CZECH POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND ITS ROAD
TO CREATING A NATION-STATE AND A PROGRAMME
FOR COOPERATION IN THE NEW EASTERN EUROPE
AT THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Today the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 can be seen as a logical direct consequence of a successful Czech national emancipation process. However, the image of a direct line does not correspond with complicated developments of Czech politics during the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The formation of the Czech nation came about under more favourable conditions than most other suppressed East European small nations.¹ Although Czech politicians never succeeded in achieving of their political national demands, the economic and cultural progress that Czech society had made since 1848 enabled its national economic and political élite to participate in the economic and political power of the Austrian monarchy. However, this was not in any adequate proportion to its changed position. Austro-Slavism – the basic concept of Czech politics till the First World War, which was formulated by the historian František Palacký during the Revolution of 1848 – was based on the premise of the necessity of maintaining the Habsburg state and the assertion of the Czech demands in the federalized monarchy. The Austrian government should have been the unbiased guarantor of the free development for small Central European nations. The existence of the empire should have functioned as an obstacle and a counterbalance to Germany. The programmes of almost all Czech political parties (except the Social Democrats and, with certain exceptions, also a small Masaryk's People's (Realistic) Party) were based on the doctrine of the Czech historical state law. Its nucleus consisted in the statement of the permanent existence and continuity of the Czech state (which has never been officially annulled) and territorial integrity of the Czech coun-

¹M. Hroch. *Evropská národní hnutí v 19. Století*. Praha, 1986.

tries within the clearly defined historical boundaries of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. The indivisibility of the Czech territory following from the historical state argumentation was directed against Austrian centralism and attempts of Czech Germans to divide the country into German and Czech parts, as well as a Czech-German part. The historical state law, even in its most moderate version, aimed at the federalization of monarchy. It was a programme which never went beyond the legal scope of monarchy. Since the introduction of parliamentarism at the beginning of the sixties, Czech politicians sought to bring about changes in the structure of the Austrian state. Their fight was a fight for Austria; in no way was it directed against this state. After the main Czech campaign for recognition of the Czech state individuality within the Austrian monarchy suffered a defeat in 1871, the Czech historical law remained only a theoretical starting point. After the failure of the Czech passive opposition Czech politicians recognized dualism *de facto*. They changed their strategy and concentrated on gradually gaining concessions, so that the economic and cultural boom of Czech society dating back to the mid-nineteenth century might allow Czechs to participate more actively in the empire's institutions.²

The First World War dealt a serious blow to this concept of the nation. Czech political representatives were startled by the declaration of war. The introduction of a state of war led to the building of a military-bureaucratic regime. The High Command perceived the war in German nationalistic terms as an inevitable conflict between the Germanic and Slavic races. The Germanization of administration and public life meant the quick liquidation of a great part of the gains which Czech politicians had made during the preceding decades of the so-called 'crumb' or positive policy. Instead of strengthening administrative positions with a chance of creating a Czech state unit within the Austrian monarchy, the future promised the prospect of an Austria under the unlimited rule of German nationalism. Eventually the idea of *Mitteleuropa* appeared in which the Czech nation would have become a tolerated minority. Influenced by the ominous reality of war, Czech political representatives tried to build two different platforms:

1) To abrogate their traditional concept and stand out against Austria-Hungary and formulate a national programme. Such a

²On problems of modernization of Czech society in Austria, see: Z. Tobolka. *Politické dějiny československého národa od 1848 az do dnešní doby*, 4 vols., Praha, 1932-1937; O. Urban. *Ceská společnost 1848-1918*. Praha, 1982; B. Garver. *The Young Czech Party and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System*. New Haven, London, 1978.

programme meant the destruction of Austria-Hungary and the creation of the Czech nation in an independent state.

2) By loyally supporting the throne to controvert accusations of an anti-Austrian and anti-dynastic Czech approach to the unpopular war; to seek the rehabilitation of the Czech nation as a loyal element; by demonstrating absolute devotion to the Habsburg dynasty and monarchy, to prevent the implementation of Germanization, and to achieve a renewal of the pre-war state.

Both lines of pro-Austrian activism and resistance functioned in tandem throughout the war. The anti-Austrian concept could come into being only in emigration or in the underground. On the other hand, the pro-Austrian activism prevailed because of political pressure till the turn of 1917/1918, when the situation began to change under new internal and external circumstances. The activism gave way to the radical national concept aiming at separation and the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia.³

There were traditional pro-dynastic and pro-Austrian political parties (clericals, Old-Czechs), but most parties followed the line of opportunism. Only one party – the State-Radical Party – calculated with the European conflagration as a chance for a final answer to the ‘Czech question’ before the war in the spring 1914, but it was a very small nationalist radical party without political influence.⁴ One must take into account that, despite the political crises in Bohemia before the war, the Habsburg monarchy was not only a constant entity but also a natural custom-free area in the Danube basin, in which the advanced Czech lands occupied a first-rate economic position.

The break in Czech politics was documented by a change in the behaviour of two politicians who later became the first statesmen of Czechoslovakia – Karel Kramář and Thomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the former in the post of the first Prime Minister in 1918/1919, the latter as the President of Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1935.

Karel Kramář was a representative of the leading civic party – the Young Czechs, a party of the Czech bourgeoisie, which was deeply rooted economically and politically in Austrian reality. Kramář organized the Slavic Congress in Prague in 1908. In spite of its anti-German character and pro-Russian sympathies (cooperation between

³M. Paulová. *Dějiny Maffie; odboj Čechu a Jihoslovanu za světové války 1914-1918*. Praha, 1937 and *Tajný výbor Maffie a spolupráce s Jihoslovany v letech 1916-1918*. Praha, 1968; Z. Zeman. *The Break-up of the Habsburg Empire, 1914-1918*. London - New York 1961.

⁴J. Tomeš. *Ceská strana státoprávně-pokroková v letech 1908-1914*, in: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Studia historica XXV*, 1982, 117-150.

Austria and Russia was proposed) Czech Neo-slavism had strong Austrian motivation; economic aspects were also important. It appealed to solidarity among Slavs in the Austrian monarchy and did not look beyond Austrian borders. However, in May 1914 Kramář changed his opinion and conceived a project of a huge empire of Slavic nations under rule of the Russian tsar. The projected Slavic empire, composed of the Russian Empire, Polish, Czech, Serbian, Montenegro and Bulgarian kingdoms, would be a centralized unit with only formal elements of democracy and federalism. Kramář's megalomaniac project compensated obvious weak points in parliamentarism for territorial expansion; not only former lands of the mediaeval Czech Crown (Silesia and Lausitz) should have been annexed to the Czech kingdom, but so should have been Slovakia as far as Vyšehrad, and a southern corridor stretching to Serbia.⁵ This state should have had in its maximum version about 20 million inhabitants, of which Czechs and Slovaks constituted less than a half of the population. Two important problems were solved by the incorporation of the Czech state into the huge unit: firstly, Kramář responded to doubts about maintaining an independent Czech state in the middle of a German sea. The chance to shape a maximum frontier was the second motivation, because the incorporation of a great mass of non-Slavic population could be absorbed better in the frame of a great empire. Kramář's project became a clear product of Czech nationalism and it could be viewed as a Czech mirror reflection of German extreme nationalism. The project was discussed only among Kramář's friends because of the state of war. Kramář was arrested in May 1915 and sentenced to death; however, not for his traitorous project, but paradoxically for his political activity before the war. He was pardoned by the new emperor Karl in June 1917. Russian military weakness and Russian revolutions doomed his ideas to fall into oblivion.⁶

The second variant was represented by a proposal conceived by a representative of the small Realistic Party T. G. Masaryk. He was an opponent of national radicalism, he denied 'state fantasy' and advocated an idea of the evolution of the Czech nation within Austria based upon gradual cultural, economic and political improvement. However, observing a change in the political climate of the Dual Monarchy before the war, he became critical of the Austrian political system and Austrian foreign policy. He rejected his original

⁵J. Galandauer. *Vznik Československé republiky 1918*. Praha, 1988, 20-29, 243-250.

⁶J. Kren. *Konfliktní společenství: Češi a Nemci 1780-1918*. Praha, 1990, 389.

pro-Austrian programme as outlined in his works from the nineties and changed from evolutionist into revolutionist. Masaryk represented the Czech pro-Entente (rather English-French than pro-Russian) geopolitical views in Central Europe. At the beginning of war, among Czech deputies and political leaders only Professor Masaryk decided, at the age of 64, to emigrate in order to begin anti-Austrian actions abroad. Unlike the theorists of direct national conflicts (Germano-Slavo, Germano-Romance), he explained the war as a “black-white” conflict between the principles of Western democracy, republicanism, constitutionalism, and the free development of small nations on the one hand, and theocratic monarchism, absolutism and Prussian militarism on the other. His standpoint was supported as the United States joined the Entente. His obvious weak point – tsarist Russia – was eliminated by the Russian revolution in March 1917.⁷

Masaryk's idea of a modern Czechoslovak state developed during the war. His first project, presented to the English historian and publicist R. W. Seton-Watson for the British government in October 1914, assumed (unlike Kramář) the rise of an independent state, consisting of the Czech lands within their historical boundaries and Slovakia with her ethnic boundaries. Unlike Kramář he accepted small frontier corrections and a shift of frontiers into the interior. This Czechoslovak state would have been a constitutional monarchy led by a Western prince (Belgian or Danish).⁸ In 1915 under Kramář's influence Masaryk agreed with a corridor to Serbia and acknowledged the possibility of rule by the Russian dynasty in his memorandum *Independent Bohemia*, but he remained skeptical himself to this. In contrast to Kramář's idea, the new Czech state would have been independent with an orientation towards the Western democracies and also allied to Russia. After the first Russian Revolution in March 1917 Masaryk revised the form of government on behalf of a democratic republic. The programme of the rise of Czechoslovakia began to realize in 1918, as the campaign abroad, supported by 100,000 men in the legions in Siberia, Italy and France,⁹ and political opinion for the creation of an independent state prevailed at home and among the Allies.¹⁰

⁷T. G. Masaryk. *Nová Evropa*. Brno, 1994, 72-78. The first English and French editions appeared in 1918, the first Czech version in 1920.

⁸J. Galadauer. *Vznik*, 29-34, 251-255.

⁹K. Pichlík - B. Klípa - J. Zabloudilová. *Ceskoslovenští legionáři (1914 až 1920)*. Praha, 1996.

¹⁰The Declaration of Czech deputies of January 6, 1918, demanding self-determination for the Czech and Slovak nations, was of great importance, then the

Masaryk did not view the Czech question as an isolated problem. From the very beginning of his political activity in exile he tried to draw the Entente's attention to the processes taking place in Central Europe. His main political goal during the war was to make the Czech question international, part of the complex of problems in the zone between Germany and Russia, where many small nations were living. 'Should the world war have some sense,' said Masaryk in 1915 at King's College, London in his lecture 'The Problems of Small European Nations in the European Crisis' with which he opened the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 'so it can only be the liberation of the small nations threatened by Germany's insatiable aggressiveness...'.¹¹ Masaryk's view of Germany as an aggressive power permanently threatening the independence of Central European nations by its '*Drang nach Osten*' also influenced his attitude to the emancipation of the Poles, Ukrainians and the Baltic nations. Masaryk has much sympathy for the movement of oppressed nations in Russia, but due to the German factor he saw their self-realizations rather in a democratic Russian Federation after 1917. Masaryk was considered to be an expert in Russian problems, but no blind Russophile. Having severely criticized the autocratic regime in Russia before the world war,¹² he was denied permission to enter the country until the fall of tsarism.

Masaryk explained his opinions concerning the new structure of Europe and the place of small nations in it in his book *New Europe* written during his stay in revolutionary Russia from summer 1917 to the spring of 1918. In that programme brochure he responded to the German occupation of the Baltic countries and Ukraine, and to

Pittsburgh Declaration of May 30 on the unity of Czechs and Slovaks which promised the autonomy for the Slovaks. Finally, the Washington Czechoslovak Proclamation of Independence by its Provisional Government on October 18, and the Proclamation of the Czechoslovak National Council on Independence of the Czechoslovak State on October 28 and the Martin Declaration of the representatives of Slovak political parties for Czechoslovakia on October 30, 1918 were basic documents of steps towards the foundation of a new state.

¹¹T. G. Masaryk. *Svetová revoluce*. Praha, 1925, 106.

¹²Masaryk specified his opinions on Russia, Russian culture and religion in books of sociological sketches *Europe and Russia*, for the first time in German version *Russland und Europa. Studien über geistigen Strömungen in Russland. Zur russischen Geschichts- und Religionsphilosophie*. Jena, 1913. Then an uncompleted part of his sociological studies appeared in Czech translation between October 1913 and June 1914; English version - *The Spirit of Russia. Studies in History, Literature and Philosophy*. London, 1919.

German efforts aimed at creating states in that area under imperial German control. His work was a polemic against F. Naumann's liberal concept of *Mitteleuropa*, too.¹³ A strong Russia, democratic and federalized, was expected from the Czech geopolitical point of view in post-Revolution euphoria to counterbalance Germany in Central Europe and protect the small nations there. The 'marginal' nations were not encouraged to separate from the democratic Russian Federation, since this would only strengthen the role of Germany. That is also why he opposed the idea of full independence for the Baltic lands and Ukraine utilized by the German propaganda then. He considered an independent state only for the Finns at that time. Masaryk's one-sided vision of Russian democracy may certainly seem naive today; but the contemporary context and the first Russian revolution, which initially aroused so many hopes among both left-wing movements and liberal intellectuals in Europe, must be taken into account. The brochure was a part of his extensive war campaign, that is why he characterized the Germans, Austrians and Hungarians only in dark colours and did not mention their future prospects in the new Europe. He underestimated Russian – Polish antagonism, too.

Masaryk was aware of the problems concerning the destabilization of Central and Eastern Europe ("Balkanization") after the destruction of the great multinational empires. The Allies had not sought the disintegration of Austria-Hungary till spring/summer 1918. Masaryk, trying to persuade the Allies of the necessity of destroying the Habsburg monarchy, conceived an idea of cooperation of small nations and perhaps a federation in the future in the place of the old multinational empires. The idea of cooperation between small nations showed many bottlenecks even before the realization of state goals started, as one of its conditions was the solution of ethnic conflicts between East European nations themselves. After leaving Siberia and arriving in the United States, Masaryk and other émigrés tried to organize the representatives of Central and East European nations in the Mid-European Democratic Union (MEDU), anticipating alleged postwar cooperation among these countries.¹⁴ The representatives of American Czechs (Masaryk), Slovaks, Poles (Ignacy Paderewski), Southern Slavs (Hinko Hinkovič), Lithuanians (Jonas Šliūpas, Thomas Naruševičius), Rumanians (Vasil Stoica),

¹³R. Jaworski. Tomáš G. Masaryk versus Friedrich Naumann: Zwei Europavisionen im Ersten Weltkrieg, in: *Occursus Setkání Begegnung*. Praha, 1996, 123-134.

¹⁴J. Kovtun. *Masarykuv triumf*. Praha, 1991; Z. Zeman. *The Masaryks: The Making of Czechoslovakia*. New York, 1976.

Ruthenians (Grigorii Zhatkovich), and also Ukrainians, Italians, Greeks, Jews and Armenians took part in the union which would demonstrate cooperation among future Central- and East-European nations. The MEDU activity culminated in the euphoric manifesto of October 26, 1918, symbolically adopted in Philadelphia's Independence Hall, by which the Union addressed the American and European public declaring universal democratic goals in the spirit of President Wilson's programme.¹⁵ Masaryk entered into contacts with the Lithuanians Jonas Šliūpas and Thomas Naruševičius among the Baltic representatives. Under Šliūpas' influence he considered the possibility of federation between Lithuania and Latvia.

It was symbolical that the vision of cooperation proclaimed in exile did not live longer than a few weeks as soon as nationalist ideas in Europe started to materialize. Masaryk remembered that he had functioned as a mediator in conflicts between Lithuanian and Polish, and between Polish and Ukrainian representatives in the United States.¹⁶ The fights between Poles and Ukrainians for Lvov (Lviv) in November (other conflicts broke out between Serbs and Croats and Slovenians, Italians and Southern Slavs) were the immediate cause for the erosion and final failure of the very fragile union, which was considered rather to a product of pro-American war propaganda, émigré dreams, united by the war for a short time in the vision of a new democratic, but also national Europe.

¹⁵J. B. Kozák, T. G. *Masaryk a vznik Washingtonské deklarace*. Praha, 1968, 112-113.

¹⁶Masaryk. *Svetová revoluce*, 299-300.