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Formation of Czechoslovakia: An Artificial State?

Abstract

The study focuses on the dynamics of the formation of the independent Czechoslovak Republic in the context of the Great War and the immediately following post-war period. Emphasis is placed on identifying the concepts on which Czechoslovakia's territorial claims to the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian and German empire were based and their formative influence on the subsequent political and economic orientation of the new state formation in the web of newly constructed relations in the Versailles-era geographic and geopolitical configuration of the wider Central European area.

An important context for this paper is that the period under study represents a paradigmatic shift for Central Europe with the dramatic disintegration of integrated state entities into a number of independent states in accordance with the right to self-determination of nations advocated by American president Woodrow Wilson.

In connection with the right to self-determination, the author of the article mentions that the Czechoslovak state was granted this right in full, despite some fabrications concerning the concept of a Czechoslovak nation of two “branches” speaking the Czechoslovak language and Edvard Beneš's “inaccuracies”

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about the number and other socio-geographical characteristics of the German population in the territory claimed by Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. Moreover, it was rather peculiar that the new state with a republican order insisted on the historical *raison d'être*, i.e. on the full consideration of the historical rights of the Crown of the Kingdom of Bohemia in the Czech lands, and conversely, on the breaking of the millennial union of Slovakia with the Crown of St. Stephen's lands on the basis of the natural right of the "imagined" Czechoslovak nation to its state. Last but not least, the paper addresses the question of whether this fragmentation, or Balkanisation in the contemporary sense of the term, helped to stabilize the overall post-war situation in Central Europe, or whether it created a rather undesirable and dangerous power vacuum in this vital area for European security.

In this context, the paper elucidates the genesis of the idea of state independence from the declaration of loyalty to Emperor Charles I by the domestic political representation during the war to the leaning towards the position of the Czech emigre and the disintegration of the century-old union of territories of the Habsburg monarchy after the final reversal of the war events in the summer of 1918. The author of the study also raises the question of whether this programme was implemented with the consent of the Diets of particular crown lands or German population prior to the proclamation or after the proclamation of independent Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1918, or only through the unelected Czechoslovak National Committee or the Revolutionary National Assembly from Prague. The question of the role of the emperor, or his dethronement, as well as Czechoslovakia's attitude to the continuity of Austro-Hungarian statehood in contrast to the reception of the Austro-Hungarian legal order, is also considered. The author of the study also emphasizes the fact that Czechoslovakia, like other successor states, was emerging in a completely new reality and that Czechoslovakia in particular lacked the essential element of statehood,

sovereignty, in much of the territory it claimed, especially in the German-speaking border areas and Slovakia; therefore, trade and political relations played a key role in this situation as one of the main surrogate instruments of state sovereignty.

The article also deals with the use of the more robust resource and industrial base and the privileged position of a member of the Entente to promote Czechoslovak political interests with neighbouring states, especially Austria, particularly in the context of the recognition of Czechoslovak control over the parts of Czech lands inhabited by the German-speaking population that had come under Czechoslovak administration before the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain. Some attention is also paid to the complicated issue of Teschen (Cieszyn) in the context of relations with Poland.

Keywords

Czechoslovakia, Austria-Hungary, Austria, independence, sovereignty

The Great War completely disrupted the hitherto traditional configuration of the “long” 19th century Europe. Its final act, which consisted of the Bolshevik Revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917 and the failure of the German summer offensives a year later, followed by the collapse of the Central Powers, resulted in the fall of the four defeated dynasties, the beginning of the disintegration of the colonial empires of the victors, and most importantly for the Central European context, the emergence of a significant number of successor states. Czechoslovakia belonged to the group of these new states as a symptomatic example of the arbitrary application of the right to self-determination of nations, the proverbial “zeitgeist” advocated by US President Woodrow Wilson. The founding of Czechoslovakia was based on the romantic mid-19th century idea of the existence of a distinct Czechoslovak nation of two branches with its own “imagined” language (Kampelík, 1842). Another critical element in the dynamics of the constitution of Czechoslovakia was Edvard Beneš’s “inaccuracies”

regarding the size and socio-geographical characteristics of the German population in the territory to which Czechoslovakia laid claim at the Paris Peace Conference,¹ designed to downplay the size of the German-speaking population in the newly emerging state. Moreover, it was rather bizarre that the new republic insisted on taking full account of the historical state right of the Crown of the Kingdom of Bohemia, but contrarily on breaking the thousand-year union of the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen, on the basis of the natural right of the virtual Czechoslovak nation to its state in the case of Slovakia.

According to Vlastislav Lacina (1990, pp. 21–22), one of the main inherent, not only economic, problems of the concept of Czechoslovakia was the fact that the industrial heartland of the old monarchy, consisting of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, Upper and Lower Austria and Styria, was fragmented. In the Czech lands, this was felt the most by South Moravia region, which was most integrated with the Viennese industrial base. The merging of the historical Czech lands with the predominantly agrarian territory of the Upper Lands (*“Felvidék”*) was also problematic; besides, the Hungarian counties inhabited by Slovaks had been an integral part of the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen for a thousand years and never enjoyed territorial autonomy (Teich, Kováč, & Brown, 2011, p. 3) like the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia or Fiume as a *corpus separatum*, or ethnic autonomy (Sedlar, 2013, p. 404) like the Saxons of Transylvania in the period before the Austro-Hungarian settlement. Czechoslovakia therefore had to necessarily integrate several entities not only at different levels of economic but also social development: the industrialised Lands of the Bohemian Crown, agrarian Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia with an economy at a medieval level of development. According to Ivan Jakubec (2008, p. 119), it created a new Austria-Hungary with all its inherited flaws.

It is not the purpose of this study to fully illuminate the economic perspective of the new state; nevertheless, the disparity in the

1 Memorandum č. 3: Problém Němců v Čechách. *Střední Evropa: revue pro stře-doevropskou kulturu a politiku*. Praha: Institut pro stře-doevropskou kulturu a politiku (I.S.E.), 1992, 8(25), 16–21.; Regarding the “authenticity” of the publication of the above-mentioned document, cf. Broklová (2002, 1–12, 309; 1994, 2, 262–263)

development of its individual parts is well illustrated by the fact that 90–92% of the industrial production of the new state came from the Lands of Bohemian Crown, as did 75% of the agricultural production (Kubů et al., 2000, p. 16). This disparity was also rooted in the adoption of two separate legal systems. While the ABGB² remained in force in Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia, customary Hungarian law applied in the Slovak and Subcarpathian territories. According to Ivan Jakubec (2008, p. 120), legal dualism³ was not completely overcome throughout the interwar period of the joint state. The lack of cross-country transport infrastructure was also a problem in creating a common internal market and in the actual functioning of the state (Kubů et al., 2000, pp. 15–16), as basically the only railroad connection between the western Czech half of the republic and Slovakia was the Košice-Bohumín railway running through the disputed territory of Teschen (Cieszyn), which was also claimed by Poland.

The Czechoslovak national programme in 1918, to which this study is primarily limited due to space considerations, oscillated between the independence advocated by the emigre and the autonomy still favoured by the domestic political scene. On 30 May 1917, the Czech domestic political representation within the reopened Imperial Council (Kárník, 2003, p. 25), almost unanimously as the “legation of the Czech nation”, for the first time publicly issued a state declaration demanding “the transformation of the Habsburg-Lorraine Empire into a federal state of free and equal nation states”. Thus it mentally still operated within the federal state on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy, which was rather disappointing for the emigre. In contrast, the revolutionary part of the declaration (Kárník, 2003, p. 25) was the first public declaration of the intent “to merge all branches of the Czechoslovak nation into a democratic state, including the Slovak branch of the nation”. However, this extension of the national programme to encompass part of Transleithania,

2 The General civil code for the German Hereditary Lands of the Austrian Monarchy (Ger.: Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch für die gesamten Deutschen Erbländer der Österreichischen Monarchie, abbreviation ABGB).

3 However, it is more precise to speak of legal trialism when it comes to Czechoslovakia since the law of the German Empire was left in force in the Hlučín region.

made any wartime reform programme extremely difficult to implement, and it is not surprising that both the Cisleithanian government of Count Clam-Martinitz and the more reform-minded government of Ernst Seidler von Feuchtenegg rejected any structural reforms based on this foundation (Gajanová 1967, p. 12). Nevertheless, all other public proclamations of the Czech national programme, such as the *Tříkrálová* Declaration of 6 January 1918 and the so-called April Oath, read out by the “national” writer Alois Jirásek on 13 April 1918, espoused a territorial concept consisting of the historical right to the lands of the Bohemian Crown and the natural right to the territory of Slovakia, and thus naturally departed from the realisation of Czech political ambitions within the Habsburg Empire. The breakthrough came at the turn of September and October 1918, when Czech deputies from the Imperial Council presented (Ota Konrád, 2012, p. 34) to Emperor Charles I a programme consisting of a demand for the immediate establishment of a Czech National Council as a participant in the peace conference and for the transfer of Czech troops stationed in the German and Hungarian areas of the monarchy to ethnically Czech territories. The Czech political representation definitively parted ways with the idea of autonomy within Austria in the National Committee’s reply to Charles I’s manifesto of 19 October (Konrád, 2012, pp. 34–35), declaring that “without exception, all the Czech people unwaveringly insist on the position that there is no negotiation with Vienna for the Czech nation regarding its future” and furthermore “there is no other solution for us to the Czech question than the complete state independence and sovereignty of the Czechoslovak homeland”. Thus, by the autumn of 1918, the Czech domestic and exiled political representation had reached a consensus on the Czech national programme of insistence on the administrative borders of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown with the annexation of Slovakia and independence from Austria-Hungary, as demonstrated by the mutual meeting in Switzerland in the autumn of 1918, which caused most of the prominent domestic political leaders to miss the coup d’état and the seizure of power on 28 October.

Independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed by Prague Old Town greengrocer František Kopecký in Prague on 28 October 1918 with

the declaration “We are independent!” (Pacner, 2018, p. 91), while the Battle of Vittorio Veneto was still in progress. This battle ended for the Austro-Hungarian army with an unfortunate truce from Villa Giusti only on 3 November (Rauchensteiner, 2014, pp. 1002–1008), which rather bore elements of unconditional surrender.⁴ According to Antonín Klimek (1998, pp. 182–189), the immediate causes of the coup d’état include both the “grain riot”⁵ and the misunderstanding of the meaning of Andrásy note⁶, caused, inter alia, by its somewhat mystifying translation displayed on the building of the *Politika* publishing house on the Wenceslas Square in Prague and later published, for example, in the *Národní listy* newspapers.⁷ The subsequent collapse of the Austro-Hungarian power, surprisingly easy even for the Czech political elite, can be attributed mainly to the reluctance of the Romanian regiments to fight, the aversion of the last Austro-Hungarian Emperor Charles I to suppress the

4 The armistice was concluded on 3 November at 3 p.m. and despite the fact that the Italians had reserved a relatively “generous” twenty-four hours to inform their troops, due to certain misunderstandings on the Austro-Hungarian side, the Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff Colonel-General Arthur Freiherr Baron Arz, von Straußenburg, ordered a cease-fire as early as 1:20 a.m. on 3 November, which in effect gave Italian, British, French, and other Allied troops two days to occupy the territory and take Austro-Hungarian soldiers prisoner. The number of prisoners thus reached nearly 360,000 in the last days of the “war”. Furthermore, the armistice, in its fourth point, accepted by Charles I “under duress”, authorized the troops of the Allied and Associated Powers to move freely throughout the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a concession that was subsequently used by Czechoslovakia, among other things, in the occupation of German-populated territories.

5 On Monday 28 October 1918, the executive director of the National Committee of Czechoslovakia, lawyer František Soukup, and the head of the provincial economic council, the landowner Antonín Švehla from Prague suburb Hostivař, arrived at the headquarters of the Grain Institute, located in the reinforced concrete palace Lucerna under-construction, and declared that on the basis of the non-existent imperial manifesto they were taking over the institute and forced its officials to swear allegiance to the new state. The seizure of the Institute was of particular importance, as it orchestrated the distribution of grain on the territory of Kingdom of Bohemia, its export to other parts of the Empire and the supply of Austrian soldiers at the front.

6 Named after foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary Count Gyula Andrásy.

7 Through this note, Austria-Hungary de facto unilaterally denounced the alliance with the German Empire. See Rakousko-Uhersko přijíma veškeré podmínky Wilsonovy. *Národní Listy*. 28. 10. 1918, p. 1.

rebellion with the army and, according to Paulová (1937), also to the decision of Emperor Franz Joseph I to appoint Max Julius Count von Coudenhove as governor of the province in 1915, rather than a general, as Archduke Friedrich of Austria-Teschén had been advocating in his well-known memoranda along with the introduction of a military dictatorship in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia since 1914. However, the military commander of Prague, General of the Infantry Paul Kestřánek, planned (see Vykoupil, 2003, pp. 77–78; Klimek, 1998, pp. 219–222, 261–264) to declare martial law at the end of October due to the continuous “insultations” of the troops and new instructions from the War Ministry, and thereby to prevent possible conflicts and unrest. However, after dramatic negotiations with the National Committee delegation on the morning of 30 October, General of the Infantry Kestřánek capitulated, whereupon he and his staff were arrested and interned.

It is worth noting that on 21 October, a week before the coup d'état in Prague, the German deputies of the Imperial Council met in Vienna in response to the October manifesto of Emperor Charles I (Suppan, 1993, pp. 69–71) to form a provisional National Assembly of the federal state of German Austria, representing the German-speaking population within the Cisleithania (without Galicia), likewise in accordance with the principles of self-determination championed by Wilson. Consequently, the Czech political representation, through the coup d'état in Prague, hastened the constitution of an independent German Austria. However, *via facti* it declared independence from a state that *de facto* no longer existed. On 29 October, deputies of the Imperial Council from the German territories of Bohemia also assembled in the Austrian Provisional National Assembly to demonstrate their opposition to the incorporation of German-speaking territories into the new Czechoslovak state on the basis of the historical rights of the lands of the Bohemian Crown. The Czechoslovak proposal to participate in the supreme legislative body and to appoint a countryman German minister was met with refusal from the political representation of free Deutschböhmen, who congratulated the Czechs on the formation of Czechoslovakia on the territory of Bohemia inhabited by the Czech majority (Kárník, 2003, p. 41). Subsequently, the political representation of Deutschböhmen,

initially led by Imperial Council deputy Rudolf Lodgman von Auen, sought to engage in negotiations with the Czechoslovak National Committee but as “equal to equal, i.e., at the international level”. The following negotiations, later headed on the German side by social democrat Josef Seliger (Vykoupil, 2003, p. 351), also failed to reach a compromise *modus vivendi*, and ultimately ended in accordance with Rašín’s well-known statement, “One does not negotiate with rebels”.

Although the process of consolidation of the new state was only just getting underway in the last months of 1918 and Czechoslovakia lacked the basic element of statehood – sovereignty – over much of the territory it claimed, Czechoslovakia’s negotiating position among the successor states was relatively strong, due to its robust raw material base and its privileged position on the international stage, which arose from its status as a member of the victorious coalition of the Allied and Associated Powers.⁸ While Czechoslovakia was internationally recognized by France until the final verdict of the Peace Conference, essentially within the historical borders of the Bohemian Crown lands and the territory of Slovakia with the border on the Danube as early as 15 October 1918 (Klimek, 1998, pp. 254–258; Beneš, 1935, pp. 368–370), Vienna in particular had to construct its new national identity, and Budapest was compelled to accept the new borders of Hungary in a highly forced manner. Both states also faced the challenge of being perceived as successors to the defeated power in the Great War. In this context, it is symptomatic that Czechoslovakia almost immediately (Konrád, 2012, pp. 53–55; Haas, 2000, p. 166) tried to project the view that Austria-Hungary practically no longer existed, thereby contradicting the “defeated” successor states, which in the autumn of 1918 were still trying to maintain some continuity with the former Empire.

The central issue in their mutual relationship was primarily a territorial dispute, as demonstrated by the course of the initial negotiations between Austria and Czechoslovakia, which actually took place on 1 November 1918, at the behest of the Austro-Hungarian government in Vienna. The negotiations were between the representatives of the State Council of German Austria and the new

8 Hereinafter Entente.

State Chancellor Karl Renner, Karl Seitz and Franz Dinghofer and the newly appointed Czechoslovak plenipotentiary to the Imperial Council Vlastimil Tusar, under the chairmanship of the last Austro-Hungarian Prime Minister Heinrich Lammasch and in the presence of other members of the last Austro-Hungarian cabinet. The negotiations were held in a cordial atmosphere, thanks to the identical left-wing political orientation of both delegations and some still existing ties between the social-democratic parties across the former monarchy (Haas 2000, p. 136). Tusar concurred on the necessity of maintaining tight collaboration between both states. Additionally, he promised to restore the standard transport link and to end the Czechoslovak food blockade of Austria, even at the price of clearly overstepping his authority. Other topics of discussion included administrative matters related to Czechoslovakia's request to be involved in the management of the Austro-Hungarian Bank and other central institutions. Nevertheless, the promising negotiations ultimately fell apart over the issue of Deutschböhmen, as Tusar naturally refused to relinquish the principle of historical state right and the borders based on it, although he explicitly ruled out the use of violence as a solution to this question. The nexus between all of Tusar's concessions and the acceptance of the Czechoslovak position on the matter of the German-inhabited lands of the Kingdom of Bohemia, as noted by Haas (2000, p. 136), was highlighted by his statement that only "the special issue of Deutschböhmen burdens everything." Conversely, Vienna's unwavering position on this issue was demonstrated by the remarkably assertive Renner reply, who stated that "Deutschböhmen is not up for grabs for the Czechs." The negotiations between the successor states highlight the complexities involved. Despite the separation of the political and economic issues, the subsequent talks in early November only on the questions of supply, transport and railways held in Vienna, Gmünd in Lower Austria and finally in Prague, led to the signing of the railway treaty of 5 November 1918 in Gmünd. Under this treaty, Czechoslovakia agreed to several concessions, but reneged on its promise to supply coal to maintain the railway running in Prague (Haas 2000, p. 138), thus foreshadowing Czechoslovakia's chronic failure to fulfil the negotiated agreements in the future.

The ongoing collapse of Austria-Hungary culminated when emperor Charles I signed a declaration on 11 November⁹ containing the well-known “Ich verzichte auf jeden Anteil an den Staatsgeschäften” (Hautmann, 1987, p. 252).¹⁰ The following day saw the proclamation of the Republic of German Austria. However, relations with Vienna, Prague’s key trade and political partner, were marked from the very beginning by a peculiar crisis of Austrian identity,¹¹ which the Republic of German Austria sought to overcome by joining Germany, even though from the point of view of the Entente, especially France, according to Gajanová (1967, p. 22) the annexation of Austrian Germans to Germany and, as a consequence, the annexation of Bohemian, Moravian, and Silesian Germans to Austria was deemed unacceptable. Notwithstanding the unfavourable international situation, the deputies of the Austrian Provisional National Assembly decided to enter into a territorial “conflict” with Prague and on 22 November defined the territory of German Austria, which included the four “provinces” located in the territory claimed by Czechoslovakia and the Moravian German-speaking language islands.¹²

Given that the aforementioned province of Deutschböhmen was one of the wealthiest areas of the Bohemian Crown lands and contained a significant portion of Czechoslovakia’s lignite deposits, the government of Czechoslovakia’s first prime minister, Karel Kramář, decided at a cabinet meeting on 25 November to address the problem of the critical post-war coal situation and the termination of

9 On this day, the German delegation signed the Armistice in the renowned railway carriage of Marshal Foch near Compiègne.

10 However, Emperor Charles I never officially abdicated.

11 The second section of the Law on the State and Form of Government, which together with the regulation of 30 October constituted a de facto provisional constitution, was as follows: “Deutschösterreich ist ein Bestandteil der Deutschen Republik”. See *Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich 1918–1919. Gesetz vom 12. November 1918 über die Staats und Regierungsform von Deutschösterreich Nr. 5*.

12 Namely Deutschböhmen, Sudetenland, Böhmerwaldgau and Deutschsüdmähren and Brno(!), Olomouc(!) and Jihlava. See *Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich 1918–1919, Gesetz vom 22. November 1918 über Umfang, Grenzen und Beziehungen des Staatsgebietes von Deutschösterreich Nr. 40.; Staatsgesetzblatt für den Staat Deutschösterreich 1918–1919, Staatserklärung vom 22. November 1918 über Umfang, Grenzen und Beziehungen des Staatsgebietes von Deutschösterreich Nr 41.*

contracts and general obedience to Prague in (according to contemporary Czech discourse) “Germanised” territories. An example of this was the largest mining company in northern Bohemia, Weinmann and Petschek, which refused to supply Czech sugar refineries.

Instead of engaging in a dialogue with the German-speaking population, the government (Machatková, Malá ed., 1974, p. 11) approved their immediate occupation by the Entente or by its own forces. According to Gajanová (1967, p. 21), this was due to Beneš’s tactic of not waiting for the outcome of the Peace Conference and potential plebiscites in territorial matters, but instead gaining control of the territory claimed by Czechoslovakia through the policy of *fait accompli*. The German question, on the other hand, was used by Beneš (Dejmek, Kolář ed., 2001, pp. 144–145) as one of the elements of argumentation for reducing coal supplies to Austria in response to requests for increased supplies by the Entente leaders. This is demonstrated by a letter addressed to the Director General of the American Relief Administration (ARA) and future President Herbert C. Hoover, in which Beneš justified the low supplies by, among other reasons, the occupation of the mines by “les bandes allemandes”. Paradoxically, these German groups were supposed to be preventing the import of coal for their fellow compatriots in Vienna.

This struggle for the German-speaking borderlands violently escalated during the elections to the Austrian Constituent National Assembly on 16 February 1919, which involved the bloodiest chapter of modern Czecho(Slovak)-Austrian history (Kárník 2003, p. 43). The Czechoslovak government prevented Germans in the territory it controlled from participating in the elections to the legislative body of another state, and during the protest demonstrations on the occasion of its constituent assembly on 4 March 1919, 54 persons of mostly German origin (among them women and children) were killed and over 100 wounded as a result of shelling by Czechoslovak troops, allegedly “at the ground”, according to an official Czechoslovak investigation. This tragic event permanently marked Czechoslovak-Sudeten German relations throughout the interwar period.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the elections to the regular legislative body in Czechoslovakia were held with a relatively considerable delay only in April 1920 (Kárník, 2000, p. 123–124). This

resulted in several ethnic minorities – German and Hungarian, and possibly also the Ruthenian minority – not being represented in the supreme legislative body for 16 months after the proclamation of Czechoslovakia. This meant that aforementioned groups were not allowed to participate directly in the drafting of the constitutional order of the new republic, just like the deputies of the Moravian and Silesian land Diets, because the Revolutionary National Assembly consisted of members of the Czechoslovak National Committee, supplemented according to the so-called key of Švehla on the basis of the results of the elections to the Imperial Council in 1911. Only deputies of Czechoslovak nationality were represented there (Kárník, 2000, pp. 63–64), and this national identification was treated in a declaratory manner, so that Beneš, for example, could be a member of the Slovak Club.

After the Chancellor of State and South Moravian-born Renner took office as Austrian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, according to Haas (2000, p. 136) the reputed “best Austrian” reconsidered Austria’s Anschluss orientation and developed a series of proposals (Payrleitner, 2003, p. 89) for resolving the issue of the German minority in Czechoslovakia within the framework of the Peace Conference. The first series consisted of the incorporation of only the southern Sudeten German provinces into Austria, while the second series called for the “cantonization” of Czechoslovakia, which essentially coincided with the inspiration of the “Swiss model” ostentatiously admitted by Beneš at the Peace Conference. This is evidenced by Beneš’s well-known formulations in the aforementioned memorandum « le régime serait semblable à celui de la Suisse » and further in a note to the Commission for the New States of 20 May 1919 (Broklová ed., 2005, pp. 95–96): «une sorte de Suisse, en prenant, évidemment, en considération les conditions spéciales en Bohême» and «qui se rapprocherait considérablement au régime de la Suisse».¹³ The final proposal involved an ambitious plan to form a federation between Czechoslovakia and Austria, with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk serving as the president and a joint parliament located in Pressburg. However,

13 See Memorandum č. 3: Problém Němců v Čechách. *Střední Evropa: revue pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku*. Praha: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku (I.S.E.), 1992, 8(25), 20–21.

the Czechoslovak political elites, as Payrleitner (2003, p. 89) aptly writes, failed to assume the role of the “new Austria” and fulfil their “historical mission”. Ultimately, Renner’s proposals for resolving the Czechoslovak-German settlement were not accepted. However, the latter plan was not entirely unrealistic, as it artfully dovetailed with the desires of the Entente Powers for some kind of integration of Central Europe, whether in the form of a federation or just a customs union, since, as Gajanová argues (1967, p. 19), they had begun to fear the consequences of the partition of Central Europe and the potential collapse of the Austrian state and the associated penetration of Bolshevism into the Central European area. Myopic Czechoslovak national and political considerations once again took priority, even if it meant sacrificing the complementary industrial structure inherited from the Austro-Hungarian economy. The Entente’s efforts to reintegrate Central Europe are also exemplified by the well-known Article 222 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which explicitly states the waiver of the most-favoured-nation clause and, as a consequence, the granting of a tariff preference system between Austria and Czechoslovakia or Hungary for a period of five years.¹⁴

The Entente’s ambition to interfere in Central Europe was further demonstrated by the fact (Woodward, Rohan ed., 1947, pp. 554–555) that on 27 August 1919 the Council of Five approved the inclusion of a special clause obliging Czechoslovakia and Poland to provide Austria with the same amount of coal as was being supplied to Austria from the territories ceded to these states before the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Council of Five even noted that both states were using the export of coal to Austria as leverage to demand additional benefits.

These arrangements were reflected in the final text of the Saint-Germain Peace Treaty in the wording of Article 224, which obliged Poland and Czechoslovakia to grant Austria a most-favoured-nation clause on coal imports for fifteen years, but still envisaged the principle of special bilateral compensation treaties. The Reparations Commission was also given relatively extensive powers in the matter

14 Sb. z. a n., *Mírová smlouva mezi mocnostmi spojenými i sdruženými a Rakouskem*, podepsaná v Saint-Germain-en-Laye dne 10. září 1919 č. 507/1921 Sb.

of coal supplies and was supposed to determine the type and quantity of compensatory supplies to Austria.¹⁵ However, in practice, this article, like Article 222, was not applied, due to Czechoslovak tactics of non-fulfilment of the treaties, referring to its own plight and the fact that Beneš preferred bilateral agreements between the successor states to the interventions of the Entente powers.¹⁶

Another clash in territorial concepts between Czechoslovakia and Austria or Austria and Hungary occurred rather peculiarly in the area of the so-called “Hungarian Western comitatuses” (Gajanová 1967, p. 31).¹⁷ However, the idea of a corridor between Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, fulfilling an ancient Czech ambition of the landlocked nation’s access to the sea, dating back to the times of the Přemyslids, was rejected by the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs at the Paris Peace Conference in late March 1919, despite the support of France. The subsequent allocation of this disputed territory to Austria in the Treaty of Saint-Germain was only definitively confirmed by Hungary’s ratification of the Treaty of Trianon in November 1920 (Irmanová, 2011, p. 330), which nevertheless resulted in an eruption of conflict between Austria and Hungary. Czechoslovakia engaged on the Austrian side, in part to confirm the unquestionability of the peace treaties. Despite his interest in mediating the conflict, President Beneš was triumphantly defeated in these efforts (Houska 2011, p. 307) by the Italian foreign minister Pietro Tomasi Marquis della Toretta, who negotiated a compromise in October 1921.¹⁸ In spite of Beneš’s support of Vienna on the Burgenland issue, the territorial question was still casting a pall over Austro-Czechoslovak relations as late as July 1919, when disputes escalated over the final shape of the border, which was being discussed at the Paris Peace Conference at this time, as evidenced by the protest meeting in Valtice and the intervention of

15 Ibid.

16 AMZV. PZ 1918–1975, Rakousko, Vídeň, no. 159; Ibid., no. 172.

17 The territory of the present-day Austrian state of Burgenland and the Hungarian region of Sopron.

18 Hungary consented to cede the territory to Austria under the stipulation that a plebiscite would be conducted in the area of Sopron, and the results of the plebiscite indicated the desire of the population to remain part of Hungary.

the Undersecretary of State, Dr. E. Waiss, with the Czechoslovakian plenipotentiary in Vienna, Dr. Robert Flieder.¹⁹

On the basis of the Treaty of Saint-Germain and the Peace Treaty of Trianon, Czechoslovakia acquired from the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, in addition to the historical lands of the Kingdom of Bohemia,²⁰ the territory of Slovakia with its border on the Danube and Carpathian Ruthenia, and was also granted the Pressburg bridgehead together with the peripheral parts of Lower Austria, so-called Bohemian Austria (Payrleitner, 2003, p. 94; Chrástský, 2008, p. 122), namely the area of Valtice, the territory of the so-called Dyjsko-Moravský triangle and part of Vitorazsko. The division of Gmünd into České Velenice and Gmünd was made with strategic considerations in mind, with the railway station in České Velenice being particularly important.

As correctly observed by Konrád (2012, p. 30), the Czechoslovak state within these borders completely fulfilled the mental concept of the Czech nation as the autochthonous ethnic group of Bohemia, Moravia and Bohemian Silesia within its entire historical borders. This position naturally relegated the German minority of several million to the role of at best an occupant of hereditary Czech lands, while elevating the Czech nation to the role of an automatic inheritor of the territories inhabited by Germans. Moreover, the Czech claim to Bohemia was further strengthened by the construct of the post White Mountain Dark Ages and the subsequent several centuries of “suffering” under the Habsburg yoke, not to mention the moral magnanimity of the Czech nation and its manifestation in the Hussite movement, which predestined the Czech state for the future role of the “island of democracy” in “barbaric” Central Europe. In this regard, the question of the recognition of historical borders was not merely an optional extension of the achievement of national statehood, but the acquisition of German territories was deemed a necessary requirement. This was because only in this “complete” state could the Czech nation achieve its full development.

19 AMZV. PZ 1918–1975, Rakousko, Víděň, č. 109. 1919.

20 Concerning the intricate Czechoslovak-Polish dispute over Teschen, see the comprehensive study offered by Jelínek (2009, pp. 10–44, 53–150).

The achievement of this national pinnacle and state of “perfection” was furthermore enhanced by the discourse of “reunification” with the “Slovak branch” of the Czechoslovak nation within a single state. The Versailles peace system was therefore viewed positively in Czechoslovakia, as a just and definitive historical settlement, and the new state considered itself its natural guardian. By contrast, any changes to this ultimate victory of the good, for example, in the form of surrendering part of sovereignty, could not be understood through the prism of Czech discourse as progress, but rather as a disaster of national proportions and an unthinkable regression from the already achieved “perfect” state.

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