

MASARYK AND THE SLOVAK QUESTION. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF IDEAS AND POLITICAL CONCEPTS

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T.G. Masaryk considered the Slovak question as a part of the Czech question. He incorporated Slovakia and Slovaks into the Czech national-political concept (part of which had been the idea of a unified Czech-Slovak nation). He created this from the philosophy of national history (the idea of humanity as a line of continuity in Czech national history) which was a result of an *a priori* intellectual concept.

Slovaks are a small nation in the heart of Europe, with their own historical and cultural traditions. As such, if we are to address the Slovak question we must consider it in a European and Slavonic context. Slovak identity came about in relationship to their closest Slavic neighbours – the Czechs and Moravians, just as the Czech nation with its own historical-philosophical and political concept of the Czech question, was coloured by its relationship to Slovakia and the Slovaks. Many authors have paid special attention to the problems of national identity and it is to be noted that sometimes even non-Slovak authors have offered conclusions about the Slovak question.

A special place is T.G. Masaryk (partially Slovak by origin) and his supposition that the question of nationhood, national identity, especially that of the Czechs is a problem of a small nation. The position, history and the future of a small nation within European connections influenced Masaryk's way of thinking.¹ We are interested in his consideration of these issues in relationship to the question of Slovak identity.

From the beginning of his social and political career, Masaryk paid special attention to the fate of the Slovaks and the position of Slovakia. By the late 1880s he had already been to Slovakia for the first time (his regular summer stays in

¹ He read a lecture on the question of a small nation in April 1905 in Kroměříž (first published as *Problém malého národa* (Problem of a Small Nation), Prague 1905). Later, in February 1911 he lectured to a Slovak audience in Budapest (his main ideas were recorded and published in Průzdy II, 1910-1911, Budapest 1911, pp. 240-244).

Bystríčka near Turčiansky Sv. Martin date back to 1887). These sojourns were not incidental but part of a conscious political intention.

Unlike other Czech politicians of that period whose attention was fully focused on finding historical precedents for legally solving the Czech question within an Austrian context (or rather the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Masaryk held the view that it was necessary to seek a compromise between historical and natural right. According to him this way was democratic and it also proved "the right of every nation and every man to his life".² He took part in debates about the natural and historical law that were current in Czech society and politics before World War I (or rather in the 1890s). He disagreed with L. Rieger's political line. Rieger's followers had little regard for Slovakia, and took their standpoint from historical state law, considering the Slovak question to be "causa finita". They also did not interfere with Hungarian policy.³ Masaryk openly admitted later that: "my main reason in these polemics has always been a constant regard for Slovakia".⁴

Masaryk considered the Slovak question as part of the Czech one not only from a national or cultural point of view (as was the case with Ján Kollár) but also from a strictly political stance. In this he followed Karel Havlíček. That is why he incorporated the question of the Slovaks into his own national-political concept. However, it could be said in advance that the price was the denial of Slovak national identity.

Masaryk, as well as other politicians including some Slovak ones, did not consider the Slovak question as a question of distinct Slovak identity. The majority of Czech politicians did not pay great attention to it and only after the creation of the Czech-Slovak state did they take notice of its importance. But afterwards they saw the question of a Slovak identity as part of a greater whole – of creating a Czechoslovak identity as a basis for Czech political thought. The Slovak question thus posed the problem of effectively integrating the less developed part of one nation into the bigger, more developed part of a united nation-state. Such have been the inner prejudiced goals and aims of the ideology and politics of Czechoslovakism.

However, Masaryk himself never revealed the inner contradictory character of his own attitude – namely that it was not possible to base the Czech question upon

² ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory s T.G. Masarykem* (Interviews with T.G. Masaryk). Praha 1969, p. 103.

³ L. Rieger ruled out the possibility of Czech intervention in Hungarian politics with regard the Slovak question. He condemned Magyarization (*pro domo*) but he refused to be involved with Hungarians "in a struggle while we are weak for that struggle". Even if TGM had a different attitude to Rieger about the Slovak question in the late 1880s he modified his standpoint from the point of view of practical politics. OPAT, Jaroslav: *Filozof a politik T.G. Masaryk 1882–1893. Příspěvek k životopisu* (Philosopher and Politician T.G. Masaryk 1882–1893. Contribution to Biography). Praha 1990, p. 213.

⁴ MASARYK, T.G.: *Světová revoluce* (The World Revolution). Praha 1928, p. 487.

this natural-legal basis and simultaneously to deny the justified claims of Slovaks for recognition of their own national identity and sovereignty.

To clarify Masaryk's attitude to the Slovak question we should have a look at his personal national self-identifying process. As known, Masaryk was by origin partially Slovak (on his father's side), at least Moravian Slovak. With regard to these Slovak origins he did not feel, as he himself said, "any difference between the Hungarian and Moravian Slovaks among whom I grew up as a child".⁵ He confessed his feeling of belonging to his Slovak origin which was strong during his youth and also later. He became Czech as his personal national awareness matured. Being Moravian Slovak by birth and a Czech national by choice, e.g. his personal self-consciousness – shaped his Czechoslovak thinking and action being based on his strong feeling of Czecho-Slovak brotherhood.

His Czech-Slovak identity was manifested in his theoretical writings as well as in practical ways. When he dealt with Kollár's concept of Slavonic mutuality he only reassured himself of his Czechoslovak patriotism. The new feature in his attitude lay in the fact that he drew conclusions from the cultural traditions of Czech-Slovak mutual bonds (which was felt on the Czech side rather as unity) and in his formulation of his own political concept.

Masaryk's national-political concept was intentionally activistic. Therefore he tried to create a Czech-Slovak relationship and not wait for advantageous circumstances. For that reason too he often stayed in his summer flat in Slovakia – as he wrote: "consciously in order to get to know Slovaks better and to influence them".⁶ At the same time he used to inform the Czech public about Slovak problems (in the regular column of the journal "Čas"). Through his personal contact with the Slovak students in Prague he tried to influence them in order to create a Slovak political landscape and prepare the situation for the acceptance of his own political and ideological concept. As he later stated in his memoirs: "At that time I tried to prepare the ground where the Czechs and Prague inhabitants would really learn about Slovakia: to sing Slovak songs was not enough for me".⁷

So Masaryk from the end of the 19th century helped to create the image of Slovakia and of Slovaks actively in the minds of the Czech public and in his own particular way he "predestined" the later attitudes towards the solution of the Czech-Slovak relationship.

⁵ ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory*, p. 102. A great deal of attention has been paid to the question of Masaryk's background in literature as well as in the political struggles of that time. I stand by his own declaration from May 1918 when he in a speech in Chicago described himself as a Moravian Slovak by origin and Czech by conscious decision. See also HOFFMANN, Roland J.: *T.G. Masaryk und die tschechische Frage*. München 1988, p. 37, f. 4.

⁶ ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory*, p. 103.

⁷ *Ibid.*

But he never recognized the Slovak question as a specific problem and since he had never felt it as such he only marginally touched on the Slovak question (as we understand it today or as it was felt by Slovaks themselves already at this time) and then only in the framework of his own thematization of the Czech question. The Slovak question is thus brought in or rather inherently "dissolved" in his treatises on the "sense of the Czech history", that is in his historical-philosophical concept as formulated e.g. in his work "The Czech question" (first published in 1895).⁸

Masaryk's historic-philosophical concept of Czech national history was inspired not only by the topical needs of the Czech national-political movement of that time (and we could say, of one form of the Czech nationalism too) as well as by his own political conviction, but also by his own philosophical interest or as he himself would have written – by his view of the world and life. His evaluation of the historical phenomena, events, personalities etc. was often based on the point of view of the present or rather of the future needs of the national community.⁹ "What should be selected from history, we have to define ourselves and then follow the route traced by the past. We should not look too much to the past, it is an error of an exaggerated adherence to history that we are looking backward rather than forwards. Everything that was, is a kind of instruction for what will be. History is still more the skill to foresee what should be done."¹⁰

He proceeded selectively while creating his own philosophy of the national history. Referring mostly to the work of the historian František Palacký, he chose from the history of the nation those ideas, events and tendencies that were, according to him, relevant. He tried through his references to the past to justify various preconceived ideas and constructed theories. What was characterized and described as "a sense of history", drawn from the aspect of the inner, immanent logic of the development, was more the result of an *a priori* intellectual concept whose aim was first of all to bridge the gap between the past and the present of the nation.

⁸ Sometimes (before as well as after 1918) he disregarded in his public utterances even the existence of the Slovaks as a distinct ethno-national group (mostly from propaganda political goals). "There is no Slovak nation... it is an invention of Magyar propaganda", he told a French journalist in an interview in September 1921. MASARYK, T.G.: *Cesta demokracie II* (The Way of Democracy II). Praha 1934, p. 78.

⁹ He also influenced his students in this direction. As Albert Pražák mentioned TGM recommended supporters of Hlas ("Hlasists") – "to retain by a piercing revision of the past only those powers that are useful for the struggle for the future". In: *Slovensko Masarykovi* (Slovakia for Masaryk). Compiled by J. Rudinský. Praha 1930, p. 101.

¹⁰ MASARYK, T.G.: *Problém malého národa* (The Problem of a Small Nation), here we are citing from the 4th edition. In: *Ideály humanitní, Problém malého národa, Demokracie v politice*. Praha 1968, p. 94.

Masaryk's historic-philosophical construction represents an attempt to connect a seemingly broken thread of continuity. According to him national-revivalist thinking followed from the point where this thread was broken, i.e. the Czech Reformation and the tradition of the Czech Brethren and Hussites. From the Hussite movement up to the national Revival he saw the tradition of the religious-reformation and ethical character carrying on with the aim of a fully developed humanity. This should have also offered a sense of the history of the nation and its culture. The idea of humanity professed by the revivalist intellectuals (particularly formulated by Ján Kollár who was inspired by Herder's philosophy of history) should have thus bridged the gap caused by anti-Reformation, for this ideal of humanity was at the same time quintessential to that of the national life. Moreover, the Czech idea of humanity should have been the universal leading idea – which clearly represented a Messianic feature of Masaryk's Czech national philosophy and at the same time one of the romantic residues in his thinking.

From this point of view, especially that which he understood as a specific feature of his own nation – i.e. the idea of humanity as a line of continuity in Czech national history, appeared to him proved by its very history and was the basis of an intellectual construct which was not without mythogenic elements. He was also convinced that what he revealed as the "sense of national history" showed the way for the future, and the next phase of national history.¹¹

However, the followers of the Czech positivist historian Jaroslav Goll had already been expressing disagreement with the basic ideas of Masaryk's philosophy and method since 1890s. They rebuked him for his basic conceptual idea which they took to be an artificial construct that was not founded in reality, on the contrary it was in contradiction to it. They criticized his tendency "to rape" the reality of historical development by an *a priori* doctrine as well as his tendency to project the idea of the present on to the past (especially his enormous emphasis on the present). Nor was his method left uncriticized, or the degree of its critical character. Professional historiographers, especially in particular the historian Josef Pekař, addressed these reprimands to him.¹²

Masaryk's formulation of the Czech question as fulfilling the idea of humanity and democracy played an important role in the époque of modern Czech nationalism in spite of its fundamental weak points. It also became the core of the polemic for the sense of the Czech history that had been formulating over decades – see the polemic Masaryk versus Pekař which also became the basis of a particular

¹¹ It was a Comtean element in his concept of historical development as already pointed out. Cf. PRAŽÁK, A.: *T. G. Masaryk a Slovensko* (Masaryk and Slovakia). Praha 1937, p. 37.

¹² He offered his sharp criticism in a treatise: *Masarykova česká filosofie* (Masaryk's Czech Philosophy), 2nd ed. Praha 1927. Masaryk's reply: *Ke sporu o smysl českých dějin* (On Dispute on the Sense of Czech History). In: *Naše doba XX*, 1912–13. Their polemics also in *Český časopis historický*, 1912.

tradition of the Czech critical writing from Josef Pekař up to Jan Patočka and Václav Černý.¹³

The result of Masaryk's *apriorism* was that he gave prominence to those personalities from the history of the "Czechoslovak nation" who helped to create the Czechoslovak idea. In particular he highlighted Ján Kollár as a co-author of the humanitarian revivalist programme and the concept of the Slavonic mutuality in its close relation to the idea of universal humanity. After all it was not incidental that "The Czech Question" (1895) arose through developing his lectures and articles on Ján Kollár's concept of Slavonic mutual bonds.¹⁴

Therefore it is not surprising that from this historical-political perspective (which had a more *a priori* character than has been admitted in previous interpretations) Masaryk did not take into account a tradition of a distinct Slovak nation. However, this tradition has its own deep historical roots founded on generations of Slovak national-revivalist intellectuals (starting with Anton Bernolák's group, through Ludovít Štúr's and Svetozár Hurban Vajanský's generations up to the ones who became the bearers of Slovak political nationalism – personified in the figures of Masaryk's contemporaries and opponents in the national-political movement – Andrej Hlinka as well as Martin Rázus).

Masaryk often stressed the need to consider the relevance of Slovaks and Slovakia while formulating Czech politics, but he did not take into consideration the Slovak national-emancipation movement and its historical forms while articulating his particular view of the Czech question. His indifference to the ideas and historical relevance of the Slovak Protestant leader Ludovít Štúr, who helped to establish Slovak as a literary language, is astonishing.¹⁵ Masaryk stated that the Slovak question had "for us", i.e. for Czechs, the "highest importance" and it was not enough to sing in Slovak but also it was high time "to feel in Slovak and also

¹³ These polemical conflicts divided the Czech intellectual community. One side was represented by Masaryk's students and supporters defending their teacher. Thus e.g. Ferdinand Peroňka agreed with the opinion that Masaryk's faults were more useful for the nation than Pekař's truths. Cf. ŠTEFÁNEK, Branislav: *Humanitätsideal als Ideologie*. Bohemia, Band 22, München 1981, p. 2.

Václav Černý pointed to the fact that Masaryk's concept of "essence of historical Czech-hood" is in ruins today, but also remarked on the high moral ethos of his personality in *Dvě studie masarykovské* (Two Studies on Masaryk), *Svědectví* XIV, Nr. 56, 1978. (Cf. also an index of works of the most important participants of these mentioned polemics.)

¹⁴ Published in the journal *Naše doba* I, 1893.

¹⁵ Although he paid attention to the views of P.J. Šafářík and J. Kollár in several works, we can find only two brief allusions to L. Štúr e.g. in *The Czech Question*. In his monograph on Karel Havlíček (1896), TGM focused in a way on his relationship to Slovakia. Havlíček highlighted the future role of Slovakia and the Slovaks as a spring of national rebirth of the Czech land; and Moravia thanks to their national genuineness and probity. TGM mentioned Štúr only marginally in connection with Havlíček's polemic against "Neo-Slovaks" and creation of Slovak literary language. Cf. *Karel Havlíček*. Prague 1920, pp. 418–423.

to – think".¹⁶ But paradoxically he, an adherent of realism, only saw this Slovak "spirit, reason and emotion" in Ján Kollár's romantic concept of Slavic mutuality. On the other hand he did not respond to the concept of the specific Slovak identity formed during Slovak National Awakening.

Masaryk declared that Kollár's characterization of Slavs is "quite a vivid picture of Slovaks" for even as a realist he could not entirely resist a romantic-sentimental image of Slovaks. "That peculiar religiousness, that hardworking industriousness, that innocent glee, that love for one's own language and finally that peaceful tolerance, ascribed to all Slavs by Kollár, are the typical features of today's Slovaks," he wrote.¹⁷ It could be stated that Masaryk's attitude to Slovaks, as well as Kollár's idealized characterization of Slavs, bore traces of images rooted in the inspirations by romantic thinking and feeling. Such a feature of Masaryk's thinking was apparent even in that part of his historical-philosophical thinking which was based on accepting Palacký's romantic understanding of Czech history (which was apparently inspired among others by J.G. Herder).¹⁸

A persisting indifference or rejection of a distinct Slovak nation and the specific aims of the Slovak national-emancipation movement were part features of Czech policy. Particular aspects of Slovak national identity were perceived (and perhaps still are on the Czech side) as certain "ornaments", or folkloresque peculiarities, "appendices" to the unity of Czech-Slovak culture and national character. These images of Slovak "uniqueness" were held by Czech Slovakophiles and other supporters of Czech-Slovak unity as well as by Masaryk.

Masaryk did not consider Slovaks as a distinct nationality even if he often expressed his sympathy for Slovakia, wrote and spoke on the problems of Slovak people. As we have already mentioned he liked to point out that: "Both Slovaks and Czechs knew that I had always stood for Slovakia, that, as a Slovak by origin and tradition, my feelings are Slovak, and that I have always worked, not merely talked, for Slovakia."¹⁹ Another time he mentioned Karel Havlíček who referred to the "national self-preservation" of Slovaks but he did not recognize even their distinct nationhood. "Two million Czechs in Hungarian kingdom! Havlíček

¹⁶ MASARYK, T.G.: *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question). Praha 1969, p. 66.

¹⁷ MASARYK, T.G.: op.cit., p. 67. In his lecture On the problem of a small nation presented in Budapest in 1911 he characterized the Slovak character in a quite different way: "I don't believe a Slovak to be sensitive, soft. I realized it with Kollár and Palacký. A Slovak is often weak but not soft. He is able to be hard to others. Cordiality? The Slovak is a rationalist, egoist. He doesn't melt." (Prúdy 1911, p. 244).

¹⁸ Cf. PEKAŘ, J.: *Masarykova česká filosofie*, 1927, pp. 23, 29. Pekař was an opponent of Masaryk's as well as Palacký's interpretation of Czech history and saw its basic force in self-preservation against German pressures.

¹⁹ MASARYK, T.G.: *The Making of a State. Memories and Observations 1914-1918*. An English version, arranged and prepared with an introduction by Henry Wickham Steed. London, G. Allen and Unwin 1927, p. 209.

wanted our cultural life to be refreshed from Slovakia. This seems to be romantic but it isn't, we shall not give up one third of our nation. If a soul were to go missing, it would not be tolerated, and this concerns two million souls which are alien to us. Our national feeling has not been completed yet. We have to get individual tribes and strengths closer together than they are."²⁰

Similarly as many before him and after him, Masaryk did not fully differentiate in his attitudes, in which he argued for the idea of Czecho-Slovak unity since he tried to stress its state-political or ethnic-cultural aspect. In this lies also the ambivalent and unclear nature of most expressions of Czechoslovakism.²¹

One of the main arguments used by the supporters of the idea of Czech-Slovak unity since the time of Karel Havlíček has been to point to the importance and influence of the numerical strength of the unified nation. That is why one of the most zealous promoters and learned apologists of the ideology of Czechoslovakism, Albert Pražák, emphasized that Masaryk could not be indifferent to the fact "whether our nation has seven or nine million souls as he wanted to keep Slovaks at any cost".²² Masaryk was aware of the importance of the numerical power of a nation (especially in regard to more than 3 million Germans living in Bohemia) as well as the size of its territory.²³ In this, he aimed first of all at strengthening the interests of Czech national politics. Undoubtedly he perceived the necessity of Czech-Slovak unity or the importance of Slovakia to the Czechoslovak state especially from the geopolitical point of view. Strategically,

²⁰ MASARYK, T.G.: *Problém malého národa*, Praha 1968, p. 87.

²¹ According to J. Opat's explanation T.G. Masaryk understood that Czechs and Slovaks are two ethnic nations (close to each other by history, culture and language) so close that he did not hesitate to regard them as a single Czechoslovak nation. He respected differences caused by history but he did not consider them to be an obstacle in the attempt to create a unified political nation. Cf. OPAT, J.: *Filozof a politik T.G. Masaryk*, p. 216.

We argue that this was an attempt to establish a united nation not only from a political standpoint but also on a cultural and social dimension. Interpretations of Czechoslovakism only as a political nation concept intentionally avoid or wash away the problems of this phenomenon on an ideological level and its consequences in the societal praxis.

²² PRAŽÁK, A.: *T.G. Masaryk a Slovensko*, p. 103.

According to Edvard Beneš, it was the role of his generation to secure culturally and materially the nation as well as to the number of inhabitants. "Here I am a great, ardent Czechoslovak nationalist and I shall never cease professing this thorough nationalism." In: *Masarykovo pojedl ideje národní a problém jednoty československé* (Masaryk's understanding of national idea and the Czechoslovak unity issue). (Lecture delivered on the occasion of the annual gathering of the Šafárik's Learned society, May 1935), Bratislava 1935, p. 14.

²³ Cf. ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory*, p. 226. Masaryk also stated: "It is important for us that the number of inhabitants will grow more quickly in Slovakia than in the historical lands." ČAPEK, K.: op. cit., p. 268.

the Czechoslovak state should have served as a barrier to German expansionism (pan-Germanism) eastward.²⁴

He was identified with the opinion that Czech-Slovak unity was the result of an organic historical development.²⁵ Moreover he saw in Czech-Slovak statehood not only a gradual completion of the historical "struggle of the nation" and a fulfilment of the sense of the national existence, but also road for future development. As we have already stated and as was afterwards shown by the course of historical events, this image was based on the *a priori* character of the historic-philosophical construct, however much Masaryk liked to refer to the realism of the points of departure of his own intellectual concept. On the other hand there were interests and strategic-political intentions which were motivated politically. Thus Masaryk's input into Czech-Slovak unity cannot be evaluated only from the aspect of his intellectual basis and coherence of this theory but also from the aspect of its real historical and political connections.

However, it has to be pointed out that he created new impulses which did not stress the language question, but more the common cultural-spiritual tradition. Even more, he emphasized the political, social and economic dimension of Czech-Slovak cooperation. It was an expression of real consideration of the needs of modernization of Slovak society when he stressed the necessity of investing in the industry and of pouring financial capital into Slovakia. But until Slovakia gained sovereignty it was only a hypothetical possibility or it could be rather an indirect promotion of the national-political movement of the Slovaks (supported mostly by the activity of the Czech-Slovak Unity – in particular at the Czech-Slovak Luhačovice sessions from 1908 to 1918).²⁶ After the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, the expansion of Czech economic interests in Slovakia and its consequences contributed less to its development than to the promotion of Slovak political nationalism. Such policies enhanced the Slovak question revealing it as not only a question of dissatisfied ethno-national aspirations but also as an important social problem as was felt not only by a few political leaders but by the majority of people in pre-Munich Slovakia.

²⁴ Cf. MASARYK, T.G.: *Nová Evropa. Stanovisko slovanské* (New Europe. Slavonic Standpoint). Praha 1920, pp. 176–177, 183.

²⁵ E.g. in: MASARYK, T.G.: *Cesta demokracie II*, p. 410.

²⁶ The Czechoslovak Unity (founded in 1896) and Luhačovice sessions (since 1908) should have strengthened not only the attempts for better mutual understanding in the cultural and economical field but also attempted to restore national-language unity. E.g. during a meeting in Luhačovice where various aspects of Czechoslovak mutuality were being discussed (e.g. in the field of financing policy), the Chairman of Czechoslovak unity, J. Rotnágl, said that "the Czechs have to perceive Slovakia as a national minority and that the Czech public has to be aware of the fact that what they do in the interests of Slovaks, they do in the interest of their reserve". (In: *Luhačovické porady*, Průdy II, 1910–1911, p. 370).

As has been pointed out Masaryk's attention to the Slovak question (ever seen as a supplement to the Czech one) was a part of his anticipated strategy aimed at the interests of Czech national emancipation and politics. His national-political concept included Slovakia, but not Slovaks as a distinct nationality with an identity of their own. "My programme was a synthesis of Czech aspirations in the light of our constitutional, historical and natural rights, and I had kept the inclusion of Slovakia constantly in view, for I am by descent a Slovak, born in Moravia," as he wrote.²⁷ He decided to fight to achieve the Czech state-political programme and during World War I in exile he, as he said later, "quite decisively calculated with Slovakia".²⁸ Pointing to the fact that whereas "many of our public men, under the influence of a reactionary German conception of the historical rights of the Czech Lands ignored our natural right to union with Slovakia", he always upheld natural right alongside of historical right. "Indeed, when I left Prague in 1914, I firmly intended to work for a union with Slovakia."²⁹ He defended the historical right of the Czechs to state and political independence and wrote that the Czechs "have natural and historical right to annex Slovakia brutally oppressed by the Magyars".³⁰ He considered unification of Czechs and Slovaks in a common state and a nation whole to be legitimate also from the perspective of their cultural and historical links dating back to the time of Great Moravia.

Masaryk took Slovak national-emancipation tendencies, which appeared abroad during World War I, as an old-new expression of the Slovak Romanticism (closely connected also with the ideas of the Russian Slavophil circles or pan-Slavism), he considered Czech-Slovak national and political unification to be the only possible solution to the Slovak question (he took the idea of an independent Slovakia as irrational, unrealizable and Slovak separatism as "utopian").³¹

Nevertheless, during Masaryk's stay in USA on 30 May 1918, the Pittsburgh Convention was signed by his presence promising Slovaks political rights such as an autonomous administration, a Diet and Courts of Law and official sanctions for the use of the Slovak language. But after 1918 central government in Prague did not make any decisive concessions to Slovak autonomy. It was never realized and Masaryk tried to justify this oversight with several opportune arguments.³²

²⁷ MASARYK, T.G.: *The Making of a State*, p. 41.

²⁸ ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory*, p. 104.

²⁹ MASARYK, T.G.: *The Making of a State*, p. 361.

³⁰ MASARYK, T.G.: *Nová Evropa*, p. 160.

³¹ As he later wrote, in the United States individuals and small local groups "repeated the cry for an independent Slovakia linked, somehow or other, to Russia". According to Masaryk the great majority of the Slovaks (in Russia and America) "supported the only reasonable and practicable plan - a united Czecho-slovak State". MASARYK, T.G.: *The Making of a State*, pp. 210, 211.

³² As he wrote, he signed The Convention as "the Czechoslovak Convention-not Treaty", as a local understanding between American Czechs and Slovaks upon the policy they were pre-

Masaryk persisted on the standpoint of Czech-Slovak unity even after the birth of the first Czechoslovak Republic when he became a personified bearer of this idea and when this intellectual construct became the cornerstone of the “state-building” ideology of the liberal-democratic republic. Therefore it is not surprising that he considered “the unification of Slovakia and historical lands” as one of the main tasks of even the Slavonic policy of the Czech-Slovak state.

As the President of the Republic he liked to point from time to time to his Slovak origin and to the fact that he came from “Slovak blood” but at the same time he emphasized the fact that Czechs and Slovaks are sons of one nation. “Czechs and Slovaks must join now since they are sons of one nation, they are divided only by the dialectical differences.”³³ He saw confirmation of this “entire unity” in ratifying the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, legally enforced in 1920. In it there was an implication (even if not explicitly expressed in the Constitution declaration by a particular law) of Czechoslovak nationality as a constitutional or state-creating element. “Czechoslovak language” became a state official language of the Republic.³⁴ In autumn 1921 he said during a visit to Bratislava: “The equality of the Slovak and Czech halves, expressed not only by the title of this state but also by the democratic constitution and the programme of state policy, secures preservation of Slovak distinctiveness, language and culture and the development of those features that are implied by the Slovak national (sic! – V.B.) character.”³⁵

Masaryk pointed to the unique character of Slovaks and Slovakia but he did not come to a real recognition of distinct Slovak nationhood and to the full equality supposed by it.³⁶ But there was a growing awareness of Slovak identity in Czechoslovakia and thus they could hardly be satisfied with a verbal appreciation of cultural-ethnic individuality of Slovaks. With the increase of Slovak national

pared to advocate. “It was concluded in order to appease a small Slovak faction which was dreaming of God knows what sort of independence for Slovakia since the ideas of some Russian Slavophils and of Štúr and Hurban-Vajanský had taken root even among the American Slovaks.” The details of the Slovak political problem (as it was laid down in the Convention according to Masaryk) “would be settled by the legal representatives of the Slovak people themselves...” MASARYK, T.G.: *The Making of a State*, pp. 208, 209. Cf. also *Cesta demokracie I*, pp. 249–250, *Cesta demokracie II*, p. 349.

³³ MASARYK, T.G.: *Cesta demokracie I*. Praha 1933, p. 69.

³⁴ NOVÁK, Ludovít: *Jazykovedné glosy k československej otázke* (Linguistic Glosses to the Czechoslovak Question). Martin 1935, pp. 170–171, p. 186. Let us say that in 1930s L. Novák tried to harmonize Slovak (ethnic-cultural) nationalism with the idea and political reality of the united state of Czechs and Slovaks by the legal term “Czechoslovak state (majority) nation” – as a nation which represents and maintains this state. NOVÁK, L.: op. cit., pp. 174–175.

³⁵ MASARYK, T.G.: *Cesta demokracie II*, p. 121.

³⁶ There have been attempts to soften Masaryk's attitude to the question of Slovak national identity or rather to explain his relationship to it as uncontradictory. Thus e.g. Štefan Krčmér wrote that TGM “saw uniqueness of the Slovak conditions” or even he claimed that “he felt the Slovak distinctiveness as a part of himself”. In: *Slovensko Masarykovi*, p. 108.

consciousness (connected with rapid growth in the Slovak intelligentsia)³⁷ they manifested ever more transparently a search for full recognition, equality and self-administration.

Masaryk thought that centralism should be counterbalanced by autonomy, especially by autonomous natural units. He could not therefore principally refuse Slovak strive for autonomy but as president, i.e. defender of the interests of the common state he could only move within narrow limits. In spite of Masaryk's expectations neither district administration nor regional arrangement (1928) was able to remove centralism and so Slovak demands for legal and political autonomy remained fully unsatisfied.

Masaryk did not see the Slovak question on a national-political level but first of all on a cultural-educational one. According to him the unified Czechoslovak nation with two branches: the Czech and Slovak one was divided only by an unequal degree of cultural development. He quite often liked to emphasize this thesis especially in his speeches during the first Czechoslovak republic. He argued for "an organic character" of a united Czechoslovakia but he also wanted to justify this unity in spite of incompatibility of both parts of this desired synthesis. It was difficult to ignore the different historical-cultural as well as political and socio-economical development of both countries. After all, its consequences appeared in the everyday life of the new republic.³⁸ The supporters of Czechoslovak unity saw as necessary not only to overcome this civilization-cultural "retardation" of "the Slovak branch" but to preserve the new state as well as the inevitability of the constructed unity.³⁹ We could say this "evaluative" accent has been a basic element of reflections on Czech-Slovak unity and has persisted in the argumentation. The preservation of nation and state unity has been seen a safeguard against the influence of Slovak "regression" or rather a presupposition of the modernization and development of Slovak society according to the Czech "pro-West" social, political and intellectual model.

³⁷ Owen V. Johnson analysed the dynamics of the development of the Slovak intelligentsia in the interwar period and he argued that from that point of view "the dream of creating a Czechoslovak nationality had no chance of being realized". JOHNSON, Owen V.: *Slovakia 1918-1938. Education and the Making of a Nation*. New York, Boulder, East European Monographs, 1985, p. 210.

³⁸ The heritage of their hard position in the Hungarian period persisted since Hungarian Slovaks "had long been oppressed by the Magyars, deprived of education and deliberately kept in a backward, nay, a primitive condition. In general culture and political maturity they were decades, perhaps generations, behind the Czechs,..." Henry Wickham Steed in Introduction to Masaryk's *The Making of a State*, p. 21.

³⁹ After 1918 the administration of Slovakia fell largely into the hands of Czechs. Many of them treated the Slovaks "as country bumpkins who had to be civilised... (they) clearly identified Czechoslovak with Czech, and were in no doubt that it was their task quickly to transform the backward Slovaks into Czechs". SETON-WATSON, Hugh: *Nations and States. An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*. Boulder, Colorado 1977, p. 173.

Diametrically different attitudes have been articulated towards the Slovak (or for others the “Czech-Slovak”) question in contemporary Slovak as well as Czech-Slovak politics. These are in contradiction to the suggestions of how to develop Slovak-Czech relations. But the very possibilities of this practical political solution and mutual cooperation were hampered. The deepening division of this co-existence was after all shown by the social-political development from the late 1930s and in its radical effects, which were not only the results of external, foreign and political interference. The unresolved nationality problem was one of the reasons which brought about the end of Czechoslovakia from within (although activated by external threats).⁴⁰

Resuming Masaryk’s concept of Czech-Slovak question it should be pointed out that he paid great attention to the problems of nationhood. He considered the shaping of national awareness as a modern social phenomenon and a part of historical emancipation movement of modern nations. The general national principle in modern times received more and more political recognition. The language and culture of various national individualities have steadily gained ground all over Europe.

According to Masaryk nationality is a universally recognized principle which penetrates all social life.⁴¹ Nations are natural organizations of homogeneous individuals. Nations are natural parts, members of a large whole – mankind. Humankind is not something supra-national, it is an organization of nations. The organization of humankind should not be state-based but nation-based.

Masaryk’s conception drew much inspiration from that of Herder and was identical with it in many aspects; according to Herder, nations are natural parts of mankind but states are “artificial” bodies. A nation was for TGM an organizing principle higher than a state. However, it should be taken into account that he thought about nation without a primary relation to a state as a political and power organization. He placed nation above and against the state.⁴²

⁴⁰ Although the Czechoslovak government wished to make a kind of Switzerland of the Czechoslovak Republic it proved to be in this respect the Austro-Hungarian Empire in miniature. Masaryk as president was probably too involved in the cobweb of Prague centralistic policy to come up with a reformatory initiative of his own in the nationality arrangements within the Republic. HAJEK, Hanus J.: *T.G. Masaryk Revisited. A Critical Assessment*. New York, Boulder 1983, pp. 24, 27.

⁴¹ In his definition a nationality create all these elements taken together: “notably language, territory, economic and social conditions, poetry, science, philosophy, morals and religion”. MASARYK, T.G.: *Problém malého národa*, p. 68.

⁴² Masaryk’s conception of the nation has been an expression of the concept of “Kulturnation” (see: P. ALTER’s *Nationalismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 19 ff.) although he later tried to accommodate it to the concept of “Staatsnation”, which had to be precisely created by the Czechoslovak nation. See also NOVÝ, L.: *Masaryks Philosophie der Nation im Denken der Gegenwart*. In: *Formen des nationalen Bewußtseins im Lichte zeitgenössischer Nationalismustheorien*. Hrsg. von E. Schmidt-Hartmann. München, Oldenbourg Verlag 1994, pp. 292, 295.

He pointed to the antagonism of state and nationality. "The state is autocratic, ruling and domineering, the nation is democratic, administering, social, developing from within. The states therefore are adapted to the nations."⁴³ Nation is an objective of social efforts, state is a means but every conscious nation struggles for its own state. He understood national movement as democratic motion, as efforts of subjugated nations for political independence, which is of vital importance to a conscious and literate nation. Every nation conscious of its nationality is naturally striving for independence and sovereignty in the process of its economic and cultural progress and political maturity.⁴⁴

Masaryk fully realized that the achievement of the political independence of the nation is not the aim of its own sake. Intensive work in all essential domains of social life is a safeguard for nation preservation. The future of the nation can be secured only by hard work and especially in the field of culture. Masaryk considered the development of national culture (by means of cultural and educational work) to be one of the most important instruments of national politics as well as a guarantee of national sovereignty. A small nation especially should preserve its own identity and confirms its independence by developing its own cultural and moral programme. Therefore as President of the Republic he emphasized in his speeches the importance of culture and education for small nations. Similarly he put stress on the ethics in politics as in private life, individually and nationally with regard to one's own as well as to other nationalities.

A positive trait of Masaryk's concept of nation was his emphasis on the ethical and religious aspect of the national question. As we have seen in his concept the nation, which we are connected with by language and culture, is a part of mankind.⁴⁵ According to him, love for one's own nation and universal humanity neither excludes nor weakens the other as mankind is a complex of nations, it does not represent something beyond them or more than them. Proper virtue – humanity should be a teleological aim of mankind. Nation is a form of "lidství" (humanity). Humane and national ideas are not at variance but the other way round: they merge to become a unity.⁴⁶ The sense of national existence is based on close relations between the national and universal ideal, in which lies the positive value of the national and cultural identity of modern nations. The national identity could and should be harmonized with the universal ideal of human

⁴³ As he maintained in the inaugural lecture of the School of Slavonic Studies at King's College, University of London, given on 19 October 1915. MASARYK, T.G.: *The Problem of Small Nations in the European Crisis*. University of London, The Athlone Press 1966, p. 27.

⁴⁴ These ideas he unfolded in various publications (e.g. in *Problém malého národa*, pp. 72–74, *Nová Evropa*, pp. 70–73, etc.). Nevertheless, he never came to the recognition of these principles (which were results of combination of liberalism and nationalism) in regard to the self-determination right of the Slovak nation.

⁴⁵ Cf. also ČAPEK, K.: *Hovory*, pp. 266, 272.

⁴⁶ MASARYK, T.G.: *Problém malého národa*, pp. 72–74.

thought and behaviour – with humanity. However, he never criticized the phenomenon of nationalism (he even did not indicate any concern about the possible negative repercussions of modern nationalism).⁴⁷

Although Masaryk's understanding of Slovak-Czech relations should be seen as outdated, what is still inspiring is his conviction that the existence of small nations confirmed by the ethical aspect of their existence has its own specific place in the history of mankind (even though one should be cautious in interpreting any so-called meaning of the history in clear-cut terms). An ethical dimension of national emancipation attached to humanistic ideals would offer deeper roots for the individual human as well as for national existence.

Masaryk's concept based on the humanist ideal overcame a limitation of Czech or the Czechoslovak nationalism. It pointed towards the national emancipation in its close connection with democracy and generally accepted human values. Such a synthesis of patriotism and humanism could have been an ideal path for the future (but unfortunately it was not to be realized).⁴⁸

Even Masaryk's Slovak students – members of the movement led by the journals *Hlas* and *Prúdy* (so-called "Hlasists" and "Prúdists") supported these aspects of the national idea. The Slovak question is, or should also have been an ethical question. But they understood the Slovak question entirely as their teacher did, i.e. as a complementary part of the "Czech-Slovak question".⁴⁹ They thus became supporters and spokesmen of Masaryk's ideas but predominantly of the concept of the Czechoslovak unity. Before the appearance of Czechoslovak Republic conditions of the semi-feudal Hungary strengthened the mutual Czech-Slovak cultural bonds and cooperation was seen as an alternative and possible means of alliance in the struggle for political emancipation of Slovaks. But after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 the idea of a unified nation shattered hope for a Slovak nationhood. That is why the role played by Slovak supporters of Masaryk in this period must be evaluated as ambivalent.⁵⁰ Hlasists and Prúdists defending the

⁴⁷ SCHMIDT-HARTMANN, E.: *Thomas G. Masaryk's Realism. Origins of a Czech Political Concept*. München 1984, p. 186.

⁴⁸ Such an attempt failed in pre-Munich Czechoslovakia although humanism had to be the basis of the Czech national idea. To this contributed not only the weakness of the democratic regimes in decisive moments (as seen in their societal disarray – Cf. PATOČKA, Jan: *Masaryk včera a dnes* (Masaryk Yesterday and Nowadays). *Naše doba* 52, 1946, p. 304. But especially in the case of Czechoslovakia it was a result of the unresolved nationality question and democratism not thought through to a supranational state idea. Cf. PATOČKA, Jan: *O smyslu dneška* (On the Sense of the Present Time). Praha 1969, p. 148.

⁴⁹ The Slovak question was nothing "but the completion" of the Czech question maintained Vavro Šrobár – Masaryk's devoted Slovak supporter. ŠROBÁR, V.: *Z môjho života* (From my Life). Praha 1946, pp. 310–311.

⁵⁰ In the late 1930s Michal Chorváth condemned "Hlasists": "The most surprising thing is that the Czechoslovak side which calls itself the exponent of Czech realism, criticism, sobriety and scientism, quickly loses its specific character in the post-war Slovakia. Its arguments are

status quo of the liberal-democratic regime of the Czech-Slovak republic, immediately became part of the policy of Prague centralism which was opposed to any attempt at Slovak national-political emancipation.

Already during the period between the two World Wars Slovaks had increased their demands for full recognition of their identity and sovereignty. They demanded their sovereign political will to be fulfilled not only at a language-cultural and ethnical level but at a national-political and state level, too. They identified and declared themselves more and more unambiguously as a self-conscious nation and not only as a people.

from day to day more heedless, its policy more and more powerfull." CHORVÁTH, M.: *Romantická tvář Slovenska* (The Romantic Face of Slovakia). Praha 1939, pp. 29-30.