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The summary of the doctoral dissertation: Nation and empire in German political thought

Hans Kohn in his work *The Idea of Nationalism*¹ showed the dissimilarity of Western and German conceptions of the nation. This thesis was also scientifically bolstered by prominent nationalism researcher Anthony D. Smith, who in the contemporary discussion defends the position that German nationalism cannot be treated as an archetype of nationalism². Both Kohn and Smith treat National Socialism as one variation of the national idea, referring to it as the organic conception of the nation. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt, in her work *Korzenie totalitaryzmu* points out that National Socialism was first and foremost racism, which should not be seen as a kind of exaggerated nationalism and that, moreover, racism promotes the destruction of the political structure of a nation³. For racism rejects the principle of state organization of nations and advocates the construction of great empires. In the scientific literature of the world, the question of the fundamental distinctiveness of German and French nationalism is no longer controversial. It is unanimously accepted that modern nationalism was born in revolutionary France and the emerging United States of America.

The issue that, in the author's opinion, has not yet been sufficiently clarified concerns the question of what exactly the difference between these traditions was, and thus what the essence of National Socialism as a sui generis formation was. According to the dominant position, the separate development of German nationalism was supposed to be due to the general civilizational backwardness of the Germans in relation to Western Europe. Above all, it was supposed to be due to the failure to develop a strong German bourgeoisie with the kind of political power that existed in Western Europe. German intellectuals, deprived of influence on political processes, were expected to form alternative ideas of the nation to the West. And since the development of German national ideas fell during the period of Romanticism standing in opposition to Enlightenment rationalist ideals, this formation had to adopt such characteristics as it eventually did. Such an interpretation is presented by, among others, the aforementioned Hans Kohn and Hannah Arendt, as well as Isaiah Berlin, arguing from liberal and Enlightenment positions.

¹ H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism. A Study in its Origins and Background*, New York 1946.

² A. D. Smith, *Nacjonalizm. Teoria, historia, ideologia*, tłum. E. Chomicka, Warszawa 2007, s. 55.

³ H. Arendt, *Korzenie totalitaryzmu. T. 1*, tłum. M. Szawiel, D. Grinberg, Warszawa 1993, s. 203.

In our opinion, however, the problem is much deeper. Specifically, it concerns the attitude of German intellectuals to the nation-state and the idea of the political sovereignty of the nation. Just as for French nationalism the most important point of reference is the idea of the state as the highest political form of organization of the nation, so the essence of modern German nationalism, especially since German unification in 1871, and later National Socialism became the apolitical idea of empire. In our opinion, the "anti-state" attitude of most German nationalists and later National Socialists toward the institution of the nation-state was due to the fact that in the course of Germany's historical development there never developed the institution of a national monarchy and later a nation-state. The political form of organization of the Germans since the time of the Ottonians, was the empire or Reich. Thus, the point of reference for Germans was the idea of an empire having a universal mission and politically uniting different peoples and nations. This was the origin of the apolitical understanding of the nation in German thought: all European peoples were to live in harmony with each other within the framework of a single empire, while cherishing their ethnic or cultural distinctions. German nationalism, in our opinion, was thus entangled from the very beginning with the anti-state institution of the Reich, which made it virtually different from all nationalist traditions and went beyond the question of an organic understanding of the nation, as it was in fact imperialism, as will be thoroughly shown in the work. This was also the form taken by National Socialism, which was precisely imperialism, which assumed a plan to rebuild all of Europe.

German and French nationalism thus differ in their attitude to the institution of the nation-state. These nationalisms cannot function side by side, since they promote completely different methods of organizing the European continent: once it is a decentralized system of sovereign nation-states, and in the other case it is an imperial model.

In the first, theoretical part of the work, we first took a closer look at the distinction made by Kohn between the Western and German conceptions of nation and nationalism, as this is the starting point of the analyses carried out in the work. We then took a closer look at the French and American concepts of the right of nations to self-determination, which were completely negated by German nationalism. We also took a closer look at the theoretical foundations of the theory of empire, which is used in the work. In the following chapters, we presented the development of German ideas of nation and empire from the Middle Ages to the Third Reich.

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