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The unfeasibility of building a political nation in Czechoslovakia 1918–1939. A case study of Milan Hodža

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Abstract: *The author analyses Milan Hodža's political thoughts on nationalism. The point of departure is the author's critique of the concept of political nationhood as developed in the current scholarship on Czechoslovakism vis-à-vis the author's approach based on the concept of particularism versus universalism. This enables the author to claim that the ambiguities of Hodža's thoughts arise from Hodža's oscillation between loyalty to Czechoslovakism and the Slovak identity.*

Key words: *political nationhood, particularism, universalism, Czechoslovakism, Slovak nation*

1. Introduction

The Preamble of the Constitution explicitly declares the existence of a Czechoslovak nation: "We, the Czechoslovak nation…" (Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity 1998: 110), supported also by a constitutional statement on the existence of the Czechoslovak language. It is evident that the concept of Czechoslovakism postulates the indivisibility of the nation it stands for. However, the statement leaves open the definition of that nation. This issue was the subject of contemporary political and scholarly elaborations of Czechoslovakism evolving into numerous interpretations mutually and internally in friction and contradicting.

Therefore Czechoslovakism represents a political doctrine, along with the ideas and political practices supporting the indivisibility of the titular nation. Among the most influential of these ideas were concepts interpreting Czechoslovakism as a project of political nationhood.

Conceptualisations of a political Czechoslovak nation focus almost exclusively on Czech-Slovak relations, with little concern for ethnic minorities which are of no lesser importance for the utilization of political nationhood. Yet these are not only excluded from the contemporary projects for political Czechoslovakism, but the current scholarship blatantly follows the same conceptual fallacy, avoiding them in analyses of Czechoslovakism while focusing on Czech and Slovak relations as a basis for political nationhood.

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From the perspective of Czech and Slovak relations, the project of nation-building in Czechoslovakia 1918-1939 is an example of building of the imagined community on two levels; one, formation on the level of the respective nations constituting the state, another promulgated by the state. Both of them are overlapping. Their mutual interaction and experience is unprecedented as a history of two constituent nations determining their coexistence for the rest of the existence of Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century.

The mutual competition between two national ideas of a Czechoslovak and a Slovak nation markedly characterize the political thoughts of Milan Hodža. I will argue that ambiguities of Hodža's views on projecting the desired national arrangements, though politically pragmatic, not only prevent him from clearly formulating and defining the mutual relations of the two nations, but more importantly, these ambiguities show the practical impossibility of building a political Czechoslovak nation even if we narrow the analysis down exclusively to mutual Czech and Slovak relations.

I will analyze Hodža's views on the basis of the universalism-particularism dichotomy. Particularism in general considers the specific aspects of belonging to a specific national community and adherence to fundamental and distinguishing values of this community, while the universalistic perspective emphasizes general aspects of belonging, a sharing of things in common, for example, moral values or ideals above the national level of a respective nation.

Before the main analysis, I will argue against other existing dichotomies utilized in the current scholarship on Czechoslovakism that indicate or directly claim the existence of or efforts towards projecting political nationhood, at least in the early years of Czechoslovakia. This approach originates in conceptual uncertainties of contemporary politicians or commentators adhering to political Czechoslovakism, such as Hodža himself. I will deal with this in the following chapter.

2. Conceptual aspects of the particularism-universalism dichotomy

2.1. Conceptual interpretation of a doctrine of Czechoslovakism

There is a fundamental misinterpretation of the nature of the doctrine of Czechoslovakism in the current scholarship (Pekník 2000; Kováč 1997; Bakoš 1994, 1995; Broklová 1993) emphasizing the existence of or endeavours to project a model of political nationhood. Therefore, before embarking on a critique of existing dichotomies justifying projecting of a political Czechoslovak nation and presenting my concept of the universalism-

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particularism dichotomy, I will identify major conceptual flaws in the current scholarship on Czechoslovakism.

The fundamental misinterpretation of Czechoslovakism as the political doctrine of a respective nation-state is the accentuation of the historical continuation of the idea of Czechoslovakism into its ideological expression in Czechoslovakia 1918–1939. The rise of Czechoslovakia is from this perspective a logical continuation and advancement of existing Czechoslovak ties, yet these ties are by definition predominantly cultural. (Bartlová 2000: 587)

This argument enables scholars to claim that Czechoslovakism is initially projected on the idea of political nationhood, eventually transforming into the detrimental ethnic variant. This transformation is perceived as the failure of political elites to take advantage of the national euphoria in the early days of the Republic and build Czechoslovakism on the foundations of a political/civic concept rather than one of ethnic nationhood. There is also a so-called betrayal argument charging Slovak politicians with disloyalty to Slovak individuality, which they allegedly sacrificed for the sake of their careers. These Slovak politicians are commonly and indiscriminately labelled as centralists. (Bakoš 1994, 1995) I will argue also against this misinterpretation**.**

The point of departure of my critique is my accentuation of the rise of Czechoslovakia with its ethnic composition as an unexpected and unprecedented outcome of World War I. The other is the historical absence of the idea of a Czechoslovak nation, unless we count mutual cultural ties, which from the perspective of the new state have a symbolic character, but which nevertheless are salient for ideological justification of a central doctrine of Czechoslovakism in search of its historical legitimacy.

Therefore I also emphasize 1918 as a new starting point in terms of the political nature of Czech and Slovak relations, with unpredictable prospects for development, rather than a natural evolution toward a political Czechoslovak nation grounded on pre-existing cultural ties. Following this path in interpreting Czechoslovakism is erroneous. This is the major conceptual drawback of the current scholarship.

Consequently, 'ethnicized' Czechoslovakism is criticised for its failure to recognize the Slovak national individuality. Thus, the feasibility of making a political nation is pre-empted by a positive justification of Slovak individuality. Also taken from this perspective, politically understandable, yet conceptually erroneous, are Hodža's political views on the feasibility of a political Czechoslovak nation.

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2.2. Conceptualising dichotomies as an analytical tool

The ethnic-civic dichotomisation becomes an influential analytical tool for the interpretation of Czechoslovakism. Naturally, in Czechoslovakia, built from constituent nations with such unequal historical, political, social, and intellectual development, existing national divisions stimulate scholars to explain national arrangements via elaborate distinctions.

Before I present my dichotomy, I will argue against the ethnic-civic (political) dichotomy. In the context of this paper, the civic/political represents Czechoslovakism attempting to exceed and unify the local Czech and Slovak identities, while the ethnic stands for the Slovak individuality resisting efforts to challenge it. At the same time the Slovak individuality strives for its political manifestation. Beside the ethnic-civic dichotomy, there are two other related variants of this dichotomy: the traditionalism-modernism dichotomy and the nationalism-patriotism dichotomy. All of these dichotomies are utilized to justify of the concept of a Czechoslovak political nation, or for decrying its absence.

The ethnic-civic dichotomy is represented by Czechoslovakism per se. As argued before, I do not think that Czechoslovakia was initially built on the idea of a political nation. Considering 'the ethnic minority factor', ethnic justification in the doctrine of Czechoslovakism unequivocally prevails. Such an idea of a political nation would consider only Czechs and Slovaks (Šedivý 2000: 565). Excluding minorities would undermine the seriousness of this national project, thus also the use of the ethnic-civic dichotomy. This fact is not taken seriously by most of the current scholarship.

The second variant, the modernism-traditionalism dichotomy, identifies two intellectual currents in the Slovak national movement at the end of the nineteenth century. One is labelled as progressive or modern, represented by Masaryk and his Slovak followers including Milan Hodža. Modernists, representing 'Westernisation', strive for a recreated national image free of stringent ethnic ties.[2] The other is conservative or traditionalist, representing continuity with the nineteenth century romantic national ideal grounded on ethnicity, revolving around the so called the Martin centre[3] represented notably by writer Svetozár Hurban Vojanský, then later in Czechoslovakia by the Slovak autonomist movement.

[2] This primarily means the overcoming of a romanticized and old-fashioned national ideal with a strong Russophile orientation.

[3] Martin is a Central Slovak town associated with some of the important events and personalities of the nineteenth-century national emancipation process.

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It seems that, for Bakoš, the origins of Czechoslovakism are in fact a modern response to traditionalist views on nation-building processes in Central Europe. There are three problems with this notion. Firstly, Czechoslovakism as a modern national response does not explain the eventual synthesis of modernist and traditionalist features in political practices during the entire existence of Czechoslovakia. In other words, why was it that some Slovak politicians and intellectuals with Czechoslovakist attitudes, and devoted 'Masarykists' in the pre-Czechoslovak era, were susceptible to becoming not only aware of their own separate Slovak individuality, but were prepared to recognize it politically. This is likely to challenge Czechoslovak indivisibility. Certainly, Milan Hodža is such an example. Here the interpretation of the state doctrine of Czechoslovakism evolving naturally from previous cultural interaction between Czechs and Slovaks does not work.

Secondly, the dichotomy, as initially applied to the pre-Czechoslovak era, becomes blurred in Czechoslovakia and it is difficult to recognize respective agents of the dichotomy, since their roles are changing in the dynamic environment of the new state. Those identified as modernists in the pre-Czechoslovak era are no longer seen as bearers of progressive national ideas, and they are criticized and rejected by successive political generations, with the possible exception of Milan Hodža.

Thirdly, the fact that Czechoslovakist concepts challenge the tradition of the romanticized ideal of the Slovak nation does not make them inevitably modern. These concepts use very similar means for projecting a desired national image such as language, culture, or cult of ancestors. Thus, the myth of ethnic descent epitomised in the myth of Great Moravia as the first nation-state is a factor in both Czechoslovakist theories (Galandauer: 2000: 539) and Hodža[4], and the political legitimization of the rise of the Slovak state, the Nazi puppet state, in 1939.

The second variant of the ethnic-civic dichotomy is the patriotism-nationalism dichotomy. Here the ethnic stands for 'nationalism' and it (fiercely) demands ethnic homogeneity while the civic, called 'patriotism', is defined as love of country, expressis verbis; love of the republic embodied in its institutions guaranteeing all kinds of liberties. Obligations to a country may be on occasion preceded by obligations to humanity that give patriotism a more universalistic character.

However, a major problem of this variant is its utilisation in political practice. Here it is extremely difficult to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism, because they often do not

[4] Thus for example Edvard Beneš, minister of foreign affairs and future president, in 1918 traces the roots of the Czechoslovak nation back to sixth century.

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bear essentially ideal attributes: the harmlessness of the former and the irreconcilable ferocity of the latter. Nationalism and patriotism are used interchangeably and their agendas may be as well.

It is clear that the ethnic-civic dichotomy and its variants by no means justify the concept of a Czechoslovak political nation. Moreover, as Robert Fine points out, both the ethnic and civic concepts are manifestations of nationalism which is a fickle beast, and as such it imposes demands for exclusivity and uniqueness. (Mortimer 1999: 154) This fact is completely avoided by the current scholarship on Czechoslovakism.

Furthermore, in my case study on Milan Hodža and on the basis of the particularism-universalism dichotomy, I will demonstrate the practical unfeasibility of building a political nationhood on Czechoslovakism.

2.3. Conceptual aspects of the particularism-universalism dichotomy

There are basically two models of the dichotomy particularism-universalism. In the first model, allegiance to universal values of mankind is valued above particularistic membership in a national community. Here nationalism strives for more a universalistic expression, as it exceeds a national community. This model is championed by Mazzini.

In the second model, the dichotomy functions at the national community level. In this second type, one national community is perceived as having achieved (or having a tangible promise of achieving) an advanced level of organization, while there is also a less developed or entirely underdeveloped national community.[5] Membership, or its refusal, in a supposedly advanced community gains a utilitarian character. Accessing it brings some benefits as opposed to prioritizing membership in a perceivably marginalized group which does not bring sufficient benefits. This model can be found in Mill's Considerations on representative government.

Czechoslovakism represents in Mill's model a doctrine of an advanced national community which provides a primary national and political bond also enabling access to and careers in state institutions and bodies of the state as well as protection for members of a Czechoslovak national community.[6] So a national identity is created via political loyalty.

Evidently, the second model of the particularism-universalism dichotomy also offers two options: utilitarian accommodation to an advanced national community (Czechoslovakism), or

[5] Indeed, this is a very subjective judgment characterized much less by empirical evidence and more as a tool for political struggles.

[6] Indeed, members of ethnic minorities are not excluded from state guaranteed protection even though they are not considered to be within the project of a political Czechoslovak nation.

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prioritizing the ties of a community perceived to be marginalized (a Slovak identity). In Hodža's concept the two overlap, with a continuous shift towards the latter.

Importantly, the community origin of the second model also implies that Czechoslovakism, though presented as a political nation devoid of the primacy of ethnicity,[7] is first of all a national project. Consequently, it can not be devoid of the symptoms of nationalism such as demands for national exclusivity and uniqueness.

The particularistic-universalistic dichotomy shows the ambiguities and shifts of Hodža's construction of Czechoslovak unity. Partially, it also attempts to draw motives of action behind Hodža's construction which may also help to show his struggling ambitions. Since his stances, regardless of envisioned ideas are conditioned by the hectic political environment and as such they are subjected to frequent political changes which ambitious Hodža can not overlook.

Furthermore, despite the declared historical continuity, Hodža's theorizing on political Czechoslovakism evolves rather from a vacuum as a result of the unexpected and unprecedented rise of Czechoslovakia rather than from pre-existing concepts or plans. Therefore the dichotomy emphasizes political change or oscillation along with theoretical ambivalence rather than any historical or political continuation of pre-existing models. It emphasizes 1918 as a new starting point with an unpredictable course of development.

3. Milan Hodža. From political universalism to national particularism

Milan Hodža was indisputably the most dominant and influential Slovak politician during the entire existence of inter-war Czechoslovakia, and perhaps the most pronounced advocate of political Czechoslovakism. His wide range of activities as well as his views as leader of the Agrarian party and Prime Minister 1935–1938 he described in his numerous articles and studies, and one book.

In his book "The Czechoslovak Split" (Československý rozkol), Hodža stresses primarily political motives for the language split in the nineteenth century. He asserts that behind the emergence of a codified Slovak language, *de facto* disrupting Czechoslovak political and cultural unity, is the idea of a distinctive Slovak nation (Hodža 1920: 8-9). As Hodža explains, this is a consequence of national conditions in Upper Hungary. The Slovak representation, on one hand, strives to manifest the Slovak individuality; on the other, it also expresses the continuous loyalty to *natio Hungarica*.

[7] Examples of the ethnic variant of Czechoslovakism are works of Albert Pražák, Václav Chaloupecký and Emanuel Chalupný.

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What is, however, more intriguing than the analysis of the split is that Hodža does not present any tangible example of political aspects of Czechoslovak unity. In fact, his use of the term political unity is entirely unclear, since in reality the Czechoslovak political unity was virtually non-existent (Hodža 1920: 323). Yet, Hodža contemplates the Czechoslovak unity as a potentially new source of identity substituting for political loyalty to *natio Hungarica*. Moreover, the ideological emphasis on the political character of Czechoslovak ties, dating back to the pre-war period, appears only after the rise of Czechoslovakia. Previously, Czechoslovak unity was defined culturally, with the latent potential to bring about political changes. This conceptual shift shows Hodža's endeavours to identify and to build foundations of a national ideology on the basis of a political unity historically legitimized. From the perspective of desired national arrangements in Czechoslovakia, it is crucial just how far the ideal of the political unity of the Czechoslovak nation reaches, and where it should be constrained by a Slovak distinctiveness. Hodža finds a solution for this problem, and for his political career, in pragmatic politics; in other words, in a search for compromise. Now I will deal with this in detail.

What in the beginning appears to be a critique of the split is eventually accepted as a historical necessity, bringing into existence the language as an expression of a distinctive culture. (Hodža 1920: 400) Evidently, it is not merely Hodža's acceptance of compelling arguments for the split, but a pragmatic *raison d'être*. By describing Štúr's internal struggle between a politician and scholar, in which the former always prevails, Hodža simply implies that political determinants must be seriously considered. The maxim defining politics as the art of the possible within a political setting thus determine Hodža's activities.[8] Despite his personal ambition to stand at the forefront of Slovak politicians offering and shaping a desired national agenda, his primary strategy is permanent access to political power. Notably this brings him to support the merger of the Slovak and Czech agrarians in 1921 despite his previous endeavours to reach a political agreement with the Ľudaks, for whom autonomy was the ultimate goal. I assume that the book is his detailed historical elaboration, his implicit justification of his actual political goals. This, however, by no means proves Hodža's adherence to Prague centralism.

[8] This is the reason for historical acceptance of the split. National distinctiveness and its acceptance is an outcome of the rational evaluation of circumstances in case of both Štúr in the nineteenth and Hodža in the twentieth century. National affinity is therefore rationally based. The similarity in argument between Masaryk and Hodža is rather unintentional, as Masaryk derives it from morality, whereas Hodža pragmatically calculates potential gains and losses. This should become clearer in the course of the analysis.

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For Hodža, the universalist idea of Czechoslovak cultural and political unity historically precedes Slovak particularism, although he gradually shifts towards more particularist stances. While adherence to universalist political and cultural Czechoslovak unity is essential for political gains, it is also a paramount moral good, yet only achievable via membership in a particularistic Slovak nation defined by its culture, notably language.[9]

Hodža never undermines the concept of Czechoslovak political unity. Yet, this universal Czechoslovak unity is pre-conditioned by Slovak particularism. This strategy is best understood in terms of his political activities, marked by his constant endeavours to find a balance between the overall improvement of Slovakia, which inevitably requires the political recognition of the Slovak individuality, and the necessity for Czechoslovak political unity.

The main principles of his theory intrinsically defining his political activities are pragmatism and anti-centralism. Admittedly, his anti-centralism, though evident in the beginnings of Hodža's political career in Czechoslovakia, evolved much slower, in the context of the determining political environment.

The specific conditions of pre-war Slovak politics, its weakness and incapacity to act independently and offer any tangible national prospects, required tight cooperation with the Czechs, yet primarily on a cultural level. On the other hand, this unity did not replace political loyalty to Austria-Hungary. Hodža speculates in the 1910s that Czechoslovak mutuality (vzájomnosť) may even bring about political changes. In fact, it is an appeal to the Hungarian government to change its nationality policies. (Hodža 1920: 170-172) It does not amount to ever symbolic defiance. The perpetuation of politically-defined Czech and Slovak relations had yet not become part of the political agenda of the day, and the supremacy of political loyalty to *Natio Hungarica* is not to be forgotten.

The rise of the new nation-state of Czechoslovakia also marked the beginning of 'Slovak politics', and presented new challenges for Hodža's previous views. The task that accompanied the birth of the new state was to define the arrangements of coexistence between the two nations, in the absence of any previous experience of the kind. Unlike Masaryk's universalist theory, considerably detached from daily politics and its national challenges, Hodža's account is

[9] Hodža's use of the term culture is somewhat unclear, since it seems to be equal parts of both universalistic as well as particularistic concepts of nationalism. Evidently he struggles in the very early phase of the existence of the Republic with the necessity for a tighter unity. This can be also seen in the context of the merger with the Czech agrarians. The emphasis on Slovak cultural particularism, which later occurs more frequently, would not have been tactically wise, and entirely inconsistent with overall Hodža's pragmatic stances.

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more concerned about the particularistic aspects distinguishing the cultures of the two nations. Moreover, Hodža frequently faces national issues, which Masaryk, from his presidential perspective[10], could afford to overlook or even reject. While Masaryk appeals primarily to reason, Hodža pragmatically accentuates emotionality together with reason. (Hodža 1920: 276) As Peroutka brilliantly states, unlike other representatives of the Slovak political youth who turned into theorizing and moralizing realists under the influence of Masaryk, Hodža remains truly realistic. (Peroutka 1991: 244) After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, Hodža was confronted with two national challenges. One lies in the founding of Czechoslovakia and subsequent efforts to build a common Czech and Slovak national bond that would define political loyalty. The other is his conviction of the necessity for political recognition of Slovak individuality.

Even though Hodža bases political unity on his vaguely expressed pre-war views on the Czechoslovak cultural unity, there is an interesting implicit explanation. Culturally, a new state is an institutionalization and a confirmation of an existing cultural *status quo*. The entire historical development of Czechoslovak cultural mutuality, though not consciously driven towards some political institutionalization, at least proved its coherence, and therefore it was to be freely manifested in the new state. Hodža, as a pragmatic politician fully aware of existing national tensions, realized the long-term impossibility of such argumentation, which downplays the national differences between the two nations. Certainly, cultural mutuality does mean cultural sameness. This view is consistent with the perception of Czechoslovakia among Czech political elites, but the Slovak political spectrum varied greatly in its views. At the same time, this was the view that enabled a political construction of the Czechoslovak language[11] to come into existence. Unintentionally, and contrary to his particularistic dedication to Slovak individuality, yet in line with his theoretical ambiguities on cultural mutuality, Hodža is in theory helping 'Czechoslovakeness' to penetrate into the sphere which he would mainly rather avoid. Thus the ambiguity of his emphasis on the continuation of cultural ties has serious political implications.

As I will show later, Hodža's oscillation between the inevitability of a universalist, yet more moderate expression of the Czechoslovak political and cultural unity on one hand, and the recognition of the Slovak individuality on the other, is reflected in his activities as an politician in the agrarian party and his endeavours towards the reform of public administration. On one side, the idea of a political nation unifying particularistic national communities at a universalist political

[10] However, it should be noted again that Masaryk writes neither about 'Czechoslovakism' nor, as a president, almost anything regarding nationalism.

[11] Indeed, this is merely a constitutional expression without any demonstrated effort to exceed its legal formulation.

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level; on the other, the call for Slovaks to remain true Slovaks (Hodža 1934: 1973); these ideas were propounded by Hodža with ever-greater insistence over the years as he found more and more people willing to listen to them. A new generation of political youth from across the entire political spectrum in Slovakia demanded a redefinition of Czech and Slovak relations. This demand unified the young political community in Slovakia regardless of their mutual ideological aversions.

By challenging the idea of Czechoslovak national unity in the early 1930s, the Slovak agrarians-party youth was questioning one of the party's sacred principles. Hodža expresses his understanding for these concerns; however, he can not identify himself with anti-Czechoslovak stances. (Hodža 1934: 236-238) In general, centralism is considered the most visible symbol of Czechoslovak unity, and this enjoyed no support from a generation raised in Czechoslovak schools by Czech professors. There was a widespread demand for the recognition of national and cultural distinctiveness between both nations. Such disapproval justified Hodža's long-term efforts and struggles within the party to challenge centralism, which he considered no less dangerous for Czechoslovak political unity than the legislative autonomy demanded by autonomists. At the time Hodža was, perhaps, the only major agrarian politician enjoying widespread respect among the Slovak Agrarian youth. (Holzer 1992: 558)

In regard to self-governance, after 1920 Hodža systematically endeavoured to present the project of administrative or local autonomy for Slovakia as a check onto state centralism and Slovak separatism.[12] Only thus can the idea of Czechoslovak unity be feasible. Therefore, the specific economic, social, and cultural problems in Slovakia require institutionalized self-governance. The 1923 law on counties was only the beginning of hopes for decentralization, and reform of public administration became an essential part of Hodža's political agenda (Šuchová 204: 105).

Intriguingly enough, unlike his cautiously-expressed considerations on nationalism during the early days of the Republic, in his anti-centralistic positions Hodža often embraces rhetoric quite similar to that of the autonomist Ľudaks, who demanded recognition of the nationality principle in public administration. Hodža is thus, perhaps, the only politician from the centralist parties to make such demands as early as 1921.[13] On one hand, Hodža's reservations towards the extreme autonomists, and his hesitating acceptance of the merger with the Czech centralist agrarians, induced him to reluctantly accept the Party's ideological line. On the other hand, his

[12]According to Hodža, legislative autonomy is the equivalent of separatism, or at least eventually results in it.

[13] Indeed, Hodža does not deny the inevitability of the Czech intellectual support for Slovakia.

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concern and personal ambitions for improving conditions in Slovakia very soon separated him from the centralist core of the party, as well as Slovak centralists in the other parties.

The 1928 law on the provinces raised new expectations for effective local government.[14] In practice it severely restricted local autonomy, and its bureaucratic apparatus was subordinated to the central government. Due to rising pressures from centralists, including those in the agrarian party, Hodža did not directly contribute to the drafting of the law as much as he has wished. His disappointment seems to have been reflected in terse, occasional criticism of the legislation by a committed man who would otherwise have rapturously welcomed these changes.

Speaking out against cultural centralism and insinuating that Slovakia was being exploited despite its strategic geopolitical position, Hodža clearly radicalizes his rhetoric in the 1930s, notably in his reference to the penetration of 'Czechizms' into the Slovak language. (Hodža 1934: 233-234) Yet, he remains firm in his adherence to Czechoslovak political unity, without placing much emphasis on its cultural bonds. The importance of universalistic Czechoslovak ties was waning. The conditions of political struggle, and the temporary political failures and falls[15] of this ambitious politician, determined his views and shifted him markedly towards more nationalistic stances. Yet Hodža does not abandon the overall universalist obligation. Thus the primacy of the political bond of a universalistic Czechoslovak unity linking together the particularist identities of the two nations remains alive in Hodža's speeches. The worsening situation in Central Europe in the mid-1930s made any change towards a more self-governing model in Slovakia practically unfeasible. Even so, Hodža, in a speech on nationality policy 1937, expressed satisfaction with the uplifting of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia in practically all spheres of life. (Hodža 1938:26) But rising pressure from the autonomists demonstrated the contrary, which Hodža himself realized in the case of the unfinished reform of public administration. The project of the Czechoslovak political nation faded only with the forced disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1939. However, in terms of Hodža's concept and his political endeavours it was never realized.

4. Conclusion

Ivan Dérer, Hodža's ideological rival from the socialist camp, at same time one of the most devoted Slovak centralist politicians, tellingly summarizes Hodža's political activities: "he

[14] Abolished counties were replaced by four provinces with their own assemblies; two thirds of their members were elected and one third appointed by the government.

[15] Hodža was compelled to withdraw from a political life in the end of 1920s after losing his position in the party, but he achieved the climax of his career as prime minister in the period 1935–1938.

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[Hodža] is neither an autonomist nor a separatist… yet he presented them with the provisional law which they never seriously considered." (Dérer 1928: 226) Dérer unambiguously grasped the ambiguity of Hodža's position. Particularistic Slovak ties oblige him to defend these interests, while cautiously trying to avoid endangering his political career, and remaining loyal to the universalistic concept of political Czechoslovak unity. His long-term efforts at justification of his standpoints determined his political stances. He never renounces universal Czechoslovak ties. But his particularistic Slovak attachments forced him into compromises in order to secure his career prospects, occasionally abetting the particularistic Slovak allegiance (unfinished reform of public administration, for example). On the other hand, his political failures gradually shifted him towards less emotional manifestations of his insulted particularistic believes. However, the unfeasibility of building a political Czechoslovak nation should be apparent already in the ambiguous attempt to define it on the basis of the previous Czech and Slovak cultural interaction, and the inability to redefine it and utilise it accordingly in political practice.

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