Miroslav Hroch and Blanka Ríchová

How Much Does State Formation Depend on Nationalism?

If we would observe the relationship between state formation and nationalism from the perspective of 1918, we could easily answer this question using the Gellnerian concept of nationalism as a 'political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.[1] From this perspective, state formation was a product of successful nationalist endeavours, the result of a gradual growth in the call for political self-determination. Nevertheless, such a perspective would be teleological: we cannot base historical explanation simply on a retrospective account.

National Movements

Naturally, the emergence of national states since the beginning of the 20th century has to be observed as a consequence of a very long formative process, which entered into its second, decisive stage in most cases at the threshold of a successful modernization (i.e. between 1780 and 1870). The starting point of this development was, however, not primarily the result of emerging 'nationalism', but an answer to a strongly differentiated situation of ethno-national developments during the first (medieval and early modern) stage of the nation-forming process.[2]

At the end of this stage, there existed in Europe only eight established state-nations, all of them having their 'own' state, ruled by ethnically homogeneous elites (including an aristocracy and an emerging industrial bourgeoisie) and having a highly developed national culture and literary language: English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Danish, Swedish. At the same time, we find more than twenty ethnic groups spread all across the territory of Europe. They usually occupied (inhabited) a compact territory but lacked their 'own' nobility, political autonomy, or continuous tradition of a literary language. This situation of a 'non-dominant ethnic group' was typical for these multi-ethnic empires in Central and Eastern Europe: the Habsburg monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, and Tsarist Russia. Nevertheless, it can also be analogically observed in the Spanish, Danish, and even British multi-ethnic empires.

The crisis of old identities concerned not only the medieval state-nations, but also the non-dominant ethnic groups. At some point, a group of intellectuals conceived their identity as a national one and started organized endeavours to achieve all the attributes of a full-fledged nation. These endeavours emerged under different conditions and with different timing, but they had something in common: the development from non-dominant ethnic groups toward the modern nation proceeded as a national

movement, i.e. as organized endeavours to achieve all the attributes of a full-fledged nation.

Even if the goals of each national movement had some specificity, they can be grouped into three sets of demands corresponding to the three main deficits which made the difference between the non-dominant ethnic group and the established state-nation:

1. The linguistic and cultural program, demanding equal rights for the new national language and trying to improve the national high culture, corresponded to the underdeveloped or non-existent national language and culture.

2. The governance of the foreign (i.e. ethnically different) ruling class was to be replaced by a social program that demanded the abolition of old feudal privileges and strove to achieve a full social structure for the new nation-to-be.

3. The absence of statehood and of autonomous self-administration was registered by the political program demanding political and civic rights for all members of the non-dominant ethnic group and some form of participation and autonomy.

The relative priority, combination and timing of these three sets of demands varies in each case. During the phase of national agitation (Phase B), the majority of national movements in Central and Eastern Europe placed high priority on their linguistic and cultural programs. Only the Poles, Greeks and Serbs saw their main goal in achieving political independence like that of the Irish and Norwegians in the West. These national movements differed from the majority of national movements in one very important way: their non-dominant ethnic group also included the ruling classes – landlords and educated elites in the Polish case, rich merchants and senior bureaucrats in the Greek and Norwegian cases, etc.

In contrast to this, national movements with overriding linguistic demands during their Phase B were almost always based on a non-dominant ethnic group with an incomplete social structure (that is, without their 'own' ruling classes). They formulated political goals only later, under conditions of mass movement, in their Phase C. Their political demands can be grouped into three categories:

1. The political program was at the lowest level substituted by scientific and cultural activities, describing historical borders, ethnic differences, demanding more social justice for the given ethnic territory or population, organizing the first meeting of the members of the ethnic group at choir festivals, theater performances, dancing balls, etc.

2. Demands for national participation, first in local (municipal) self-administration, and later, under constitutional regimes: national leaders demanded fair represenation in regional and central legislatures. This was possible after 1860 in the Habsburg monarchy, and after 1905 in Russia, though it was never possible under Ottoman rule.

In those cases where the non-dominant ethnic group consisted of lower and lower-middle classes, the demand for participation was sooner or later accompanied by the demand for a democratic electoral system. This seemed to be the only way to achieve genuine participation under conditions of an incomplete social structure. This relationship is, of course, not an absolute one. However, it can be illustrated by comparing the relevance of democratic ideology among Polish or Magyar national leaders and their Czech or Estonian counterparts.

A further important characteristic was determined by the inclusion of linguistic demands in the political program. Participation became a battleground for the interests

of the national language in the school curricula and in public administration.

3. Participation, even when combined with some elements of democracy, sooner or later came to be seen as insufficient. Having no capability of influencing central decision-making through participation, national leaders sought to minimalize the power of the center and to gain more space for independent decision-making. The best possible way to achieve this seemed to be by enhancement of shared national identity through increased autonomy of 'their' territory. There were two ways to define the national territory: by ethnic criteria or by historical borders. The choice depended on historical tradition, on what was offered to different national movements; to Slovenes, Estonians, Latvians on one side, to Czechs, Croatians, and Magyars on the other.

Until World War I, both in Austro-Hungary and in Russia, the demand for autonomy remained most radical. We do not find significant political groupings and personalities demanding full independence for their nations. Why was the development on the territory of the Ottoman Empire different? The prioritized call for self-determination joined with violent methods can be explained as a result of three combined circumstances:

1. Ottoman dominance was introduced by conquest and based on force, while Habsburg rule was legalized by 'contracts' and 'constitutions', similar to the Tsarist rule in Finland, the Baltics and Ukraine (note here the different ways of Tsarist conquest of the Caucasus where Russian rule more closely resembled the Ottoman style and the reaction of the local population was similar to that of the Balkans).

2. The difference between the ruling elite and the local population was primarily based not on linguistic, but on religious differences.

3. The non-dominant ethnic group kept a 'full' social structure corresponding to the given, very low level of economic development achieved at the time of first insurgences. (The only West European national movement which used similar violent methods and prioritized political self-determination was the Irish, where all three characteristics, mentioned above, could also be observed.)

National Self-Determination

The great change came as a result of World War I and the October revolution in Russia. Even though some national movements did not achieve full independence at this point (Croatians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Ukrainians), the majority of them did. The emergence of new states is at least understandable if we take into account the interests of Great Powers (and in some cases, such as that of the Baltic states, independence was the only viable alternative). What is surprising is the fact that this suddenly achieved independence was accepted everywhere with enthusiasm – at least if one believes the accounts given by national historiographies. Naturally, these accounts can sometimes be viewed with scepticism. However, there is one change which can be accepted without doubt – from this time on, independence became the generally accepted and respected aim of most of the successful national movements. There were significant differences when compared with the 19th century: democratic demands were now no longer the frequent and natural companion of political demands. The trend toward authoritarianism was much stronger in Slovak, Croatian, Ukrainian, and Macedonian national movements than it was in earlier national movements.

Did politicians and people, impressed by the new slogan of self-determination, sud-

denly change their minds during the years 1917-1918? Or had the idea of independence been hidden away somewhere in the hearts of people? Were the participants in national movements and their leaders simply disguised nationalists? Such explanations are not very helpful. The same can be said about the widely-shared view articulated by Hans Kohn that 'Every people awakened to nationalism sees political self-determination as its goal.' This rather facile solution cannot explain why people successfully 'awaken' to nationalism, why such a coincidence between the mass movement and the call for self-determination would appear, and why national movements differed so greatly in their timing.

Even though a systematic explanation based on comparative empirical research has yet to be given, it is possible to distinguish some factors which might be examined in such research. The strong link between a national mass movement and the demand for self-determination seems to lie in the completion of a full social structure of the nation-to-be. The new ruling class of this nation can guarantee some degree of organic social order in the new emerging state based on a division of labor. Naturally, the concept of the personalized nation accepted by the masses was important. The image of the personalized nation could easily be linked to the image of the state as a subject of international relations. Also, the very general, but self-evident role of the breakdown of Empires cannot be neglected as a precondition (Tsarist Russia 1917, Austro-Hungarian Empire 1918, Ottoman Empire 1918).

The most promising type of explanation seems to be in the logic of political power, above all as a new arena for nationalist activities of the leaders, but also as an important political experience of the masses. The struggle for participation integrated national leaders into the sphere of competition for power. Nevertheless, they were unable to compete with existing ruling elites on equal terms, since they always were arithmetically in the minority. Even if they could have succeeded in mobilizing the majority of their national group, they could never have become the decisive power in a multinational empire. Their position always remained subordinated to that of the numerically stronger ruling nation.

The call for autonomy seemed to be the only solution. Within the territory defined as a 'national' one, the leaders were supposed to afford protection against the power of the state. Wherever a national movement achieved autonomous status, a new system of power relations started to work. Although there were political differences among them, all national leaders gave precedence to national demands over all other group and party interests. Naturally, this opened the way to different kinds of manipulation, since group interests could always be presented as national ones. The ruling state-nation – the German or the Russian – remained the main enemy. The power of national leaders was limited to decisions concerning their own autonomous territory, while their influence on decisions of the center at the level of the state were limited and depended on the degree of autonomy that had been achieved. During the struggle for greater autonomy, the nationalist program focused on a dualist model as the most radical solution. National leaders were so deeply accustomed to entrenched relations of inequality that the idea of full independence remained beyond the horizon of their imagination.

Under which circumstances, then, does a new wave of national self-determination begin to rise again? And must this necessarily happen? What differences or similarities can be noted between old national movements and the new processes of self-determination which have appeared in Central and Eastern Europe since the breakdown of the communist regimes in this part of the world? Or is there another solution for the non-full-fledged nation in modern society? What linkage is there between movements of national self-determination and democratization in the contemporary period?

As Dankward A. Rustow stresses in his book on the process of building democracy in a modern society[3], there is only one necessary condition for democratization in a modern society: a broadly-shared consensus on a community and a state, that is, a general consensus on national identity among the entire society. If there are no feelings of common identity of the community and the state as a whole, there is no hope for democracy. Democratization of a deeply divided society can begin only when the 'old' state is destroyed. In other words, if political leaders prefer to maintain the integrity of the state, they must put a stop to democratization. According to this view there is only one way to develop a democratic society: to build a society based on the nation state. Can this be corroborated by empirical cases?

If we focus on the situation in post-communist countries, the disintegration of the state plays a very significant role in the contemporary period of transition. Democratization is closely connected with national self-determination, especially in those countries which did not form nation-state societies during the former period, that is, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In countries like Poland or Hungary no such movement has appeared. Why have some of the new politicians elected after the breakdown of communist party regimes become nationalists and proclaimed democratization as well as national interests to be the main aims of their activities? Why do they place such great emphasis on this step and consider it to be the necessary prerequisite of equality in a new civil society? Have they used nationalism as a means to pursue their private political goals? Or have they given voice to the real national feelings of the community which they represent?

To answer these and the other related questions we must first ask whether it is correct to speak of the interruption of a national movement under a communist regime. There exists a widespread view that all national processes are frozen during the period of a communist party regime. However, reference to empirical data compelled us to reconsider this interpretation.

As noted above, the political demands voiced, for example, by Slovak political representatives were broadly formulated for the first time during the last decades of the 19th century. The Slovaks asked for political equality with the ruling Magyar community in Hungary by introducing universal suffrage. Like the leaders of other small national communities in this part of the Habsburg Empire, they did not achieve their goal before World War I.

They hoped that the breakup of the empire gave them a new opportunity to complete the process of self-determination in a new state, namely, the Czechoslovak republic. In 1918 the Czechs became a full-fledged nation. Their political demands for more autonomy in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire were succesfully realized through

the foundation of an entirely new state. However, this state was, once again, a multinational one. According to the Versailles system of partition of Central Europe, Czech statehood was transformed into the idea of the Czechoslovak Republic.

But the 'founding fathers' of this first Czechoslovak Republic formulated the idea of an entirely new nation – the Czechoslovak nation. Czechoslovakism was the idea of a unitary nation-state in which the last phase of the Czech national movement, the demands for political equality and self-determination, were mirrored more faithfully than the phase in which the Slovak national movement continued to exist. This is why all Czechs accepted the view that the first Czechoslovak republic was the state of their own nation.

Quite different feelings appeared soon after 1918 among some Slovak intellectuals.[4] They pointed out that the Czechoslovak Republic was unable to support the national interests of all Slovaks, especially those among them who were politicized, and that from this point of view, the situation for their Slovak national community had not basically changed. The new form of unitary state and the entire democratization process did not bring them the national equality they had asked for, and did not support their national demands. Those Slovaks who experienced national repression from Czechoslovakism formulated the two basic aspects of their new situation of inequality: first, the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia remains on the periphery, as it had been before World War I, and second, the degree of repression of Slovaks as a national community is the same as it had been toward the end of the 19th century. The only change is that the center of the new government is now situated in Prague. From this point of view, the Czechs and leading politicians, whether Czech or Slovak, became the potential enemy of Slovak national self-determination.

These feelings of national inequality and demands for greater autonomy which appeared during the twenties and the thirties show that the Slovak nation was still in the situation of a non-full-fleged nation. Slovak political aspirations were still very strong but not accepted by the center. Moreover, those closely connected with state power, that is, with Czech politics, and those who took part in decision-making processes were not able to give voice to demands for full independence for Slovakia. This situation changed toward the end of the thirties when some Slovak nationalists took advantage of Hitler's interests and called for the breakup of the Czechoslovak Republic.

This Slovak nation-state, proclaimed in 1939[5], figures importantly in the historical consciousness of the Slovak nation. For many Slovaks, it became a symbol of nation-statehood – especially after November 1989. But we can hardly consider this Slovak state to be a manifestation of the third Phase of a national movement, Phase C. The main reason is that, during the pre-1938 period, the Slovak nation was still a nation with an incomplete social structure – lacking an intelligentsia and especially entrepreneurs. Changes in social stratification became manifest in Slovak society only after 1945, particularly during the last two decades of the communist party regime.

During the post-World War II period, 1945-1948, in official proclamations and major legislative proposals, all leading politicians accepted the fact that the 'old' Czechoslovak republic had been reborn. Now, however, it was a state consisting of two equal nations – Czech and Slovak. But in fact, the center of gravity of the whole system was again to be found in the central government. From this point of view, there had been no change. In fact, Slovak politicians were not considered to be legitimate representatives

of the Slovaks' national interests during the initial phase of a new process of democratization led by the central government. Demands for Slovak autonomy were branded as a potential danger to democracy because of the historical experience of the breakup of the first Czechoslovak republic. Nevertheless, no one risked attempting to rebuild a unitary state. The Slovaks preserved their autonomy, however, in a largely formal way.

Three years after 1945 the situation changed fundamentally. The communist party system was introduced and the communist party played a leading role in the whole society. The process of democratization was interrupted. Although the situation was somewhat different than it had been before World War II, the new communist leaders continued to repress all Slovak political demands, formal and informal, especially those asking for greater regional autonomy. With the idea in mind that it was possible to develop their own nation-state, some Slovak leaders, non-communist as well as communist, struggled to maintain a formal autonomous status. They reached their goal in 1968 and 1969, when the unitary Czechoslovak republic was transformed into a federation. The question remains as to what kind of federation it was since the system of government had not changed at all.

The post-1948 period of a single-party system influenced the development of the Slovak national movement in a very specific way. Moreover, the process of national liberation was of the same kind as that found in many multicultural communist states which had been transformed into federations under single-party regimes. The communist ideology of class stratification and equality of all people did not accept the notion that national communities had specific political interests. All nations were equal because of the social equality of the working class and the leading role of the communist party and its government.

On the other hand, nations were considered to be a specific kind of cultural entity. Hence, cultural and economic demands were the only acceptable forms for their autonomy. This is why it was possible, during the entire period of the communist party system, for movements for self-determination of small nations like the Slovaks, Slovenes, and Macedonians to continue their cultural and economic development. In many aspects, this development was extremely substantial and rapid in comparison to the development of those nations that had completed their formation before the period of the communist regime. What is extremely important for the development of non-full-fledged nations during the contemporary period of post-communist democratization is that cultural and economic emancipation could not be followed by political emancipation.

The political demands were formulated by 'national' communists who fully accepted the leading role of the communist party in society, but also tried to use state power and the decision-making process to the benefit of their own nation. Many of them came, sooner or later, to be considered enemies of the central communist government. In Slovakia, for example, after a brief period during which political demands for greater Slovak autonomy were formulated and proclaimed, some Slovak communists, like Gustav Husak, were tried and imprisoned in the fifties for championing such views. On the other hand, the demand for greater autonomy was still alive during the sixties, when the communist regime in Czechoslovakia became more moderate. Nevertheless, the communists, because of their hold on political power, became the leaders of the struggle for greater autonomy for Slovakia in 1968-1969.

In the case of Czechoslovakia the idea of federalization was acceptable to the central government only under the condition that the Slovak communists would become an integral part of this central government, that is, that the regime would not change. In fact, the preservation of a single-party system allowed only one form of autonomy – a formal one from the point of view of the possibility to make decisions about the future political development of the national society. Nevertheless, the formal federalization allowed the development of the formation process of nations in economic and cultural ways to strengthen. Neither communist party governments nor communist regimes were able to stop this national development.

Although the federalization was mostly formal it was the first visible juridical step to the real autonomous status of a non-full-fleged nation. From the point of view of the representatives of those non-dominant ethnic groups, the situation could be considered a useful one only if one condition was observed: the communist leaders of those non-full-fledged nations had to take part in a decision-making process of a central communist government. So, they had to be deeply involved in it. This situation was necessary for saving the integrity of the state. But new problems appeared during the post-federalization period.

A new deep gap arose between the communist representatives of this 'politically suppressed' nation who became members of a federal government and those who remained active on a regional level: the latter were fully accepted as the real representatives of the 'cultural' nation entity, the former became alienated. The stronger links between politicians in a regional government and national community, the weaker links between the 'national' communists in a central government and the national community in the region.

This gap seemed to be important during the monoparty regime, because of the communist party's decisive position in power. When the leading role of the communist party was destroyed, this gap became visible and a new political situation was strongly influenced by the demands for more autonomy of those non-dominant ethnic groups, as happened between the Slovaks and the Czechs in Czechoslovakia, in the former Yugoslavia, or in the Soviet Union. The new wave of democratization opened the door for a new formulation of national political autonomy.

The newly elected representatives of the national community asked for more political power and for stronger influence on the decision-making process. The new question about statehood, i.e. about the future form of federalization and about distribution of power between nation-state governments and federal structures has appeared. The dominant interpretation is the identification of the old federation with the communist regime. When this regime was destroyed, the people, and especially the politicians, promoted the self-determination process. They declared it to be a necessary condition for democratization of the entire post-communist society. The main goal has become not formal autonomy but attaining real decision-making power for each regional government; they have called for a structure without a superior central governmental body in the future.

The post-communist national self-determination process seems to be the last phase (Phase C) of the development of non-full-fledged nations, i.e. those nations which were not sufficiently successful in building nation-states before the communist period. The communist regime helped them to reach higher cultural and economic levels. But, this

regime could not give them the political autonomy they wanted. When the communist regime broke down, political goals started to play a decisive role in the building of a new democratic state and society, i.e. as a political entity of equal nations. If the former federal state is perceived as an alien body for national representatives, both by those from 'small' nations as by those from full-fledged ones, the federal state must be destroyed. And this is the situation we can find in the former federal communist states in Central and Eastern Europe.

References

1. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford, 1988.
2. Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*. Cambridge, 1985.
3. Dankwart A. Rustow, 'Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model', *Comparative Politics* (1970): 337-363.
4. Natália Krajčovičová, 'Politické strany na Slovensku a úsilie o samosprávu v dvaciatych rokoch' (Political Parties in Slovakia during 1920), in *Slovensko v politickom systéme Ceskoslovenska*. Bratislava, 1992, pp. 47-55.
5. Ivan Kamenec, *Slovensky stát* (The Slovak State). Prague, 1992.