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## ITALIAN GEOECONOMIC ATTEMPTS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS DURING THE FASCIST PERIOD

*Abstract:*

This paper gives a comprehensive description of the assumed Italian geoeconomic ideas and attempts in the direction of Central Europe and the Balkans during the Fascist period. It suspects the existence of concrete plans about creation of the Italian sphere of interests and the success of the implementation of the ideas. These presumptions are based on researches that pointed out the real interest of great powers in the region after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The paper also uses maps, graphs and statistical data to analyze the Italian geoeconomic activity in the region. Eventually, the concrete Italian ideas, and partially the success of their realization were proved. In the Italian plans, the role of the ports of Trieste and Fiume was significant. Italy finally had to politically waive the Danube Basin and focus more on the Balkans region. There were already ongoing developments in the Balkans, primarily in the case of transport and communication infrastructure, which served the Italian geoeconomic objectives in the region. The base of the initiatives was Albania, which was in personal union with the Kingdom of Italy.

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*Key words:*

Geoeconomics, Italy, Central Europe, Balkans, Fascism

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The research of this paper is built on two statements. The first one assumes that Italy had concrete plans to gain influence in Central Europe and the Balkans with economic

tools. The second one alleges that these Italian attempts were successful, however, due to WW2 did not last for a long time. The time framework of the exploration lasts from the beginning of the Fascist regime in 1922 till the end of the leadership of Mussolini in the major part of Italy in 1943. It is important to note, that the article does not analyze the Fascist political system. In territorial terms, the article focuses on the region which before the outbreak of the world war involved the states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria. This territory was a geopolitical buffer zone, between Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. This period was quite rich in geopolitical thoughts in Italian literature. Several ideas attempt with the goal to help the Italian foreign policy in realizing a proper sphere of interest by influencing certain countries and regions. However, this paper does not wish to investigate all kinds of perspectives from the Fascist era, only the geoeconomic ones, which projected to use economic tools.

The books of Luigi Gozzini (Gozzini 1935), Giulio Sinbaldi (Sinbaldi 2010), and the articles of the contemporary Italian geopolitical journal, which existed between 1939 and 1942: *Geopolitica Rassegnamensile di geografia politica, economica, sociale, colonial*, gave an important base for the examination of this paper. Besides these sources, many other materials connecting to the fields of Geopolitics, Political Science, and History helped this research.

The article is based on the investigation of relevant scientific literature connecting to the cited fields in Italian, Hungarian, and English languages. During the preparation of this article, the focus was on the analyses of publications that described the Italian attempts to influence the countries of the observed region with economic and trade tools. This is an approach with a historical and territorial focus. Some results of the research are illustrated in designed maps in the article.

## **THE MEANING OF GEOECONOMICS**

Before starting to investigate the subject of this article, it is important to determine the concept of geoeconomics. The

terminology 'geoeconomics' became widely spread at the beginning of the 1990s, after some authors, like Edward Luttwak and Pascal Lorot recognized the systematic changes in the international relations as powers started likely using economic and trade tools for influential attempts instead of classical military ones, thus geoeconomics replaces geopolitics (Bernek 2018:81-83). As Luttwak stated: "If the players left in the field by the waning importance of military power were purely economic entities labor-sellers, entrepreneurs, corporations then only the logic of commerce would govern world affairs." (Luttwak 1990:18). However, besides economic relations, trading ties, and transport infrastructure developments, geoeconomics connects to more other fields, like high-tech, research and development, innovation, economic intelligence, and other economic, fiscal and monetary policies (Jean 1995b:1-7; Csurgai 1998:1-4.). Although, the geoeconomic thinking was much simple in the research historical period, though the existence of geoeconomic thinking is thought to reality in this era, as Gyula Csurgai pointed out, economic means were used throughout the history for certain geopolitical objectives (Csurgai 2019:152), nevertheless, the many Italian geopolitical thinkers used the terminology 'geoeconomia' during the 1930s and the 1940s (D.G. 1939).

## **THE INFLUENCE OF GREAT POWERS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS**

According to Luigi Gozzini, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the sectors of the economy were functionally shared, especially between the two main parts of the Empire, the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. Austria was dominated by industry, while the Hungarian economy was more likely agricultural. This kind of specialization created a mutual, but harmonic dependence between the two main parts of the Empire.<sup>1</sup> Even inside the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary the different regions specialized. For example, Styria on mineral exploitation, fruit and game

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<sup>1</sup> This is demonstrated by the average trade data, as according to Gozzini the share of Austria was 72% from the exports, and 71,5% from the imports of Hungary (Gozzini, 1935:23).

production, Bohemia on the textile industry and barley production, Lower Austria on rye and sugar beet production, Moravia on coal exploitation and barley production, the alpine states of Austria on dairy production, the vicinity of Vienna on the production of legumes, Hungary on flour and sugar beet production, Galicia on swine and poultry husbandry, Bucovina on forestry, Transylvania on mining, etc (Gozzini 1935:23-39).

However, despite this economic harmony, Gozzini also echoed the centrifugal economic forces within the Empire. For example, the Hungarian industrial elite wished to be more independent from Austria, thus began to develop the industry in the Hungarian part of the Empire, especially in the territory of later Slovakia. On the other hand, this Hungarian elite feared the strengthening of German economic and political influence in Austria. For instance, the idea of the German-Austrian customs union seriously harmed their interests. The German dumped goods on the markets of Austria from year to year (Table 1).

Year	Export (Million Mark)	Import (Million Mark)
1898	672	452
1904	703	592
1909	750	770
1913	830	1100

**Table 1: Trade turnover of Austria with Germany.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini, 1935:39).

The economic influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was determining in the surrounding states and was the most influential power in the Balkans (Gozzini 1935:57).

In parallel with the political collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the unified economic region and the common market were also crushed. According to Gozzini the former concept of 'Central Europe' ceased after the collapse of political unity due to the treaties of Trianon and Saint-Germain and remained only a geographical meaning (Gozzini 1935:7). These changes eventuated the unbalanced distribution of resources among the states of Central Europe. The general lack of basic food, fuels, the war damages, and the economic depletion characterized the region. These economic problems

led to strong inflation as well, which made the situation even worse. Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria were also obligated to finance the reparations for the war. The states of the region attempted to address the economic problems with favoritism, isolationism, and the aspiration to autarky. Economic nationalism meant the strengthening of national ownership in the economy.<sup>2</sup> (Domonkos 2016:369-370). Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia also wished to minimize the trade relations with Hungary and Austria<sup>3</sup> to cut the traditional trading routes of the new territories which gravitated towards the looser states, and began to find new trading partners. This policy also forced Austria and Hungary to find new economic ties outside of the Danube region (Table 2, Table 3). The former specialization and the economic isolation led to the lack of certain products in the successor states, which also urged the governments to block exports and it led to the aspiration of autarky. This meant the development of the sectors which were not in the focus of specialization during the Austro-Hungarian era. Therefore, the industry was developed in the agrarian states, like Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia,<sup>4</sup> and the agriculture was intensified in the more industrialized states, like Austria and Czechoslovakia (Gozzini 1935:55-90).

Exporting state / Year	1923	1924	1928	1929	1930	1931
<i>Austria</i>	39.30%	36.80%	34.50%	33.90%	31.20%	29.50%
<i>Hungary</i>	69.55%	68.41%	63.60%	57.20%	53.80%	43.80%
<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	37.57%	39.25%	30.20%	30.80%	31.90%	24.80%
<i>Yugoslavia</i>	45.87%	46.08%	36.09%	40.70%	36.10%	39.20%
<i>Romania</i>	-	39.91%	35.50%	31.80%	25.40%	

**Table 2: The share of the five Danube states from the export.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini 1935:108).

<sup>2</sup> These were characteristics especially in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, where many companies were bought up, which had been in Austrian, Hungarian or German hands (Gozzini 1935:57; Domonkos, 2016:370).

<sup>3</sup> The mutual trade volumes decreased significantly, however, sometimes the need for certain products urged the states of the region to merchandise, in these cases the practice based on agreements between the governments became general (Gozzini 1935:74).

<sup>4</sup> Due to the significant growth of the rural population in Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia the agrarian reform was also inevitable (Gozzini 1935:63, 73, 87).

Importing state / Year	1923	1924	1928	1929	1930	1931
<i>Austria</i>	41.00%	41.40%	35.50%	35.50%	38.20%	35.50%
<i>Hungary</i>	62.09%	60.21%	51.50%	48.80%	46.50%	41.90%
<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	16.71%	18.98%	17.00%	16.70%	20.00%	16.30%
<i>Yugoslavia</i>	-	-	27.40%	37.20%	30.40%	-
<i>Romania</i>	39.69%	44.94%	44.50%	43.80%	43.40%	40.30%

**Table 3: The share of the five Danube states from the import.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini1935:108).

Although there was a partial success due to the new economic policy of the states of the region, the Great Economic Depression in 1929-1933 set back seriously the development of these states. More causes can be identified for the quite remarkable collapse of these economies. The economies of most of the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans were based and highly dependent on the export of agricultural goods. As the world market prices of food commodities suddenly dropped, these economies lost their competitiveness and their external markets. The agricultural crisis was followed by a financial crisis since 1931<sup>5</sup> (Domonkos 2016:374). The bad industrial structure and the unharmonized transport systems also aggravated the economic problems, which had already been significant even before the Great Economic Depression (Gozzini 1935:42-55).

To address the economic problems of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans, especially during the Great Depression, some ideas of economic integration appeared both from the states of the region and the great powers. However, the many times rivaling powers were almost always jealous of the other's initiatives, fearing their proper security, power, and the other's potential growing influence.

The first attempt came from France. Aristide Briand the foreign minister of France presented his plan of the economic integration of the European states based on the Pan-European idea in 1929. However, the Briand-plan was opposed by the United States of America and the Soviet Union, as they were

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<sup>5</sup> The financial crisis in Central Europe began with the collapse of the Austrian Kredit Anstalt financial institute.

left out of the initiative. Furthermore, non the European countries favored the idea. A few years later came the idea of the Austro-German Customs Union which was finally also rejected by the international community. This idea hurt the interests of France, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia from the beginning, and later Italy, Great Britain, Romania, and Yugoslavia also joined to the oppositional, and eventually, managed to prevent the creation of Austro-German cooperation. The following idea was initiated by a country of the Central European region, Czechoslovakia. The so-called 'Benes Plan' was the idea of a customs union between Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. The aim of the Benes plan was the exclusion of Germany and the Soviet Union from the Danube Basin, and the cooperation of the previous regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>6</sup> However, the Czechoslovak proposal was also unsuccessful. Italy and Germany rejected the idea as they suspected French economic aspires behind the creation of the cooperation. Nevertheless, the Benes plan was not welcomed by Austria and Hungary. Great Britain was not interested in interfering in the region, however, her economic influence in the Danube region was quite significant.<sup>7</sup> Due to the concerns about the potential supremacy of a rival power in the region, aiming to balance the continental great powers Great Britain also designed a plan for the economic cooperation of the states of the region. The idea was based on the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, which played an important role in the balancing foreign policy of Great Britain. According to the British plan, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria would have formed a duty union. The British suggestion was not accepted by Germany, Italy, and France. After the Briand plan, France designed a new initiative, which focused more on the Central European region. It was presented by the French prime minister and foreign minister André Tardieu in 1932. The Tardieu Plan aimed to solve the serious economic problems of the states of the region. Its vision was about cooperation between Austria, Czechoslovakia,

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<sup>6</sup> The Benes plan did no conclude Yugoslavia and Romania in the light of their assumed strong German affiliation (Diószegi 1997:74).

<sup>7</sup> Great Britain was the biggest investor in the region with 8597 million francs before the United States (7684 million francs) and France (3034 million francs) (Diószegi 1997:83).

Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania, but eventually, this plan was also rejected by the rival powers (Diószegi 1997:68-99).

Initiative	Participating states	Initiating state / supporting great power
<i>Briand Plan</i>	States of continental Europe	France
<i>Austro-German Customs Union</i>	Austria, Germany	Germany
<i>Benes Plan</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary	Czechoslovakia / France
<i>British idea</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria	Great Britain
<i>Tardieu Plan</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania	France

**Table 4: The different plans of economic cooperation in Central Europe between the two world wars.** Source: own editing based on the data of Diószegi (Diószegi 1997:63-114).

As it was seen above, France was quite active in proposing plans aiming at the reconstruction of Central European economic unity. Besides this kind of political activity, it is also interesting to study the investment policy of the great powers in the region. During the 1920s foreign capital primarily arrived in the form of stabilization loans in Central Europe and the Balkans. This kind of loan was granted mostly by the League of Nations, however, many times economic and financial entities from Great Britain, the USA, and France, sometimes from Sweden also played a crucial role in the economic developments. Later, the bilateral financial relations became more and more significant. This kind of investment was aimed at not only economic benefits but also political, diplomatic, and strategic objectives.<sup>8</sup> The main investor in the region was Great Britain, followed by the United States of America and France after WW1. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland also can be mentioned as important investors.

<sup>8</sup> There was a solid geopolitical goal: blocking the advance of Germany and Soviet-Russia.



Endre Domonkos highlights that Great Britain and the USA did not aspire to gain strategic industrial sectors, but to find new markets for their trading goods, however, they took a significant share in the electronic, financial, naval of Danube, metallurgy, chemical, military, and oil sectors. Although France was only third behind Great Britain and the USA according to the number of investments, she had aspires for political and economic hegemony in Central Europe and the Balkans. Thus, France consciously attempted to gain important positions in the heavy industry, banking sector, metallurgy, mining, engineering, and oil sector. French investors made built the free port of Csepel in Hungary on the river of Danube (Domonkos 2016:219-239). Germany also attempted to gain positions in Central Europe and the Balkans with less success. She invested in heavy industry and mining, while boosted her trade volumes with the states of the region, especially after Hitler had come into power. However, significant economic results of the German foreign policy were only after the revisionist political decisions beginning from 1938. It is also important to note, that since 1938 Germany became the dominant economic and political power in the region (Domonkos 2017:9-20).

## **THE GEOECONOMIC ATTEMPTS OF ITALY**

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, just like other powers, Italy also recognized the possibilities to expand her economic influence in the post-Monarchy region. These ideas from Italian thinkers correlated with the geopolitical aspirations. However, the Italian foreign policy still had not been too active until the 1930s. Nevertheless, there were some attempts to gain economic influence in Central Europe and the Balkans. The Italian Commercial Bank (Banca Commerciale Italiana) invested in the timber industry in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Italian entities also invested in the banking sector in Hungary and the banking sector and textile industry in Poland. The 5% of investments were connected to Italian entities in Bulgaria (Domonkos 2016:231). The most significant success was reached in

Albania, as Italy reached to gain economic rights, including the oil production against Great Britain in the Balkan state. After the signing of the Italian-Albanian Treaty of Friendship in 1926, Italy managed to build a monopoly in many strategical sectors, including the financial, oil, and mining ones. (Horváth 2006:18-21). In parallel, Italy also wished to break the French dominancy in Central Europe both in political and economic terms. (Map 1).



**Map 1: The Italian-French rivalry in Central Europe. Source: own editing.**

Central Europe and the Balkans were one of the three main directions of the Italian geopolitics beyond the Mediterranean and the African territories of colonization. According to the Italian theories, the living sphere of Italy is the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> To prevent the interference of foreign powers in the Mediterranean, Italy has to secure the possible gateways in the Mediterranean basin. In the case of Central Europe and

<sup>9</sup> The economic factors played a significant role in the theoretical creation of the Italian living sphere (Antonsich 2009:266).

the Balkans, the Italian objective was the prevention of German and Russian advances (Map 2). Thus, Central Europe and the Balkans were crucial parts of the Italian geopolitical aspirations. The countries of the Danube basin, especially Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary formed a blocking zone against Germany in the Italian geopolitical thinking. The Danube and his affluents were important communicational routes favoring the position of Germany (Pracchi 1940:491; Jean 1995:242; Sinbaldi 2010:117-124). Poland also played an important role in the Italian geopolitical vision as a potential ally against Pan-Germanism or Pan-Slavism in the region (Fornano 2006:12). However, the borders of the planned geopolitical sphere of interests of Italy were the Carpathian Mountains (Jean 1995:242).

Italy wished to achieve these geopolitical goals with geoeconomic tools. France, the strongest power in Central Europe during the 1920s, lost her influence by the middle of the 1930s as she had suffered from inner political and economic crisis (Halecki 1952:284), while it was mentioned before, toned-up Germany gained more and more potency within Central Europe and the Balkans. The Soviet Union, in turn, preferred military power as her economy was less competitive. Thus, Roberto Pracchi stated, the only rival great power of Italy in Central Europe and the Balkans in economic terms was Germany. The Italian strategy, on one hand, aimed to increase the trade volume and the export of Italian goods to the states of the Danube basin and the Balkans. According to Pracchi, the unification with Albania<sup>10</sup> gave an important basis for the Italian economic plans. On the other hand, Italy attempted to play a crucial role in the overseas trade of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans through her ports (Pracchi 1940:491-495). Luigi Gozzini also pointed out the importance of this territory in building economic ties towards the East and the Black sea region (Gozzini 1935:109).

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<sup>10</sup> The Italian forces occupied Albania in April 1939. Later the Albanian Constitutional Assembly offered the crown to Victor Emmanuel III, forming a personal union between Italy and Albania (Horváth 2006:41).



**Map 2: The geopolitical situation of the states of the Danube Basin and the Balkan Peninsula according to the Italian theories between the two world wars.** Source: own editing.

The Italian answer to the different ideas of economic cooperation in Central Europe proposed by great powers was the so-called Brocchi Plan<sup>11</sup> which visioned a duty union between Italy, Austria, and Hungary. The Italian foreign policy managed successfully to take advantage of the rival of great powers of the region, and cooperation between Italy, Austria, and Hungary was realized. It was created officially in Rome in 1934 by the transformation of bilateral ties to a multilateral collaboration. This idea served both geopolitical and geoeconomics objectives. High representatives from the three countries met annually until 1938. On one hand, Italy attempted to weaken France in the region and block Germany by cutting the way from South Tyrol<sup>12</sup> and the Balkans. On the other hand, Italy wished to find a market for Italian goods and to boost the trade with the two other member states to strengthen the economic influence<sup>13</sup> (Réti 1998:40-110; Horváth 2006:34-38; Hamerli 2018:170-181). It can be stated, that comparing to other initiatives, the Italy-Austria-Hungary duty union was successful as it eventually was realized and working though, it did not last for a long time.

As it was mentioned one of the objectives was to make the long-distance trade of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans dependent on the service of ports of Italy. The newly-gained ports, Trieste and Fiume played the main role in this vision. Both of these ports had been important parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for a long time, and their hinterland still were the post-Austro-Hungarian territories, thus Italy began to develop these ports.<sup>14</sup> This idea aimed primarily at the landlocked countries, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. The Italian diplomacy attempted to strengthen the position of Trieste and Fiume in these countries. For instance, an Italian

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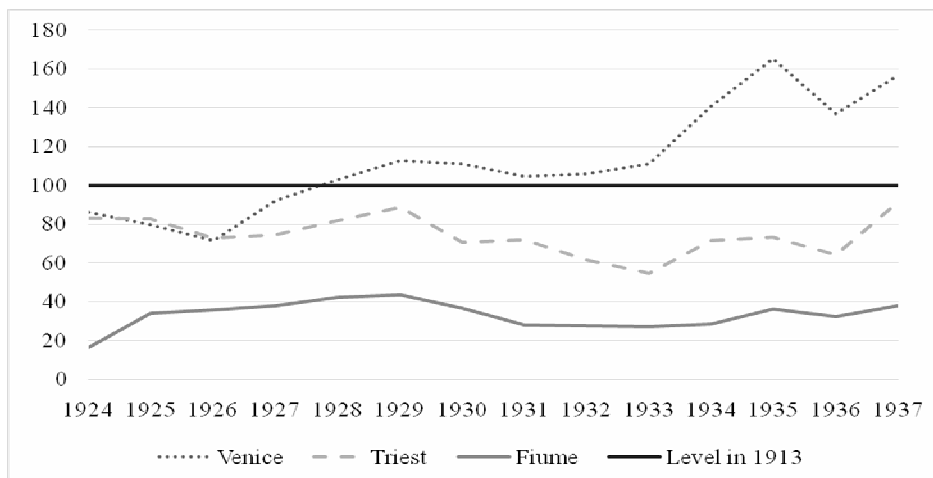
<sup>11</sup> Igino Brocchi designed the plan of the trilateral cooperation in 1929.

<sup>12</sup> The majority of the population of South Tyrol was German-speaking and earlier the territory belonged to Austria.

<sup>13</sup> Italy promised to open her market for the Austrian industrial and Hungarian agricultural products, Austria also promised to buy more agricultural goods from Hungary, while Hungary pledged to cut down the tariffs on the Italian and Austrian industrial goods. An agreement was also accepted to guarantee the priority of Italy and block the German activity in the economy of the two countries.

<sup>14</sup> Beyond the geopolitical aspiration, the development of these ports also served their integration in Italy.

agency was founded in Prague in 1925 to lobby for the trade through Trieste. Italy also offered favorable fees and made agreements with Austria and Hungary about using the two ports, Trieste (Austria) and Fiume (Hungary) (Petri 2008:18). Nevertheless, the Italian leadership grabbed every chance to oppose the protectionist trade policy of these countries (Gozzini 1935:109). However, despite these developments, the two North Adriatic ports could not overcome their turndown after the new situation created by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the modification of borders (Chart 1).



**Chart 1: The ratio of goods turnover in the ports of Venice, Trieste and Fiume compared to the level in 1913.** Source: own editing based on the data of Rolf Petri (Petri 2008).

Beyond these difficulties, Trieste and Fiume also had to compete with other important transit ports for the Central European markets. Due to this significant trade war, Italy paid a lot of attention to the Danube natural communicational channel. As it was mentioned above the Danube connected Germany with the small states of Central Europe and the Balkans, naval rights were in the hand of Great Britain and France also had an important position, like the port of Csepel in Hungary. The Danube transport way was a strong rival of the Adriatic ports. Through this river, the overseas goods could be ported from the big ports of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam) and Germany (Hamburg, Bremen). The number one rival port was Hamburg, especially after the Anschluss and the

Munich treaty (Grioni 1939:165). Hamburg was the primer port in overseas trade also in the case of Bulgaria, which is the furthest country from Germany on the Danube way (Jaranoff 1940:467). Nevertheless, the Polish ports, like Gdansk and Gdynia also became concurrency for Trieste and Fiume (Cerasi 2008:50-91).

After the geopolitical changes in Central Europe, like the Anschluss, the Munich Treaty, and the outbreak of WW2, the political and economic positions of Germany had undoubtedly strengthened, excluding more and more Italy from the region.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Mussolini and Hitler agreed about the spheres of interests in 1936. The agreement granted Germany the Northern part of the Danube basin, and Italy the Balkans (Réti 1998:85). However, the Italian analysts still studied the states of the region, like the former territories of Austria (*La Marca Orientale e i problemi economici connessi* 1939), Czechoslovakia (*Le variazioni territoriali nell'Europa Centrale e le grandi comunicazioni ferroviarie (cartina)* 1939; E. B. 1939) and Poland (*Danzica e la Vistola* 1939) and Hungary (D. G. 1939; Cametti Aspri 1940) in geoeconomic terms. The analytical maps of Mario Morandi about the Danube basin (Morandi 1939) and the Danube river (Morandi 1940) also must be highlighted.

Eventually, due to the recognition of the new situation and the new pact between Mussolini and Hitler, in which the parties reaffirmed the spheres of interests, including the right of Germany to dominate the Northern part of the Danube basin (Jean 1995:242),<sup>16</sup> Italy began to focus more on the Balkans. In economic terms, some articles from *Geopolitica* can be mentioned, which attempted to analyze the geo-economic situation to help the realization of Italian interests. One article investigates the economic and trade developments between the member states of the Balkan Pact (*Per lo sviluppo delle relazioni economiche tra paesi dell'Intesa Balcanica* 1939). Ernesto Corsi elaborated the economic characteristics and the

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<sup>15</sup> However, some opinions stated that the Munich Treaty was favorable for the Italian economic activity in the region. For example, Antonio Chianale shared this view citing the boost of certain goods (like banana) in the region through Italian mediation (Chianale 1939).

<sup>16</sup> Carlo Jean also assumed German territorial demands in Croatia and Bulgaria as corridors towards the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea.

economic ties with Italy of Bulgaria (Corsi 1940) and the already mentioned Roberto Pracchi investigated the Italian possibilities of economic influence in the states of the Balkans (Pracchi 1940).

To reach more geoeconomic influence in the Balkans, Italy wished to develop the communication corridors, as it could make better connectivity and boost the trade volumes. In these concepts the base was Albania. Ciro Rachello made a statement about a planned highway between the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. This idea served the connection of Italian ports, especially Trieste with the states of the Balkans (Rachello 1939:168.). The Italian researchers knew well the great ideas of former transport projects across the Balkans by Germany (Gozzini 1935:39) and by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Polli 1942:318). An article of *Geopolitica* in 1940 demonstrated the evaluation of Italian projects of communication corridors in the Balkans. According to the article, the ongoing construction of the railway between the port of Durrës and Elbasan in Albania would be the first part of the greater railway between the Adriatic Sea and the other parts of the Balkans and the East. The article also underlined the junction close to Bitola, which would continue in three directions: to Skopje, Thessaloniki (Greece), and Bulgaria. Marine transport between Durrës and Italian ports and telecommunication lines between Durrës and Bari are also mentioned in the article (D. I., 1940). Bice Polli wrote about three planned major projects (Balkans railway, Adriatic railway, and the Balkans channel) which would strengthen the Italian geoeconomic influence in the Balkans (Polli 1942:319-340).

## CONCLUSIONS

As conclusions it can be stated that my first statement was proved, as in the literature of the historical period, and also according to the analysis of Italian foreign policy, Italy had interests and solid plans to influence Central Europe and the Balkans by using economic tools. In the Italian plans, the role of the ports of Trieste and Fiume was significant due to their



geographical position and their historical ties with Central Europe. My second statement was partially proved. It was demonstrated that only the Italian initiative based on the Brocchi Plan was realized among the ideas of different great powers, however it did not last for a long time. In this case, the Italian foreign policy successfully took an opportunity in the actual international situation. However, Italy joined the competition late, and eventually, Germany could overtake her in economic influential terms. The ports of Trieste and Fiume could not reach the planned level in the trade of the states in Central Europe and the Balkans. Moreover, Italy finally had to politically waive the Danube basin and focus more on the Balkans region. There were already ongoing developments in the Balkans, primarily for the transport and communication infrastructure, which served the Italian geoeconomic objectives in the region. The base of the initiatives was Albania, which was in personal union with the Kingdom of Italy.

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