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GEOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CZECH STATE

V. Gardavský: *Geopolitical Development of the Czech State*. – Sborník ČGS, 99, 2, pp. 71 – 78 (1994). – The paper deals about the development of the Czech state since its beginning up to now. This development is connected to the development of Central Europe and Europe. Stress is put upon the influence of the geopolitical position of the Czech Republic and upon its millenary state continuity. This investigation enables to demonstrate exposure of the Czech state for the next century.
KEY WORDS: Central Europe – Czech state – geopolitics.

Since a millenary, the Czech State has been figuring, in different territorial extent and in different degree of dependence, on the political map of Europe. Its geopolitical position is frequently, in geographical as well as in political publications, described for instance as heart of Europe, bridge between East and West, etc. These comparisons usually did not take into account the function and therefore geography can accept them only as characterising its central position in the peninsular Europe (that is situated westwards the line Dniestr – Nemen). The connecting line between the most northern part of the Adriatic Sea coast and the Baltic Sea coast near the Oder estuary has its centre in Central Bohemia. This inland state central position between seas can be considered as a certain advantage. As Europe is a small continent, this position is associated to an extraordinary economic and cultural development.

The Czech state, and by that also the Czech national individuality, is territorially based on two, immediately neighbouring orographic entities – the Czech Massif and Western Carpathians. The neighbourhood of these entities is all the nearer as the depression of the younger one of them has caused a South-East directed lowering of the Czech Massif and consequently to the depression of the Vienna Basin, the majority of Carpathians water flows are south-eastward directed. By these processes, the Morava river drainage area has become a region connecting the Herzynian Czech Massif and the Alpine Western Carpathians, and in the same time equalizing differences between them.

The connecting function of the Morava has in the same time a larger, even international significance. This most northern Danubian river together with the most southern headland of North-European continental ice-covering characterize and limit one of the most important depressions of the major European water shed, the Moravian Gate. As this Moravian line is roughly the prolongation of the eastern margin of the Alps, since primieval times, the main communication between the Adriatic and Baltic Seas has been running this way. And exactly on this important European communication, the first state formations on our territory were formed in the 7th and the 9th century, and that the empire of Samo and Great Moravia.

The international, and by that also the geopolitical significance of the Moravian Way, is largely stressed by the fact, that it crosses, in a flat and fertile landscape, the Danube Way of the same importance. Since primieval times, the Danube has connected European inland with East Mediterranean. During centuries, cultural, religious, economic and other impulsions were coming by this way to barbarian Europe from Eastern Mediterranean which cultural and economic supremacy was shining far beyond its bor-

ders. And when later similar centres had arisen in Western Europe, it was again the Danubian Way which was the most natural communication, as it passes from the sub-alpine couloir almost imperceptibly into the Rhine drainage area. The Danubian Way was in the same time the way of retardation, it enabled for instance expansion of Osman Turks whose penetration had been stopped exactly on the Danube-Morava crossing.

There is another belt of an easy East-West communication stressing the international significance of the Moravian Way and by that characterizing the geopolitical position of the Czech state. It is a narrow belt of loess sediments adjacent to the northern extremity of the Czech-German Highlands and of the Carpathians and representing the most useful heritage of the pleistocene glacial period. This belt of a relatively dry and scarcely wooded land linking up to the South-Russian forest-steppe zone had become a natural communication way for primeval and historic migrations toward east. It was probably by this way that the oldest components of the Czech state population were coming and constituting the population basis for the local population ontogenesis. Naturally also destructive invasions of Central-Asian nomads were penetrating by this way. In the same time, this periglacial belt of the easy East-West communication increases the significance of the Moravian Line as it represents its easiest and shortest communication with the Danubian Way.

In the 11th century, the Czech state loses the Lower Morava region and by that also its geographic base on the Danube. In the same time, the Czech state loses the immediate connexion with the most important region of Slovakia, with its economic and population basis in the Danubian Basin. The centre of the Czech state - its metropolis succeeded to hold up definitely in the protected position of the Upper Elbe region, and only after the World War I (1918) and after the break-up of the Austria-Hungarian monarchy, the newly constituted Czechoslovak state regains its position on the Danube. From the historical point of view, after a short historic period, the Czech state, as consequence of the decomposition of the Czechoslovak Federation (1st of January 1993), loses this base once more.

During the last millenary, the geopolitical position of the Czech state was always extremely difficult. Since the beginning of its existence, the Czech countries had been always in the centre of an active interest of the most powerful European states. Already at the beginning of the Central-European history, our countries were situated at the Roman Empire border and became object of its organisation (Markomania project). They were also scene of long lasting struggles between the Roman Empire and North-European German tribes. In the first state formation, Great Moravia Empire, there was conflict of interests between the Byzantine Empire and its most powerful Western partner, the Frank Empire. In the moment extremely important for the world history, the Czech countries were supporting the heavy burden of a double great powers conflict, that is Turkish wars and the Thirty Years' War. It were exactly only these countries to support such a burden, and consequences of that time's economic impoverishment and of disturbances in population evolution had been accompanying the Czech society till the 19th century. Even if closing of the Thirty Years' War by the Westphalian Peace Treaty (1648) did not seem very lucky, mainly because these agreements simply confirmed political and religious frontiers settled down by the war, to the Czech countries, they brought a possibility of a normal development, even when marked by a long period of war troubles.

The great part of the state boundary of the today's Czech state follows historical boundary of the former state formations. Only a small part was newly traced after the World War I and tracing of the eastern boundary of the Czech Republic is object of negotiations with Slovakia. The oldest part of this state boundary is one of the oldest state boundaries on the European continent. It had been constituted by the belt of mountain forests, by a desert boundary belt which was remaining uninhabited between lower situated regions where the state power was getting organized. Such primary, natural

boundary is formed by border mountain ranges from the Šumava and Bohemian Forest to the Orlické Mountains and Hrubý Jeseník. These mountain ranges have been forming the legitimate state boundary uninterruptedly for a millenary, with the exception of the Lusatian Mountains and the Upper Ohře drainage area. Very old is also the boundary with Austria in place since nine centuries already.

The Czech Republic state boundary was based above all at the Paris peace treaties, namely the Versailles Treaty of June 28, 1919 with Germany and the St. Germain Treaty of September 10, 1919 with Austria. The frontier contention between the newly constituted Czechoslovakia and Poland was decided arbitrarily by an ambassadors conference in Paris on July 28, 1920.

Geopolitical entities of the Czech state, characterized in the previous paragraphs, had been influencing its development during the whole history, but in the 20th century, it was in an extremely dramatical way. The previous century, mainly thanks to the settlement on the Vienna Congress (1814-1845) can be characterized as a period of "fragile peace". The aim of this settlement was to restore, if possible, the system of big and small monarchies existing before the French Revolution as the only basis of legitimate and permanent frontiers in Europe. This geopolitical settlement proved to be right as the following Pan-European war broke out only after 99 years.

Leading personalities of Czech political and intellectual life, for instance historian František Palacký, journalist and writer K. Havlíček, and number of others, were convinced that only a democratic and federalized Austria may guarantee the Czech national identity. The concept of Central Europe was explained as a territory "pinched" between Germany and Russia. In the same time, Czech politicians, but also some geographers, considered Russia as counterbalance of German political and cultural hegemony. But outbreaking of Polish insurrections in the years 1831 and 1863 had darkened the image the Czechs had painted of Russia. Nodal from the geopolitical point of view can be considered the year 1867 when, after the so-called Austria-Hungarian settlement (Ausgleich), the Empire had changed to a dualistic Austria-Hungarian monarchy. Czech were left out of this settlement, although a part of their political representation aimed to establish triple federation. After that year, there is a renaissance of Slave ideas aiming to constitute a Slave federation with Russia as leading empire, but in the same time, there were crystallizing, even if mainly on academical level, ideas on constitution of an independent Czech state. The second half of the 19th century can probably be considered as exposition of geopolitical development of the Czech state in the following century.

After fourteen short years on the beginning of the 20th century, the World War I, which in its results brought deep geopolitical changes on the whole European continent and naturally also on the scale of the Czech state, had broken down. During one year, three leading monarchies of Central and Eastern Europe disappeared and in the end of 1918, there was no hope left to restore any of them. Liquidation of these ruling families untied unions of heterogeneous nationalities. According to the last Austro-Hungarian census, the Habsburg state included a dozen of nationalities: 12 millions of Germans, 10 millions of Hungarians, 8.5 millions of Czechs, 1.3 million of Slovaks, 5 millions of Poles, 4 millions of Ruthenians, 3.3 millions of Rumanians, 5.7 millions of Serbs and Croats and 0.8 million of Romansch and Italians. Disintegration of Austria-Hungarian monarchy and constitution of succeeding states was nevertheless disintegration not only of a supranational state, but also of pluralistic culture, and in a large extent, it was announcing a European crisis.

The first modern Czechoslovak state, created more by the will of great powers than by that of the local population, included three unhomogenous parts which, after 1918, attempted to pursue common development. Differences between Czech countries on one hand, and Slovakia and Ruthenia on the other hand, were abysmal not only in the

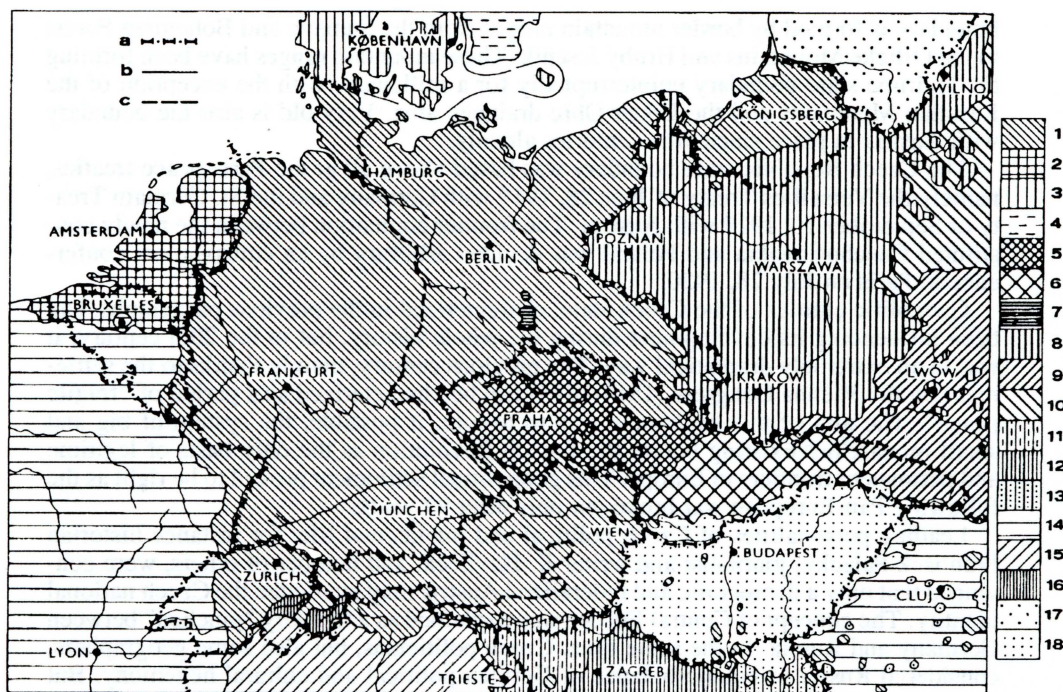


Fig. 1 - Nationality map of Central Europe according to language principle in 1938. a - state boundary, b - language boundary, c - western boundary of the limit Slave penetration. Language-national regions: 1 - German, 2 - Netherlandish, 3 - Danish, 4 - Swedish, 5 - Czech, 6 - Slovak, 7 - Upper and Lower Lusatian, 8 - Polish, 9 - Ukrainish, 10 - Bielorrussian, 12 - Croatian, 13 - Serb, 14 - French, 15 - Italian, 16 - Romansch, 17 - Lithuanian, 18 - Hungarian. (V. Král, 1994.)

ern part of the state had been living its own state life. The connoisseur and keen observer of the development in the Central-European area, H. Seton Watson (1945), could legitimately state that the new states created after 1918 unified Eastern regions (Russian, Turkish) to the Western ones (Austrian). Some of them, as Hungary and Bulgaria, were actively struggling against boundaries settled by the Versailles Treaty. Czechoslovakia, Poland, and especially Yugoslavia, were ethnically so diversified as their imperialistic predecessors, but with one major difference: they had no supranational ideology which would allow to the national minorities, constituting an important part of their population, to feel integrated, or at least not too alienated, in the new state. National minorities of the first Czechoslovak Republic, mainly the German and the Hungarian ones, but also the Polish one, are, by their attitude towards the newly constituted state, verifying this opinion. In the same time it must be stated that the Slovakian population did not accept the rather artificial theory about the existence of the Czechoslovak nationality constructed especially to counterbalance the strong German minority, and its majority did not identify themselves to the new state.

The newly constituted state had to solve number of extremely difficult problems. First of all, its territory of a significantly West-East orientation was 900 km long. In the same time the Czech countries, turned in the previous period especially towards the monarchy metropolis of Vienna, had their transport infrastructure orientated mainly in the North-South direction and the only West-East oriented railway ended in the North-East extremity of Moravia. Industry which was there much more developed than in the other parts of the state territory lost its markets and had to transform its territorial, as well as

commodity structure. Nevertheless in spite of all these problems, the first Republic was developing in intentions of a democratic, pluralistic state. The Czechoslovakia's geopolitical paradox which has shown up again after 1989 is the time shift between the acceptance of Western civilization, political ideas and institutions and reality of its economic and social development, as well as its ethnical composition.

It was not only in the period between the two world wars when the Czechoslovakia's evolution was going on in a narrow connexion with the Central-European area. Although the geopolitical delimitation of this area might seem difficult, it undoubtedly really exists. Recently, this conception has been pregnantly defined for instance by V. Král (1994) stating quite correctly that during the last half century, mainly thanks to the "iron curtain", this conception has practically totally disappeared from literature. According to this author, the Central Europe is defined as the region of Central-European lowlands from Calais to Gdansk, then of the Central European herzynian mountains from the Western Ardennes and the Vosges to the Little Poland and the Lublin mountains and finally the Alpes-Carpathians mountainous system with intermountainous basins and large depressions. The in this way delimited Central Europe is above all a region of linguistic, cultural, religious and economic contacts between German and Slave nations.

During all the period between the two wars, the Central European states were being exhausted by permanent contentions concerning mainly boundaries and their course and national minorities. Hungary declared its territorial exigencies towards all of its neighbours, Poland was arguing with Czechoslovakia about Těšín region and with Latvia about Wilno. Those contentions were lead also in the period of evident jeopardy by Nazi Germany. The Western powers had resigned to their role and the United States had started to practice isolationism policy. It seemed that Great Britain was more alarmed by the dominating position of France than by the Nazi menace. France was giving to Czechoslovakia, as well as to other Central European countries, different, but uncertain promises. This geopolitical phase characterized as "policy of friendly indifference" (J. Rupnik, 1992) was creating, in a constantly more evident way, conditions in which the main powers wishing revision of the Versailles Treaty, that is the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, could more and more forcibly present their competitive claims to spheres of political and ideological impact. This development lead then not only to the World War II, but also to the definitive end of the first Czechoslovak Republic constituted only some twenty years ago.

The end of the World War II had number of consequences for the Czechoslovak state. Important from the geopolitical point of view was the fact that this Republic, after secession of Ruthenia, had become directly adjacent to the Soviet Union whose army had liberated, according to the allies agreements, the majority of the state territory. Even if the post-war development should be guaranteed by treaties of victorious powers signed in Jalta, their flagrant violation going even to their ignoring by the Stalinist Soviet Union, lead to a division of Europe and, in the atmosphere of sharpening tension, to the creation of "iron curtain". The states between Germany and Soviet Russia had been separated by a military, ideological and economic line, but historically and culturally, they were always remaining the "heart of Europe". The Czechoslovak Republic, whose length had got reduced to 700 km, had in spite of that transferred its geographical centre from the eastern slopes of the external Carpathian curve to the point by Rychtářov, Vyškov district, in the Central Moravia.

The system of Soviet type was imposed to the Czechoslovak state from without, and in addition, it was a system derived from specifically Russian conditions and traditions and grafted by force to a society with absolutely different culture and traditions. From the geographical point of view, there had arisen a paradoxal situation when maybe for the first time in the modern history, the periphery of the Soviet empire was considering

its centre not only as an aggressor, but in the same time as being from the cultural point of view totally strange and on a lower level. Nevertheless the forced incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the Eastern bloc had fatal consequences for the cultural, religious and economic future of the state. This proces might be pertinently characterized by quantitative data about a heavy denaturation of all the environmental components and by its consequences on the life of the local population.

In the fifty year period, European bipolarity stressed basic characters accompanying the geopolitical development of the Czech state since its most ancient history. It is a marked development duality between authoritarianism and democracy, between West and East. Another trait is the political discontinuity of the geopolitical development which had been always dependent on the political orientation and interests of powers in the Central-European region.

If the first great "geopolitical big bang" of the 20th century was the break-up of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, at least the same importance had the disintegration of the Soviet empire on the beginning of the nineties. Transformations on the political map of Europe going on during this last decade, are, by their extent and significance, comparable to transformations going on in 1918 and in 1945. The end of the artificial division of our continent does not mean that some old frontiers might not be restituted again or some new ones might not appear. Central-European states, and naturally also the Czech Republic, have got rid of the Soviet supremacy, but up to now, they are unable and non prepared to join the European Union. In this process between efforts and possibilities of integration, a new form of Czech state, probably exposure for the 21st century, is begin-

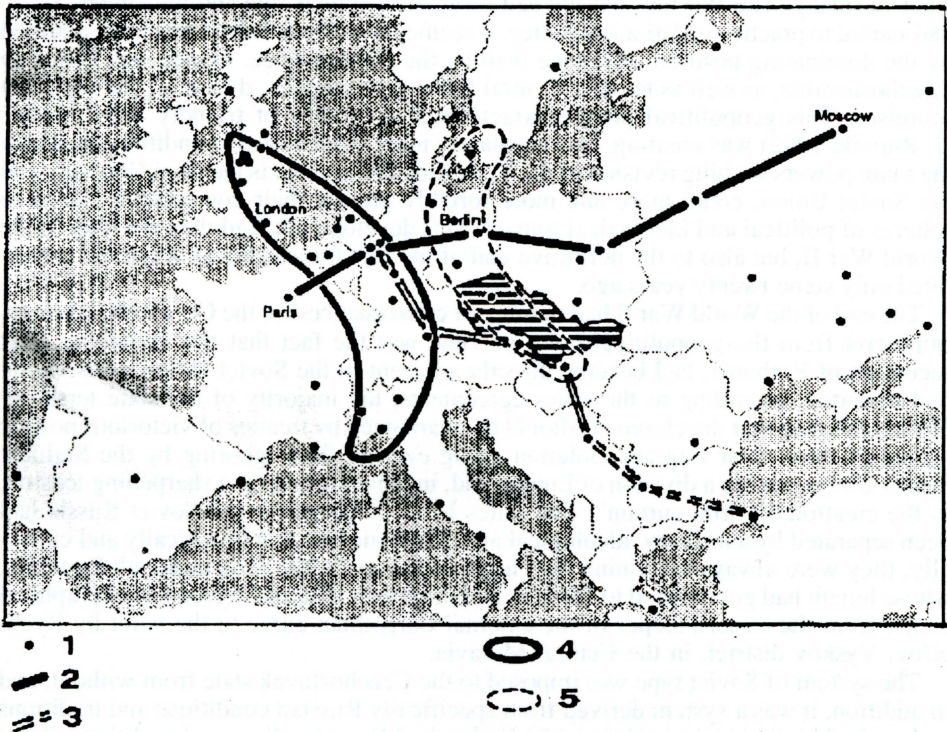


Fig. 2 - Main traits of the geopolitical and geoeconomic structure of Europe. 1 - agglomerations with more than one million of inhabitants, 2 - main geopolitical axis, 3 - secondary geopolitical axis, 4 - main geoeconomic axis, 5 - possible secondary geoeconomic axis. (P. Dostál, M. Hampl, 1992.)

ning to crystallize. The Central-European states are becoming at the end of century a sort of geopolitical laboratory, where parallel dying away of both concurrent alliances may be observed.

Disintegration of the Czechoslovak federation (January 1, 1993), which is a sensitive part of today's European geopolitical motion and agitation, had returned the Czech state on the political card of Europe. Debates and controversies about causes and consequences of this disintegration will undoubtedly continue. It can be considered as paradoxal that both succeeding states have the same aim, reunification, but within the European Union. The geographical centre of the Czech state moved westwards and is now situated in Central Bohemia, north-westwards from Ledeč nad Sázavou, in the cadaster of Čihošť. This quantitative index is showing the shift of the Republic towards West.

The territorial basis of the Czech Republic is even in the end of century in a region, considered as especially exposed from the point of view of European continent. Besides the geoeconomic and the geopolitical axes running from South-East England to Northern Italy and having a very ancient basis in the development of Europe, some authors (for instance Hampl, Dostál, 1992) mention another European development axis. Its course is orientated from Copenhagen via Berlin, Prague, Vienna and Budapest. This axis could become a good basis for reconstruction of a great part of Central and maybe also of Eastern Europe. Besides the settlement intensity accompanying this axis, its geopolitical and development prerequisites are intensified by the cultural and social level of population, as well as by its economic, cultural, religious and political tradition. The position of the Czech state on this development geoeconomic axis might be understood as an important geopolitical prerequisite for its future development.

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Shrnutí

GEPOLITICKÝ VÝVOJ ČESKÉHO STÁTU

Český stát patří mezi nejstarší státní útvary v Evropě, na politické mapě kontinentu figuruje po celé tisíciletí. Je charakterizována územní základna, vytvořená těsným kontaktem mezi Českým masivem a Západními Karpatami. Významnou spojovací funkci mezi nimi má povodí Moravy. Tato územní základna má dobré možnosti komunikace s evropskými kulturami, náboženskými i hospodářskými centry.

Český stát byl svou geografickou polohou v celé své historii předmětem aktivního zájmu nejmocnějších evropských států. Jeho státní hranice přejímají z větší části hranice starších státních útvarů a jen z menší části byly vytvořeny po první světové válce. Východní hranice, která je rovněž historicky daná, je v detailech upřesňována v současné době.

Základní geopolitické charakteristiky ovlivňovaly vývoj českého státu v průběhu celých dějin. Neobyčejně dramaticky se však projevily ve 20. století. První moderní československý stát vznikl rozhodnutím velmocí v roce 1918. Skládal se ze tří nestejnorodých částí, z nichž jen západní část republiky žila po tisíciletí vlastním státním životem. Takto vzniklý stát neměl (jako jeho předchůdce) nadnárodní ideologii, která by národnostním menšinám umožnila identifikovat se v něm. Geopolitickým paradoxem Československa (projevil se opět výrazně po roce 1989) je časový posun mezi přijetím civilizace, politických idejí a institucí západu a realitou ekonomického a sociálního rozvoje i etnickou skladbou společnosti.

Po druhé světové válce byly státy mezi Německem a Ruskem odděleny vojenským, ideologickým i ekonomickým předělem, avšak historicky a kulturně zůstávaly stále "srdcem Evropy". Takto vzniklá evropská bipolarita dala v padesátileté periodě vyniknout základním rysům, které vyznačují vývoj českého státu od jeho nejstarších dějin. Jde o výraznou vývojovou dualitu mezi autoritářstvím a demokracií, mezi západem a východem. Druhým rysem je politická diskontinuita geopolitického vývoje, který byl vždy závislý na politické orientaci a zájmech velmocí ve středoevropské oblasti.

Státy střední Evropy, samozřejmě i Česká republika, se sice zbavily sovětské nadvlády, ale jsou zatím neschopné a nepřipravené připojit se k Evropské unii. V tomto procesu mezi snahou a možnostmi k integraci začíná krystalizovat nová geopolitická poloha českého státu.

Obr. 1 - Národnostní mapa střední Evropy na základě jazykového principu (stav v r. 1938). a - státní hranice, b - jazykové hranice, c - západní hranice nejzazšího proniknutí Slovanů. Jazykově-národnostní oblasti: 1 - německá, 2 - nizozemská, 3 - dánská, 4 - švédská, 5 - česká, 6 - slovenská, 7 - hornoa dolnolužická, 8 - polská, 9 - ukrajinská, 10 - běloruská, 11 - slovinská, 12 - chorvatská, 13 - srbská, 14 - francouzská, 15 - italská, 16 - rétorománská, 17 - litevská, 18 - maďarská. (Podle V. Krále, 1994.)

Obr. 2 - Hlavní rysy geopolitické a geoeconomické struktury Evropy. 1 - milionové aglomerace, 2 - hlavní geopolitická osa, 3 - vedlejší geopolitická osa, 4 - hlavní geoeconomická osa, 5 - potenciální sekundární geoeconomická osa. (P. Dostál, M. Hampl, 1992.)