

The Meaning of *The Czech Question* Today

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Abstract: The following study concentrates on two issues: first, on Masaryk's own reflections on and interpretation of the political and cultural crisis of the Czechs at the end of the 19th century and, secondly, on the question as to what extent *The Czech Question* still says something to generations nearing the end of the 20th century. Masaryk's reflections on the Czech crisis are closely linked to his essays on *Modern Man and Religion*. In his interpretations of the modernity crisis and the Czech question, one discovers a social dualism which, at first sight, may seem contradictory. In Masaryk's view, however, this dualism of rationality and religiously anchored humanism forms the very core of the modern European spirit. The author of the article explores Masaryk's ideas as an effort to combine moral rationality in Durkheimian terms with Weberian rationality, i.e., with *Zweckrationalität*. The most compelling moment in Masaryk's thought is his insistence upon the inseparability and complementarity of both types of rationality.

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Česká otázka (The Czech Question) is the result of two processes: firstly, of the deepening political crisis in the Czech lands in the 1880s and 1890s and secondly, of Masaryk's growing awareness of the precarious Czech situation in this period. The crisis was of an intellectual and political nature. Old political programmes, as formulated mainly by Palacký, had lost their attractiveness. The new political force, i.e. the Young Czechs' Party, was, however, neither able nor willing to formulate a clear strategy for the land, while other newly-formed parties were concerned mainly with their particularistic goals. The situation can be described as an ideological vacuum which was accompanied by a lack of reputable leaders. The fact that Thomas Garrigue Masaryk saw the crisis from two angles is also relevant both in the light of his interpretation of the intellectual history of modern Europe, and in the spirit of his basic philosophical ideas. These ideas had already been formulated in his study on suicide, in his essays on Plato, Hume and Buckle, as well as in his lectures on Comte and John Stuart Mill at the Viennese university.¹ Already, in that early period – which includes twelve years of his life in Vienna and the first years in Prague – his sociological approaches to the history of modern Europe were being shaped, as was his fundamental thesis concerning the necessity of religion in human life, and his conviction that the crisis of modern humanity is a religious one. Even by that time, he had constructed an unusual link between Comtean positivism and a deep, personally experienced and felt religion. Without understanding this polarity in Masaryk's thought, an authentic and correct interpretation of *The Czech Question* is not possible.

The following study is not aimed at analysing the political crisis in the Czech lands during the first years of Masaryk's stay in Prague, this crisis having already been

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¹) On Masaryk's activities in Vienna see [Král 1947].

analysed many times, by many authors.² Our attention is concentrated on the second process: on Masaryk's own reflections on and interpretation of the crisis. The second part of the study seeks to answer the question, to what extent – a hundred years after its publication – *The Czech Question* still says something to generations of people nearing the end of the 20th century. The study should also identify both what remains up-to-date and appealing to us and what is outdated and irrelevant.

Masaryk's Concept of the Czech Crisis and Interpretations of his Views

It is surprising how many interpretations of Masaryk's *The Czech Question* can be identified. Even his contemporaries understood him in a variety of different ways, this variation continuing today. This is partly due to Masaryk's own formulations – politically, he was a man left of the centre, and therefore did not utter radical, one-sided opinions, but rather linked elements usually considered heterogeneous or even conflicting; thus he himself stimulated various interpretations of his own ideas.

A much stronger source of this variability in interpretations, however, were and are the differing critical approaches adopted by his commentators.

Those generally sympathising with Masaryk explain the genesis of *The Czech Question* in roughly the following way. When Masaryk was preparing the book, Czech politics had been undergoing a prolonged crisis. „The time of enthusiasm for the policy of passive resistance and the fight for the renewal of the Czech state on the historical constitutional law (...) was over. Promises dating from the time of the so-called Fundamentals³ failed (...) Palacký was dead, František Ladislav Rieger – politically guided by Clam-Martinic – was at that very time compromised by so-called punctuations.⁴ There was no leader who would give the nation a new, strong political program“ [Trapl 1948: 151]. The new political movement which was gaining leadership in Czech society, i.e. the Young Czechs' Party, practised pragmatic policies without any clear goals, without any compelling ideas. The Social Democrats did not yet have an elaborated national programme for the Czech lands, and the rising agrarian movement predominantly defended the interests of their own social group alone, i.e. the interests of the farmers. Political Catholicism had an excessively narrow confession-based orientation.⁵ Masaryk, who, for a short time had been a member of the Young Czechs' Party (1891-1893), was intensely aware of this ideological vacuum. In comparison with his experience from the intellec-

²⁾ See the earlier studies by [Denis 1904, chap. 3; Srb 1901, Tobolka 1932-1937, Heidler 1914]. Among the new studies see [Křížek 1959, Garver 1978, Vojtěch 1980].

³⁾ The term „Fundamentals“ was used to describe the agreement in the year 1871 between the Austrian Government, represented by A. Schäffle, and the politicians representing the Czech Lands. The „fundamental articles“ incorporated some unimportant parts of Czech historical state laws into the new constitutional framework of the Hapsburg Empire established by the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise.

⁴⁾ F. L. Rieger, one of the representatives of the Old Czech Party, signed with the German representatives at the Czech Diet an agreement on the division of the Bohemian territory into a bilingual zone (German-Czech) and a monolingual zone (German only). The agreement was labelled „punctuations“. The victory of the Young Czechs' Party at the 1889 elections prevented, however, the implementation of the „punctuations“.

⁵⁾ At the end of 19th century, the majority of the Czech population was Catholic, but Czech Catholicism was traditionally lukewarm, differing in this respect from Polish or Slovak Catholicism. The political appeal of the Catholic parties always remained relatively low.

tually dynamic, modern and cosmopolitan Vienna⁶ of those times or from his journeys to Western Europe and the USA, he probably felt, very bitterly, the narrow-mindedness and parochial nature of Czech thought. He feared that the Czechs – regardless of the fact that the Bohemian economy was at the forefront of modernisation in the Empire – were not well-prepared for the confrontation with the newly emerging world, led by countries which were rapidly modernising their economies, their policies, as well as their *Weltanschauung*.

A lack of space does not allow us to add to this short account of the external factors in the genesis of *The Czech Question*, the views expressed by conservatives, liberals or marxists.⁷ An analysis of these critical views would itself be an interesting study. Here we can only stress that in the interpretation of the meaning and impact of *The Czech Question* – which was definitely not just a theoretical, but a deeply political work, a kind of manifesto – the critics' perspectives played a decisive role.

Today, it is useful and productive to study *The Czechs Question* by applying two interlinked steps:

1. to define and summarise the philosophy of history which Masaryk used in his analysis of Czech history and society and of Czech revivalists' and political leaders' work;
2. to consider which ideas of *The Czech Question*, after one hundred years, have retained their vigour and interest to people of our time, and which, on the other hand, we feel to be irrelevant for us and can only be considered components of a historical document.

Masaryk's Philosophy of History – The Background of His Czech Programme

Thoughtful, critical but sympathetic comments on Masaryk's philosophy either describe it as „....a synthesis of platonic mood with modern positivistic-scientific criticism“⁸ or speak about a deep discrepancy between his stress on individual responsibility – which is anchored in Christian religion whose loss is, in Masaryk's view, one of the main causes of the modern tendency to suicide – and his positivism, expressed, among others, in his agreement with many of Auguste Comte's fundamental theses.⁹ He agrees with Comte's theory of the evolution of society, with Comte's interpretation of the crisis of modernising societies, i.e. with the stress on the transition from the theological phase to the scientific phase. Masaryk accepts Comte's ideas on the emotional bases of morality and on the importance of consensus between different parts of the social system. The fact that Masaryk combined these positivist ideas with his individualistic psychology of responsibility has led many critics to blame him for syncretism or even eclecticism.

When writing *The Czech Question*, Masaryk was also, most probably, preparing his essays on modern man and religion, a work which is considered by some commentators to be one of his most original contributions to the understanding of the European

⁶) The best account of Masaryk's years in Vienna can be found in [Čapek 1928-1935]. Compare also [T. G. Masaryk... 1992].

⁷) The conservative views were best expressed by [Pekař 1929]. The liberal position in the discussion was represented mainly by [Herben 1927, Rádl 1925 and Slavík 1929]. The Marxist and left-wing criticism was expressed by Zdeněk Nejedlý in his unfinished monography, by J. L. Fischer [1926] and by František Fajfr [1982] and by Otto Urban.

⁸) See the note in [Patočka 1991: 30] where he quotes Em. Rádl.

⁹) The agreement with Auguste Comte is stressed by Jan Patočka [1991: 31].

modernity crisis. *Modern Man and Religion*¹⁰ is based on the ideas already expressed in his „*Suicide*“, published in Vienna in 1881 [Masaryk 1981]. To try to understand the hidden, less explicit meaning of *The Czech Question*, without a knowledge of this wider context of Masaryk's efforts to understand the crisis of modern man, would be a mistake.¹¹

In *Modern Man and Religion*, as well as in some parts of *The Czech Question*, one can discover a social dualism which at first sight may seem contradictory. However, one can interpret this dualism rather as testimony of Masaryk's conviction that there are two complementary pillars of European social thought: rationality and religiously anchored humanism.

That basic duality, full of tension, with which Masaryk was able to live and which he moreover used as the basis of his activities, could be – at the risk of oversimplification – expressed in the following way. On one hand, Masaryk positively appreciates individualism, individual responsibility, rationality, purposefulness, critical spirit and realism. For him, for example, „humanistic endeavours must be practical, must lead to some results.“ On the other hand, he simultaneously lays stress on solidarity, on efficacious social love, on humanity, on the emotional roots of morality and on practical, socially oriented policy. He often speaks of the „solidary organisation of all mankind“.

Some authors of the interwar period considered such a combination impossible and stressed, in their interpretations and critiques of Masaryk, that his concept of humanity is in fact one-sidedly individualistic.¹² In the short post-war period 1945-1948, when it was still possible to write freely about Masaryk and with the intention of understanding him, it was more frequently and more correctly stressed that the roots of his political theory, i.e. the idea of humanism, are a synthesis of ethical individualism and socialism [Trapl 1948: 152].

To express Masaryk's philosophy purely in narrow terms with political connotation would, however, be to underestimate the real importance of his approach. In his dualism, Masaryk touched upon the basic issues of the „Organisation des Sociétés Supérieures“, in Durkheimian language [Durkheim 1893], but also the Weberian duality between *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität* [Weber 1964] as well as Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* [Tönnies 1887]. In this respect, Masaryk was a typical member of the fin de siècle Europe, reflecting in particular the

¹⁰) Masaryk's book *Modern Man and Religion* [Masaryk 1934] was published in 1934 in Prague. It was a re-edition of his articles from the journal *Nová doba*. The articles were published in the years 1896-1898 [Masaryk 1896-1898].

¹¹) In a discussion on this article, Ernest Gellner stressed the fact that Masaryk was working on two levels: He was concerned with the crisis of modern man in general, the loss of religious faith and the transition to a technological society; he was also working on the level of the specific, small nation, which was, as it were, „incomplete“, without its own state, without a full upper class, without a fully complete high culture and so on. This, Gellner believes, to be the clue to understanding him. Masaryk finally found a position which enabled him to offer an answer applicable at both levels simultaneously. This surely is the heart of the story.

¹²) Among those authors who stressed that Masaryk's concept of humanity is individualistic number Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef L. Fischer and František Fajfr.

tensions within the Hapsburg Empire in which, as Ernest Gellner¹³ shows, the conflict between the partisans of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* was particularly acute. It should be stressed however, that in *The Czech Question* these dilemmas of modernity are not explicitly mentioned, but rather form a philosophical context from which Masaryk tried to both understand the revivalist Czech thought and to formulate his own programme.

Like Durkheim, Weber and Tönnies, Masaryk also perceived the epochal meaning of the transition of European societies from traditional, corporatist, non-contractual and relatively closed and non-mobile ones, to a modern society based on markets, industry, contractual solidarity, a developed division of labour, mobility and individualism. Masaryk moreover stressed that modernisation also means a development from theocracy to democracy. This transition also implicitly meant a shift from the revealed religion to an inner and personal one. This led him to lay stress on his reflections of the meaning of Czech history, on the Protestant tradition (Hussitism, Bohemian Brethren) as being the most positive element of Czech thought. He considers Reformation to be a step towards Enlightenment in general and the inspiration for Czech revival specifically. Reformation is also a base of modern democracy. Masaryk, however – and this is important –, did not link modernisation with secularisation and was convinced that religion would not die, even though a deep change of religion was needed.

For many contemporaries, Masaryk's own concrete concept of religion is unacceptable. However, what is still attractive is his search for a unity between what Ernest Gellner calls „rationality in the Durkheimian or generic sense“ and the „specific rationality“ of Max Weber. Masaryk would agree with Weber that the transition from societies which had been organised by the first, generic rationality and which were communitarian, into societies with the predominance of Weber's *Zweckrationalität*, is one of the greatest changes in human history. He would also consider this change as predominantly positive – being unable to see the ensuing disenchantment as clearly as Weber. He would, however, have stressed that even after such a transition, we would not manage to live with reason alone, with *Zweckrationalität* alone. This modus of rationality does not suffice to answer the questions of how to live, what to do. The deepest layer of Masaryk's thought, which was incidentally the basis of *The Czech Question*, consists of his insistence on the inseparability and complementarity of both types of rationality.

In *The Czech Question* there are many passages where documentation of this dualism can be found. Masaryk positively appreciates the rationality as well as the critical and scientific spirit of Dobrovský, and pays considerable attention to the role of science in formulating his own programme. In his opinion, Czech thought is often too vague, irresolute and weak and suffers from a kind of irrationality, an opinion he often gives voice to. On the other hand, however, he considers it a positive feature, that so many revivalists were fighting for freedom of thought. He mentions mainly Dobrovský, Kollár and Havlíček, in this context.

In *The Czech Question*, Masaryk also frequently expresses his opinion concerning philosophical as well as political realism. He shows high esteem for Karel Havlíček whom he considers „...a man of the present or rather of the future (...) modern, progressive.“ Realism is, in Masaryk's view, closely related to a practical approach to life. But

¹³) Ernest Gellner stressed this polarity in the introduction to his lecture on Wittgenstein and Malinowski delivered at CEU Prague in February 1995.

he would not have accepted being called a pragmatist. He was considered a practical idealist, stressing purposeful activity.

The other side of his rationality, which can be described as moral rationality, can also be easily documented. In the first place, it is his strong accent on humanity: „Humanity is our ultimate goal, national and historic... Humanity is the Czech Programme“ [Masaryk 1969: 240]. It should not, however, be a matter of sentimental rhetoric. In accordance with his Protestant ethic, stress is again laid on work: „Humanity is not sentimentality, but work and more work.“ [Ibid.: 220]

There are some passages in *The Czech Question* where Masaryk deals with the concepts of nation and nationality, but these are surprisingly few. He also stresses a wider responsibility and solidarity among the Czechs, unromantic, unsentimental love is often mentioned and Chelčický is taken as a model. One feature should perhaps be underlined in this context: Masaryk quotes both Karel Havlíček and his stress on the value of ordinary people's common sense very positively. He also admires such common sense in some parts of new Czech literature.

Among the categories expressing communitarian orientation in Masaryk's programme are his proposals to start social reforms. He points out that „...the social question is also a Czech question par excellence“ [Ibid.: 173]. The roots of his demands for social reforms are ethical – his calls for the improvement of the conditions of the working classes are linked to the teachings of the Bohemian Brethren. In his version, social reform should not, however, be conceived in a narrow technical sense: political life in its entirety – education, labour legislature – needs to be reformed, needs to be socialised.

What Is Still with Us and What Belongs to History

The dominant motive of Masaryk's philosophy is undoubtedly his endeavour to find answers to the following questions: how to be both modern and moral, how to do away with myths, how to assert the role of science in society, how to be practical and efficient while at the same time conserve religion and faith in God, how to live sub specie aeternitatis and, last but not least, the role for a small nation in the modern world. In *The Czech Question* Masaryk disaggregated these great issues into several smaller ones and tried to apply his results to the Czech problems of his time.

Realism versus historicism

In several parts of his book, Masaryk criticises Czech thought for its exaggerated historicism. By historicism he means the interest in the past, in history and the effort to understand the social and cultural life by explaining it genetically. He considers as legitimate the fact that historicism was strong in the writings of authors concerned with the past, i.e. P. J. Šafařík, Jan Kollár and evidently, František Palacký. But historicism was not cultivated solely by historians and archaeologists, but by many other social scientists. According to Masaryk, the Czech revival movement was, in general, heavily oriented towards history; while justified in the first phase of the revival, this approach later began to become somewhat of an obstacle. Historicism „leads in many ways to trajectories unduly conservative.“ [Ibid.: 159] The first Czech revivalist who laid stress on the need „to dive into the present and, from the understanding of reality, draw one's national strength“ [Ibid.: 159] was Karel Havlíček. Masaryk sincerely agreed with him, and it is interesting to observe what reasons he gave for his opposition to historicism. The predominance of historicism exerts an unfortunate influence on people, leads to vagueness, irresolution:

„man gets lost in the idea of flow and permanent change.“ [Ibid.: 160] Against the traditional Central European – and one may say German – historicism, according to which: „....we cannot fully understand anything human unless, among other ways of apprehension, we understand it genetically, i.e. in its growth, in its evolution“,¹⁴ he placed his realism. To use his words: „....try to understand always and everywhere the things and their core. The priority for thinking is not the evolution of things, but the things themselves ... the attention should not stop at understanding the historical change.“ [Masaryk 1969: 160] When reading his critical notes on historicism, one feels that he was aware of the difficulties and dangers of the predominantly German philosophical orientation of Czech thought at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In this respect, it was most probably his intellectual experience from Vienna university, which had, thanks to the Austrian positivists and mainly thanks to Franz Brentano, endowed him with a critical view on the predominance of historical approaches in the social sciences. Masaryk probably registered the famous *Methodenstreit* between Schmoller and Menger,¹⁵ there being no doubt that he sided with the analytical Menger. We can therefore – in accordance with today's interpretations – classify him as a member of the „Austrian school“ and of the wide stream of Austrian rationalists and analysts, to which Karl Popper, among others, belonged. Karl Popper's words of admiration for Masaryk, delivered when he received a honorary doctorate from Charles University in Prague, 1994, testify, from another side, to the affinity of Masaryk's thought and critical rationalism. Even if Masaryk's critique of historicism had other sources than Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*, (i.e. a perplexing combination of Plato's essentialism and the positivism of Auguste Comte and J. St. Mill), both men laid similar stress on the social and political dangers that historicism engenders. And this, of course, is a theme which, at least in the Czech Lands, still numbers among the most discussed.

Rationalism versus vagueness and „phantasticism“

In *The Czech Question*, Masaryk does not explicitly speak about the tension between rationalism and romanticism. It seems, however, that even when writing his book on Czech problems, he reflected, in the second plan, upon the „split of the soul into emotions (accompanied by the will) and reason“. He points especially to the rationalism of Dobrovský, Kollár and, of course, Havlíček and greatly appreciates Palacký's testament, from which he quotes with sympathy, among others: „The need is now to educate ourselves and to act in obedience to the command of cultivated reason.“ [Masaryk 1969: 139] Nevertheless, it seems to Masaryk that Czech life suffers from „its own lack of virility connected with a strange phantasticism...“ [Ibid.: 62]. There is no doubt that Masaryk lays stress on the need for rationality in political life and blames the Czechs for their tendency to romantic vagueness and fogginess. This is connected with his rejection of various kinds of myths. Contemporary commentators of his work would, however, hold against him – as did his opponents in the past – that in *The Czech Question* he himself created a new version of myth, based on an ahistoric reconstruction of Czech history. There seems to be no doubt about it nowadays. However, what remains alive, even in the

¹⁴⁾ Description of historicism as expressed by Albion Small [1924: 21].

¹⁵⁾ The exchange of views between Gustav Schmoller, who represented the historical approach in economy, and Karl Menger, who supported the analytical views, occurred in the year 1883. Masaryk's „antihistoricism“ can be compared to that of Husserl and Malinowski.

present day, is his plea for a rational, realistic and practical policy, and his rejection of irrational philosophies, one-sided subjectivism and voluntarism.

Programme or Laissez-Faire?

The title of the book was *The Czech Question*, which to an English person or anyone thinking in the English tradition, for example, may be almost incomprehensible. In fact, the title was meant to signalise the search for a reliable foundation for „...internal policies, ethical and cultural progress.“ [Trapl 1948: 166] Masaryk also characterised his intention that his book should be a general cultural programme. Implicitly, he frequently asks in his texts: Should we formulate a programme? Do we need a programme? Does modern policy need to state its goals? Is good policy merely the delimitation of the space within which spontaneous forces can be expressed? Here, Masaryk is full of tension and his position sometimes hard to understand.

When writing his book, Masaryk had not then laid stress on the concept of democracy or liberalism; at that time he did not explicitly concentrate on these problems. We know that his opinion on democracy crystallised in the years 1907-1914, more than ten years after the publication of *The Czech Question*. Masaryk's comments on liberalism, as compared with those on democracy, were, however, more frequent in *The Czech Question*, although short and unsystematic.

In spite of the non-existence of explicit and systematic views on these issues, in spite of all indistinctness, Masaryk's opinion on the relation between programming and leaving the life of the national community to drift, can be reconstructed. It is already evident that when reflecting on his book, Masaryk did not approve of the laissez faire principle in its most frequently used social and cultural meaning. This is documented by the very decision to write a book which would offer a programme. In Masaryk's opinion, the search for a general programme anchored in philosophical principles, especially in times of crisis, transition, turn, is inevitable.

Masaryk expressed his views only on the „basics“ of Czech policies, on the main goals which should be pursued and on what, in today's terms, could be called political culture. It was not his aim to define concrete political guidelines. He understood his programme as a general orientation. Only in some fields, in social and educational policies, for example, was he more explicit. However, *The Czech Question* contains in nuce two of the general ideas which were later to become the basis of his practical policies. First, the conviction that democracy is not only a state and administrative form, but a concept for life, a *Weltanschauung*, he often speaks in this context about „democraticism“. Thus, even when writing *The Czech Question* – this being by its very formulation – Masaryk leaned towards the positive concept of democracy: democracy is not only a frame, it can also be defined by certain goals.¹⁶ From what has been said equally ensues Masaryk's attitude towards the liberalism of both his times and his region. It was basically negative. This is most evident in his commentaries concerning Josef Jungmann. It is necessary to add, however, that Masaryk incorrectly identified the term liberalism with indifferentism. He was convinced that a genuine human being who really wants to achieve something, cannot – after all – be a liberal.

¹⁶⁾ Masaryk did not discuss democracy in *The Czech Question*. His positive concept of democracy was formulated later, mainly in the years 1907-1910.

Many of our present, ongoing discussions, held of course in another language and in other contexts – and perhaps with less clarity – concern issues that were raised for the first time in Masaryk's book: What should remain outside political and legal regulation and what should be regulated? What is and should be left to the free moves of market forces and what, on the contrary, should be taken out of this free-moves field? And if it is taken out, which mechanisms should decide about those parts of social life which are not subject to the market? There is no doubt that the queries Masaryk raised one hundred years ago are relevant even for contemporary Czech generations.

Czechs, Germans and Slavs

In Masaryk's political thought, few motives are repeated so often as his discussions on the relationship between Czechs and Germans. His own opinion in this respect changed – in response to European history, to the evolution of the Hapsburg monarchy and to the evolution of Czech society itself. Certain biographical facts also played a role here. His mother had attended a German school, his own schooling was predominantly German, and he studied at the university of Vienna. He was bilingual and, as a university student, asked himself whether it was possible „to belong to two nations“ [Ludwig 1935: 105].

When writing *The Czech Question*, his attitude to „Deutschstum“ (German-ness) and to Austria differed from the one he was to adopt later, i.e. after the law-suit with Lueger, after the Zagreb trial and the Friedjung affair and especially during and after WWI. His intellectual evolution from *The Czech Question* to *New Europe* [Masaryk 1920] and *The Making of a State* [Masaryk 1925] is marked by his growing nationalism.

When writing *The Czech Question*, Masaryk disagreed with Palacký, who considered our history a fight against German-ness. Masaryk admits that this is an important, but not the main, feature of Czech life. He pleads for a positive definition of the Czech programme and refuses to build the nation's identity vis-à-vis Germany. He himself documents this positive approach in the last chapter of his book on Czech problems. There he makes no mention whatsoever of the relations with Germans nor of those with the Austro Hungarian monarchy, stressing only what the Czechs should do with themselves and their own culture.

In other chapters of *The Czech Question*, Masaryk explicitly supports Palacký's „Idea of the Austrian State“ and is, in a way, more pro-Austrian than Palacký in his old age. He requires „a genuine and strong interest in the fate of Austria“ and wants the Czechs to work for the progress of a whole Austria. From Masaryk's many notes on Germany, German philosophy and literature, one can sense the attitude of a man who was thoroughly acquainted with German culture in its strength as well as in its weakness and who also knew about its decisive influence on Czech thought. At the same time, he evidently wishes to see Czech culture built up, primarily on its endogenous foundations, which he considers sufficiently strong. In his opinion, political philosophy should be more oriented on English, French and American thought. This is already the attitude of a self-confident European who has overcome his dependency on an influential neighbour. And this rational, calm, self-confident while at the same time co-operative spirit, which lays stress on universal values, is the core of Masaryk's relationship to German-ness at that time. It had not then been changed by his later, negative experience and his political engagements. It is this very spirit of *The Czech Question* which can be considered inspirational even in our times, probably more so than that of his later works.

When Masaryk was preparing his programme, he did not think intensively about the Czechs' relation to the Germans alone, but also about Slavonic culture. In Čapek's *Talks with TGM*, he explains: „The problem which interested me most at that time was Slavness. I have felt it, though vaguely and more through a kind of anticipation, since childhood.“ [Čapek 1946: 99] He studied Russian literature intensively, was interested in Poland and worked politically with Serbs and Croats. So in the 1890s, he was well acquainted with Slavonic cultures. In *The Czech Question*, he devoted more space to matters connected with Slavness, panslavism and slavophiles than to relations with the Germans and Austria. He registered Kollár's panslavism, Dobrovský's deep sympathies for Slavonic peoples and, of course, Havlíček's mistrust of Czarist Russia. At the same time, however, he stated realistically that in spite of verbal enthusiasm for the Russians, the „Germans remained our teachers“ and that the Czechs had more contacts with the Germans and the French than with the Russians. In fact, according to Masaryk, the Czechs' relationship with Slavonic people (mainly Russians) was, with the exception of some individuals or groups, rather superficial. Masaryk himself, after having thoroughly studied Russia, after having been there three times (1887, 1888, 1910) and after having visited L. N. Tolstoy, summarised his attitude towards Russia as follows: „On the whole, I brought back from Russia the same as Havlíček did: a love for the Russian people and an aversion to the official policies and to the ruling intelligentsia.“¹⁷ *The Czech Question* shows that he already had this feeling in the nineties. Masaryk also rejected the attempt of some Czech liberals – and Catholics – to „regenerate“ the Czechs by linking up with the Cyril and Methodeus traditions.¹⁸

All his studies in Germany, Austria and Russia served as a basis for political decisions and for what, in modern terms, would be called the geopolitical orientation of the Czechs. His critically expressed reflections on the Czechs' situation at the end of the 19th century were somewhat one-sidedly based on an analysis of thought and of political vision. In *The Czech Question*, we scarcely learn anything about the country's economic strength, about its dynamic development in the nineties, about the social forces and groups which influenced Czech policies. What is lacking is a Weberian type of analysis of the sociological bases of power in the Czech lands and of the political preferences of social groups. Nevertheless, Masaryk did see the consequences of the choices between different options that the Czechs faced.

After Palacký and Havlíček, Masaryk knew that the Czechs had, in fact, only three options: austroslavism, panslavism and an attachment to Germany. The last one could not, at that time, be considered. He rejected the second and rationally accepted the first, on certain assumptions, i.e. on the condition that the Czech position in the Hapsburg monarchy would improve and on the condition of the internal democratisation of the Empire. In *The Czech Question*, he strongly interceded for this option, and was therefore accused by certain parts of the public an „austrophile“. As often happens in history, none of these theoretically possible options materialised. The modernisation process of the Czech lands and, connected with it, Czech nationalism, as well as the implacable logic of

¹⁷) For the quoted attitude towards Russia as expressed by Masaryk in [Čapek 1946: 100].

¹⁸) The Czech intellectuals who supported the Cyril and Methodeus traditions – among them mainly one of the leaders of Czech liberals, i.e. Karel Sladkovský – hoped that by the revival of this tradition, a bridge to the old Slavs would be created, as well as a link to the Czech reformation representing the efforts to return to the roots of true Christianity.

the political philosophy that Masaryk himself had adopted, i.e. left-wing liberal democratism, made him accept, shortly before WW1, a fourth option. The outbreak of the war made him fight for it: the aim was to create an independent Czech state, which would become, according to his later reflections (1915), part of a new Central-European federation of free nation states. The geopolitical pillar of *The Czech Question*, i.e. Austroslavism, had collapsed, but he laid more stress on the other pillar, the one that remained: to form a modern Czech society based on western political philosophy. Masaryk and his collaborators were compelled to quickly build up a new geopolitical structure, based primarily on the relationships to France and, secondarily, to Great Britain. Masaryk overestimated the stability of this anchorage as well as the West's interest in Central Europe.

Today the situation is different, but in the approach to our geopolitics, we can exploit Masaryk's experiences. Again, there are several options, some of which are of course new:

- 1) joining the European Union, either with an acceptance of the decisive influence of Germany on Czech Republic or with the cultivation of relationships between the Czech Republic and other EU members;
- 2) forming a looser political union in Central Europe;
- 3) trying the „Norwegian“ way. In the game there is, of course, a fourth option which is not a Czech choice but one, which de facto Czech politics have to face: i.e. the building up of a new cordon sanitaire between the „Fortress Europe“ and the unorganised East of the continent. That forces exist in Europe which support such a solution cannot be doubted. Masaryk's realism, linked with a positive vision, are a useful compass when reflecting on the new situation of the country. In its method, approach and clarity of views, *The Czech Question* thus remains inspirational even today.

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