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The Concepts of Universal Monarchy and Balance of Power in Charles Davenant's *An Essay Upon The Ballance of Power* (1701)

In the 17th century – especially in the period after the *Peace of Westphalia* (1648) – more and more treatises were published about the European balance of power, which clearly appeared against the concept of universal monarchy (*monarchia universalis*) by this time. The balance of power principle became a prominent element of 18th-century state politics and political journalism, as well as one of the key concepts of the emerging theory of interstate relations. The term became part of the official language of diplomacy with the *Peace of Utrecht* (1713), becoming part not only of political thought, but also of the official political practice, and developed into one of the fundamental milestones of English foreign policy and political thought in the 18th centuries. This paper analyses the contemporary incorporation of the balance of power concept into English political thought with the analysis of English economist and political writer Charles Davenant's (1656–1714) *An Essay Upon The Ballance of Power* (1701). The analysis is trying to point out how the principle of balance of power began to play an increasingly important role in European great power politics as well as in English domestic and foreign policy in the decades before the *Peace of Utrecht* (1713), and how Charles Davenant's political pamphlet can fit in this context.

Keywords: English Political Thought, Political Pamphlet, Balance of Power, Universal Monarchy, Charles Davenant, Peace of Utrecht, Conceptual History



Charles Davenant's political pamphlet *An Essay Upon The Ballance of Power* was published in 1701, in a single edition with the author's two other pamphlets closely related to the subject of balance of power with the titles *The Right of Making War, Peace and Alliances* and *Universal Monarchy*. Previous research only touched upon Davenant's political pamphlets in passing, thus they are worth being subjected to a deeper analysis in the context of contemporary opinion on the concepts of universal monarchy and balance of power.

This paper analyses Davenant's above-mentioned first pamphlet, treating the concepts of universal monarchy and balance of power as historical 'category of practices'¹ used by diplomatic and political actors in various contexts at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. The analysis will try to point out how the principle of balance of power began to play an increasingly important role in European great power politics as well as in English domestic and foreign policy in the decades before the Peace of Utrecht (1713), and how Davenant's mentioned work can fit in this context.

The English mercantilist economist and politician was born in 1656, whose name is primarily known for his pamphlets discussing subjects related to foreign trade and government finances.² Davenant obtained his degree in law at Cambridge in 1675, and thanks to his interest in economics, he worked as *Commissioner of the Excise* between 1678 and 1689. His prestige was enhanced by the fact that in 1685, he was elected to Parliament as an MP for the constituency of St Ives in Cornwall.³ As a consequence of the domestic political changes of 1688–1689, he faced difficulties regarding employment; he failed to find a new job and gain an economic position after the "Glorious Revolution". It was probably this situation that made him start to write pamphlets on economic topics, his first such essay was published in 1694. By the end of the 1690s, he had become an influential Tory pamphleteer. In the meantime, he was very determined, and he repeatedly tried to regain his economic positions, but failed. However, in 1698 and 1701, he returned to Parliament as an MP for Great Bedwyn. Finally, he obtained economic appointments again during the reign of Queen Anne (1702–1714), who followed William III (1689–1702) on the throne in 1702. First, he became secretary of a commission for three months in 1702, then he worked at the customs service from 1703 until his death in 1714 as *Inspector-General of the Exports and Imports*.⁴

Most of the literature items dealing with Davenant and his works are analyses of an economic historical perspective and primarily focus on his writings discussing his theory of the balance of trade.⁵ However, due to his political career, a shift in emphasis can be observed in his work after 1699–1700, from which time he published more political pamphlets. This is also noted by David Waddell,⁶ who – in addition to analysing his economic writings – was the only researcher of Davenant's biographical details so far, which he summarized in his unpublished Oxford dissertation in 1954.⁷

¹ By treating the concept of universal monarchy and balance of power as historical 'category of practices' I follow M. S. Andersen's method used by him in his doctoral dissertation on the genealogy of the concept of balance of power: ANDERSEN 2016. p. 7.

² HONT 2015. p. 201–202.

³ WADDELL 1958. p. 279–280.

⁴ WADDELL 1958. p. 281–286.

⁵ WADDELL 1956. p. 206–212; WADDELL 1958. p. 281; HONT 2015. p. 59–62.

⁶ WADDELL 1958. p. 282.

⁷ WADDELL 1954.

The balance of power has been a central concept in the theory and practice of international relations for centuries, and it has also played a key role in developing a theory of international politics in the study of international relations in the 20th century.⁸ In terms of etymology, the origin of the concept of *balance* is derived from the Latin terms *aequilibrium* ('equilibrium') or *aequilibrium potentiae* ('the equilibrium of power'), and it can already be found in 12th-century French and 13th-century English language use. From the 15th century, it can also be detected in German, where it became overshadowed in the 18th century by the term *Gleichgewicht* ('equilibrium', 'balance').⁹

The model of the balance of power was developed on the basis of Italian examples by the 16th century, and from then on it gradually gained ground in Europe through such classical writers of political history as Niccolò Machiavelli or Francesco Guicciardini.¹⁰ The principle clearly appeared against the concept of universal monarchy (*monarchia universalis*) by this time.¹¹ After the *Peace of Westphalia* (1648), the 'idea of a balance of power'¹² had emerged to keep the status quo and protect inter-dynastic and interstate relations.

In England, the balance of power played a particularly important role in domestic policy from the 1660s and 1670s, where the use of the concept became more and more a commonplace, as English pamphleteers and politicians started to use it virtually as a "weapon" both in political debates in political journalism and in Parliament.¹³ In terms of foreign policy, it was primarily used against the Dutch during the period of the two *Anglo-Dutch Wars* (1652–1654, 1665–1667), but as a consequence of the *War of Devolution* (1667–1668) launched by King Louis XIV of France (1643–1715), the use of the concept increasingly turned against the French.¹⁴ Both the pamphlets and the parliamentary speeches in England denounced France more and more frequently as the great power pursuing to ruin Europe and establish a universal monarchy.¹⁵

The use of the balance of power principle became firmly established after the *Treaty of Ryswick* (1697) that ended the *Nine Years' War* (1688–1697);¹⁶ however, considering the situation in England, the balance of power-model increasingly came to be used in various ways for domestic policy purposes,

⁸ See among others SHEEHAN 1996, especially p.1–24; LUARD 1992; LITTLE 2007.

⁹ KOVÁCS 2017, p. 18.

¹⁰ SHEEHAN 1988, p. 29–36; ANDERSON 1993, p. 150–153.

¹¹ BOSBACH 1998, 83–84, 87–88; GELDEREN 2007, p. 66–68. See also the classical study on the concept of universal monarchy and how the use of the concept was still present up to the age of Louis XIV in political pamphlets: BOSBACH 1988.

¹² SCHRÖDER 2017b, p. 183.

¹³ SHEEHAN 1988, 48–52; KAMPMANN 1996, p. 360–366. About the changing face of English press and the popular English political opinion in the Stuart Age also see: COWARD 2003, especially p. 88–110.

¹⁴ NOLAN 2008, p. 6–12, 513–514; ANDERSEN 2016, p. 80–91. On the shift in contemporary English political opinion from anti-Dutch to anti-French see: PINCUS 1995, especially p. 360–361.

¹⁵ THOMPSON 2011, p. 271–272; ANDERSEN 2016, p. 87. See also PINCUS 1992; PINCUS 1995.

¹⁶ NOLAN 2008, p. 320–330.

especially in the internal conflicts of the Whigs and Tories.¹⁷ The significance of the mentioned Treaty of Ryswick lied in the fact that it definitively established the idea of the European balance of power that had been discussed and promoted more and more frequently since the 1670s.¹⁸ From then on, political actors of the era came to accept the concept as the norm for establishing the European state system, which was explicitly included in the *Treaties of Utrecht* (1713–1714) that closed the *War of the Spanish Succession*.¹⁹

English politicians and pamphleteers continued to use the concept in foreign policy aspects as well, still mainly against France. Due to the dynastic wars of the second half of the 17th century, political alliances designed in the name of the balance of power once again came to the fore – these included, for instance, the *League of Augsburg* created during the Nine Years' War mentioned above, or its successor, the *Grand Alliance* formed in 1689 to which England also joined, against Louis XIV of France.²⁰ In this situation England increasingly interpreted its position as an external leader of the states of the European continent, and the pamphleteers thought that England was 'the hand that keeps the balance' in Europe.²¹

The balance policy of William III aimed at keeping the Habsburg Monarchy and France in balance, as well as checking this balance.²² The real threat to this balance of power lied in the great power opposition of the Bourbon and Habsburg dynasties, attributed to the unclear fate of Spanish inheritance.²³ By reason of the childlessness of the weak and sickly King Charles II of Spain (1665–1700), succession to the Spanish crown had been a central question of European politics well before the Treaty of Ryswick was signed, although the Spanish inheritance was not discussed in Ryswick yet. England and the Dutch Republic strove to agree with France peacefully by way of special negotiations to avoid passing the entire Spanish inheritance to the Habsburgs or the Bourbons.²⁴

The *First Partition Treaty* (or the *Treaty of The Hague*) was signed in October 1698 in The Hague to this end, under which France and the Habsburg Monarchy would have divided the Italian dominions of Spain, while the Spanish crown would have passed to Charles II's appointed successor, Prince Joseph Ferdinand of Bavaria. However, the appointed successor died in 1699, and the parties signed the *Second Partition Treaty* (or

¹⁷ CLAYDON 2007. p. 196; THOMPSON 2011. p. 268; DEVETAK 2013. p. 131–132. On the change of political thinking between Restoration and Hanoverian Succession see Justin Champion's paper: COWARD 2003. 474–491.

¹⁸ NOLAN 2008. p. 413; DEVETAK 2013. p. 135–136.

¹⁹ NOLAN 2008. p. 487–488, 516–527; BOIS 2017. p. 294–297.

²⁰ BRUIN et al. 2015. p. 13.

²¹ THOMPSON 2011. p. 270–271.

²² CLAYDON 2002. p. 152–158; NOLAN 2008. p. 533–534; TROOST 2011. p. 283–286.

²³ COWARD 1994. p. 365.

²⁴ COWARD 1994. p. 364–366. On the English political opinion and the Dutch alliance before and during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) see: COOMBS 1958, especially p. 16–19.

the *Treaty of London*) in March 1700 in London.²⁵ In the treaty, they agreed that France would acquire the Spanish territories in Italy, while the Spanish throne would pass to Archduke Charles (the future Emperor Charles VI), the son of Emperor Leopold I, which was unacceptable to Charles II of Spain, who insisted in his last testament that the integrity of the Spanish crown should be maintained at all costs, and nominated Duke Philip of Anjou, Louis XIV's grandson as his successor, who later became king of Spain as Philip V (1700–1724, 1724–1746).²⁶ According to the will, should Louis XIV not accept this, the entire territory of Spain would pass to the son of the Habsburg Emperor. Months later, Charles II finally died on 1 November 1700, and Louis XIV accepted the terms of his will on 16 November, which meant that he breached the Second Partition Treaty and disowned his allies, England and the Dutch Republic. Consequently, the prolonged War of the Spanish Succession mentioned above broke out in 1701, which only ended in 1714.²⁷

In his pamphlet on the concept of European balance of power published early in 1701,²⁸ Davenant clearly raises his voice against the above-mentioned partition treaties, criticising at great length mainly the second one, calling it a “fatal Treaty”, which has ultimately “brought the whole Dominion of Spain under the French Power or Influence”.²⁹ He emphasises the risk of the development of Spanish succession already on the first pages of the pamphlet, linking Philip, Duke of Anjou's inheritance to the potential danger of establishing a French universal monarchy, which would threaten both England and “the Liberties of Europe”.³⁰

As an economic expert, Davenant also draws attention on multiple occasions to the fact that the strengthening of France could later also cause serious foreign trade barriers for England, since France may – in a very short time – “supplant” England in its Spanish and Turkish trade interests.³¹ According to him, it is a serious threat to the English trade that – due to the Second Partition Treaty – Flanders would be in French hands, as well as that several ports of Spain and Italy would be in the power of France.³²

After the introductory thoughts, Davenant discusses the acts of former English monarchs from the reign of Henry VII to 1678, arriving at the conclusion that in the past 190 years “England has all along endeavour'd to hold the Ballance of Europe”.³³ He continues by discussing the “Glorious

²⁵ RULE 2007. p. 105–106; 110–111.

²⁶ COWARD 1994. p. 384.

²⁷ NOLAN 2008. p. 526–527. On the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) see among others FALKNER 2015.

²⁸ The exact date of the publishing is not yet known, but it is certain that the political pamphlet was published after the conclusion of the Second Partition Treaty (March 1700), according to Waddell in the first half of 1701. (WADDELL 1958. p. 283)

²⁹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 77.

³⁰ DAVENANT 1701. p. 4.

³¹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 4.

³² DAVENANT 1701. p. 61, 76, 85–86.

³³ DAVENANT 1701. p. 28.

Revolution” of 1688–1689 and the ensuing Nine Years’ War, then praises the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) that ended the war, since – in his opinion – that was the last time England was in an exceptionally good foreign policy position.³⁴ Davenant goes on expressing his negative views on the measures taken after 1697, primarily the Partition Treaties of 1698 and 1700. In his view the fact that England had signed an agreement with France suggested that England was weak, thus encouraging France “to disturb the Peace of Europe”.³⁵ Next, the author arrives at the central part of the pamphlet, in which he explains how England could return to its leading role in keeping the balance of Europe, for which he thinks it is first necessary to solve the domestic issues and parliamentary feuds England is currently struggling with.

The central concept of the balance of power started to intertwine in contemporary England with other concepts such as *public interest*, *common welfare* and *national interest (raison d’État)*, and the principle of the balance of power played a prominent role in the need for joint action against a possible universal monarchy as well. In this sense, the concept of universal monarchy included all negative effects of private interests. From the reign of Elisabeth I, the struggle against universal monarchy became a central thesis in England, especially in the debates regarding the European continent; this debate revived during the Restoration, starting around the 1660s, as a result of the potential and dangerous French expansion.³⁶

The political authors of the era, including – in addition to Davenant – Bolingbroke, Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe, repeatedly emphasise in their writings the need for an optimal parliamentary debate and the political importance of Parliament as the main site of common thinking. In general, all political authors of the era discuss in some way the thought that individual interests pose danger, while public interest does not lie.³⁷ As Davenant explained, the private interests of several former English monarchs prevented the English nation from recognising the dangers that threaten the country from the European continent where the balance of power has been disrupted; furthermore, in terms of domestic policy, several problems of the era resulted from the unbalanced constitution.³⁸

In domestic policy, the concept of public interest incorporated everything that is objectively good for the state, while in foreign policy, Davenant and his contemporaries started to expand the concept to the objective interests of

³⁴ In connection with the discussion of the news of the Peace of Ryswick at Parliament in December 1697, the House of Commons expressed its joy towards William III, believing that by signing the treaties, the monarch managed to “restore England’s privilege as the keeper of European balance of power”, attesting the fact that they did think in 1697 that the country got into an especially good foreign policy position as a result of signing the peace treaties. (JHC 1697–1699. p. 2–3. [December 7, 1697], <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol12/pp2-3> [access: June 22, 2019])

³⁵ DAVENANT 1701. p. 33.

³⁶ DEVETAK 2013. p. 130–131.

³⁷ ANDERSEN 2016. p. 93.

³⁸ ANDERSEN 2016. p. 78.

Europe as a whole. Davenant also repeatedly emphasises how important it is in domestic policy that the defence of citizen rights from tyranny is only possible with a balanced constitution, while in foreign policy, the interests of Europe can be protected from the dangers of universal monarchy by using the balance of power.³⁹

The importance of national unity was addressed in contemporary pamphlets – for example in Bolingbroke’s writings⁴⁰ – more and more frequently, discussing at length in this regard the dangers of party disputes, the harmful effects of the Tory-Whig opposition and the importance of a balanced constitutionality, in which respect they praised the ancient English constitution and the balanced constitution.⁴¹ Davenant also praised and feared the ancient constitution of the country in his pamphlet on the European balance of power. He criticised the political leadership of recent years and discussed at length that a small group of political advisors decided on signing the failed partition treaties, without convening the full Parliament and seeking its advice, thus this group did not consider either the interests of the country or the interest of Europe. On the last pages of the pamphlet, Davenant argues that recent political leaders must be held accountable for their faults, as it was a serious mistake not to convene a parliamentary session immediately upon learning about the death of the Spanish king, because seeking the advice of Parliament is of utmost importance, and it is also necessary for a balanced constitutionality.⁴²

After a while “the interest of England”, that is the national interest also included domestic political debates as well as religious, economic and commercial interests. The balance-of-power thinking often appeared embedded in religious terminology, for instance while discussing the “Protestant interest”.⁴³ It is worth noting that an analogy for public interest in the era also included the concept of *commonwealth*,⁴⁴ as well as the medieval metaphor of *body politic*.⁴⁵ These ideas not only linked the new terminology of balance of power to well-established notions of political thought but – unlike the term *State* – also underlined the interest of the *political community as a whole* in matters of foreign policy. The terms *commonwealth* and *body politic* appeared in Davenant’s analysed pamphlet too – but *State* was by far the most often used term – who outstandingly and consciously linked national interest with “the Protestant interest throughout

³⁹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 36–38, 45–48, 85–89.

⁴⁰ KRAMNICK 1992.

⁴¹ CLAYDON 2007. p. 201–208; THOMPSON 2011. p. 278.

⁴² DAVENANT 1701. p. 89–101.

⁴³ ANDERSEN 2016. p. 77.

⁴⁴ On the origin and the contexts of the concept of commonwealth see: EARLY MODERN RESEARCH GROUP 2011, especially p. 660–661.

⁴⁵ ANDERSEN 2016. p. 76.

all Europe”⁴⁶ and with “the ballance of Europe”,⁴⁷ in which England has a leading role, as both Davenant and his contemporaries agreed.

According to contemporary thinking, the universal monarchy undermines public interest and objectivity both in domestic and foreign policy through financial interests and their “accomplices”.⁴⁸ In foreign policy, these interests lead to arbitrary government, while in domestic policy, they give rise to corruption. This also emphatically appears in Davenant’s analysed pamphlet, who says that those politicians who employ corruption give up the ancient constitution of England. He also explains that recent political decision-makers, who – according to the author’s view – took English foreign policy in the wrong direction with the partition treaties, sinned against the ancient constitution of the country with their “Misgovernment” and “Corruption”.⁴⁹

Davenant clearly indicates that failing to defend the balance of power poses a threat to the English constitution as well as to Europe, thus he urges action against arbitrary power in the summarizing thoughts of the pamphlet, linking this thought to the dangers of a possible universal monarchy. He refers on several occasions to the fact that the Second Partition Treaty and Louis XIV’s actions⁵⁰ are leading to the formation of a potential universal monarchy (“universal empire”) in the form of France. Already in the introduction of the pamphlet, he strongly raises his voice against politicians corrupted by financial interests, who he says are not interested at all in the fate of “the ballance of Europe” or “which side the Scale inclines”,⁵¹ the scale having been a frequent and popular metaphor for representing and illustrating this balance as early as the 16th century.⁵²

The political pamphlet therefore links the discussion of the domestic problems to the issue of Spanish succession and the criticism of the already discussed Second Partition Treaty, which – in Davenant’s opinion – worried each English citizen after it had been signed, since it “put an aspiring Monarchy [i.e. France] into a better posture both at Sea and Land, to enslave Europe than it was before the War [i.e. the Nine Years’ War]”.⁵³ Therefore, for England and thus Europe the gains of the Peace of Ryswick were lost by signing the partition treaties, for which only those in leading positions can be held responsible who had drafted the partition treaties and against whom investigations should be conducted for the interest of *public good*, thus the problems of the country could be solved.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ DAVENANT 1701. p. 43.

⁴⁷ DAVENANT 1701. p. 3.

⁴⁸ ANDERSEN 2016. p. 78.

⁴⁹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 85.

⁵⁰ NOLAN 2008. p. 259–266.

⁵¹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 3.

⁵² SCHRÖDER 2017a. p. 91–93.

⁵³ DAVENANT 1701. p. 54–55.

⁵⁴ DAVENANT 1701. p. 12.

In Davenant's opinion, the English and the Dutch awarded such easily gained territorial advantages to France (towns in Flanders, Spanish and Italian ports) under the Second Partition Treaty that they could not have obtained by force in many years and only after a great effort.⁵⁵ As regards Charles II's last will, he argues that it had created a new situation and possibilities that the partition treaties did not contain, but England should have used these possibilities. He mockingly notes that Louis XIV's decision to accept the terms of the will is not at all surprising, since „what will you agree to in case the King of Spain's Last Testament be in your Favour?“⁵⁶ According to Davenant, France and Spain got so close by Louis XIV's decision that it poses a real threat to the whole of Europe. In his opinion, after Ryswick, England should have approached Spain instead of France, and they should have formed a relationship of trust with the Spanish crown „to keep the two great Monarchies from being united, and to secure the Peace of Europe“.⁵⁷

Davenant contemplates that in order to solve the problems of the country and to maintain the balance of power both in England and in Europe, it is necessary for the two contending English political parties to form a coalition, to set up a suitable Parliament “to consult upon the Distempers of the Body Politick”,⁵⁸ that is to discuss the problems of the country. On the closing pages of the analysed pamphlet, Davenant urges in an increasingly vigorous tone to undertake war against France in order to maintain the balance of power in Europe, since England is the keeper of the balance, and it must take measures “to keep the Power of France within due limits”, and “to maintain our [i.e. England's] Post of holding the Ballance”.⁵⁹ Referring again to the Peace of Ryswick, he argues that in his opinion the most England can hope is that the foreign policy situation will be the same as it was when the Peace of Ryswick was concluded, and that Spain must be no longer under French influence.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that – considering his political career – Davenant was a Tory politician, it is interesting to note the tone and content of his pamphlet; his political party, the Tories did not support the new war commitment of the country, yet Davenant vigorously call on his readers to act against France and undertake another war.⁶¹

The balance of power principle became a prominent element of 18th-century state politics and political journalism, as well as one of the key

⁵⁵ DAVENANT 1701. p. 85–86.

⁵⁶ DAVENANT 1701. p. 67.

⁵⁷ DAVENANT 1701. p. 71–72.

⁵⁸ DAVENANT 1701. p. 96.

⁵⁹ DAVENANT 1701. p. 85, 87.

⁶⁰ DAVENANT 1701. p. 86–87.

⁶¹ This may be attributed to the fact that at the time of writing the pamphlet, Davenant had no position of employment; he was trying to obtain an economic appointment for himself by gaining the attention of leading Whig politicians. He finally succeeded in this only in 1703, after which date the tone of his political pamphlets did change noticeably from being anti-French to being anti-Dutch. (WADDELL 1958. p. 285–287.)

concepts of the emerging theory of interstate relations.⁶² It is no coincidence that the expression ‘balance of power’ was first used in an international legal sense in the treaties of Utrecht in the early 18th century.⁶³ In the case of Davenant’s political pamphlet, the author’s terminology and thinking on the concept of the balance of power was mainly dominated by the old-time bipolar model, the scale for the metaphorical reference for this view.⁶⁴ Nevertheless his usage also predicted some recent ideas – as ‘preserving the liberties of Europe’, or ‘the general good, the peace and the balance of Europe’ – which have been explicitly included in the peace treaties of Utrecht; such as the expressions ‘the liberty and safety of all Europe’, or ‘the general peace of Europe’ in the Second Article of the *Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Great Britain and Spain* from July 1713.⁶⁵

Charles Davenant’s *An Essay Upon The Ballance of Power* not only criticised the foreign policy of William III, but he definitively raised his voice against the Second Partition Treaty and its promoters. He emphasised the need for undertaking another war against France in order to defend the balance of Europe, in which regard England’s most important task was to maintain its role as keeper of the balance of power.

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⁶² BLACK 1983. p. 55–58; KOVÁCS 2017. p. 18.

⁶³ SASHALMI 2015a. p. 23–24.

⁶⁴ SASHALMI 2015b. p. 228–231.

⁶⁵ CHALMERS 1790. p. 43, 56.

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