of the Habsburg Empire, later on, due to the peace settlements after the WWI any kind of effective regional cooperation became unrealisable. Following the WWII most Central European countries became subjugated to the Soviet Union which resulted in a deformed regional cooperation among them. From the 1980s the idea of Central Europe became very popular again among the opposition of the communist regimes but after the transition, for the countries concerned, national sovereignty and accession to the Euro-Atlantic integration became more important than regional cooperation.

### 3. The EU Danube Regional Strategy

Further on, I examine the significance of the Danube and the Danube Strategy. The Danube is the second largest river in Europe and its catchment basin is populated by circa 100 million people. Due to the 2004 and 2007 enlargement processes the river became almost an internal river of the EU. Consequently, it has geopolitical, geographical, economic, environmental, cultural, political, etc. importance. As an answer for the challenges posed by the process of globalization and localization, and by the democratic deficit of the EU, functional macro-regional strategies as special types of multi-level governances integrating and coordinating more community policies became more and more popular. The Baltic Sea Strategy as a first initiate proved to be successful, so the Danubian countries suggested to launch an EU supported Danubian macro-regional strategy which would provide a framework for the

cooperation and coordination of different community policies, initiatives, projects, etc. Hopefully the EDRS will be accepted by the European Council during the Hungarian Presidency and it will start its functioning in the second half of 2011.

#### 4. Potentials and hindrances

There is a significant potential in the Danubian region which can assure the success of the EDRS. The new kind of strategic approach, the economic potential of the region, the opportunity for deeper integration, and the possible evolution of a successful and decisive Danubian identity are such factors which have key importance to put the EDRS across. One of its main aims is to build the initiatives on the civil society and to enforce multi-level governance and to create the transparent network of relevant institutions and projects.

On the other hand, the deficit of social capital, the undeveloped civil society, the possible shortage of financial means, the differences among political priorities of the participants, the asymmetrical social and economic characteristics of them, etc. should not be forgotten during the implementation of the Strategy since each of them is able to hinder the possible achievements. These hindrances were relevant in case of regional cooperation in the area so it is a huge but not unachievable challenge to address them.

#### 5. Conclusion

I would insist that even the success of the Danube strategy does not mean the reconstruction of Central Europe since it has never existed as such before. Every time scientist and politicians were talking about Central Europe in different ways. Among the participants of the EDRS there are very few similarities. Yet they are not exclusively Central European but Balkan, South-eastern European as well. On the other hand, Poland which is generally counted as one of the most important Central European country is not involved to the Strategy. In case of the success of the EDRS it will be able to construct but not to reconstruct Central Europe. Moreover, its characteristics will have to be defined clearly and the Danubian identity which is only a vision nowadays should be embraced by the citizens of the region. As a result, we will be able to speak about a stronger Central Europe which is a requirement for a stronger European Union.