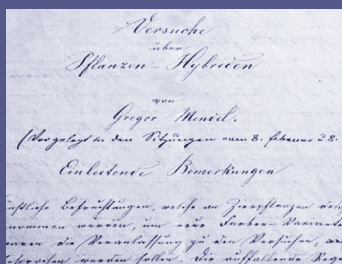
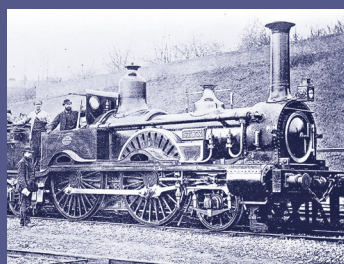


Politics and Culture in 19th Century Europe



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Politics and Culture in 19th Century Europe

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Introduction

The authors of this book recently carried out an interesting experiment whereby they decided to present different topics from the history of the 19th century in the form of a debate between two experts who, although coming from different areas of the social sciences and humanities, share an interest in the period when European modernity was emerging. The attempt to involve students of Masaryk University in these debates was only partially successful at the time, but a dialogue between historian Jiří Hanuš and political scientist Vít Hloušek was established.

This was also thanks to the fact that Jiří Hanuš is particularly interested in politics while Vít Hloušek occasionally finds himself in the position of historian. They decided that the outline of the individual debates could be developed into separate texts, several other topics were gradually added, articles appeared in the journal *Kontexty*¹, and eventually this book began to take shape. All the texts represent the combined work of the two authors. Naturally, some topics were covered more by the historian, while the political scientist contributed more to others, but the final form is the product of ‘ping-pong diplomacy’, i.e. sending texts from one email to another—interventions, changes, and additions—before finally reaching a consensus.

This book does not aim to replace existing textbooks on 19th-century history as it is not a traditional events-based history, instead it focuses on selected key concepts associated with this period. Nor does it aspire to provide an interpretation of all the important concepts and issues of 19th-century history. If we look at the selection of concepts and processes under examination, we can see they have a great deal in common. In addition to their significance for the historical changes that Europe witnessed during the 19th century, these are concepts with a political dimension and also processes which have shaped the 20th century and, indeed, contemporary Europe. In this context, it is worth noting that in the last decade, publications have appeared in German and French that link the 19th and 20th centuries into a unified whole (Christoph Nonn, Serge Bernstein, and Pierre Milza). This is not only due to the time lag

¹ *Kolonialismus není černobílé vyprávění* (Colonialism is not a Black and White Narrative) was published in 2018 (no. 5, pp.33–40), *Stát: od hesla L'état, c'est moi k demokracii* in 2018 (no. 4, pp. 9–17), *Sionismus: sekulární cesta vyvoleného národa* (Zionism: The Secular Journey of the Chosen People) in 2018 (no. 22, pp.13–19) and *Nesvaté národy* (Unholy Nations) in 2018 (no. 1, pp.18–24). Two texts were published in 2017: *Náboženství: příběh s otevřeným koncem* (Religion: An Open-Ended Story) (no. 4, pp.32–38) and *Ideologie: zlobivá dítka Francouzské revoluce* (Ideologies: The Wilful Children of the French Revolution) i(no. 6, pp. 28–34).

in the observers' perspective, but in some cases also to the fact that many authors have become aware of one aspect of historical discontinuity: for example, in the realm of ideas, history may advance in 'leaps': the 19th century can, in certain respects, be seen as a continuation of the 13th century, while at the same time, from the vantage point of the 2020s, the century before last can appear to us as strikingly close.

We decided to focus specifically on the following topics: aspects of cultural history closely related to political change, secularization, nationalism, Zionism, ideologies, political philosophy, democratization, diplomacy, and colonialism. The book opens with a chapter on Central Europe, reflecting our awareness that we are approaching these issues from this particular vantage point. Culturally, we are Central Europeans 'by birth and by choice', even as we affirm our country's Western orientation. This is followed by a chapter entitled *I know a lot, but I want to understand everything!* which explores the role of Romanticism and the Enlightenment, transformations in education, and the place of intellectuals in Europe. Here we seek to grasp and articulate the ideas which have profoundly shaped the politics, society, and culture of the modern era. In the chapter *Religion: An open-ended story*, we address not only the process of secularization—i.e. the retreat of religion from the state and the public sphere—but also trace the evolving responses of Christian churches, especially Catholicism, to these new challenges. The chapter *Unholy nations* is devoted to the origins, theory, practice and, to some extent, the critique of modern nationalism. Here we most clearly demonstrate the links between various 19th-century concepts and movements and those of the present day. We also decided to devote particular attention to the process of Jewish emancipation. The chapter *Zionism: The secular journey of the Chosen People* complements and connects the themes of all three previous texts using a very singular example. Zionism, concerning a people traditionally defined as a religious community, emerged as a response to the challenges of modernity. Its realization vividly illustrated both the new opportunities and the new problems arising from the transformation of society and politics in 19th-century Europe. The chapter *Ideologies: The wayward children of the French Revolution* traces the birth of three fundamental 19th-century ideologies in response to the revolution: liberalism, which aligned itself with the revolution; conservatism, which emerged in sharp opposition to it; and socialism, which radicalized its ideas. We then follow the trajectories of these ideologies through European political discourse and the perspectives of their leading proponents.

It is possible to say that the next four chapters are primarily political in nature. The chapter *The state as will and idea* is devoted to the development of political philosophy and thinking about the state, and reveals not only the plurality of opinions but also the continuity between the intellectual tradition of the 19th century and the political practice of the 20th century. In *The state, constitution and suffrage*, we focus on the profound changes in European politics from the French Revolution to the turn of the 20th century. In Western Europe (and to an extent in Central Europe), politics underwent a gradual process of constitutionalization, liberalization, and

later democratization, and it can still be argued that the roots of the current liberal democratic order lie squarely in this period. The chapter *The Concert of Great Powers and diplomats* looks at the development of diplomatic theory and especially practice during one of the golden ages of this craft. In the chapter *Colonialism is not a black and white narrative*, we venture outside of Europe to look at the actions of Europeans as colonizers. We do not hide our critical perspective on this aspect of Europe's past, yet we resist viewing colonialism as an entirely negative process and provide a number of arguments to support this position.

If readers—in particular students—wish to supplement the information presented here with additional events, processes, and concepts from the 'long' 19th century, as Eric Hobsbawm termed it (symbolically beginning with the French Revolution in 1789 and ending with the outbreak of World War I in 1914), they may consult the following: Hobsbawm himself wrote three Marxist-oriented publications in which he attempted to synthesize 19th-century European history: *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1798–1848*, *The Age of Capital 1848–1875*, and *The Age of Empire 1875–1914*. We can also recommend more recent syntheses by other British authors, such as *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800–1914* by Robert Gildea, and *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914* by Richard J. Evans. A concise but equally interesting account of the key events of 19th-century European history can be found in Norman Davies's monumental tome *Europe: A History*. Monographs devoted exclusively to the 19th century are also available and we can recommend Michael Rapport's *Europe in the 19th Century*. The fin de siècle period, i.e., the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, has received considerable attention. Here we can recommend Felix Gilbert's and David Clay Large's *The End of the European Era: 1890 to the Present*. For those interested in intellectual and cultural history, John Burrow's *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1848–1914* and Christophe Charle's book on intellectuals in 19th-century Europe are indispensable. A somewhat dry but fairly comprehensive overview is *European Culture Since 1848. From Modern to Postmodern and Beyond* by James Winders, while Carl E. Schorske's classic *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, which we refer to in one of the chapters, is both highly readable and offers a profound exploration of the subject.

For a basic introduction to the political concepts and figures of the modern era, we recommend consulting the well-established reference works *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* or *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, or alternatively the 'conservative classic' *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*.

Before delving into the individual chapters, there are two points worth noting. As has been emphasized, this book focuses on European history. It does not aspire to be a global overview of the 19th century, nor does it address the period from a pan-European perspective. Even where we deal with issues that transcend the geographical, geopolitical and cultural boundaries of Europe (in the case of colonization and Zionism), we focus on the significance of these concepts and processes for European history, culture, politics, and society. This focus is neither a manifestation of Eurocentrism

nor a disregard for developments elsewhere. It reflects our own expertise, which is primarily centred on the 'old' continent. We also consider European history of this period to be sufficiently coherent to allow us to selectively highlight external influences and stimuli. Moreover, until World War I, Europe was both an expansive continent and an expanding culture, encompassing not only the political extension of its influence through colonization, but also the export of European technologies, scientific achievements, and artistic forms, trends, and influences. The history of the modern era can, of course, be viewed 'globally', and although experiments of this kind are important (Christopher Bayly), we have opted for a more traditional approach.

The second point concerns the book's genre. Both authors have long served as university lecturers, teaching the 19th century, its history and European developments across a range of courses in history and the social sciences. Accordingly, they have written the individual chapters with the aim of making the book suitable for use as a textbook. As noted earlier, the book does not aim to replace existing compendiums of 19th-century history but to complement them. With its largely non-event-based approach, it is also well suited for students of political science, European studies and other social sciences—students who are seeking to understand the processes and phenomena which have shaped contemporary politics and society. We therefore believe the book can work well as teaching material.

At the same time, however, we did not want to limit our readership by writing a book that was overtly didactic. Consequently, you will not find typical instructional features such as review questions or practice topics. Instead, each chapter provides suggestions for further reading which informed our writing and which we consider highly stimulating for those seeking a deeper understanding of these concepts. The style we have chosen could be described as academic popularization and as a result the book does not contain a classic bibliography.

The authors would like to thank those who helped in the preparation of the book, especially the staff of the Brno publishing house Books & Pipes (Kateřina Hloušková, Jiří Mičkal, František Mikš, and Kateřina Mikšová). We are also grateful to Alena Mizerová from Munipress, who suggested having the book translated into English, and Graeme Dibble, who provided the translation.

The book was not easy to write. In today's university climate, where academic output—with its emphasis on quantity and precisely measurable 'performance'—often resembles an industrial operation rather than contemplative research, we had to carve out time for the texts collected here from various projects and other demands of contemporary academic life. Nevertheless, we can say that it was a pleasure finding that time, and we truly enjoyed working on the book. It is therefore perhaps our immodest hope that readers will enjoy it too.

Jiří Hanuš & Vít Hloušek

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I. Europe is not just the name of a continent

As was mentioned in the introduction, all the chapters in this book focus primarily on Europe, the European perspective, and topics and views that were typical and important for 19th-century Europe. Our book is Eurocentric in many ways, and this Eurocentrism is partly our choice as authors and partly a consequence of our European origins, education, and outlook. Even when focusing on global events and processes (colonization, international politics), our perspective is European. And in some places even Central European. We have not set out to write a global history of the 19th century, even though this contrasts with the current mainstream of Western historiography. Today, popular works—often sophisticated in scope and synthesis—tend to focus on world history across different eras, the global history of specific phenomena, or, as in the case of Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, the history of humanity as a whole.

Without intending to go against this trend systematically, our starting point is the natural limits of our knowledge and experience. We even believe that a Central European perspective on 19th-century European history can be both refreshing and enriching, offering a viewpoint that was not dominant but, in its marginal position, can complement Western and Eastern perspectives. While the book strives to maintain a focus on Europe as a whole, a Central European—or occasionally Czech—perspective inevitably emerges in places.

However, as we know, Europe and Central Europe are not just geographical concepts, but primarily cultural, historical, and even political or geopolitical concepts. Accordingly, this chapter will explore these concepts from a 19th-century viewpoint, seeking to understand the environment in which people from the period lived, the ways they interpreted the world, and the broader context that must inform our reflections and writings on 19th-century Europe. The effort to grasp and understand Central Europe is perhaps even more important because a Central European perspective—the viewpoint of the economic semi-periphery, the strudel region, or the place from which the Habsburg myth grew in (not only) modern Austrian literature (Claudio Magris)—can be highly beneficial. It serves as a complement and, in some cases, as a corrective to the history of 19th-century Europe written from Paris, London, Moscow, or Berlin. It is also important to define what is meant by Europe in the context of 19th-century history and what is meant by Central Europe.

A European sense of civilization

We do not have to agree entirely with Samuel Huntington, who, after the end of the Cold War, attempted to describe the world through the lens of civilizations and their supposedly inevitable confrontation. According to Huntington, civilizations are a kind of ‘culture on a grand scale’. They are more a product of religious, social and cultural patterns than of economic or military expansion, although they may strive for the latter. Huntington could be rather vague when treating the concepts of civilization, culture, religion, borders, and nations. Some of his conclusions regarding civilizations as dominant forms—their division, encounters, and conflicts—are rather superficial and controversial, often guided more by the logic of his argument than by the much more complex empirical reality. As Josep Fontana points out, diversity, contrasts and dissent are as typical of European history as certain shared phenomena, and the complexity of European history resists being squeezed into simple civilizational narratives.

However, a not insignificant proportion of Europeans, especially those in the West whose countries participated in the creation of overseas empires (Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and later Italy and Germany), considered Europe to be a specific civilization. They even considered it a civilization that was superior to others, a civilization destined to rule the world. As Niall Ferguson wrote: *“For much (...) of its history, the British Empire acted as an agency for imposing free markets, the rule of law, investor protection, and relatively incorrupt government on roughly a quarter of the world.”* British and, at the end of the 19th century, American foreign trade policy did indeed contribute to the first wave of economic globalization. Although we are not at all sure whether historians from the once-subjugated territories and nations would agree with Ferguson’s positive assessment, it is certain that not only British ideas about free trade but also British administrative and political institutions spread rapidly and took root in many places.

The USA and Japan – the limits of European expansion

On the one hand, the 19th century was an era in which European colonial empires expanded. In the Balkans and the Middle East, the power of the Ottoman empire declined dramatically, which served to increase the global influence of the countries of the ‘old continent’. On the other hand, even before World War I, two countries had already shown the limits of this European expansion. During the presidencies of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, the US went beyond the Monroe Doctrine (1823), which limited American foreign policy interests to North, Central, and South America. The US became a technological and economic superpower which demonstrated its growing ability to determine world politics not only militarily

with its easy victory over Spain (1898), but also through symbolic activities such as sending the US military fleet around the world (1907–1909), or Theodore Roosevelt winning the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the Russo-Japanese conflict (1906). The US emancipated itself and adopted the rhetoric typical of European colonists. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, *“If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation.”*

Japan was also awakening, as the Meiji reforms from 1869 onward transformed it into a modern industrial economy, society, and state. Naturally, Emperor Meiji drew inspiration from Europe, while American and European pressure during the 1850s—when the great powers compelled Japan to establish economic ties—laid the groundwork for these sweeping reforms. The inspiration derived from Europe and North America was both sustained and comprehensive. It encompassed the creation of modern political and economic institutions, such as a parliament, a supreme court, the Tokyo Stock Exchange, and even a modern postal system. The education system was overhauled, culminating in the founding of the first modern university in Tokyo in 1886. Both the currency and the language were unified, helping to centralize administration and society, which put Japan on the same path towards building a nation-state which European countries had taken earlier. The country rapidly developed its industry and modernized its army, once again drawing on European models. Japan capitalized on these innovations by winning wars against China (1894–1895) and, most notably, Russia (1904–1905). Perhaps even more significant, however, was the alliance agreement with Great Britain (1902), which symbolically elevated the country to the ranks of the world powers. However, this would occur only at the end of the long 19th century, which was otherwise dominated globally by the interests and interactions of the European powers.

European history as a working term

European history and its specific unity and global significance can also be viewed in a non-imperialistic way. Polish historian Oskar Halecki described the period from the 19th century until the outbreak of World War I as the zenith of the European epoch in history. This era gradually emerged from the transformation of the Mediterranean world in the first ten centuries of our era and ended with World War II, which was accompanied by a radical decline in Europe’s global influence and its division by the Iron Curtain. Halecki did not think in the same way as many 19th-century European intellectuals and historians: he did not equate the history of Europe with the history of humanity as a whole. For him, the ‘European era’ was more of a working term and

definition of an area where it makes sense to conduct comparative research. Halecki did not perceive Europe as a 'civilization', nor did he identify it with 'the West' or Christianity, although he did not deny the importance of Christianity. For him, Europe is a whole unit comprising the West, Central Europe and the East, all of which belong together.

Half a century later, Norman Davies was similarly inclusive regarding what Europe is: *"Wherever or whatever the core is taken to be, it is linked to the Ebro, the Danube, and the Volga, as well as the Rhone and the Rhine; to the Baltic and the Black Seas as well as the Atlantic and the Mediterranean; to the Balts and the Slavs as well as the Germanics and Celts; to the Greeks as well as the Latins; to the peasantry as well as the proletariat. Despite their differences, all the regions of Europe hold a very great deal in common."*

The evolving idea of Europe

The very idea of Europe predates the beginning of the 19th century. There is no point in returning to the medieval analogy of Europeans and Christians, which was shaken by the great schism between the Western and Eastern (Orthodox) churches in 1054 and further fragmented by the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants in the modern era. As Federico Chabod has shown, the idea of Europe developed gradually and communication within the 'republic of scholars' (the Renaissance *Respublica Litteraria* eventually transformed into the Enlightenment *La République des Lettres*) was key to this development. Through these exchanges, the elites of the time realized not only their intellectual affinity but also their shared European cultural and political framework. Of course, it was neither a network of European citizens nor an immediate political or economic community; our continent had to experience the horrors of two world wars and division by the Iron Curtain before political leaders (hopefully) understood the need for sustained cooperation and political and economic unification.

It was, above all, a network of ideas and their disseminators—scholars from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In certain respects, it resembled the medieval network of monastic learning, yet it remained confined to a narrow, highly educated, skilled, and mobile elite. This community shared a common language which, unlike the medieval reliance on Latin, gradually shifted to French, despite unsuccessful efforts to secure the primacy of Italian. In other respects, however, it differed, as its members and their circles moved in step with the growing differentiation of science and culture, and with the gradual emancipation and development of national languages. However, their activities, networking, common interests, and shared values were sufficient to sustain a sense of Europe's cultural unity. A similar example of distinctly European unity can be found in Freemasonry, which was popular, mythologized, not to mention feared in the 19th century. Within two decades of its inception in the

early 18th century, it had spread from England to Russia. In the 19th century, Europe represented a similar network of ideas and human capital in terms of technological and economic developments. Engineers and bankers were far from being constrained by local conditions, and they and their products circulated throughout the continent. Indeed, we are both from Brno, nicknamed the ‘Manchester of Moravia’, whose textile industry thrived not only because of its favourable geographical location, but also thanks to the infusion of foreign capital and technology.

Eastern Europe as a Western construct

During the Enlightenment, it also became a popular pastime to divide Europe into western and eastern parts. Just as Europe defined itself in contrast to non-European regions, populations, languages, and customs, Eastern Europe was actively constructed by Western Europeans. Thus, even then, the idea of Eastern Europe was a peculiar blend of recognition and rejection: a recognition that the lands east of the German empire formed part of European history, coupled with a rejection of the notion that they were of the same character as Western Europe. Without explicitly speaking in terms of civilization, 18th-century authors were already drawing up a boundary which implicitly marked off that part of Europe seen as on the ascendancy from the part condemned to backwardness and perpetual imitation.

Naturally, this border was also described in geographical terms and related to various parts of Europe, such as Russia, the Balkans, and the broader area lying between the German-speaking lands and the Romanov empire. However, it was experienced even more strongly in cultural and linguistic terms. Larry Wolff recounts the story of Mozart’s journey from Vienna to Prague, during which he jokingly told his fellow travellers at the border to adopt absurd pseudo-Slavonic and pseudo-Oriental names. It is worth remembering that Prague lies not only to the north but also to the west of Vienna—highlighting the fact that the axis of ‘West’ versus ‘East’ was far more cultural and psychological than strictly geographical. The idea that Prague lies west of Vienna is still completely alien to our students from Western Europe, as our teaching experience with maps has shown. Prague, with its Slavonic population, was simply the East for Mozart, even though ‘his Praguers’ understood him so well, as he himself declared following the rapturous reception of his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* in January 1787. The idea that whatever lay mentally east of Vienna was somehow strange was not just unique to Mozart. Hugo von Hofmansthal described Vienna as the gateway to the East, a *porta orientalis*. Chancellor Metternich famously said that Asia began where Vienna’s Rennweg street ended.

Russia and Europe

However, this didn't only concern Prague. Russia undoubtedly belongs to 19th-century Europe, as since the time of Peter the Great it had been absorbing European trends, and by the 19th century it had integrated them to a degree unmatched since the era of Kievan Rus. Indeed, many contemporaries commented on the emergence of the Bolshevik regime as signalling Russia's separation from Europe. Even here, however, it was not really a separation as Marxism was a European phenomenon. The underlying ideological unity is apparent, but in Russia it assumed harsher forms, shaped by the country's earlier political traditions. As Krzysztof Pomian points out, this unity was evident in the arts, science, culture, diplomacy, and warfare. It did not, however, extend to the sphere of government, which instead reinforced its autocratic character and only undertook serious liberalizing reforms in the wake of the disastrous Russo-Japanese War and the revolution of 1905. Despite Russia's specific nature and economic and political backwardness, any serious attempt to deal with Europe in the 19th century must take it into account as an important power, which—though ideologically and politically unique—was an integral part of European events and European history. This holds true in domains as diverse as classical music and classical warfare.

The problem with Central Europe

Is the division between Western and Eastern Europe sufficient to understand the specific development of individual European regions in the 19th century? We believe that the division into West and East has always been somewhat crude and misleading, even in earlier periods—such as the Great Schism of 1054, the Reformation and subsequent religious divides, or the ideological split of the Cold War. In addition to regions that can be identified as distinctly Eastern or distinctly Western Europe, there also existed—and continues to exist—the geographically shifting yet internally coherent and distinctive region of Central Europe.

For Western Europeans in the 19th century, 'Central Europe' was understood primarily as the German empire, perhaps Switzerland, but certainly not the eastern territories of the Habsburg monarchy. This concept was established by the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, which conceived of the area of present-day Germany and the Benelux countries as a buffer zone (this sounded more elegant in the diplomatic language of the day—*Europe intermédiaire*) between France and Britain on the one side, and Russia and Austria on the other.

Similar thinking in terms of a buffer zone was also shared by many Central Europeans, but the geopolitical causes of their concerns lay elsewhere. For the Czech historian and politician František Palacký, Central Europe represented an area inhabited by smaller, mainly Slavonic nations between the German world and the Russian empire,

which could be threatened by expansion from both the West and the East. In 1848, he stated that the existence of Austria was crucial not only for its nations but for Europe as a whole, as the Habsburg monarchy was the only obstacle to Russian expansion towards the West. Even in his 1865 treatise *The Idea of the Austrian State*, in which he was far more critical of the current state of the monarchy and called for substantial reforms, Palacký expressed a similar opinion, albeit with a certain degree of scepticism.

Central European nationalism

However, 19th-century Central Europe was not only an area where federalization plans for the Habsburg monarchy, such as Palacký's, were being developed. Central Europe was also marked by internal conflicts and tensions between its nations. In the 19th century and the years leading up to World War I, the region became increasingly destabilized due to rising nationalism, chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of collective intolerance and neurosis. István Bibó wrote that the borders of states had become separated from the borders of nations in Central Europe. Of course, this also happened elsewhere; for example, the Basque Country was historically divided and is still divided today between France and two Spanish autonomous regions. We can also observe complex historical and geopolitical shifts on the borders between the German, Italian and Slovenian settlements around Trieste, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and South Tyrol. The truth is, however, that such a disconnect between the borders of states and nations is quite typical for Central Europe and, according to Bibó, leads to the "*confusion of existing national frameworks*". As we will see in the chapters on nationalism and the state, the phases of state-building and the creation of a modern nation overlapped in Central Europe, or might even be said to have occurred in reverse order. Modern nations were first of all formed during the 18th to 20th centuries, and often only gained statehood afterwards, which explains the heightened politicization of linguistic nationalism in Central Europe.

Local nationalism also acquired an economic dimension that was closely linked to the rise of economic liberalism. In the 19th century, a form of economic nationalism emerged on both macro and micro levels, manifesting itself in efforts to foster business relations primarily along national lines. A Czech entrepreneur would bank with a Czech institution, while a Slovenian worker would buy bread from a Slovenian baker. This was often regardless of the fact that the German banker had broader credit options and the German baker made cheaper bread. The stunted process of state-building in Central Europe also meant that the absence of genuine political life was often compensated for by the politicization of social life. Balls, dances, clubs and public bars served as substitutes for political engagement and as displays of patriotism. Patriotic entertainment not only compensated for the lack of political activity, it also 'sanctified' entertainment as something noble and a vehicle for

national consciousness, rather than a mere social gathering. Central Europe was not unique in this respect; across Europe, clubs and social activities often substituted for and stimulated political life under regimes hostile to constitutional government and liberal reform. A notable example is the Paris banquets preceding the revolution of 1848, where explicitly political messages were conveyed under the guise of seemingly social and non-political gatherings.

Habsburg or German

For much of the 19th century, the Habsburg monarchy and Prussia vied for dominance over the future shape of Central Europe. The conflict extended beyond the region itself, but the decisive question—whether German unification would follow the ‘Lesser German’ or ‘Greater German’ path—was crucial for Central Europe’s future. Reflecting on Czech-German coexistence at the end of the 20th century, Czech and German historians used the term ‘fateful community’, which can also be applied to the encounters and clashes between the German world and other nations in the Habsburg monarchy and elsewhere. We might recall the harsh Germanization policies imposed on the Polish minority in Prussia, or the complex situation in the Baltic provinces, which were controlled by the Russian empire yet strongly influenced by German-speaking townspeople and entrepreneurs. The Greater German solution envisioned unification under Habsburg leadership, thereby incorporating the monarchy’s other nations into the new framework. The Lesser German solution could, at least in theory, have paved the way for greater equality among the nations living under Habsburg rule. Unfortunately, instead of federalization and equality, the Habsburg lands witnessed the advance of Germanization—with its Magyarization equivalent in the Transdanubian region. The Moravian Compromise of 1905, which attempted to defuse conflict by dividing provincial institutions between Czechs and Germans and introducing segregation as a means of coexistence, came too late and was far from a universally applicable solution.

However, ideas about linking Habsburg Central Europe with the states of the German Confederation were not only motivated by nationalism or geopolitics. As early as the first half of the 19th century, German economist Friedrich List proposed the creation of a Central European economic area. However, List’s Central Europe was more German than Habsburg in terms of nationality. List’s vision encompassed the German-speaking lands, today’s Benelux countries, as well as Denmark and Switzerland. It also carried a clear foreign policy dimension: a German-led Central Europe was to ally with Great Britain, thereby creating a counterweight to both France and Russia. Similar ideas also resonated within the Habsburg monarchy, championed for instance by Karl Ludwig von Bruck, one of the key architects of the liberal economic reforms during the neo-absolutist phase of the 1850s.

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