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**COMPARATIVE
POLITICS**

OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC,
POLAND AND HUNGARY

Comparative Politics of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary

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Comparative Politics of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

The analysis of politics as a system, in which individuals and groups with specific goals and interests meet, is a basic precondition for the better understanding of the current situation and the future development of individual states.

Politics as a system is a supra-structure that summarises various social, cultural and civic entities as well as reflecting the causality of relations among the bodies of state power, political parties, ginger groups and citizens. The understanding of a political system is based on the knowledge of the life conditions of individuals and groups, the quality and extent of social involvement, through which it is possible to contribute to the creation of autonomous political concepts in specific time and space.

The logic of this monograph's text lies in several fundamental premises that are gradually reflected and verified in the text. Firstly, the premises are modelled on the foundations of the historical development of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and Hungary. The first premise is based on the fact that all three states had a similar concept of their establishment and transformation into different state structures. During their previous history, they had become the part of mighty empires. Hungary and Bohemia became part of the Habsburg Monarchy, and Poland became a part of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. None of these three countries had state sovereignty or autonomous status. Despite this, they preserved their internal cohesion grounded in cultural, linguistic and historical identity. The end of World War II marked a turning point, when in accordance with the principles of the Versailles system various independent states were established in Central Europe. Poland and Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) seized their right to self-determination, and joined the ranks of successful European countries with all their features of internal and external sovereignty. The second premise is represented by the analysis of political development after World War II., which despite some post-conflict unity required from the states of the Soviet Bloc, did not result in the building up of the same and homogenous political structures. Poland, Hungary and Bohemia (within the framework of Czechoslovakia) followed specific lines of development and their own strategies ultimately focused on rejecting the model of power based on one political party.

The third premise identifies the development of the respective political systems of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and Hungary from the beginning of the 90s up to the present, and the political position of these states in Central Europe during the last two decades.

The analysis of the development in Slovakia is not included, though such an opportunity was offered at first sight. The politics of Slovakia is considered in other publications that are well known.

With respect to its structure, the text is divided into three chapters. Adriana Vasiľková is an author of the chapters about the Czech Republic and the Republic of Poland, and Ján Koper contributed with the chapter about Hungary. However, research aims are the same for the both authors' approaches. It is an ambition of this monograph to present for the public the comprehensive work about politics and political development of three Central European countries, which has not been published by Slovak academic staff in such a compact form so far. The text of chapters is divided into the subchapters sketching the process of establishment and formation of the states and their constitutional development, the institutional framework of political systems, the basic principles of democratic ruling and the development and character of the system of political parties.

English version widens the space of the book's social contribution, and come up the expectations that this analysis will be included into the presentation of Slovak political culture and scientific erudition, just because it is focused on a wider Central European context, whose integral part the Slovak Republic definitely is, which at the same time gives an opportunity of comparison with other similarly focused foreign publications.

Chapter 1

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

1.1 THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHMENT AND FORMATION OF THE CZECH STATE AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Since January 1, 2013, when Czechoslovakia was divided, the Czech Republic has been an independent democratic Central European state. The territory of the Czech Republic consists of Bohemia, Moravia and part of Silesia

In pre-Christian times, the territory of the Czech Republic was inhabited by the Celtic tribe of the Boii. The name “Bohemia” derives from Latin, and has been used to denote the Czech Republic in many languages.

The Slavs arrived in the territory of Bohemia in the middle of the sixth century. The Slavonic tribes gradually started to merge into bigger ethnic groups with the same political interests, and were governed by Czech dukes. They were later united under the leadership of the Přemyslid royal dynasty.¹ After the short interlude of Great Moravia² (in the ninth century), which also had domination over the Czech dukes, the territory of Bohemia then came under the influence of the Kingdom of East Franks, and later it became the part of the Holy Roma Empire. The Czech dukes succeeded in strengthening their power during this period, and they were awarded the hereditary title of kings in the twelfth century. Bohemia became a kingdom with great privileges and strong stability.³

During the next few centuries, the Czech Kingdom experienced rapid political, cultural and economic development⁴, but also witnessed the Hussite Wars, other religious wars and the uprisings of the Czech gentry against the rule of the House of Habsburg which controlled the territory of

¹ In the 11th century, the Czech and Moravian territories were united, and thus the core of the Czech state was created.

² Great Moravia is considered the first Slavonic “state in Central Europe”

³ BOBKOVÁ, L. 2003 *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české IV.b (1310 – 1402* Prague Paseka 2003 ISBN 80718555104

⁴ During the reign of Charles IV, from the House of Luxembourg, Prague became the seat of the Holy Roman Empire and the centre of Europe’s cultural, social and political life.

Bohemia from 1526. Wars resulted in economic decline, the country's physical devastation, and a violent religious reformation and Counter-Reformation. After the Thirty Years' War, the 'Czech lands' were included in the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy and lost their independent status as a Czech kingdom within the Empire.

During the reigns of the Habsburg emperor Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II in the second half of the eighteenth century several reforms were made with the purpose of administering the empire more effectively. Maria Theresa and Joseph II, absolutist enlightened monarchs, abolished serfdom, adopted education reform, issued the Patent of Toleration that allowed freedom of faith, and abolished the Jesuit Order. On the other hand, they strengthened the centralisation of administration and the Germanisation of their territories.

This absolutism, strong Germanisation and centralised administration activated Czech nationalists in the Habsburg Monarchy. The subsequent development process of the Czech National Revival, which led later to the formation of the modern Czech nation, was also influenced by the fact that the Czechs had had a historical experience of their autonomous state - the Czech Kingdom⁵. It is important to stress that the national oppression of the Czechs was orchestrated from one centre – Vienna, whereas several nations in Empire had to face, besides the Austrian Germanic oppression, oppression too from Hungary. This fact played an important role in the formation of the modern Czech nation and its fight for political independence. The cultural enlightenment and education reforms initiated by the Habsburgs supported the political requirements of Czech intellectuals. Pan-Slavism, a very popular movement, became an integral part of the political programme of Czech national parties after 1848. Two main political streams were formed in the 19th century: liberal and radical-democratic. The liberal stream was of the opinion that the Habsburg Monarchy should be gradually changed into a constitutional state with a federal system. The Czech radical democrats not only demanded the introduction of democratic principles, but also independence for the "Czech Lands" in their programme.⁶

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Bohemia became an autonomous part of the Austrian part of the empire. A relatively liberal constitutional system (compared to the Hungarian part) left room for social and political activities. The Czechs had their representatives in the Vienna parliament (the Imperial Council), they established political parties, and they were allowed to form

⁵ The existence of this kingdom and the experience of using Czech as an official and literary language as well as a teaching language, helped to strengthen Czech national awareness, and supported efforts to build up a modern Czech state in the nineteenth century.

⁶ Lipnická, M. (2009/2010) *Formování moderního českého národa 1815-1914* In *Historický obzor* 2009 20 (9/10), ISSN 1210-6097, p. 194-205

their own Czech Regional Council within the framework of regional and state administration which later, as industry developed, achieved more and more self-government competency.⁷

The multinational Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was weakened by persistent ethnic problems and serious economic difficulties. The World War I and the continuing disintegration of society demonstrated that governing elites were not able to solve the spiralling crisis. Non-Hungarian and non-German nations living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire were well aware of the fact that these were favourable conditions for the formation of new independent national states.

From the beginning of World War I there developed an idea that of the most culturally and linguistically similar Slavonic nations of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Czechs and the Slovaks, should proceed together in their fight for sovereignty. Czech-Slovak relations were not begun during the World War I, but much earlier, during the pre-war period. These relations became more intense in the nineteenth century, during the period of the Czech and Slovak National Revivals.

Czech and Slovak groups in exile contributed greatly to the eventual establishment of Czechoslovakia as a new nation. Pre-eminently the Czech politician, philosopher and university professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, his fellow Czech Edvard Beneš and the Slovak Milan Rastislav Štefánik. At the beginning of the war and for the first time, the idea of the two nations' coexistence in one common state was articulated by Tomáš G. Masaryk in his Memorandum of Independent Bohemia, in which putative state he also included Slovakia.⁸

The main centre of the resistance in exile of the Czechs and the Slovaks was France, where the representative body, the Czechoslovak National Council, was formed in 1916. Its aim was to gain approval from the Western powers to establish an independent Czechoslovakia after World War I. Besides this foreign resistance, centres of Czech and Slovak domestic resistance were formed during war. They emphasized the right to national self-determination.

After negotiating with the Western powers and with the support of the foreign and domestic resistance, an independent Czechoslovakia was declared on 28.10.1918; the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic.⁹ The Slovaks joined this declaration on 30. 10. 1918 with the Declaration of

⁷ HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z 2005 *Dějiny správy v českých zemích Od počátků státu po současnost* Prague NLN 2005 ISBN 978-80-7106-906-5

⁸ BRABEC, J. 2002. *Cesta a odkaz T.G Masaryka Fakta, úvahy, souvislosti* Prague Lidové noviny 2002 ISBN 80-7106-620-6

⁹ The process of the establishment of Czechoslovakia was not simple, and it was preceded by several suggestions of state "forms" from a federal state of Czechs and Slovaks with full autonomy for the Slovaks up to a unitary state based on the so-called concept of "Czechoslovakism", which was supported by T. G. Masaryk. According to this concept, Czechoslovakia comprises one nation – the Czechoslovak nation. See: MARSINA, R., ČIČAJ, V., KOVÁČ, D., LIPTÁK, Ľ. 1992. *Slovenské dejiny*. Martin: Matica slovenská 1992. ISBN

the Slovak Nation. The new Czechoslovak Republic consisted of the territories of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.

Czechoslovakia, which thus originated as one of the breakoff states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, became a parliamentary democracy with a republican system and a strengthened executive. The Constitution of 1920 confirmed fundamental principles relating to the division of power and of human and civic rights and freedoms. Legislative branch was interested in two-chamber National Assembly, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, while executive branch was represented by the President and the Cabinet, and judiciary by an independent judicature.¹⁰

The borders of Czechoslovakia with surrounding countries were demarcated by the Paris Peace Treaties (the Treaty of Versailles, the Treaty of St.Germain and the Treaty of Trianon). While the border with Germany and Austria was based approximately on the historical border of the Czech Kingdom, the demarcation of the northern and southern borders were more complicated. There was no natural dividing line between Hungary and Slovakia, as the territory of Slovakia had been an integral part of Hungary for many years. With respect to Poland, it was a historical territory of Cieszyn Silesia, and parts of the territory of Orava and Spiš were claimed by both states. The dispute was resolved by a court of international arbitration.

As much as 60 % of industrial plants from the previous Austro-Hungarian Empire was situated in the territory of Czechoslovakia¹¹, which contributed to the fact that Czechoslovakia was among the richest industrial countries of Europe during the interwar period.

Despite several shortcomings resulting from the theory of 'Czechoslovakism', the unsolved problems of nationalities, and from the existence of non-parliamentary groups that in fact were deciding all important issues, the First Czechoslovak Republic remained the only country in Central Europe that preserved its democratic form until World War II.

80-7090-239-6, p. 195-205. The supporters of this Czechoslovak concept argued the establishment of the Czechoslovak state should be defended by one nation as its main representative. At that time, the make-up of inhabitants in the territory of Czechoslovakia comprised 51.5% Czechs, 14% Slovaks, 23% Germans, 5.6% Hungarians and 3.5% Ukrainians. See: TÓTH, A., NOVOTNÝ, L., STEHLÍK, M. 2012. *Národnostní menšiny v Československu 1918–1938. Od státu národního ke státu národnostnímu?* Prague: FF UK 2012, ISBN 978-80-7308-413-4, p. 3-5

¹⁰ *Ústavní listina Československé republiky, 1920* In LOUŽEK, M. (ed.) 2010. *Československá ústava 1920. Devadesát let poté.* Prague: Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku 2010. ISBN 978-80-86547-89-3

¹¹ URBAN, O. 2000. *České a slovenské dějiny do roku 1918* Prague: Aleš Skřivan 2000. ISBN 80-902261-5-9, s. 231

The relations with surrounding states, specifically with Hungary and Germany, were not simple. Neither of the latter countries were able to cope with post-war development or with the peace conditions that they had had to accept after the war. They tried, therefore, to revise them to the detriment of Czechoslovakia. The coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks in one Czechoslovak state turned out to be less than ideal, too. In fact, the Czech political elite monopolized social and political life in the state. The constitutional confirmation of the concept of 'Czechoslovakism' was suppressing the specific features of the Slovak nation and Slovak political culture. The unclear definition of the state, doubts about the legal status of Slovaks, later resulted in many discrepancies.

Hitler's Germany, which based its policy on the ideology of Nazism, used and supported growing nationalistic and separatist tendencies by ethnic Germans in the territory of the Sudetenland. During the later 1930s, the Sudeten German Party activated their demands for autonomy for the German minority living in the republic. The party became a kind of satellite of Germany in Bohemia very quickly. German intentions were focused on the gradual liquidation of the Czechoslovak state, and this began after Czechoslovakia was forced to sign the Munich Agreement on 30.09.1938. In the absence of any spokesmen for Czechoslovakia, the representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany agreed that Czechoslovakia had to give up large border territories in favour of Germany, and to comply with the territorial requirements of Poland and Germany.

This turbulent situation was taken advantage of by the Slovaks, who declared the autonomy of Slovakia in Czechoslovakia on 06.10.1938. In November, the Autonomy Act became effective. At the same time, based on the Vienna Awards, Slovakia lost approximately a third of its territory to Hungary. This is sometimes called the Second Czechoslovak Republic¹²

Hitler's plan for the liquidation of Czechoslovakia was finalised in March 1939. Hitler "recommended" to Slovak political representatives, under the threat of a further division of Slovakia between Hungary and Poland, that they should declare an independent Slovakia (14.03.1939). In breach of the Munich Agreement, Germany then occupied the remaining territory of Bohemia, and the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" was declared. The liquidation of post-Munich Czechoslovakia was completed by the occupation of the eastern part of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia by Hungary. The Second Czechoslovak Republic ceased to exist.

The Nazi Germany established a brutal fascist dictatorship in the Czech lands. The Protectorate was formally headed by the Czech Cabinet under Prime Minister Emil Hácha, but its

¹² MARSINA, R., ČIČAJ, V., KOVÁČ, D., LIPTÁK, Ľ. 1992. *Slovenské dejiny*. Martin: Matica slovenská 1992. ISBN 80-7090-239-6, p.239-242

activity was supervised by the Reich's Protectorate. During the existence of this Protectorate, ten thousands of inhabitants (mostly Jews) were violently transported to concentration camps, or became the victims of pogroms. The territory of the Protectorate served - thanks to its highly developed industry - as a base for German military production.

The idea of a common state of Czechs and Slovaks became topical again during the World War II. The Czechoslovak government-in-exile, headed by the exile President Edvard Beneš, worked in London from 1940. This government was recognized by Great Britain, the USA and the USSR. Besides the government-in-exile, however the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) also strengthened during World War II. The representatives of both centres-in-exile agreed to establish the Czechoslovak government in April 1945 with the so-called Košice Government Programme, where they declared the renewal of the state consisting of two nations – the Czechs and the Slovaks – as well as reiterating their basic principles of domestic and foreign policy.¹³

After Czechoslovakia was liberated by the Soviet army, the Czechoslovak Republic was re-established as it had been in 1937, but without the territory of Carpathian Ruthenia.

The so-called third Czechoslovak Republic, which lasted from 1945 to 1948, as sometimes the period 1945-1948 is called, underwent rapid development. Its character was strongly influenced by its orientation to the USSR (illustrated, for example by the Agreement on Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation signed between the CSR and the USSR). At the same time, the years 1945-1948 saw the strengthening of the CPC's position, which was also assisted by the inter-party agreements on the partial limitation of political competition, the nationalisation of property, the liquidation of municipalities, and so on.¹⁴

The non-Slavonic inhabitants were expelled from post-war Czechoslovakia, in particular the Sudetenland Germans and to a lesser extent the Hungarians also seen as a potential threat. This inevitably worsened Czech-German and Slovak-Hungarian relations, and many contentious issues from that period have still not been resolved today.¹⁵

¹³ VARTÍKOVÁ, M. 1978. *Košický vládný program* Bratislava: Pravda 1978

¹⁴ KAPLAN, K. 1990. *Pravda o Československu 1945-1948* Prague: Panorama 1990. ISBN 80-7038-193-0

¹⁵ A dispute relates to the so-called Beneš Decrees. These were the presidential decrees that should have helped to consolidate the situation in society at the end of World War II and after it. The Decrees related to several spheres, such as the confiscation of the property of Germans, Hungarians and collaborators, the modification of the citizenship for persons of German and Hungarian nationality, and the nationalisation of mines, key industries, banks and private insurance companies. See: ŠUTAĽ, Š 2004. *Dekréty Eduarda Beneša v povojnovom období* Prešov Universum 2004. ISBN 80-89046-21-5

The CPC made an effort to monopolise power. In the first post-war election in 1946, the CPC acquired 38 % of the votes overall (40 % in Bohemia), but in Slovakia, the anti-communist Democratic Party won 62%, and the communists only acquired 30% of the votes. The CPC therefore assumed key positions in the Cabinet. ¹⁶ The communists definitively assumed power in February 1948. The Czechoslovak Republic found itself in the sphere of Soviet interest. ¹⁷

In May 1948, a new Constitution was adopted. This Constitution defined the Czechoslovak Republic as a “peoples’ democratic state”. The basic principles declared in the Constitution, however such as the principle of people’s sovereignty, the freedom of election for the highest constitutional bodies, and independent courts were not observed. Although the highest bodies formally existed - a one-chamber National Assembly (as a legislative body), the President and the Cabinet (as executive bodies) and courts - they had no real powers and they were merely the executive bodies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its Central Committee. ¹⁸ All the power structures of the state were bound by decisions of the Soviet Union.

The “people’s democratic” character of Czechoslovakia manifested itself in all the spheres of economic and political life. In the economy, emphasis was put on heavy industry and the political strengthening of the working class, and a violent collectivisation of agriculture occurred. With respect to the strategy of the liquidation of the internal and external enemies of the state at the beginning of the 1950s, there were many acts of repression against the representatives of other political parties, the representatives of churches and proprietors. There were purges and fabricated political proceedings, and labour camps were operated. The specific features of the Slovak nation were not accepted.

In 1960, the National Assembly adopted a new constitutional law, the so-called “socialist constitution” which included the declaration that Czechoslovakia had built up socialism, and was starting to build up communism. Article 4, that declared the leading role of the CPC, became very important. At the same time, the Constitution modified the name of the state into “The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic” (CSSR). ¹⁹

¹⁶ RENNER, H. 1993. *Dejiny Česko-Slovenska po roku 1945* Bratislava : Slovak Academic Press 1993. ISBN 80-85665-16-6, p. 12

¹⁷ KAPLAN, K. 1990. *Pravda o Československu 1945-1948* Prague: Panorama, 1990 ISBN 80-7038-193-0

¹⁸ *Ústavní zákon ze dne 9. května 1948. Ústava Československé republiky* [online].2013[cit. 16.8.2013.] Available on the Internet: http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1948.html

¹⁹ *Ústavní zákon ze dne 11. července 1960. Ústava Československé socialistické republiky* [online].2013[cit. 16.8.2013.] Available on the Internet: http://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1960.html