

# **LIBERAL CIVIC PATRIOTISM AND THE NATIONALITY QUESTION IN HUNGARIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT (1849-61)**

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## ABSTRACT

The clash of the various nationalisms during 1848-49 in the Habsburg Empire inspired both the supporters of centralism and federalism to search for new political solutions. The Kremsier Compromise, in which Austro-Slav ethnic federalism and Austro-German centralism asymmetrically blended, with the preeminence of the latter principle, was one way to follow. But in the Hungarian context both federalism and centralism were went beyond, or at least that was the promise which civic patriotism held out.

The remarkable similarity of the post-'48 ideas of Lajos Kossuth and József Eötvös on the nationality question was due to the common approach of civic patriotism and the goal of preserving Hungarian historical statehood. They shared a strong faith in the civilizatory-progressive mission of Hungarian statehood, modeled on the similar German *Kulturmission*.

Major differences between them were that Eötvös' bid was to preserve not just Hungarian historical statehood, but historical statehood in general, as he deemed the further existence of it necessary for progress and liberty to flourish, whereas Kossuth's post-'49 program was the destruction of the 'reactionary and unredeemable' Habsburg Empire and its replacement with a progressive Danubian Confederation of the small nations (Romanians, Serbs, Hungarians, Croats), in which all of the member states would be internally organized according to civic patriotic or at least liberal nationalist principles. For Eötvös (and for the majority of the Hungarian political elite) this idea equaled to a blasphemy, a monster, an unholy mix of mostly underdeveloped nations and would-be nations, destroying the given infrastructure of progress and chocking Hungary in the abyss of oriental darkness and potential ethnic fragmentation.

# INTRODUCTION

My thesis' subject matter lies between political-institutional history and the history of political ideas, placed into a multinational setting. The conditions of cultural and social fragmentation together with the multilayered, medieval mixture of differently developed peoples, the task of building a modern, cohesive society (using and adapting the available European models) presented formidable dilemmas, unseen and unfronted on this scale and magnitude in the western part of the continent. Therefore political wisdom could not be derived directly from there; innovation of some sorts was needed. Furthermore, the decision to experiment and innovate with one possible solution or the other was not solely in the hands of those directly concerned, that is, the various elites and populations of the multiethnic and with time, increasingly multinational empire, but also in the hands of the Habsburg dynasty, traditionally supported by such supra- and transnational social entities as the imperial bureaucracy, the *Kaisertreu* aristocracy, the loyal army and the Catholic Church. This complex matrix of social-political settings was completed by the emerging kin nation-states of Serbia and Romania, which were emulating the most popular state-building model of the time: the French nation-state with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century doctrine of the state-nation.

These years were prone to produce that intellectual innovation in political thought which the 'West' could not supply directly— and, according to my thesis, this post-'48 task in Hungary was attempted by two opposite political figures: baron József Eötvös and Lajos Kossuth. Their attempt deserves a distinguished place in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century political thought. I will also present the other, more important side of this partial achievement, namely, that the incompatibility of liberty and nationality became a consciously recognized and widely shared axiom, and the (for some) tortured, but conscious choice of nationalism over liberalism

ruled out the acceptance of civic patriotic or autonomist ideas beforehand. The second element of my thesis, widely discussed in available literature, but rarely in analytical terms, concerns the link between intellectual shifts regarding nationalism and the unitary state and actual institutionalization, by presenting the debates and outcomes on the nationality law and political system of Hungary and the empire itself in 1861.

I argue that through the debates on the nationality question, the various political groups were engaged in a struggle to define the structure and boundaries of the political community of Hungary, which was in close relation with the public status of non-Hungarians: was the constitutional kingdom to be multinational, culturally plural or openly assimilative? On the first glance, the traumatic experience of the civil war of 1848-49 could have tilted the balance to a multinational direction, meaning a political solution recognizing non-dominant ethnic groups as political partners – the role of the Hungarian émigrés, especially of Lajos Kossuth and László Teleki, as well as the post-'49 shift in the thought of Eötvös, is of some importance to this direction. But the deeper analysis shows that their creative thinking on the solving of the nationality question realistically and pragmatically choose the direction of civic patriotism and cultural pluralism. Even the conceptualization of a Kremsier-type nationality compromise

I will argue that 1861 is the crucial year in the period of the nationality laws in Hungary (1849-1861-1868) since it became the moment of major divide between a culturally pluralist, municipalist, and associationalist civic patriotism and an etatist-centralist, ethnonationalist liberalism, a crucial precursor for the late 19<sup>th</sup> century radical disengagement and subsequent fin de siècle antagonism of liberalism and nationalism in Hungarian and Central European political culture.

# CHAPTER 1 – LIBERALISM, NATIONALISM AND CIVIC PATRIOTISM

## ***1.1. Political modernity and the nationality question***

In a totally unified world, functioning under a perfect world economy and political culture, the asymmetries and asynchronies of transfers and adaptations would be negligible. It seems that for “global/cosmopolitan democracy”, a popular theme of contemporary political theory, originating in Enlightenment universalism and specifically the socio-political ideas of Kant (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, 1784 and *Perpetual Peace*, 1795), it is an absolute precondition either a single world political community or an array of brotherly liberal democracies living according to the tenets of “democratic peace” and forming a world federation (a federated United Nations).

The latter case was the starting point for the various liberal nationalisms of the Young Europe movement, epitomized by the mother-movement, the Young Italy of Mazzini. According to their vision of the future, the world under the several processes of Progress (the precursor of today’s modernization theory) will be composed of liberal democratic nation-states in a harmonious fraternity of nations, before eventually yielding its place to an even higher stage of human development and social organization. For Mazzini, the United States of Europe was a natural next stage to the unification of Italy. This messianic progressivism defined a civilizational notion of nation, meaning that “small and backward nations” (the “non-historical nations”) were deemed to assimilate in the name of progress (and in this vision, they

would be assimilating enthusiastically, knowing that this kind of sacrifice is their indispensable contribution to the cause of universal progress).<sup>1</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup> century political and social thought, as repeatedly pointed out by Isaiah Berlin, the dominant idea about nationalism was that it is deemed to disappear with progress.<sup>2</sup> By the end of World War I (“the war to end all wars”), Wilsonianism was democratic and culturally pluralist, but operated with the same basic tenets as Mazzini, even creating the League of Nations, a putative instrument of future world federation and “democratic peace” (based on the doctrine of “collective security”). The emergence of mass politics and the radicalization of nationalism at the end of a 19<sup>th</sup> century was not part of mainstream social reflection, as would be the case after “the breakdown of civilization” with World War II and the Holocaust. The explanation of Nazism (German racial ultranationalism) was at the heart of the birth of the discipline which we call today modern nationalism studies.<sup>3</sup> The late Friedrich Meinecke (*The German Catastrophe*, 1946) and Hans Kohn (*The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background*, 1944, *Nationalism: Its Meaning & History*, 1955) can be considered the founding fathers. The former formulated, against the orientalist-primordialist interpretations of inherent German barbarism, the theory of uneven and failed modernization, a structuralist account of backwardness, differentiating two, general type of nation-building: the “constructivist rationalist”, bottom-up democratic (“French”) or the “historicist traditionalist”, top-down elitist-etatist (“German”); the latter, in his theory merged the structural types with the European symbolic geography of West and East, where “nation, nationality” means

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<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-75* (London: Abacus, 1995 [1975]), 107-108.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power” in *The Proper Study of Mankind* (London: Pimlico, 1998), 581-604.

<sup>3</sup> Important pre-World War II contributions were numerous, since the principle of the nation-state, through Wilsonianism, was the dominant international doctrine, and with it, the problem of national minorities was an ever present concern, especially in East Central Europe. Examples include Carlton J. H. Hayes (*Essays on Nationalism*, 1926, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, 1931) and E. H. Carr (*The Twenty years Crisis*, 1939, *The future of nations : independence or interdependence?*, 1941). Furthermore, works in the dominant liberal nationalist tradition go back till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with such definitive figures as J. S. Mill, J. Dalberg-Acton, E. Renan and the many precursors of Karl Renner, Otto Bauer, Edmund Bernatzik and Oszkár Jászi, like Adolf Fischhof or József Eötvös.



citizenship and civic patriotism (French *peuple* or civic demos) versus *völkisch* ethno-nationalism and communal violence.

Lurking behind these constructions was the moral tale of bad and good nationalism, which can be ascertained also in the next generation of scholarship; this scholarship criticized, but did not undermine the initial narrative. The mainly sociological discourse of Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Mann or Benedict Anderson retained the perspective of the state-confirming, liberal nationalisms of the West (Great Britain, France, United States, Switzerland) being an essentially different, civilized, properly modern form of nationalism, while having an orientalist gaze to the East, which lived and lives (apropos to the post-'89 ethnic wars) in a different "time zone" (Gellner), failing to become properly modern and waging instead, almost inconceivably, "atavistic-tribal" wars even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can read the same old universalist tenet about the gradual disappearance of nationalism through modernization (in 19<sup>th</sup> century parlance, 'progress') at the end of the *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* by Hobsbawm<sup>4</sup>, first published in 1990.

They all use the rational choice-contractualist paradigm of early Rawls, centered on "procedural democracy" and the myth of ethno-cultural neutrality of the liberal nation-state (called methodological nationalism by Will Kymlicka<sup>5</sup>) without reflecting on them, which is a major shortcoming, as the recent discussions on 'cultural embeddedness' and multinational

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<sup>4</sup> "As I have suggested, 'nation' and 'nationalism' are no longer adequate terms to describe, let alone to analyse, the political entities described as such, or even the sentiments once described by these words. It is not impossible that nationalism will decline with the decline of the nation-state, without which being English or Irish or Jewish, or a combination of all these, is only one way in which people describe their identity among the many others which they use for this purpose, as occasion demands. It would be absurd to claim that this day is already near. However, I hope it can at least be envisaged. After all, the very fact that historians are at least beginning to make some progress in the study and analysis of nations and nationalism suggests that, as so often, the phenomenon is past its peak. The owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling round nations and nationalism." E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000 [1990]), 192.

<sup>5</sup> Will Kymlicka - Christine Straehle: Cosmopolitanism, Nation-States, and Minority Nationalism: A Critical Review of Recent Literature in *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 65-88.

liberal democracies convincingly suggest (the works of Charles Taylor, James Tully, Alfred Stepan and Veit Bader, among others<sup>6</sup>).

Beyond this constructivist-primordialist cleavage, the ethno-symbolist/ perennialist approach of Anthony D. Smith and John Armstrong operates with the premise that the birth of modernity was not a leap, but a gradual, although accelerating and uneven transformation, in which the ethnic groups adapted their communal identities to the indirect, more diverse and more abstract social relations and interactions of modernizing societies. Here the focus is on the interactions between state and culture, instead of state elites creating national culture. If the focus is put on the culture itself, as in the phenomenological-anthropological discourse, the questions of identity-formation and not of the one-sided identity-creation or identity-invention are examined. If the relevant question of the how about the invention and creation of modern nations by various competing elite groups are not contextualized by asking the why – why did they launched themselves in these endeavors, addressing collective existential stakes of large social segments; which were the available political and cultural sources to tackle the problem of preserving cultural continuity and the need for rootedness and so on – it only hinders historical understanding.

Because of this complexity, a macro-theory of nationalism would only simplify a dynamic, heterogeneous, interactive and uneven field of “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein), in which many aspects are widely shared and common, but many are specific and unique without the possibility to totally disentangle them in order to create relatively separate types. This approach is explained and elaborated, in regards to political ideologies (so, applied here to the ideology of nationalism) by Michael Freeden in his *Ideologies and Political Theory*. To quote him: “For Wittgenstein a particular combination of features could

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<sup>6</sup>See Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994).; Veit Bader: Reasonable Impartiality and Priority for Compatriots. A Criticism of Liberal Nationalism's Main Flaws in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2 (Papers Presented at a Conference on Reasonable Partiality, Amsterdam, October 2003) (Apr., 2005): 83-103.; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995)

be identified as having broad similarities with another particular combination, if enough features overlapped. He called up the phrase ‘family resemblances’ to characterize ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’ [...] Wittgenstein departed both from *Gestalt* theory and from structuralism in introducing the dimension of change over time. Families, after all, have histories. They are identified because their members have a direct relationship with other people that have hitherto been members of the family. Wittgenstein was anxious to argue that those resemblances are like a thread. There is no one fibre running through the thread in its entirety, only the overlapping of many fibres which create the object we call thread.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Freeden suggests, together with Brubaker, who criticized “methodological groupism”, that it is high time to take methodological individualism seriously, but without falling into the trap of underrating the power of collective and political identities. After all, as László Tevesz, a student of Hungarian liberal nationalism, using the tenets of discursive history of ideas, argues, notions of nation are carried by different political and social groups, according to various agendas, reflectively and/or unconsciously.<sup>8</sup>

## **1.2. Liberalism, nationalism and the problem of social cohesion**

### **Variants of liberalism and nationalism**

Liberal nationalism, a term commonly used in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was recently (re)introduced as an analytical term in historical scholarship (the work on Continental liberalism of the German historian Lothar Gall); in normative philosophy and political theory,

<sup>7</sup> Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 89.

<sup>8</sup> László Tevesz, “A 19. századi magyar liberális nemzetfogalom vizsgálatának elméleti kerete és európai kontextusa” (Theoretical Framework and the European Context for the Analysis of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hungarian Liberal Notion of the Nation) (*Sic Itur ad Astra*, Vol. 17, No. 3-4, 2006: 67.; online version: <http://epa.oszk.hu/01000/01019/00005/pdf/1986Tevesz.pdf>)

but a wide appeal, by the work of the Israeli philosopher and politician Yael Tamir (*Liberal Nationalism*, 1993). Iván Zoltán Dénes, historian of political thought, defines liberal nationalism as an “ambiguous relationship” between liberty and nationality, later to disconnect and transform into separate and antagonistic political principles; but at the birth of political modernity at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it represented a common ground around 1. constitutionalism (against absolutism/despotism), 2. middle-class/bourgeois/civil society (against social backwardness and the feudal estate-system) and 3. independent and free nation-state (against empires, according to the republican principle of autonomy and freedom from domination).<sup>9</sup> The concept, by using an adjective to denote a form of nationalism, implies a priority given by the adherents of the ideology for nation-building (political autonomy and/or independent statehood, cultural modernization and nationalization of society) to the building of “procedural democracy” (*Rechtstaat* and civil society; in Hungarian, “polgári társaság” or “polgári társadalom”). But in fact it does not give justice to the mental world of most of the adherents, from France to Poland, who were craving to catch-up on all fields – socio-economically, politically and culturally (the nation being a contested symbol for a holistic and future-oriented project); for them, one thing was only possible through the others, and vice versa.

Liberalism itself, in a classic study by Friedrich Hayek, was divided normatively in two big streams: the ‘French’ rationalist-constructivist and the ‘British’ empiricist traditions, corresponds to the slightly more precise and more familiar Continental versus Anglo-Saxon distinction.<sup>10</sup> Miklós Szabó, historian of 19-20<sup>th</sup> century liberalism and political thought, describes the Anglo-Saxon tradition as the classical stream of liberalism rooted in the reaction of the ‘unholy alliance’ of noblemen and bourgeoisie against the encroaching absolutist

<sup>9</sup> See Iván Zoltán Dénes, *Liberalism and Nationalism: An Ambiguous Relationship in Liberty and the Search for Identity*, Iván Zoltán Dénes ed. (Budapest-New York: Central European UP, 2006), 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Friedrich A. Hayek: *Freedom, Reason and Tradition in The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1960), 54-71.

territorial state (taxation for standing armies and professional administration), and therefore earlier to the Continental tradition, which partly builds on the achievements of territorial state-building. Great Britain, the Netherlands and the United States managed to avert the development of a large, absolutist bureaucratic state and produced a political culture inspired by republicanism ('civic humanism'), supporting constitutional government, local autonomy and free enterprise. Merchant capitalism and classical liberalism – described and expressed by such figures as Locke, Hume, Mandeville, Smith and Bentham – went together. Late feudal, estate society was fertilized by the rising groups of merchant capitalism defending the model of small, but strong and efficient territorial state ('minimal state', 'nightwatchman-state').<sup>11</sup>

In areas where merchant capitalism did not fare that well (Spain, Italy, partly France) or were too landlocked and backward (Habsburg Monarchy, Poland-Lithuania), various forms of the mentioned absolutism won and the economic and grass-root homogenization by early capitalism was both boosted and hijacked there by etatism. The Continental tradition, rooted in the Enlightenment, saw in the territorial state an ally against the feudal and/or backward society to be modernized. The integration of Hungary into the Habsburg Monarchy, in contrast with the Czech Lands (crushed in 1620), remained an unfinished business; the native titled (aristocracy) and untitled or lesser nobility survived unscathed (middle, *bene possessionati* or gentry and small, *possessionati* nobility, plus nobles without property, quantitatively the largest group). As a result, both the Continental and classical streams of liberalism emerged in the Hungarian liberal movement, the latter, carried socially especially by the lesser nobility being by far the dominant. This is why observers from C. A. Macartney to George Schöfflin, Alice Freifeld or Gáspár Miklós Tamás note the unusual 'Britishness' of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian liberalism amidst Cisleithanian, German or Romanian dominant preference for the Continental tradition.

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<sup>11</sup> Miklós Szabó, "A liberalizmus elvi kérdései" (Theoretical Issues of Liberalism) in *Liberalizmus és nemzettudat* (Liberalism and National Consciousness), Dénes Iván Zoltán ed. (Budapest: Argumentum-Bibó István Szellemi Műhely, 2008), 11-15.

Civic patriotism, another key concept denoting very similar dimensions as the concept of liberal nationalism, is animated by a universalism linked to territory and by a political loyalty linked to historical statehood. It is the highest republican ideal in which the core identity of the political community is given by pure political will and the history of this will, linked to a given territory. It operates with the promise that the irrational part of human nature can be harnessed to the goals of a reasoned political community. It comes up always as a possible better, higher form of liberal nationalism. In the words of Margaret Canovan, “if one is concerned for minority rights and multicultural harmony, then denunciations of nationalism are not enough. It is necessary also to theorize and foster an alternative form of loyalty that will be compatible with universal values but will be able to attract the people of a particular territory, perhaps as a stage on the way to world citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> This modern approach draws on the examples of the USA and Switzerland, as did after 1848-49 Kossuth and Eötvös, in that it tries to go beyond the liberal nationalist hierarchy between nationality (national minority) and nation (state-nation) by a minimal state and extensive local self-government coupled with a robust civil sphere, both of them animated by a strong civic spirit. The central point is the goal of non-institutionalization, that is, depoliticization of nationality in favor of a two-tiered patriotic loyalty to local and central historical statehood. The case of the post-revolutionary Hungarian thinking on solving the challenge of nationalisms is a good illustration for the incoherence of this approach, given the fact that it tries to depoliticize and neutralize something which actually calls for political solutions.

### **The Hungarian liberal nationalist movement and the moderate-radical divide**

Political and cultural modernization, coupled only with slow socio-economic advance (except the years of war boom, 1799-1817) and the widespread reception of British, French

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Patriotism is Not Enough”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 413-432 415.

and German ideas of liberalism and popular sovereignty-based, modern nationalism between 1770 and 1840 changed the social imaginary of elites in East Central Europe and induced a transformation which came to a new equilibrium only by 1871 (Italian, German, Romanian unification completed, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise firmly in place).

Attila Debreczeni, specialist in early modern and Enlightenment studies, wrote a seminal article on late 18th century political identities<sup>13</sup>, the starting point of modern national discourse in Hungary; József Takáts tackled early 19th century political languages and their continuity with their later conservative, liberal and political nationalist uses (the languages of ancient constitution, enlightened governance, noble republicanism, scholarly patriotism and cultural nationalism)<sup>14</sup>. Their conclusions go together with those voiced by László Kontler in his *The Enlightenment in Central Europe?*: “In Hungary, too, once the language issue was thrown into prominence [...] and received reinforcement from the sensibilities of Romanticism, it remained an important current alongside the concept of the Hungarian liberals of the ‘unitary Hungarian political nation.’ The latter grafted the Enlightenment heritage, together with early-nineteenth century liberalism, on the gentry tradition, in arguing that the nation is the bulk of the emancipated citizens enjoying equal rights as individuals under a modern constitution—and onto that ground denied demands of collective rights established on the ethno-linguistic principle by those who did not possess an institutional and ideological tradition upon which ‘political nationhood’ could be erected. [...] there is a pedigree of each of the shades of nineteenth-century nationalism in Central Europe that can be traced back to what was, apparently, an unprejudiced quest to unite the talents and the

<sup>13</sup> Attila Debreczeni, “Nemzet és identitás a 18. század második felében” (Nation and Identity in the Second Part of the 18th century) (*Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, Vol. 105, No. 5-6, 2001: 513-552.)

<sup>14</sup> József Takáts, “Politikai beszédmodok a magyar 19. század elején” (Political Languages in Early 19th Century Hungary) (*Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, Vol. 102, No. 5-6, 1998: 668-686.)

commitment of men as reasonable and sociable beings in the service of improvement.”<sup>15</sup> If in France political indifference towards linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the country was eliminated by the Great Revolution, in the Habsburg Empire it happened during the reign of Joseph II- under the auspices of the modern idea of state-nation and equal citizenship.<sup>16</sup> In Hungary, Joseph’s centralist policies (including the linguistic Germanization of state and public life) elicited a response which in Clifford Geertz’s dual typology of essentialist vs. epochalist answer to extreme change falls in the latter category. Copying and adapting the techniques of the ‘superior enemy’ seemed for the ethnically mainly Magyar, but also German, Slovak, Romanian and firmly patriotic (*Landespatriotismus*) nobility, titled and non-titled, to be a proper answer without questioning the social (issue of serfdom and taxation) and political (king and Diet dualism) consensus. The more broad-minded Hungarian reformers busied themselves with the least sensitive issues and championed cultural modernization, including the use of Hungarian in as many spheres of public life as possible. Therefore the period of language laws in Hungary stretches from as early as 1790 to 1868, out of which the sub-period of 1849-68 was that of the nationality laws, with 1836 as the breakthrough year in the replacement of Latin by Hungarian as the official language of the kingdom. The next major shift came in 1849, initiated the sub-period of nationality laws; the choice of interpreting them still in the framework of language laws comes from the nature of the actual proposed (1861) or passed (1849,1868) laws: they recognized a culturally and linguistically plural populace united by the new, liberal civic spirit of Hungarian historical statehood/political community. Ethnoculture and language remained subordinated to the civic

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<sup>15</sup> László Kontler, “The Enlightenment in Central Europe?” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, Balázs Trencsényi-Michal Kopeček eds. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), vol. 1, 41-42.

<sup>16</sup> See also the comment on the same general process (repeating itself for instance in the “post-colonial Third World”) of Margaret Canovan: “each new state’s choice of a language of government and education itself politicized linguistic differences, in many cases turning what had previously been a relatively private matter into a focus of intense political antagonism. Similarly, the modernized communications and universal suffrage that were supposed to be part of the process of nation-building made it possible for politicians to build followings by appealing to sentiments of identity connected to language, religion and ethnicity.” in Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1996), 109.



and political-historical components of political community; not surprisingly, though, this latter dimension of the historical Hungarian statehood acquired two, opposite interpretations: one in which the culturally diverse kingdom of Saint Stephen was always animated and led by a core nation, the descendants of the nomad conquerors led to the Carpathian basin by Árpád, in line with the collective lesser noble self-image and narrative going back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century; and the other, in which the conquered or invited/accepted peoples, through their later participation in the nobility, are framed as partner-nations of the indeed conqueror and leader Hungarians; this way the same crucial identity topos about the past came to reflect the clash of majority and minority nationalisms instead of forming the basis of a fragile, but viable common view of the past and with it, of the common political community.

The public debut of István Széchenyi, an aristocrat with a forceful anti-feudal program in 1830 signaled that times became ripe for a reform movement instead of the series of more or less sporadic efforts for ‘national improvement’. Széchenyi was an Anglophile, influenced by the utilitarianism of Bentham and the enlightened Josephinist tradition, who wanted to build the infrastructural and cultural-mental conditions of modernity for his backward Hungary without directly challenging the political status quo (an early parallel to the Polish ‘organic work’ approach).

Miklós Wesselényi, Ferenc Deák and finally Lajos Kossuth, leaders of middle noble (‘gentry’) liberalism, wanted to modernize their social group and with it Hungary from the inside, employing the old noble tactics of the Diet gravaminalists for renewal, deeply despised by the ultra-elitist and gradualist Széchenyi. In this endeavor, the anti-etatism of lesser noble liberalism got closer to the Continental stream, represented clearly by the third, marginal liberal group, the centralists. They advocated a strong and efficient central government, modeled on British parliamentarism, as an extra tool (‘the trump ace’) to facilitate the creation of modern, civil society and the successful transformation of the noble land-holders into a

modern entrepreneurial middle-class, assimilating in the process the other middle-standing groups, like the German urban burghers; they also realized the importance of local self-government, supporting sub-county level township and communal autonomy, trial by jury and strong civil sphere against the county-centered feudal municipalism, in which they saw a remnant of the past, hindering progress and not the bastions of Hungarian freedom against Vienna. The municipalist-centralist debate over the political, governmental and administrative structure of the kingdom became one of the defining points of subsequent politics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary. Those following the Continental tradition tended to be centralists, those following the classical tradition tended to be municipalists.

The centralist position was also a catching-up liberalism devised for the conditions of relative backwardness, similar to the logic of Friedrich List's economic nationalism. Their approach was heir to the political languages of enlightened governance and civilizational advance.

Another point, shared also by Széchenyi, was to keep the Monarchy, and Hungary within it, together, as they thought that a separate Hungary would degenerate into a Polish-style feudal-anarchic 'noble republic'; whereas the Monarchy, in spite of its post-josephinist conservative bureaucratic absolutism, was still the potential bulwark of civilization and progress, carrying a continental imperial 'white man's burden' towards the Hungarians and other, even more 'backward peoples of the East'. This civilizational gaze was part and parcel of a political and moral liberalism animated by enlightened progressivism, humanism and Christian ideals. It is slightly similar to the 'liberty enforcing' logic of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic period, only that its universalist zeal is nuanced by the particularistic doctrine of historical vs. non-historical peoples or nations (its classic formulations came later, from socialists like Friedrich Engels or Otto Bauer)<sup>17</sup>. For József

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<sup>17</sup> See Szabó Miklós, "The Liberalism of the Hungarian Nobility" in *Liberty and the Search for Identity*, Iván Zoltán Dénes ed. (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2006), 214-215.

Eötvös and Zsigmond Kemény, in line with the historical sociology of Montesquieu and the classical liberal tradition, this distinction is rooted in history and civilizational development; they don't talk about national genius and other topoi of national characteriology, like many in the liberal or the conservative groups. Even if the famous critique of Lewis Namier on the liberal German political culture (by extension, of the dominant elites) of the Vormärz and 1848 as ethnocentric and racist blurs the nuances of historical and colonial-ethnicist thinking, it certainly has a point.<sup>18</sup> From the point of view of the 'awakened' non-historical nations, as political collectivities whether one wants to assimilate or rule them on a liberal progressivist ('naturally and peacefully') or an ethnicist basis ('forcefully') it does not matter, because in the final instance both would take away their collective identity and existence. In an important contrast, however, at the individual level, it was of major significance whether one is coerced to embrace an alien liberty, superior as it may be, or, on the contrary, is patiently persuaded and won over to this same alien and superior liberty by an assimilative, but still advantegous transaction. This contrast between the individualist-voluntarist and the collectivist-coercive approaches of national integration were to be the cause of the moderate-radical divide over the interpretation of Hungarian supremacy and the relationship with the nationalities living in the 'common homeland' of Hungary.

Hungarian national supremacy, probably the most common and widely shared political axiom among the political elites of the kingdom (and increasingly shared by their counterparts in Transylvania), was the basic tenet of a political culture leaving behind the old *Hungarus* noble solidarity to be replaced with a two-tiered 'culture of limited suffrage' (Alan S. Kahan)<sup>19</sup>. Those with political rights (largely, of course, still the former untitled nobility and the aristocracy: the capable and educated *few*) would lead the whole of the society (the *many*),

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Namier, *Vanished Supremacies. Essays on European History, 1812-1918* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963 [1958]), 21-53.

<sup>19</sup> See Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 153-171.

to be granted civil liberties by the magnanimous feudal *populus* and united by the extension of rights (*jogkiterjesztés*) and union of (class) interests (*érdekegyesítés*) in the framework of a more or less sovereign liberal nation-state.<sup>20</sup>

In a kingdom ruled by a foreign dynasty and high bureaucracy in four separate territories<sup>21</sup> and where the lack of vertical, social cohesion and solidarity between the feudal estates and non-nobles was compounded by ethnic diversity, the doctrine of the liberal nation-state had to face insurmountable challenges as the Hungarian Reform Age progressed. The first comprehensive statistical survey of the lands of Saint Stephen by Elek Fényes, published in 1836-40 showed that the population ratio of ethnic Hungarians in the Lands of St. Stephen was around 39%. Even if only the Hungarians and the Croats possessed fairly complete social structures, the tiny elites of Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks and Ruthenes being no match for them, it deeply shocked those who were dreaming about a unified and caught-up liberal nation-state.

Together with the perceived German and (Russian-backed) Pan-Slavic double menace, and the national movements of the Croat, Serb, Romanian and Slovak elites, usually dismissed as some agitators in the service of Pan-Slav interests, without real popular appeal and justified agenda, gave enough reason to split the Hungarian liberal nation-builders into the mentioned moderate and radical camps.<sup>22</sup>

The radical-moderate divide came to the open surface when Széchenyi in his Academy of Sciences address of 1841 attacked the noble liberal orthodoxy about the non-Hungarian national movements as mere tools of Pan-Slavism. He pointed to the linguistic Magyaromania

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<sup>20</sup> The latter part, as we saw, was contested from the left and the right liberals alike, not to speak about nationally minded and/or loyal, imperial patriotic conservatives.

<sup>21</sup> Hungary proper, a kingdom; Transylvania, a grand principality; Croatia-Slavonia, a kingdom; the Military Frontier, directly under the Viennese War Council; they were kept separate after the Habsburg dynasty reconquered the land of its Hungarian crown from the Ottomans.

<sup>22</sup> There were also those who advocated the freedom of all peoples based on democracy and natural rights (a minuscule group), and those who represented the old imperial and Hungarian pre-national patriotic identity (chiefly the very influential old conservatives), but they failed to achieve widespread public appeal among the politically most important group, the ethnically almost completely Magyar middle/bene possessionati nobility.

of the radicals as the real cause for their abandonment of the common Hungarian homeland. Instead, he offered the alternative of spontaneous and free assimilation if the Hungarians concentrate only to the societal, not state-backed development and progress of their own ethnic group, which would, combined with its already given historical advantage, freely attract to the nascent middle class-led Hungarian nation everybody who wants to live according to the times, that is, wants to be modern.<sup>23</sup> “In recognizing the nationality issue as an important aspect of Hungarian reform, Széchenyi, virtually alone among Hungarian liberals, foresaw the great dangers which lay concealed behind this explosive doctrine. He realized that the employment of coercion in matters affecting nationality rights would endanger not only Hungary but also the existence of the Habsburg Empire. He feared class conflict and social revolution for the same reason. Both would call into question the internal stability of the empire and endanger its existence as a unified political entity.”<sup>24</sup>

The points of radical-moderate consensus were the use of Hungarian as a country-wide lingua franca and the final national aim of a transformed, national society (politically and publicly Hungarian). The final aim was the same, the assessment of the conditions and the best approach suitable to them were totally different.

The moderates were convinced that in the framework of the Habsburg Monarchy, as a civilizational and geopolitical unit, modernity will work for the benefit of the historical nations, and therefore, the chief task was to keep the monarchy together and modernize it in a way which does not jeopardize this unity (including the slow bending of the imperial center to the goals of national and constitutional liberty/modernity).

The radicals, on the contrary, wanted to use the bigger autonomy and separate statehood to be reinstated by the imperial center as a further and efficient political and

<sup>23</sup> See Balázs Trencsényi-Michal Kopeček eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), vol. 2, the section on István Széchenyi, 224-229.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös and the Modernization of Hungary, 1840-1870. A Study of Ideas of Individuality and Social Pluralism in Modern Politics* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1972: 1-134.), 31.

economic guarantee for national development, including the containment of non-Hungarian societal and political demands, before it gets too late and Hungary disintegrates under the internal and external pressures.

The sense of radical menace most Hungarians felt was pictured vividly by Wesselényi, when he described that in Hungary, ethnic Hungarians are located in the middle of the country, surrounded by mountains inhabited by Slovaks and Romanians, thus at their mercy, without any means of viable defense. Wesselényi, who accepted the view that the nationality movements in Hungary have their own internal roots, watched them with fear and clanged almost desperately to the idea of liberal reform as a national unifier (liberties, emancipation and rights in exchange of acquiring a Hungarian patriotic spirit), proposing initially, in an illiberal manner, that the emancipation of non-Hungarian serfs to be granted with the condition that they learn Hungarian. The centrality of language acquisition, of ethnoculture as the basis of national integration remained the basic tenet of liberal nationalist orthodoxy: “It is our Slavs’ civic duty to confine the use of their mother tongue within limits set by the common good. In other words, it is their duty to exercise and cultivate their tongue to an extent which will not impede on the use and proficiency of Hungarian since this is an indispensable requirement for national unity.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is their duty to publicly and politically become Hungarian in the name of progress.

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Ágnes Deák, “Miklós Wesselényi on the future of the Habsburg Empire and Hungary” in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region: Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998*, Ignác Romsics-Béla K. Király eds. (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998), 35.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONALISM IN THE HABSBURG EMPIRE

### **2.1. 1848-49 in the Habsburg Empire and the concept of Gleichberechtigung**

By the late 1840s liberal reformers were gaining serious ground throughout the German Bund and the Austrian Empire; the Austro-German liberals mustered up their courage by looking to the example of the more rigorous Hungarian movement led by Batthyány, Deák and Kossuth; their cooperation with Victor Franz von Andrian-Werburg ushered into a common empire-wide agenda of achieving constitutional monarchy; the 1847 *Declaration of Opposition*, penned by Deák and Kossuth, contained the demand of empire-wide constitutional transformation as the fundamental guarantee for Hungarian liberty. This rapprochement was rather tactical, as later events showed; only the minority of the Hungarian liberals thought likewise with Széchenyi and Eötvös, the latter explaining that “The proximity of Russia on the one hand, and our own situation coupled with the divisive tendency of our nationalities have convinced me that while the preservation of the monarchy is not necessarily the prerequisite of our existence, it is a condition of our peaceful development and therefore all patriots must do everything possible that the whole of which we form a part be maintained intact.”<sup>26</sup> This letter of Eötvös to Széchenyi was sent 28 February 1848, four days after the abdication of Louis Philipe. It is worth highlighting that at that point there was no trace yet of the later renowned expert of the nationality question; he simply accepted the axioms on the externally-fuelled ‘divisive tendencies of the nationalities’.

Kossuth, sensing the great opportunity, introduced a daring petition proposal in the Hungarian Diet on March 3, which encountered difficulties with the Upper House and the

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<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös...*, 48.

Crown, the liberal magnates (Eötvös, Széchenyi and Batthyány) trying to mediate; but in the meantime, in the tail-wind of the French events it managed to galvanize the Viennese public.

In the various German summaries and translations which circulated in Vienna, the passage where Kossuth demanded constitutionality for the whole empire was translated as ‘common constitution’ instead, which caused widespread enthusiasm among the liberal leaders.<sup>27</sup> Various associations and clubs, the students, the factory and workshop workers and the urban poor all were restless. March 13 was the date to which the Lower Austrian Estates were convoked; the day when Adolf Fischhof, a previously unknown German Jewish doctor born in Óbuda, Hungary, nolens-volens entered history with his speech as the initiator of the Viennese revolution. He ended his speech with an optimistic note: “Long live Austria and its glorious future! Long live the allied people of Austria! Long live liberty!”<sup>28</sup>; the reference to the alliance of peoples is to be noted – such idea would have been unheard of in the Hungarian half of the empire, even though in Austria itself was never reached a clear idea how this alliance would actually be and function; Metternich abdicated that night, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> came the imperial pledge for conceding a constitution.<sup>29</sup> After those days, events followed one another in quick succession.

By late May, the moderate liberal victories in Hungary, Croatia, Bohemia and the Hereditary Lands achieved considerable success, chasing the dynasty and the loyal conservatives away from Vienna, to Innsbruck (a sign that liberals had almost no backing in the countryside after the peasants were thankful for their emancipation mostly to the emperor); at the same time, in conjunction with liberalism, the various and conflicting national demands clashed with each other. Lombardy and Veneto presented a clear-cut case:

<sup>27</sup> Ágnes Deák, “Együttműködés vagy konkurencia. Az alsó-ausztriai, a csehországi és a magyarországi ellenzék összefogási kísérlete 1847-1848-ban” (Cooperation or competition: an attempt at cooperation among the oppositions in Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary in 1847-1848) (*Aetas*, Vol. 14, No. 1-2, 1999 <http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00011/1h-02.html>)

<sup>28</sup> Quoted by István Fenyő, *Adolf Fischhof és a Habsburg Monarchia* (Adolf Fischhof and the Habsburg Monarchy) (Budapest: Argumentum, 2002), 22.

<sup>29</sup> See István Fenyő, *Adolf Fischhof...*, 9-25.



the republican Venetian leader, Daniele Manin affirming that “We do not ask Austria to be humane and liberal in Italy. [...] We ask her to get out. We have no concern with her humanity and liberalism; we wish to be masters in our own house.”<sup>30</sup> Beside the Italians, in direct war with the empire, three patterns of national movement emerged: the urban-bourgeois Austro-German movement, the lesser nobility-led Hungarian, Croat and Polish movement and the ‘underdog’ Czech, Slovene, Ruthen, Slovak, Romanian and Serb movement, forming the group of non-dominant nations.<sup>31</sup>

This was a faithful juncture where the centralist or federal Great Austrian (Austro-German-led imperial civic patriotism), the national federal Great German, the ethno-federal Austro-Slav (led by the Czechs, but supported by almost all non-dominant ethnic groups) and the dualist-personal unionist Hungarian national projects clashed and endangered the prospects of the ‘lawful revolutions’<sup>32</sup> of March-April.<sup>33</sup>

The biggest illusions were harbored by the Austro-Germans liberals who were hoping to create at least a politically centralized constitutional Great Austria, which in turn, given its weight, to lead the would-be German Federation.<sup>34</sup> The German liberals combined the Reich’s historical rights (German imperial state-right) with the ethnic principle of national Romanticism (Herder, Fichte, Arndt). This made the Austrian imperial civic patriotism incompatible with any sort of Great German unity since more than two-thirds of Austria’s population was non-German. This same problem with the east Prussian territories inhabited by Poles and naturally comprising also mixed areas was finally “solved” by the Frankfurt

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Bernard Yack, “Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism”, *Political Theory* Vol. 29, No. 4, (August 2001): 521.

<sup>31</sup> See Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy: from Enlightenment to Eclipse* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 135.

<sup>32</sup> István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians 1848- 1849* (New York-London: Columbia UP, 1979)

<sup>33</sup> Ágnes Deák, “A Habsburg Birodalom a nacionalizmus kihívásai között. Tervek és koncepciók a birodalom újjáalakítására (1848-1849)” (The Habsburg Empire between the Challenges of Nationalism. Plans and Conceptions for the reorganization of the empire) (*Aetas*, Vol. 12, No. 4. Fall 1997: [http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00007/1997\\_4-01.html](http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00007/1997_4-01.html)), 1-41.

<sup>34</sup> Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy*..., 143.

Assembly at the end of the ‘Polish debate’ by splitting it according to nationality, leaving the Polish part outside Germany.<sup>35</sup> The trend of the various German-led *Mitteleuropa*-plans showed a possible way to reconcile the Great German and the Great Austrian plans.

The Hungarian position was compatible with either a loose *Mitteleuropa* or a Great Germany, but the Czech national demands, following the Hungarian and Imperial German hybrid ‘ethno-historical’ model, did not fit in any of the German or Austro-German plans, except maybe a German-Austrian customs union.<sup>36</sup> The April 11 reply to the invitation of the Frankfurt Preliminary Assembly (Board of Fifty) of the moderate liberal Czech leader, František Palacký, became a cause célèbre exactly because he put the cold facts into the face of the various exalted planners. Palacký, with the 8 April imperial rescript on Bohemian autonomy ‘in his pocket’, gave the first formulation of the Austro-Slav agenda: “You know that in the south-east of Europe, along the frontiers of the Russian empire, there live many nations widely differing in origin, in language,—Slavs, Wallachians, Magyars, and Germans, not to speak of Turks and Albanians—none of whom is sufficiently powerful itself to bid successful defiance to the superior neighbor on the East for all time. [...] [Therefore] if the Austrian State had not existed for ages, it would have been in the interests of Europe and indeed of humanity to endeavor to create it as soon as possible. [...] Austria has long failed to recognize the real juridical and moral basis of her existence, [...] that all the nationalities and all the religions under her scepter should enjoy complete equality of rights and respect in common. The rights of nations are in truth the rights of Nature. [...] Nature knows neither dominant nor subservient nations. If the bond which unites a number of diverse nations in a single political entity is to be firm and enduring, no nation can have cause to fear that the

<sup>35</sup> András Gergely, The Hungarian Nationalities Act of 1849 in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region. Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998*, ed. Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király, (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 43-45.

<sup>36</sup> Ágnes Deák, “A Habsburg Birodalom a nacionalizmus kihívásai között...”, [http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00007/1997\\_4-01.html](http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00861/00007/1997_4-01.html), 4-23.

union will cost it any of the things which it holds most dear. [...]”<sup>37</sup> With these elevated words, which caused extreme shock among the German and Austro-German liberals, began the bitter Czech-German struggle over Bohemia-Moravia and the public career of Austrian liberal ethno-federalism. But first, moderation played its role, since of the two drafts of the Pan-Slav Congress<sup>38</sup> held in Prague (May-June), the document sent to the Austrian emperor struck the middle ground between imperial patriotism and ethno-federalism, demanding liberal federation on crownland basis for the whole of the empire, but implying the disregard of Hungarian state-right.<sup>39</sup>

Robert Kann rightly points out that the “intellectual contribution [of the Austrian Revolution] to the potential solution of the nationality problem still represents the foremost achievement in that field [...] it was of great importance as a promoting cause for the further development of conscious political nationalism among the Austrian nationalities in general, of considerable influence in further theoretical and practical attempts to solve the constitutional problem of the multinational state, and, finally (this applies particularly to the legislative work of Kremsier) it was a unique achievement of liberal constitutionalism.” On the other hand, as Maciej Janowski contends, “All this does not, perhaps, match the intensity of the ethnic conflicts of 1848-1849. As a rule, a naive ‘internationalist’ standing of March 1848 soon gave way to enmity made all the more stronger as it was fuelled by disillusionment.[...]”

37 František Palacký, Letter to Frankfurt, 11 April 1848 in Balázs Trencsényi-Michal Kopeček eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), vol. 2, 326-327.

38 Trencsényi, Balázs – Kopeček, Michal eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity...*, vol. 2, 326-327.

39 They could not polish them into finished declarations as the imperial troops of Windischgrätz descended upon them. Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918*, Vol. 2. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 9.

By supporting the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia (Croat state-right), Serbian territorial autonomy (Vojvodina) according to their old, feudal privileges from 1690, municipal and cultural autonomy for the Slovaks and Ruthens of Hungary; Slovene ethnic demands were also converted into cultural autonomy and they carefully avoided the issue of Polish independence, brokering instead for an incipient Polish-Ruthen compromise. On the latter: “After sharp debates within the ‘Polish-Ruthenian section’ of the Congress, intellectuals taking part in the debates accepted a compromise that recognised the equality of two nationalities within the land and at the same time restrained from dividing Galicia into two separate provinces. It never was put into practice, and the politicians of both sides in Galicia disavowed the deal, but it shows that intellectual possibility of compromise was not yet closed.” Maciej Janowski, “Wavering Friendship: Liberal and National Ideas in Nineteenth Century East-Central Europe”, *Ab Imperio*, 2000/3-4. <http://abimperio.net/cgi-bin/aishow.pl?state=showa&idart=475&page=6&idlang=1&Code=>; Kann, *The Multinational Empire...*, 5-11.

In this process two intellectual-political achievements need to be highlighted. One is the Kremsier (Czech: Kroměříž) Draft Constitution, the other the German, Austro-German and Hungarian centralist concepts of cultural autonomy (or, rather its various interpretations; Gleichberechtigung [equality of ‘Volkstammen’] in Cisleithania, ‘népiségek nemzeti szabad kifejlődése’ [free national development of nationalities] in Hungary).

As A. J. P. Taylor and C. A. Macartney emphasized<sup>40</sup>, the Reichstag, which was transferred after the October Revolution to the Moravian archbishop’s summer residence at Kremsier, operated in a political vacuum and under the possibility of counter-revolutionary backlash; therefore, they dismissed its achievements as ‘overrated’; this back-projection is not accurate, as the mainly liberal MPs still hoped that a constitutional monarchy, firmly averting democratic, socialistic and other aspirations of the ‘mob’, will be retained. Therefore the Czech-led Slavs and the Austro-Germans managed to make a deal by reconciling political centralism (*Gesamtstaatsidee*), crownland-federalism and national demands (ethno-federalism) with constitutionality and individual rights (civil and political liberties); the result was a parliamentary constitutional monarchy with a centralized federal structure, having the Austro-Germans in the lead, but without retaining their former dominant status. Its guiding principle was the separation of nationality and high politics and devolution of competences for the former to the local (municipalities) and district (*Kreis*) levels. There nationality was allowed to take territorial-institutional forms in the ethnically homogeneous would-be districts; the federal and large parts of the crownland level would have remained disproportionately German-speaking, but without directly hindering the non-German groups. This extent of concessions from a dominant group was and remained the most extensive in the period. It was a special moment when the mainly German-speaking liberals soundly balanced their national-social fears of loosing ground and their goal of creating a constitutional and

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<sup>40</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809–1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 79-80.; C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790–1918* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 418.

inclusive regime in the framework of a centralized federation. Besides the whole of section II., containing the Bill of Rights, its most famous provision was on national equality (art. 21): each of the nationalities had “an inviolable right to the preservation and cultivation of its nationality in general and its language in particular. Legal equality of all languages spoken in school, government agencies, and public life will be guaranteed by the state.” The ideal was still the unitary public sphere supported by civic patriotism, but unlike to the concurrent multilingual, but mono-national Swiss solution, where the cross-cutting cleavages presented a much more favorable situation, they had to give in to the logic of multi-nationality through the local and district level arrangements. Once this road was taken, actual and full-blown confederalism and conflicting ethnic demands started to lurk in the background. With the start of the uneasy power shift between the previously dominant and non-dominant groups, the first casualty was the old, trans- and supranational imperial identity – true, suffering a relatively slow death.

But the time was not quite ripe for the simmering start of widespread nationalist mobilization in the empire, as the Reichstag was dissolved and the Kremsier Draft was replaced by the imposed Olmütz (Czech: Olomouc) or March Constitution. Communal autonomy, the crownland organization, the bill of rights and the declaration of national equality was retained, but under the centralist autocratism of the emperor; until 31 December 1851, when the *Sylvesterpatent* revoked it, it remained on paper because state of emergency was in place throughout the empire; with its transient nature, it successfully fulfilled its legitimacy-sustaining role when the dynasty and the imperial-loyal elites still needed it during 1849-50.

## **2.2. Ethnic civil war and reconciliation efforts in Hungary**

Because of the crownland-system was applied also to ‘rebellious’ Hungary, it still seemed to offer more for the Serbs, Croats, Romanians and Slovaks, clamoring for their own national crownlands, than what the Hungarian government was offering; because, besides the equal individual rights under the April Laws and some language rights in education and religious life, they were offering nothing.<sup>41</sup>

In Hungary, fighting in defense of the April Laws and for personal union within the empire, had developed an ethnic civil war interwoven with the former issue, seemingly beyond the ethno-social cleavage; most of the Slovaks and Ruthens, plus the Romanians of Hungary proper fought on the Hungarian side, appreciating the abolition of serfdom and the liberal constitution, whereas the Transylvanian Romanians, the Saxons, the Croats and the Serbs fought on the imperial side; in spite of this, all of them were voicing national demands, challenging the mono-lingual state-nation paradigm. As long as the Great German question was open and the war in Italy went on, the window of opportunity for a separate Hungary was open and shrewdly taken advantage of first by the Batthyány cabinet, than by the Kossuth-led Committee of National Defense; long after the tide turned, the Kossuth-led Hungarian Parliament was still in the vein of revolutionary optimism; they declared Hungarian independence, opposed by the moderate Peace Party seeking a compromise with Vienna, in April 1849 only a slight majority. The hoped for international solidarity of free peoples did not materialize, and it was also no use against the next imperial invasions of Austria and Russia in May (the latter’s army being invited by Francis Joseph too help him out); in this period the tactical importance of the reconciliation with the nationalities finally dawned on some leaders of the left (among them Kossuth), and was expressed during a press polemic like this: “We Hungarians have to start with assuming the Gleichberechtigung-type promises of

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<sup>41</sup> See the Proposal of the Committee on the Union of Transylvania with Hungary on “the guaranteeing of civil rights of the Romanian nation on the basis of equality [of the law]”, 27 September 1848 in György Spira, *A nemzetiségi kérdés a negyvennyolcas forradalom Magyarországon* (The Nationality Question during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848) (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1980), 185-186.

the enemy even more than they do. Let us show through actions, that this promise on our lips is thousand fold more real than on those, which beguiled the Wallachians and Servians [“rácok”] with it, and who managed on this pretext to generate fatal animosity between us and them.”<sup>42</sup> “It is possible that the desire for that degree of national existence, upon which one takes up arms is still not awakened in the various nationalities, and the fact that it happened notwithstanding can be solely imputed to the instigations of Austria. There is a lot of truth in this, but it is undeniable, that the elements, out of which sooner or later these desires will rise are already given; consequently it is better to solve the whole nationality issue in advance radically or at least to guide it into such a rut in which it can advance smoothly [...] without dislocations”<sup>43</sup> argued the liberal-democrat Albert Pálfi (or Pálffy), who proposed a future federative Hungarian republic and communal and township autonomy as instant conciliatory-preliminary measures. Furthermore, count Laszló Teleki, Hungarian emissary in Paris, taking part in the Polish-led émigré networks of various East Central European nations, took up the fashionable federal and confederal ideas animated by democratic messianism and he applied it to Hungary. “Arguing that Saint Stephen's Hungary was as dead as Austria, he would grant autonomy not only to the Croats, but also to the other nationalities. Yet even he insisted that the official language of federated Hungary be Hungarian. Furthermore, he imagined that Hungary would become ‘the center and queen of a future Danubian Confederation with power to crush forever the monster of absolutism and with borders extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea.’ [...] [in May] a number of leading emigrés—Teleki, Pulszky [Hungarian emissary to Britain], a third Hungarian [Frigyes Szarvady, associate of Pulszky], the Czech František Rieger, Czartoryski, and other Poles—met and drew up a protocol according to which Hungary would grant complete territorial autonomy to Croatia, the Serbian Vojvodina,

<sup>42</sup> *Márczius Tizenötödike*. (March Fifteenth) 6 March 1849, no. 22, 85-86., quoted in György Spira, *A nemzetiségi kérdés...*, 198.

<sup>43</sup> *Márczius Tizenötödike*. (March Fifteenth) 10 March 1849, no. 22, 85-86., quoted in György Spira, *A nemzetiségi kérdés...*, 200.

and the Romanian-inhabited areas of Hungary. Germans and Slovaks would enjoy local or municipal autonomy. [...] Kossuth indignantly rejected the protocol, and there can be little doubt that the domestic leaders of the other nationalities would have rejected it too, had they ever been told of its contents. Pulszky, who had come to Paris at Teleki's request, considered the whole affair a comedy [...].” Pulszky was right in that no serious consideration was given to the idea of Danubian Confederation by any politician in power; nevertheless it led to the *Projet de pacification* signed by Kossuth and Avram Iancu, the leader of the Romanian Insurgent Army, mediated by Nicolae Bălcescu<sup>44</sup>, a Wallachian revolutionary, member of the mentioned émigré network. This in turn led to the Nationality Resolution of the Hungarian Parliament in Szeged on 28 July 1849<sup>45</sup>, twenty-four days before the final defeat of Independent Hungary. The first section stated that the main goal was “to reassure [...] the non-Hungarian speaking citizens of the fatherland” through “free nationality development of all the nationalities of the Hungarian Empire”, a wording which was identical to the one used in the Basic Rights resolution of the Frankfurt Assembly (May 1848). It contained a rudimentary form of cultural autonomy and multilingual administration at the local and county level. ‘Outside’ the state, religious life and denominational education was freed from the previous provisions on the usage of Hungarian as the official language; ‘in’ the state, in “those counties where one ethnic group formed the absolute majority, minutes of the meetings could be kept in that language, besides being kept in Hungarian; in communal assemblies people were

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<sup>44</sup> On his agenda: “Bălcescu presumed to find the following stages in the course of history: war of joint liberation by several nations; collective liberation; then the individual struggle, the fight of nations, corresponding to the class wars of the West; and finally the arrival of the ‘real confederation’. The Romanian exiles intended to use the help of the Hungarians to liberate the Danubian Principalities and then later planned to make use of their ethnic predominance. ‘We have to make sacrifices in the present for the benefits of the future’, he wrote to loan from Pest on June 6, 1849.” Ambrus Miskolczy, “Dialogue among Hungarian and Romanian Exiles, 1850-51” in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region. Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998*, ed. Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király, (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 108.

<sup>45</sup> “For technical as well as for constitutional reasons the nationality statutory provision of July 1849, promulgated by the Hungarian Parliament, was a parliamentary resolution not a legislative act. The Legislature had prepared for an overall settlement of the nationality question and raised the issue of a new constitution after passing the Declaration of Independence in April, 1849. However, due to compelling circumstances the nationality issue had to be dealt with quickly and a resolution was passed.” András Gergely, *The Hungarian Nationalities Act...*, 41.



allowed to use their own language, with the minutes kept in the language decided upon by a majority of members. Local National Guards were to be commanded in their own tongue; primary schools, whether public or denominational, were to use the local language.”<sup>46</sup> Hungarian was to be the sole (internal) language of (central) government and intra-state (above communes) communication.<sup>47</sup> It was a major shift from the mono-lingual to the plural and inclusive concept of state-nation in Hungarian political thought, which closely followed the Frankfurt example rather than that of the Austrian approaches; as the “non-Hungarian speaking citizen” formula and the preserved prevalence of official Hungarian in all but the communal level shows, the normative ideal of a unitary and mono-lingual official-public space and state authority was preserved. Keeping in mind also that the resolution was born in the triple juncture of a more and more hopeless war against Austria, the coupled ongoing ethnic war and the strong desire to ethnic appeasement, besides its straightaway benefits, potentially a stepping stone towards a possible future Danubian Confederation, a tool to secure Hungarian independence<sup>48</sup>, I cannot wholly agree with the appraisal of János Varga (with the resolution “Hungary has given up on the idea of a homogeneous Hungarian political nation, thus on the manifestation of Hungarian supremacy”<sup>49</sup>); not just that it was very much a tactical situation, but also in view of subsequent discussions on the nationality issue by all parties concerned. Was for an actual, implemented, supported and internalized agreement, it would have remained the common starting point for all the later solutions considered (domestically in 1861 and 1868). As this will be made clear, it was true only indirectly and as the minority position, upheld against the more and more dominant national egoist views.

<sup>46</sup> István Deák, *Lawful Revolution...*, 314.

<sup>47</sup> András Gergely, *The Hungarian Nationalities Act...*, 41-60.

<sup>48</sup> “The Hungarian Government was aware of the extraordinary significance of the Resolution. Therefore, it announced it immediately and tried to utilize it both in its European propaganda and in the appeasement process.” András Gergely, *The Hungarian Nationalities Act...*,

<sup>49</sup> János Varga quoted in András Gergely, *The Hungarian Nationalities Act...*,

## CHAPTER 3 – THE CIVIC PATRIOTIC ANSWER

### 3.1. *Émigré politics between national egoism and federalism (1850-68)*

With the final defeat of Hungary in August 1849, underlined with brutal retributions, a new period began in the history of the empire. The left-liberals and radicals, leaders, like Kossuth and others, especially soldiers, went into exile.

By following Kossuth in its exile and with it the émigré discussions, one enters the terrain of “clean history” of ideas (Ambrus Miskolczy), freed from any direct exigency and motivated by loose and ambivalent perceptions of opportunities and progressive appeal. The debate between Kossuth and Teleki over the territorial-centralist or ethno-federal and autonomist approach, in direct continuation of the 1849 discussions and negotiations went on during 1850-51 in the context of alternating émigré debates and planning animated both by international democratic solidarity and national egoism.<sup>50</sup> The majority of the otherwise deeply divided and factious Hungarian émigrés sided with the territorial intransigence of Kossuth (Sebő Vukovics, Gyula Andrássy, János Czeecz, István Gorove, Ferenc Pulszky and finally Klapka), while the master of petty scheming, Bertalan Szemere, sided with Teleki.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of 1849, Bălcescu and Ion Ghica proposed an eastern confederation against Russia and Pan-Slavism under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte. It was during this time, that the meeting of Hungarian exiles (10 January, London) clarified how Hungarian

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<sup>50</sup> See György Szabad, “Lajos Kossuth’s Role in the Conceptualization of a Danubian Federation” in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region. Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998*, ed. Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király, (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 61-97.

<sup>51</sup> Ambrus Miskolczy, , 122-125.

supremacy ought to be preserved in a regenerated, federative Hungary. Teleki and Klapka agreed that “if we have to reconstitute ourselves in Hungary, why would we need to renounce our Hungarian national supremacy? Since their ethnic demands are sufficiently mature, we should provide everything that Serbs, Croats, and Wallachians request – but not the Slovaks. Since they are not ready for it yet. We should establish a federative state with the Hungarians as *natural* and not superimposed leaders since they are the most developed of all, politically, numerically, and in terms of their character.”<sup>52</sup> This view is the identical equivalent of how the Austro-Germans saw themselves in relation to the Cisleithanian Slavs which enabled the Kremsier Compromise and later a neo-josephinist cultural policy, including the use of the *Gleichberechtigung* principle as the basis for state legitimacy.

Meanwhile, Kossuth and the other émigrés who exited to the Ottoman Empire got close to cause with their asylum status that international crisis which they wished and worked for from early April 1849 on. Finally, Austria, Russia, Turkey and Britain did not go to war over some ‘defeated revolutionaries’, but compromised by the decision that Kossuth and his retinue be interned to Kütahya/Kiutahia, a desolate and isolated place at the Asian shore of the Sea of Marmara. This internment lasted between April 1850-September 1851, at the end of which Kossuth was invited as a guest of the United States. He formulated the first incipient version of a constitutional proposal for Hungary in a June 1850 letter to Teleki which was to become a year later a full-fledged version, the famous “Kütahya Constitution”. According to Samuel J. Wilson, but generally echoed in historiography, from György Spira to András Gerő and Ágnes Deák, it was “one of the most farsighted plans ever devised to develop democracy in Hungary.”<sup>53</sup> If the moderate liberals took a conservative turn, under the impact of their not unprecedented ‘fear of democracy’ (Anthony Alblaster)<sup>54</sup>, Kossuth reformulated

<sup>52</sup> Ambrus Miskolczy, “Dialogue among Hungarian and Romanian Exiles...”, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel J. Wilson, “Lost Opportunities: Lajos Kossuth, the Balkan Nationalities and the Danubian Confederation”, *Hungarian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1993), 172.

<sup>54</sup> See Anthony Alblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984)

democratically and inclusively the legacy of 1848. He could do it since he was in the position to disregard those Hungarian lesser nobles which made his spectacular career possible, exploring flexibly the possibilities under the guidance of the ‘what if’. He combined extensive cultural autonomy and levels of local self-government, in direct continuity of his pre-‘48 anti-centralist municipalism, elevating the counties to autonomous entities in a decentralized minimal state. The counties would preserve their national political functions since they would keep the link with their MPs and through the Senate (Upper House), where every county would send two deputies. He took his foremost inspiration from the federal and democratic system of the United States. This included the idea that civic patriotism, both on the local and ‘national’ levels and linked to historical statehood, common memories and civic spirit, will form the basis of political identity, and not (ascriptive) ethnicity. This included the German-style leading position and *Kulturmission* reserved to the historical nation, the Hungarians, as voiced by Klapka and Teleki.

He also supported a necessary reorganization of the counties, where possible according to ethnic lines, as with the Stadion-type *Kreis* system under the Kremsier Constitution. On the other hand, he stressed historical statehood and vociferously rejected any idea of territorial autonomy to be granted for the Serbs or the Romanians. His argument pointed out the function of the future confederation as an alternative against ‘territorial partitioning’: “this confederation would guarantee political existence on their own political territories for Czech, Polish, Wallachian, Serb, Slav, Croatian, Dalmatian, and Hungarian nationalities. Not only would it guarantee their nationality, but given the confederate ties, it would also assure that the Wallachians, Serbs, and Slovaks living in Hungary or the Hungarians living in Moldavia [the Csangos, originaly Szekler/Hungarian settlers coming from Transylvania, 13-18<sup>th</sup> centuries] can find support in the civic development of their

nationalities and thus will never again have to fear absorption.”<sup>55</sup> This idea of trans-border ethnic ties as agents of inter-state peace and free cultural development was also voiced by Eötvös after 1851. Support of cultural autonomy and local self-government in the framework of the minimal state were also crucial common points, although Kossuth kept the flavor of his old municipalism and significantly strengthened self-government with the federative Upper House of the Counties (Senate).

Teleki, more of an idealist and fervent adept of internationalist democratic messianism after 1849, tried to fill the gap by the power of words and deliberation. He wrote that “the difference of opinion in our case is not too big in the matter of nationalities. I believe that besides the communal, county, jurisdictional, church, and schooling concessions, the Wallachians and Serbs should also have permission to form a provincial assembly so that they can decide their own internal matters, in compliance with existing regulations. [...] in the delimitation of Vojvodina and the Wallachian regions, one should ensure where possible that other nationalities do not fall under Serbian or Wallachian rule. This would not be as difficult as it might seem since this is not the delimitation of two independent countries. Therefore, completely surrounding all the territories is not required. We all remember what Felső-Fehér [Upper-White] county was like [it was a county made up of small fragments scattered throughout the south-east of Transylvania].”<sup>56</sup>

Kossuth’s answer was a reiteration of the territorial principle, against the ethnicity-based, more radical plans: “the idea of territory is decisive. It is the container, in the absence of which the life fluid of a state will not come to boil.” Therefore “I want a *territory* for Hungary, and on this territory I want equality for every nationality under the protection of common justice, common freedom, and common laws.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Ambrus Miskolczy, “Dialogue among Hungarian and Romanian Exiles...”, 115.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted by Ambrus Miskolczy, “Dialogue among Hungarian and Romanian Exiles...”, 117.

<sup>57</sup> Ambrus Miskolczy, “Dialogue among Hungarian and Romanian Exiles...”, 118.

By this time, the original sponsors of the confederation idea, the Poles of Hotel Lambert, gave up on the project. “They believed that if the confederation wanted the Poles, Poland should come above all the other nations within the alliance. The problem was that Kossuth felt the same about Hungary's participation. [...] Czartoryski, like Kossuth, hoped, or rather expected to dominate and use the confederation for his own purposes. After all, the Hungarians and Poles viewed themselves as having the more advanced cultures.”<sup>58</sup>

At the end, the Hungarian exiles, enumerated above, all voiced their opinion over the necessary concessions to realistically engage in negotiations with the Serbs and Romanians, and deemed territorial autonomy, not to speak of territorial concessions (which, for example, the Italians under Cavour grudgingly, but accepted in exchange for the advance of Italian unification) as being against Hungarian interests. Consequently, feverish planning subsided after 1851, in a waiting for a new general European conflagration.

In 1858-59, with the long awaited opportunity of alliance and war against Austria, Kossuth was persuaded by Klapka and Teleki to put aside his revulsion against caesaristic France and endorsed the new anti-Habsburg alliance; consequently, they reached an uneasy consensus over the autonomy of Transylvania and the Vojvodina in order to secure Romanian and Serb tactical support for the Danubian Confederation. After the favorable window of opportunity passed, Dániel Irányi, notary of the Hungarian National Directorate, asked Kossuth's permission [in April 1859] to publish the letter, “Kossuth reverted to a more limited position, arguing that these were just tactical concessions to be offered in extreme necessity, and not his real political platform.”<sup>59</sup>

After 1861, Kossuth once again deemed it necessary to take on the idea of confederation and developed his most complete plan, in which he made the biggest

<sup>58</sup> Samuel J. Wilson, “Lost Opportunities ...”, 187.

<sup>59</sup> Balázs Trencsényi, commentary on Kossuth's “Proposal. Concerning the Future Political Establishment of Hungary, in View of Solving the Nationality Question in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, Balázs Trencsényi-Michal Kopeček eds. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), vol. 2, 271.

concessions of his émigré years: autonomous Vojvodina for the Serbs, and the option for Transylvania to be linked only with personal union with Hungary. In 1862 the preliminary draft was published in the press (first in the Hungarian-Italian *L'Alleanza* of Milano, published by Ignác Helfy, and then quoted extensively in the Hungarian press) against his will (“indiscretion”), and had to face a serious backlash and loss of support from the Hungarian public from all sides, who felt that their true national hero and prophet betrayed the highest national ideals.<sup>60</sup> He knew that it was ‘an unfortunate mistake’ given the political situation and he had the draft republished, with minor modifications and an exalted explanatory note emphasizing that he always fought for the self-determination and unity of Hungary and this time too he had only the national good in mind when he proposed a Danubian Alliance.<sup>61</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise created again a new situation in which the prospect of Hungarian independence faded to the distant future; the man who among other things became famous as the author of the adage that politics is the art of exigencies, now, as in 1859, “went back on his [1862] offer, refusing to accept the separation of Transylvania from Hungary proper, and called the granting of territorial and political autonomies within Hungary the ‘murdering of the homeland’.”<sup>62</sup>; he did this because he believed that the previous politics of ‘extreme concessions’ became obsolete and thus unnecessary after 1867; in line with this resigned nationalist attitude, at the end of the 1870s, when he was editing his papers for publication (published as *Irataim az emigrációból* [My writings from emigration], 3 vols., 1880–82), he decided to edit out all the items from his Constitutional Proposal of 1851/59 which were not in line with the complete ‘territorial and political integrity of Hungary’ (reverting basically to his 1848 intransigence); ending up eventually with a simple summary in the final, published version of the writings. With this, according to György Spira,

<sup>60</sup> György Spira, *Kossuth és alkotmányterve* (Kossuth and his Constitutional Proposal) (Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, 1989), 29–41.

<sup>61</sup> György Spira, *Kossuth és alkotmányterve...*, 33–34.

<sup>62</sup> Ignác Romsics, “Nation and State in Modern Hungarian History”, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 164 (Winter 2001): <http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no164/4.shtml>

the true voice of the alternative, national and democratic Hungary made the mistake of basically bowing in front of his own prophecy about the inevitable tragic dissolution of the old, reactionary empire and of Hungary. He made this dark forecast in his famous ‘Cassandra-letter’, an open letter addressed to Deák, exhorting him to the inevitable dangers resulting from the alliance with the dying Austria. That is to say, instead of actively guiding and preparing his nation for the coming inevitable storm, in order to achieve the smoothest transition possible, he choose to discard the whole issue of domestic nationality reconciliation as useless.<sup>63</sup> But this strain of action was kept alive by a small, but determined group of liberal democratic followers, Lajos Mocsáry being the most important among them; therefore the posterity is in the position through the results of Mocsáry’s long career (1860-92) to see how a similar policy on which the ‘true voice of the nation’ had had given up, did fare after 1867.

Mocsáry, closely following the ideas of Kossuth and the post-’60 Eötvös (also resembling the thought of Adolf Fischhof), advocated a quasi-independent, Hungarian-led, but multilingual/multicultural, decentralized liberal state, criticizing all feudal and absolutistic remnants left in the political system. He was the leader of the main independentist party during 1874-84 only to be ousted from the party itself in 1887 by Dániel Irányi (who returned to Hungary in 1868). The reason: he demanded the full observance of the 1868 Nationality Act and a fair and conciliatory nationality policy; in line with this, he was also defending non-Hungarians against administrative harassments. He won his last MP mandate in the mainly Romanian electoral district of Karánsebes (Romanian: Caransebeş) of Krassó county in 1888, amidst the vitriolic attacks and mocking of both the Hungarian and non-Hungarian press; he was forced to retire from politics in 1892, after which he went into an internal exile.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> György Spira, *Kossuth és alkotmányterve...*, 35., 39-42.

<sup>64</sup> See István Csucsuj, “Lajos Mocsáry’s Political Theory of National Minorities” in *Geopolitics in the Danube Region. Hungarian Reconciliation Efforts, 1848-1998*, ed. Ignác Romsics and Béla K. Király, (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), 161-176.



One can conclude, that Kossuth's post-'67 backpedaling is important both in itself and in relation to the turns of domestic politics in Hungary. This is because the nationalist logic, which was also his most important guiding principle, started too assert itself in a militant and exclusivist manner, transforming Kossuth's and Mocsáry's (and one can add, the bulk of the Reform Age generation's ) tarnished liberal patriotism to seem outdated and feeble; from the point of view of the new liberal nationalist generation, the old liberalism of Kossuth, Mocsáry, Deák and Eötvös alike was dangerous for the nation because it supported a 'tolerant' policy towards the nationalities instead of active and firm Magyarization. All this tend to the conclusion, in line with the thesis on liberal nationalism of Pieter M. Judson<sup>65</sup>, the type of national idealism and opportunism practiced by Kossuth was equally the parent/origin and the enemy of the subsequent integral nationalism which rose in the last third of the 19th century throughout Europe and even beyond.

### **3.2. Imperial civic patriotism vs. Hungarian patriotism (1850-59)**

Eötvös was minister of education and cults in the first constitutional government of Hungary, led by Lajos Batthyány, but left Hungary bound to München, after Lamberg, special envoy of the Habsburg court, was lynched signaling the final rupture between the court and Hungary. In a letter written not long after his arrival, he explained that "I felt myself useless. I was not born a revolutionary. However great the purpose may be, I cannot ignore the sufferings of individuals. It is my conviction that material power, which is the support of every revolution, is not the path on which the human race can progress."<sup>66</sup> He spent the months of his self-imposed exile in or near München, between October 1848 and December 1850 and again till 1853, with his relatives. Ágoston Trefort (1817-88), his brother-in-law,

<sup>65</sup> See Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive revolutionaries. Liberal politics, social experience, and national identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1996), 1-10.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to Antal Csengery, quoted in Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös...*, 59.

kept him intellectual company, actively collaborating with him in the polemic with Franz Hartig and František Palacký during 1850-51, in which he defended civic patriotism against the Herderian ethnic principle.<sup>67</sup>

Eötvös started out with an analysis of the defining political and social upheaval of his age, the French Revolution. He concluded, not surprisingly and in line with such post-restoration figures as Constant, de Staël or Tocqueville, that reformism is superior over radicalism and violence. Therefore he reiterated the superiority of the gradual, but effective and pervasive changes over the ways of organicism or radical revolution. The liberal Catholicist Tocqueville, with his elitist liberalism and republicanism proved to be, for the second time in Eötvös' intellectual career, a crucial inspiration. But the nationality question was that unreflected point of western liberal thought which ultimately made the Central European Eötvös, through his political theory, both famous and misunderstood. With the words of Paul Body "Tocqueville's orientation was formed... by the political circumstances of France, where nationality problems were not paramount, and for that reason perhaps he did not fully appreciate the role of nationalism as a source of oppression in the modern world. It is noteworthy that most of his commentators have failed to point out this important omission in Tocqueville's critique of modern society."<sup>68</sup>

This political thought of Eötvös during this period was determined by the shock of radicalism, civil war and mob rule in 1848, the general post-'48 anti-democratic and conservative turn of moderate liberalism and a waning, but still shimmering hope in a fully constitutional consolidation of the Habsburg Monarchy. He personally felt, given his pre-48 centralist program, responsible for the chaos and destruction, although he also acknowledged that Kossuth's Hungary was waging a legitimate defensive war. Therefore his flight disturbed him, even though he knew and as we saw, explained-excused himself with his temper,

<sup>67</sup> See Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös...*, 62 and Gábor Gángó: *Eötvös József az emigrációban* (József Eötvös in Emigration) (Debrecen: Kossuth UP, 1999), 67-93.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös...*, 67.

arguing that it made him a man unsuitable for revolutions or radical upheavals in general.<sup>69</sup> The closest parallels were the post-'48 thought of Victor von Andrian-Werburg<sup>70</sup> and Zsigmond Kemény. The latter's pamphlets, *After the revolution* and *One more word after the revolution*, going against the current and offending all kinds of patriotic sensibilities in the midst of national mourning, equated Kossuth's politics with irrational populist degeneration and proposed an alternative reform program inspired by an interpretation of Széchenyi. Kemény concluded to three fundamental principles as the basis for a restored and reborn Hungary: the recognition of Hungarian state-right as the key to the stability of the empire, Hungary sharing the imperial *Kulturmission* to the east; rejection of democracy in favor of liberalism and 'mixed constitution'; and finally, the 'bending' of liberalism and progress if it comes in contradiction with the needs of Hungarian supremacy. Although Kemény's shocked the Hungarian public, his proposal enjoyed widespread reception and appreciation. It became the political Bible for the loose liberal group informally led by Deák which sought a dualist rapprochement with Vienna, on the basis of Hungarian state-right.<sup>71</sup>

The post-'48 Eötvös' universalist methodology, widely shared in the period by all strains of progressivist thought, from liberals to anarchists, dismissed nationality as a form of primitive human sociability belonging to the past which was weakened by the ecumenic religions (Christianity) and was being superseded by large state-societies; at the same time, conscious about the novelty and power of modern nation-states and national movements, he was the first who formulated the twin thesis about 1848 being first and foremost the 'revolution of nationalism' plus suprematism/national egoism as the fundamental principle of nationalism. "The basis of any kind of national aspiration: its sense of superiority; its goal: to

<sup>69</sup> Paul Bödy, *Joseph Eötvös...*, 59-60; András Gergely, "Eötvös korszerűtlen koreszméi" (The Unseasonable Ideas of Eötvös) (*Új Forrás*, Vol. 17, No. 2, February 1985: 35.)

<sup>70</sup> Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire...*, 89-93.

<sup>71</sup> See Takáts József: *Modern magyar politikai eszméletörténet* (A History of Modern Hungarian Political Thought) (Budapest: Osiris, 2007), 58-59.; commentary and excerpts of Zsigmond Kemény in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)*, Balázs Trencsényi-Michal Kopeček eds. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), vol. 2, 455-462.

rule and dominate.” His 1850 pamphlet, *Über die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in Österreich* (Concerning the Equality of the Nationalities in Austria) was a philippic against all kinds of political nationalism in the name of individual liberty and equality and an apology of large, constitutional polities, like the Habsburg Empire. He reiterated this position in the first volume (‘diagnosis’) of his magisterial treatise on political theory, *The Dominant Ideas of the Nineteenth Century and their Impact on the State* (published simultaneously in German and Hungarian; original German title: *Der Einfluss der herrschenden Ideen des 19. Jahrhunderts auf den Staat*, 1851, 1854), the magnum opus of his career, by lobbying the initial chapters of the pamphlet into the first volume (1851). The novelty of this first volume was the fully elaborated conservative turn of his liberalism, rejecting what he saw as the modern, ‘fashionable’ and ‘popular’ interpretations not just of nationality (=ethnic political nationalism), but also of liberty (=democracy) and equality (=socialism and communism), opting for a sound and reformist *via media* based on individualism and political liberty (rule of the *few*).

The reception of these two works were cold, to say at least. The widely respected Transylvanian scholar, Sámuel Brassai (1797/1800?-1897) wrote in his 1851 review of the first volume that “Our view is, in spite of the of the utopian hopes of the respectable baron that with the proliferation of contacts there will also be in the case of nationality only one kraal and one shepherd, that the national feeling, through which a people is connected [...] also fights against its cessation, it needs to be respected.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Eötvös’ view on Hungarian state-right and the historical-political entities of the empire in general were based on the need of a strong, politically centralized government, linking the autonomous entities; this clashed with both the dualist (moderate) and the personal unionist (radical) interpretations of Hungarian state right.

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted by Ágnes Deák, “‘A magyar nemzet jövője cultura kérdése’. Eötvös József nemzetiségpolitikai koncepciója” (‘The future of the Hungarian nation of a question of cultural progress’. The views on nationality policy of Eötvös József) (Aetas, Vol. 6, No. 1-2, 1990: 10.)

The second volume, ‘solutions’, came only 3 years later, in 1854. This was a treatise on its own right, where he, under the influence of the many criticisms received, changed his mind over nationality, now framing it as an essential part of the present, of the two-tiered triumphal march of liberty and modern, large statehood. He influenced Lord Acton, who argued against Mill’s liberal nationalism by saying that a multicultural realm is more beneficial for constitutional liberty, than a monocultural one.<sup>73</sup>

Eötvös retained his civic patriotic program, the goal of which was to enable the workings of liberty and progress and to depoliticize nationality through that large free sphere to be created by the multi-level autonomy of the historico-political entities, counties/districts, towns and communes, complemented-balanced by the strong civil sphere of associative and communal life. Nationality could be pacified by the principles of self-government and civic patriotism. Nevertheless, he accepted the doctrine of historical nationality, since it was a compound of civic (history, territory, institutions, political culture) and ethnic (language, culture) factors of political community, in line with the goals of civic patriotism.

The following section deals with the thought of Eötvös after he surrendered his antagonism thesis and accepted historical nationality as beneficial for liberty, progress and large, historical statehood. The point of departure remained his Christian universalism.

In one of the best studies available in English on Eötvös, Steven Béla Várdy identifies Christian progressivism and humanitarianism as the most important axiom for Eötvös, which stood as the foundation for his liberalism.<sup>74</sup> This liberalism was informed by the Christian idea of equal dignity and autonomy for every human soul, and not by the rationalist interpretations of the natural rights theory. For him individual liberty and Christian dignity were the same, with same historical roots in early medieval times, when the process of

<sup>73</sup> See Ágnes Deák, “József Eötvös and Lord Acton. Meeting at the Crossroads of Liberalism and the Critique of Nationalism”, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 182 (Summer 1996)

<sup>74</sup> Steven Béla Várdy: “Baron Joseph Eötvös: Statesman, thinker, reformer” in *The Austro-Hungarian Mind : at Home and Abroad*, Steven Béla Várdy and Agnes Huszár Várdy ed., (Boulder: East European Monographs No. 254, 1989), 74.

civilization (“polgárosodás”, “művelődés”, “Gesittzung”), meaning material and moral progress (the French “civilisation”, reinterpreted from the original Enlightenment usage of improvement of mores by Guizot), began. This was different from the ancient civilization because of the new Christian idea of inherent human dignity. Gángó notes that Eötvös paid his tributes to Guizot, whom he regarded as one of his spiritual fathers, by using his interpretation of civilization; but he also changed it at two points: 1. the original eruption point of bourgeois civilization during the Reformation was pushed back to the early medieval times, entailing also the principle of separation of church and state, and 2. in the triadic setup of Roman, Germanic and Christian mixed components of European civilization, the ruling factor became the state instead of society.<sup>75</sup> (This latter shift is an important one showing that in the Central European context building a modern state was still a desiderata and not a reality.)

This Christian paradigm of progress was not universal, but rooted in the history and culture of the West – against the Orient or Asia, paradoxically including the Eastern Christians and looming large as the homeland of the most horrific despotisms (especially Russia, the “northern colossus”). For Eötvös, progress was neither arithmetic, nor organic, but gradual and uneven (or even regressive, which he holds highly unlikely, at least in the West); his British-style evolutionism (similar to that of Macaulay, Spencer or Buckle) meant a hierarchy of progress, with peoples and places being in different stages of it; it was both synchronic and asynchronic, liberty flourishing in advanced forms in some places (Britain, Holland), being incipient (Germany) or even repressed (France, Habsburg Monarchy) in other places.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Gábor Gángó, *Eötvös József Uralkodó eszméi- Kontextus és kritika* (The Dominant Ideas by József Eötvös- Context and Critique) (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó- Bibó István Szellemi Műhely, 2006), 87-89.

<sup>76</sup> József Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek befolyása az államra* (The Dominant Ideas of the Nineteenth Century and their Impact on the State) (second, revised edition, Pest: Ráth Mór, 1871), vol. 2.: on progress: book 6, chapters 1-6, 561-631.; on uneven and historicized liberty in the world: 415-426.

Modern theories of political society/statehood tend to crystallize around the contractarian or the historical-organicist positions, the former going back to Roman origins and having reached its most seminal treatment by Hobbes; the other going back to Plato and Aristotle, the latter's famous thesis, the *zoon politikon* holding that the natural, the social and the political state are inseparable, being animated by the inbuilt human need to create culture and society; he held the view, reported by Eötvös, that those who cannot form a state (polis) are incomplete humans, and those who live outside one because they don't need it, are superhumans.<sup>77</sup>

Eötvös, in its turn follows Montesquieu and Hume and does not endorse neither of the above mentioned positions; he is Aristotelian in arguing that in reality, there is no separable natural and social state, since as the experience of the geographical explorations had shown, humans are always found in some form of social state, primitive or advanced; on the other hand, the political state is a human construct, and arises after a certain level of civilization is achieved; it is not natural, in-built, like the fused social state, since there are many cases when a state collapses or gets dissolved without other state/states springing up to take its place; this suggests that state-making is not a natural human trait, but comes with a certain degree of civilization.

For the question, what motivates humans to get civilized beyond the natural sociability boundary, he has a Newtonian and Smithian answer: aside that in the last instance God is the ruler of history and the creator of natural laws, the specific human traits of reason, self-reflection, language and perfectibility account for the continuous human quest to seek individual and communal improvement through society and later, polity/statehood.

He rejects the traditional schools of statehood because they equate the problem of the origins of the state with the problem of political legitimacy; for him, these are two separate

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<sup>77</sup> See Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek ...*, 77-78.

issues and have nothing to do with each other; the contractarian rationalism is quite right regarding legitimacy (individual rational consent, since long-lasting and stable statehood cannot be founded solely on coercion), he says, but absolutely wrong on the origins, since history shows clearly that these original contracts do not exist; again, it entails a jump from the natural-social state to the political one, which projects a primitive, still uncivilized people gathering around, conceiving and signing an abstract and complicated social contract, by a highly rational process of consent. The historical school is demolished by the simple argument that conditions change, and therefore legitimacy cannot be based on already outworn state of affairs.

What Eötvös proposes instead is to leave the issue of origins to the historians, and the issue of legitimacy for political science. Now, if the state arises because of needs coming from a higher level of civilization and social complexity, the individuals realizing that they need statehood for complex, beyond-individual goals, the legitimacy for modern states must come from this line of reasoning and individual free will. Free will, on its turn is determined by human reason and sense of morality, always contingent because people tend to have diverse perceptions and choices on what to do in the same set of circumstances. People also tend to base their free will on their passions and desires rather than reason, but those choices on social or state level cannot endure. Therefore the chief sign of reasonable legitimacy for a state is its endurance and stability in a given level and stage of civilization (a set of circumstances). For him, the six hundred years old historical continuity of the English ancient constitution was one of the benchmarks for reasoned legitimacy of statehood in line with the laws of advancement.

This is almost the same reasoning which made the Baron de Montesquieu famous: those states are the most legitimate and stable which base themselves on the principles underlying the “general or national spirit” (the specific set of circumstances) of their



respective societies. Both of them would agree that for the Western set of circumstances the most appropriate forms and ways of government are the moderate ones, while rejecting the extreme ones, which tend to eliminate, through excessive centralization, those “intermediary powers” so important for liberty and the civic spirit.

Montesquieu itself distinguished between the social and the political state, employing the concept of “national spirit” to counter the doctrine of enlightened despotism put forward by Voltaire and his colleagues, according to which the “French kings [...] had “made” France by bringing together under their royal sovereignty people who had been divided by their feudal lords and religious leaders [...]. The Kingdom, as a society of subjects, produced in its turn a society of patriots, a society of persons living willingly together under the same sort of laws and customs, that is to say, a nation.”<sup>78</sup> This voluntarist-instrumentalist, historically quite precise account of French nationhood, centered on the undivided absolute sovereignty of the king<sup>79</sup> was contrary to everything which he held dear in France, except probably the social peace. With the thesis of efficient statehood possible only if based on the specificities of its society (“national spirit”), he turned the equation of Voltaire on its head. Enlightened reason and morality “dictated” to rulers, in his interpretation, to acknowledge those spirits instead of crippling them.

Upholding the autonomy of individuals and the society against the caging effect of the centralizing and homogenizing territorial state became the central tenet for Eötvös as well. He admired the liberty of the Americans and the Swiss, and the way the small component states institutionalized their alliance to defend themselves; for the Continental milieu, he regarded the British Westminster model of a constitutional sovereign state as the best, and the French model of unitary and centralized state as the worst. In the Westminster model, sovereignty

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<sup>78</sup> Maurice Cranston: The Sovereignty of the Nation, in: *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. 2: The Political Culture of the French Revolution, ed. Colin Lucas, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988, pp. 97-104, 101.

<sup>79</sup> This finding became famous in the book of Tocqueville on the French Revolution (*The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, 1856).

was layered, but still unitary; the crucial decentralization involved financial, administrative and legal self-government (municipalism); central authority was embodied by a representative parliament and a ministry or cabinet directly responsible to it. The principle of checks and balances was achieved not by the separation of powers, an American invention after close-reading Montesquieu, but by the working of the “mixed constitution”, balancing the social and interest-divergences of the nation through the monarch, the Upper House (the aristocracy) and the Lower House (the commons).

Eötvös, through his pragmatic point of view (“practical state science”), held that the formalist-procedural organization of central state powers which could contain all tyrannical attempts is an inflated idea, because if the given society becomes elitist or oligarchic (one or a few social classes or interest groups taking hold of the central state), then these checks do not work anymore – so it is not true that they perform regardless of the social-historical milieu.<sup>80</sup> With this he formulates the same idea on the importance of political and civic culture (and the material conditions) like Montesquieu or political scientists after World War II on the collapse of the (procedurally balanced) Weimar Republic.

The voice of an experienced practitioner speaks also when he explains that although formally the cabinet (central government) is and should be subordinated to the legislature, de facto their relationship is an uneven or even mutuality and unity, the cabinet dealing with situations when no specific law is given and also being the chief initiator of law proposals. He firmly believes that this kind of essential unity of the central powers, or their centralized, concentrated nature, is a natural and necessary consequence of the size of the modern states. Therefore, in the final instance, the checks and balances system is irrelevant; what matters is which power gives the lead for the central state: the legislative or the governing power (in his parlance, the executive power is the administration).<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek ...*, 174-187.

<sup>81</sup> See Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek ...*, 188-192.

Actual and effective democratic control is impossible on this level, except the alternation in power of the parties through the elections. He formulates the enduring suspicion, that modern liberal democratic politics is a form of silent oligarchy or elite rule, at least on the central level. He presents it as a natural fact, the consequence of the sheer size, complexity, specialization and atomization of modern societies, including the inevitable professionalization of politics.

The modern state, product of individual free will and the specific sets of circumstances, has to be accepted with its tendency towards oligarchy; local self-government, his solution, is not presented as a panacea, but as a limited but necessary “school of liberty” and sphere of direct and semi-direct political participation, thus genuine control and local civic spirit. The impossibility of transplanting it to the central level comes from the fact that in that scale direct- and semi-direct participation is ineffective. The optimism of Rousseau transformed into the nightmare of Jacobin despotism because of the simple disregard of the size-problem, he emphasizes it many times. The real dangers of its age are identified in all those thinkers and politicians who advocated an unmediated structure of political society in conditions of modern and complex societies – classical republicans/democrats, socialists, communists, anarchists and ultranationalists. All of them are guilty because their egalitarian ideal in modern times can be achieved only if state and society are made co-extensive by excessive centralization and infrastructural-power extension, with the necessary sacrifice of individual liberty and societal efficiency (the crippled free market and free association mechanism). Because of this, he certainly would have not shared in the quasi-nostalgic yearning for the lost civic spirit evinced by Hannah Arendt, among others.

His alternative rests on the following liberal tenet: “[...] it is the duty of the state, regarding those needs, which it cannot fulfill, to give the possibility for the fulfillment to the individual; that is: it has to secure individual liberty, without which the procurement of those

goods on which the happiness of the individual depends, is impossible.”<sup>82</sup> Decentralization and municipalism is both a moral and a material need for reasonably legitimate states of the Western civilization. His materialist argument, in the form of a short study on the fiscal implications of centralization and state infrastructural power was specifically targeting the neo-absolutist and despotic governments of Austria under Bach and France under Napoleon III.

Eötvös valued inclusive patriotism over democratic nationalism because he deemed it more inclusive and fair; his concept of the minimal, decentralized and neutral state of classical liberal vein was endorsed by him also because it contained the promise of free and undisturbed advancement of the individual and its many groups to which he was affiliated without the encroachment of power politics. His interpretation of the art of association was based on the Mandevillian formula of private vices-public benefits (or the Kantian unsocial sociability, for that matter) modified by the participatory component of local self-government as a social-political device to harness these “individual vices” not just for material, but also for moral benefits, that is, for the goal of republican or political liberty. Local direct participation is the means which can make the individuals to feel that they have real and tangible stakes in their civic life, giving crucial motivation which keeps them involved and civic-minded. The centralization of the powers on the central level is thus required to keep these local civic *patrias* in their larger unit, and the two, together with the sphere of free associations, balance, strengthen, complete and control each other.

His post-'48 evolutionism made him to respect historical rights and old institutions since a radical break between the past and the future as advocated by the modern rationalists would make things worse on the long run; in this vein, the Habsburg Monarchy for him was a historical unit worth of praise, because it provided security and stability for its people and

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<sup>82</sup> Eötvös, *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek ...*, 147.

mediated the more advanced stage of Western civilization to the east, therefore being also progressive. Modern constitutionalism, infusing this hierarchical structure would give voice and space for all nationalities to develop freely under the Habsburg security-umbrella.

This is why his seminal pamphlets advocated the liberal reform of the Habsburg Monarchy according to the historical provinces and kingdoms against the ethno-federalism of František Palacký. He saw the restructuring of the Monarchy along ethnic lines and ethnic sovereignty as dangerous to individual liberty and civic spirit, because ethnic sovereignty in his interpretation tended to create a homogeneous structure of the self, supra-posing over its diverse and network-like social identities the categorical and all-encompassing ethnic/national identity; as a consequence, these ethnically mobilized communities would clash head-on over those many areas where their ethnic brethren were mixed with the other nationalities.

His proposal, instead, was based on the tenet of separation of politics and culture (state and ethnicity), modeled on the liberal solution devised for church-state-society relations; he was conscious of the fact that this is possible only to a certain point, after which the central state would follow the culture of the historical and most developed nation. This asymmetry of social power emanating from the top would still enable the peaceful co-existence of the nationalities in the local level, where the separation of state and culture was still possible, because in this structure one is not forced to choose between categorical ethnic identities; in this structure the coercive identity-choice is humanized by the principle of individual liberty and local autonomy: one still has a quite generous public and private space at his disposal, even though the complete recognition (union of state/power/sovereignty and culture) and therefore the most prestigious, both materially and psychologically rewarding public status is awarded only to the titular historical nation, which happens to be the most developed and the carrier of historic statehood, experience and progress.

It follows from this that Eötvös' nationalism is rather an accepted necessity, a requisite of modern statehood, than a deep conviction and sentiment; it remains political and abstract (that is, republican) in nature, at the stage before this precise abstractness of the nation was spiritualized and naturalized by linking it coextensively with ethnicity (a common feat of an array of French and German intellectuals and politicians at the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, among them Rousseau, Herder and Fichte<sup>83</sup>); although personally removed from this linkage (after all, his mother tongue was German and his professed nationality Hungarian, a natural fact for him), he could not escape it when going public as a politician and thinker; even more so, since he advocated a modern state, and modern statehood *nolens-volens* implied nationalism; what he choose, then, is to enable this modernity only as much as it was truly necessary and required by modern civilization, and ensuring its tamed state by institutionalizing individual liberty, free association, and local civic spirit; in this, Christian liberalism and republicanism are employed to moderate the storm of radical modernity, the centralized state and ethnic sovereignty. And since individual liberty (free will and human reason) and the process of civilization were inherently tied up in his thought, he came to finally endorse the advance of moderate modernity as being the real and undertakeable embodiment of progress.

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<sup>83</sup> On the spiritualization of the nation see Maurizio Viroli, *For love of country. An essay on patriotism and nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 95-160. and Attila Demeter M.: *Republikanizmus, nacionalizmus, nemzeti kisebbségek* (Republicanism, nationalism, national minorities) (Kolozsvár/Cluj: Pro Philosophia, 2005), 73-92.

## CHAPTER 4 – THE FAILURE OF CIVIC PATRIOTISM IN HUNGARY (1861)

### ***4.1. The start of Habsburg erosion and its politics in Hungary***

On a particularly hot day of June, 1859, near Solferino, a small town of Lombardy, Italy, the armies of king Victor Emanuel II and emperor Napoleon III unintentionally run into the army of emperor Francis Joseph I. The subsequent, extremely bloody pitched battle left the emperor of the French victorious, but still without decisive win. Still, it prompted not just the establishing of the International Red Cross but also the final erosion of the neo-absolutist edition of the Habsburg *Gesamtstaat*, but without the defeat of centralist impulses per se. Of course, another important ingredient, near state bankruptcy (a well-known acquaintance of Habsburg history), the outcome of overstretched imperialism and large army plus bureaucracy, was also needed for this outcome.

By 1860, for the sake of his empire, Francis Joseph finally decided to concede again a constitution to his embittered lands and peoples, and he had high hopes that this would be the last time, that he needs to forfeit his princely prerogatives and bend in front of the liberal *Zeitgeist*. The constitution, granted in an imperial diploma, hence the usual name of it (*Oktoberdiplom*), drafted by the *Kaisertreu* Hungarian aristocrats headed by baron Antal Szécsen, was combining the conservative federalism of the historical-political entities with traditional dynastic centralism. This semi-restoration of estate constitutionalism reactivated the traditional dualist structure between Cisleithania and Hungary – this was “the first attempt

at the Austro-Hungarian Compromise” (Péter Hanák)<sup>84</sup>, but its exact terms were left intentionally ambiguous by Francis Joseph, as a space for manoeuvre and negotiation.

For Deák, the uncontested leader of the Hungarian elites, except for the aulic (*Kaisertreu*) old and new conservatives, it was a sign of opportunity and he shifted to a moderate optimist mood. But, after his and Eötvös’ imperial audience in late December 1860, he realized that no reasonable common ground between the de facto king and the negotiation-ready ‘loyal kingdom’ exists, and he reverted to his previous attentive passivity. The February Constitution (*Februarpotent*, imperial decree issued under the guidance of Schmerling as an amendment to the October Constitution, but in fact totally altering it) reverted to full-blown centralism, changing the conservative imperial constitution into a liberal one, having its social basis and supporters in the Austro-German liberals (bureaucracy and bourgeoisie) of Cisleithania.

For Kossuth, the émigré leader, and his liberal nationalist followers at home and abroad, the years of 1859-61 were equally the years of high hopes and despair, because finally a war had been produced against the Habsburg State, but it ended in short notice with the dynastic agreement at Villafranca of Napoleon III and Francis Joseph I and he feared that the constitutional shift of the Habsburg dynasty would drag the Hungarian elites into a inopportune compromise, before the next, generally anticipated anti-Habsburg war.

The biggest lesson of 1848-49 for these leaders was about the workings of European power politics. Before 1848, their detailed horizons ended with the Hungarians being wretched between the Germans (the Habsburg Empire and ‘Germany’) and the Slavs (the Pan-Slavic menace from Russia). During 1848-1849 all of them acquired the harsh experiences of the European Concert being in action, especially the conservative dynastic solidarity of Prussia, Austria and Russia (vanished after 1856) and the still valid tenet of the

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<sup>84</sup> See Péter Hanák: *The first attempt at the Austro-Hungarian Compromise: 1860* (Budapest: Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae, 1975)



balance of powers (held dearly especially by the ‘supreme judge’ of the Concert, Great Britain).

The second lesson was about the conscious rejection of the new, “civil and liberal” (e.g. progressive) 1848 constitution by the majority of nationalities living in the Kingdom of Hungary, culminating in parallel ethnic civil wars (Hungarian-Serbian, Hungarian-Croatian, Hungarian-Romanian) and contributing to the defeat of the liberal project.

The big question of 1861, with public life restored and the Parliament convened, was not the form of the political system which could accommodate all concerned parties (that moment already past in late December 1860), but the firm rallying of the elites of Hungary behind a common national and constitutional program. The two mainstream alternatives were represented by the persons and leadership of Teleki and Deák (the Conservatives, old and new, being side-tracked again and supporting nolens-volens the stance of Deák).

## ***4.2. The Nationality Committee of 1861 and the failure of civic patriotism***

The nationality question popped up as an off-topic issue several times during the petition versus resolution debate, and although the majority of deputies did not see it as a domestically contentious issue (only in the matrix of high politics), they readily accepted the initiative of Eötvös to elect a special committee to create a draft law on the issue. The committee, under the informal lead of Eötvös, had 27 members, including leading figures of the Hungarian Liberals such as László Szalay, count Gyula Andrássy, Frigyes Podmaniczky, Imre Madách and László Tisza as well as 12 non-Hungarian members of the House, among them Jakov Ignjatović, Aloiziu Vlad, Sigismund Popovici and Ioan Pop. Chair was assumed by the Conservative György Bartal, who presented the report (containing two proposals) before the House on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August.

The first proposal, endorsed by the majority of the committee led by Eötvös, is a masterpiece of liberal legislation. Its structure and argumentation follows perfectly the guiding liberal principles exposed with remarkable clarity in the short preamble.

The preamble comes like this: for the proceedings of the committee, “two ways offered themselves: the declared demands of some of the nationalities living in our homeland, [...] or the demarcation of those limits, within which the nationalities can freely satisfy their needs”; the committee “choose this second way; because it held that any question, which is so closely related with individual freedom like the satisfaction of the nationality demands to be resolved through concessions is incompatible with the principle of the equality before the law, declared in 1848”; because “since the nationalities of the homeland are dispersed and intermingled, the satisfaction of their concrete demands would suppose territorial changes and round-outs which would threaten the political integrity of the country or would lead to the

total suppression of the smaller nationality fragments living on the territory of the larger nationalities” and “the way of the concessions would be the steadiest instrument to maintain the frictions between the nationalities and ... to overshadow, by the barren rivalry around the attainable rights, the salutary-results-yielding, free competition.”

Because “Hungary, given his specific ethnographical profile even seems to be driven to solve the nationality question once and for all by such legal measures which forming a shield under whose protection the individual citizen’s legitimate nationality claims would be the same in all parts of the homeland, as well as under which the development by free association of the nationalities as bodies/corporations/associations (“testületek”) would be secured.” The already existing elements in the Hungarian Kingdom for this legal-institutional “shield” are, according to the draft, the communal self-government, the confessional autonomies, and above all, the municipal system (counties and towns), which as a constitutional counterbalance against the potentially overbearing central government, is the realm of free “personal and moral individualities” limited only by the necessary integrity of the state.<sup>85</sup>

The obvious normative core of the preamble is the liberal political community, founded upon personal liberty and the rule of law, equal for everybody, everywhere in the country. The equal measure of liberty for every individual of the political community is the precondition for their transformation into citizens and compatriots, not just equal subjects of the same laws. The principle of equality before the law is the cohesion and solidarity principle of this newly created civil, that is, modern (“korszerű és polgári”) society.

For these legislators, any intrusion into this supposedly neutral, color-blind, universal and equal public space by nationality institutions, like the territorial autonomies/nationality districts or counties (rounded out according to nationality) meant the destruction of the

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<sup>85</sup> *Képviselőházi Irományok* (Papers of the Hungarian House of Representatives) (1861, no. 48, 211-214.)

cohesion principle, of the unitary public sphere, making political community impossible. This is what “political integrity of the country” denotes. It is important, that they do not fear, at least in this instance, secession per se (“territorial integrity” would be used), but ‘only’ its precondition, the break-up of a single national public space. (This problem is famously addressed in J. S. Mill’s book, *Considerations on Representative Government*<sup>86</sup>, published one year later, also from a liberal nationalist perspective.)

Tying up territorial units and institutions of the state directly with the respective nationalities of the country would also lead, according to them, to ethnocratic despotism of the ethnic majority against the ethnic minorities remaining in the respective units. This view, already common during the Reform Age, had been just reiterated for them, after the fatal clashes of 1848-49, with the recent history of the Serbian Vojvodina and Temes Banat, a province created in southern Hungary to partially gratify the Serbs for their services in the suppression of the ‘Hungarian revolt’; as Vienna consciously avoided to carve out an overwhelmingly Serb area, the imperial authorities had to conduct a futile struggle to maintain ethnic peace between the ‘titular’ Serbs and the ‘non-titular’ Hungarians, Romanians and Germans (Svabians).<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, they point out two possible consequence of a Hungary organized according to nationality: the escalation of demands (up till secession) and the

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<sup>86</sup> The famous part of chapter 16, *Of Nationality, as Connected with Representative Government*: “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government can not exist. The influences which form opinions and decide political acts are different in the different sections of the country. An altogether different set of leaders have the confidence of one part of the country and of another.[...] The same incidents, the same acts, the same system of government, affect them in different ways, and each fears more injury to itself from the other nationalities than from the common arbiter, the state. Their mutual antipathies are generally much stronger than jealousy of the government. That any one of them feels aggrieved by the policy of the common ruler is sufficient to determine another to support that policy. Even if all are aggrieved, none feel that they can rely on the others for fidelity in a joint resistance; the strength of none is sufficient to resist alone, and each may reasonably think that it consults its own advantage most by bidding for the favor of the government against the rest.” *Considerations on Representative Government*, New York: Harper&Brothers Publishers, 1862. digitized version at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5669> ; translated into Hungarian in 1867 (John Stuart Mill: *A képviselői kormány*, trans. Ferenc Jánosi, Pest: Emich Gusztáv).

<sup>87</sup> Covered excellently in Ágnes Deák, *"Nemzeti egyenjogúsítás": Kormányzati nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon 1849-60* (“Equality of nations”: Government Policies Concerning the Nationalities in Habsburg Hungary 1849-60) (Budapest: Osiris, 2000)

proliferation of demands<sup>88</sup> - which is, again, the fragmentation-and-dissolution nightmare, surpassed only by the vision of the ‘death of the nation’ in romantic national poetry.

The conclusion of the preamble is a mission statement: the country’s “ethnographic profile” is a positive incentive to create a definitive legal-institutional ‘shield’ guaranteeing nationality through individual and non-territorial collective rights- that is, through cultural, and not political, autonomy.

From these arguments they finally concluded to two basic principles:

1. “That every citizen of Hungary, speaking whatever language, constitutes politically nothing else than the one and indivisible Hungarian nation, corresponding to the historical notion of the Hungarian state;” and
2. “that all peoples living in the country, namely: the Hungarian, the Slav [Slovak], the Romanian, the German, the Serb, the Russian [Ruthen] etc. people – are considered nationalities with equal rights, whose respective nationality needs are to be satisfied within the limits of the country’s political integrity, on the basis of individual freedom and the right of free assembly, freely and without any restrictions.”<sup>89</sup>

At first glance the declaration of the centralist French model of the homogeneous state-nation, these principles are embodying rather the Central European emulation of the British pluralist model: state-nation according to historical right, in which the former *natio Hungarica* includes all citizens; it also refurbishes the old feudal municipalism through the modern republican principle of local self-government. In the centralist French model there was no place for historical right or local self-government (civic municipalism), for that matter.

This was the victory of moderates over radicals and an attempt to conciliate the nationalities in the framework of Hungarian civic patriotism; enumerating the Hungarians

<sup>88</sup> Labels used by Claus Offe, “Political Liberalism, Group Rights, and the Politics of Fear and Trust”, *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Sep., 2001): 181.

<sup>89</sup> *Képviselőházi Irományok* (Papers of the Hungarian House of Representatives) (1861, no. 48, 212.)

among the “peoples living in the country” showed that they wished to separate nationality and politics as far as the liberal principle of political centralization plus administrative decentralization allowed. According to this, all citizens were Hungarians, speaking different languages, including the Hungarian; they all were Hungarian-, Serb-, Slav-, Ruthene-, Yiddish-, German-, Romanian- etc. speaking Hungarians. There was also an implicit hierarchy. The “historical notion of the Hungarian state” meant that one of the people was *primus inter pares*, since the Hungarians as the only historical people bore the brunt of political existence and wars during the long history of the Hungarian state; the Hungarians were the only statehood-capable people of the common homeland. This was the ethno-historical or historical nation model. Cultural, as opposed to political recognition was the maximum possible offer which the post-civil war Hungarian liberals could present to their non-Magyar compatriots.

The body of the draft consist of four parts and twenty-four paragraphs, starting from the bottom up, with the rights of the individuals and associations/corporations (part A), continued with the municipalities (communes, towns and counties) (part B), the central government (part C) and finally, as the highest authority of state, the Parliament (part D). The deliberative and administrative language of the Parliament and central government is solely Hungarian, but the laws of the country are to be translated into the languages of the nationalities by default. The free use of the native tongue is guaranteed in speech as well as in writing between the individuals, nationality associations, churches and their commune, county or the central government. The administrative languages at commune level are decided by the communes, whereas at the county level the use of Hungarian is obligatory, the free use of additional languages being allowed, according to municipal preference. Inter-municipal and intra-municipal (county-commune) communication can be in non-Hungarian, except if one party uses Hungarian as primary language, because then Hungarian translation is required;

county-government communication is solely in Hungarian, commune-government direct communication is in the language of the commune. It is an obligation of the central government to employ citizens belonging to the non-Hungarian nationalities in fair and sufficient numbers. Private schools as well as the religious denominations have total autonomy; state schools have to provide education in the nationality languages at the elementary level; for state universities, there is no provision on multilingualism, only the obligation to establish chairs of linguistics and literature of the nationality languages. The crux of the matter is the decentralized, non-interventionist (“night-watchman”), pluralist and neutral liberal state, which leaves large sections of public and state life (in the latter case, through municipal self-governments) at the disposal of free competition and individual choices of the citizens belonging to different ethnic groups.

The ‘generous offer’ was appreciated by the committee members pursuing non-Magyar cultural agendas. Less so by those who wished some form of political recognition. Most of them considered that the old noble, ethnically neutral, *Hungarus* community was replaced with ethnic Hungarian supremacy at the basis of the declared political nation. The hope of peaceful assimilation of the moderate Hungarians was mirrored in the ethnic groups concerned as the fear of extinction – at least in the case of those groups which were already boasting nationally-minded elites and pervasive national consciousness (Romanians, Serbs, Saxons and other Germans; the Slovaks only partially and even less so the Ruthenes).

Vlad and Popovici tried to mediate between the moderate Hungarian and the moderate non-Hungarian positions; they had submitted the second, ‘minority’ proposal of the committee, which had a different upbeat: “The peoples of Hungary speaking different languages, living in different territories in bigger numbers and en masse, that is: the Romanians, Slavs [Slovaks], Serbians, Russians [Ruthenes] and Germans, are recognized as nations, equals with

the Hungarian nation, and the totality (“összesség”) of these nations constitutes the political nation of Hungary.”<sup>90</sup>

Contrary to this very powerful, almost ethno-federalist first paragraph, the body of the proposal, which is more detailed than the ‘majority’ one, is a close pair of the first proposal. It shares the same liberal concept of the decentralized and minimal state. The central government would use Hungarian as his administrative language (“ügykezelési nyelv”); free use languages. The fundamental difference is in the way of how the state bodies below the central government are envisioned. First, districts or circles of the counties and the counties themselves, as well as the electoral districts should be reshaped to contain as ethnically homogeneous populations as possible. Second, every commune and the thus out-rounded counties would choose only one official language, that of the majority nationality in the respective unit. Only where clear-cut majority by out-rounding is impossible, multilingual practice is proposed. Thirdly, in relation with the central government, Hungarian would be used as second, additional language (the two column system: the first column in the respective local official language, the second one the Hungarian translation), except when the official language of the respective municipality is also Hungarian. With this, the main concern of the draft (in addition to a free public life, autonomy of denominations and free schooling, the elements of cultural autonomy) is to carve out and secure for the nations of Hungary large sectors of the local state, as an institutional guarantee for and consequence of the legal principle of the multi-national “political nation of Hungary”. Paragraph 25 contains a provision mirroring likewise this multi-national political nation: in schooling, besides the “country’s pragmatic history” the respective “own national histories” are to be taught as regular subjects; paragraph 31 secures the right of the free use of national symbols and dresses, in all public and official instances, including the Parliament. Paragraph 34 than does

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<sup>90</sup> *Képviselőházi Irományok* (Papers of the Hungarian House of Representatives) (1861, no. 48, 215.; the whole proposal: 215-219.)



not come as a surprise: “The present law cannot in any way injure or prejudicate the integrity of the country.”, addressing the fear of escalation and fragmentation, the lack of the cohesion principle in general, with a declaration of intent.

This is still a *Hungarus* outlook, in which the central government remains Magyar in character, but lacks the direct instruments of social integration and cohesion – the ultimate safeguard for the protection of the nationalities against Hungarian assimilation. In this framework, the locus of social integration and cohesion is delegated to the ‘constituent nations’, Hungarian being only one of them.

These days of July and August was the period when the post-civil war anti-radical reckoning on all sides reached its climax; but the still huge chasm separating the conflicting nationalist agendas could not be bridged by the benevolent and hopeful efforts of Eötvös, Vlad and Popovici; the territorial-institutional safeguards demanded were anathema for Hungarian Liberals, whereas the nationalities could not accept the otherwise appreciated and recognized advantages of liberal statehood at the expense of their collective liberty. The fact that the proposals did not enjoy parliamentary debate, because at the fourth plenary session (68. session, 22 August) after the submission of the committee report (9 August), the representative Parliament was dissolved, precludes the historian to measure the exact backing of such a conciliation attempt, at the time when the liberals needed the biggest and widest support possible against Vienna. Still, one could speculate

As a final move, the Parliament passed a protestation to the King, formulated by Deák, and a resolution, by Kálmán Tisza, which set out the following three priority issues for the next Parliament: 1., the satisfaction of all nationality needs, which are not in contradiction with the country’s political and territorial integrity; 2., the establishment of equal civil and political rights for all confessions, including the Israelites; and 3., the abolishing, through board-waging and compensations, of all the remaining feudal obligations, in accordance with

the sanctity of private property. This resolution had the tactical importance of catching the liminal momentum and attempting to secure the broadest popular support for the liberal nationalist project, now that the Viennese regime was reverting to authoritarian rule regarding Hungary under the Schmerling cabinet. The traditional ‘divide et impera’ tactics of the Viennese government was a natural expectation from all sides.

Eötvös explained after the dissolution of the 1861 Parliament in a letter to Frigyes Pesty: “Exactly because I also think that the idea of liberty in our country is linked with the idea of Magyardom; because I know, that our race/nationality [fajunk] in areas of wealth, culture, mores or intellect has a higher status than the others; because I am convinced that in every regards it is entitled to premium status, I am also convinced that it needs only liberty to occupy this position natural to it and this is the reason why I see the not only peaceful, but as regards to Magyardom, the most favorable solution of the nationality question in full liberty and equality, which here, as with everything else, it is useful only for the most powerful; this is the reason why on the one hand, we should not allow privileged separate status for Serbs or the other nationalities, because this way free contacts and with them, our assimilative influence would be rendered ineffective; and this is why, on the other hand, we should not demand privileged status for our nationality either, because it would only provoke reaction and also hamper the natural evolution of things.”<sup>91</sup> This was neither a contractualist, nor an organicist viewpoint, but British-type gradualism-evolutionism harnessed to the profit of liberal progress. In other words, it was inclusive-assimilative national egoism in the service of universal progress and liberty. Here, tamed ethnic struggle and competition leads, as an automated process, to national homogenization and advancement in civilization, as modernity and liberty spreads to the farthest and most isolated parts of the diverse kingdom. Liberty and

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<sup>91</sup> Eötvös József: *Összes Munkái*, XX. kötet, Levelek (Works, vol. 20: Letters) (Budapest: Révai Testvérek, 1903), 41.

Magyardom are one and the same. But at the end of this advancement still stands the cosmopolitan ideal, the final fraternal union of all peoples under the banner of humanity. One can almost touch in these paragraphs the unshaken faith in the secular religion of humanity, liberty and progress.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I choose to follow one type of post-revolutionary answer given to the upsurge of clashing nationalisms in the Habsburg Empire. The civic patriotic response developed separately by the émigré Lajos Kossuth and the self-exiled József Eötvös both reinterpreted the pre-‘48 liberal nationalist orthodoxy, and choose to elaborate on the pre-‘48 moderate interpretations of Hungarian supremacy. This was a major shift for both of them, since they clearly believed before 1848 in the assimilative and attractive powers of progressive liberty and the necessity to build a strong Hungarian nation-state.

In chapter 2 I argued on the persistency of the dominant groups’ self-image based on a meditative, west-to-east *Kulturmission* and the prevalence of the centralist model of state-building, which nevertheless ‘suffered’ an early modification through the introduction of the ‘free development and equality of nationalities’ (*Gleichberechtigung*) principle. This was adopted by the Kossuth-led Hungarian government only after a tactical understanding of the military predicament of 1849 for his government opened up the avenue for the July resolution. Placed in its proper context, the 1849 Hungarian resolution on the nationalities loses its oversized significance which is usually credited to it. It did certainly not go beyond the similar German/Austrian solutions and compared to the imperially aborted Kremsier Compromise, it was a lesser achievement, first of all and most importantly in its potential to secure a stable reconciliation with the nationalities.

Chapter 3 is a comparative presentation of how both directions taken in 1849 (multilingual and multicultural and ethnic autonomist) are developed in the realm of political ideas, based on civic patriotism – as a new centralist cure against clashing nationalisms. It is of major interest that two such different political figures, as the left-liberal and municipalist

Kossuth and the right-liberal and centralist baron Eötvös both came to take the United States, Switzerland and Great Britain as political models and embrace three crucial points over state-building: 1. decentralized and minimal structure of the liberal state (which in Kossuth's case was pushed towards federalism), 2. levels of local self-government, strong civil sphere and with it, the fostering of civic spirit, and 3. the *Kulturmission* of historical Hungarian territorial statehood which was interpreted in a civic, inclusive and multicultural manner, giving extensive language rights, cultural autonomy and local self-government to the nationalities, but denying any kind of political recognition (that is, combating the ethnic principle). This latter point being the most sensitive, it was also a point of major divergences between the two: Kossuth's federalism implied some use of the ethnic principle with the reorganization of the counties and gave bigger space in general to the nationalities, whereas the more rigorous and scholarly Eötvös envisioned a completely Hungarian speaking (central) government under which the different societal and territorial autonomies burgeoned, expressly rejecting any kind of acceptance (meaning institutionalization) of the ethnic principle.

Finally, chapter 4 is a case study of civic patriotism in action. Of the three Hungarian nationality 'laws' (the 1849 resolution, the 1861 proposals and the 1868 Nationality Act) the former two were created in a situation of political exigency, when the willingness to depart from the radical interpretation of Hungarian supremacy was the strongest. 1861 was a special moment because the program of the civic, decentralized and minimal liberal state seemed to triumph over both Magyar and non-Magyar nationalisms. But in the final instance it proved to be the failure of this civic patriotic proposal of going beyond ethnicity-based or liberal nationalism. The chasm of the clashing nationalisms could not be bridged with a proposal that was, after all, a civic/republican repackaging of traditional Hungarian supremacy. The riddle of providing full-fledged, not just individual, but also collective liberty and equality for all could not be solved by the civic patriotic approach.

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