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**NATIONAL LIBERALS AND THEIR PROGENY
APPROACHING THE PECULIAR DEVELOPMENTS
IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN LIBERAL PARTY TRADITIONS,
1867–1918**

Abstract

This paper addresses patterns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century structural and ideological transformations of liberalism in Central European party politics that might be perceived as region-specific. Focusing on the Czech, German, and Slovene speaking lands of the Cisleithanian half of the Habsburg Monarchy, it also shortly discusses the Imperial German, Hungarian and Polish Galician contexts. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the complex interplay between ideologies, organized political movements, and political languages within the context of rapidly changing political cultures during the last third of the nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth was the changing relationship between the national and liberal components within the national liberal traditions. By 1900 the national came to visibly prevail over the liberal: nationalism was gaining in strength and intensity and was adopting new, more aggressive and integralist forms. From the turn of the century onwards it is therefore more proper to talk about heirs of liberalism in terms of party politics rather than simply liberals. The nationalist turn of the Central European national liberals and their political heirs, reached its peak by the turn of the century and continued to develop further into the interwar period. Partial abandonment of classical liberal tenets largely distinguished the contemporary organized liberalism to the West as well. What makes the Central European developments specific in this regard is their direction, which unlike the emergence of currents of new or social liberalism in the West, to a notable degree led towards adoption of anti-liberal and radically nationalist positions and therefore partial vanishing of liberal traditions.

Keywords: liberalism, nationalism, Austria-Hungary, political parties, political traditions

This paper addresses patterns of the late nineteenth century developments of liberalism in Central European party politics that might be perceived as region-specific, especially in contrast to the ‘western’

liberal counterparts. The overview covers the years between 1867 up to the First World War – briefly touching upon the state of affairs at its aftermath – and focuses primarily on the German, Czech and Slovene speaking lands of the Cisleithanean half of the Dual Monarchy. Some attention is devoted also to the German Empire, as the nineteenth century developments of liberal politics in Germany were to a large extent paradigmatic for the broader Central European region. To a lesser extent, the Polish and Hungarian contexts are discussed as well.

My main aim is to demonstrate how the national liberal traditions through the last quarter of the nineteenth century and further underwent certain far-reaching transformations – structural as well as ideological. These transformations included shifts that might be considered as illiberal or, in certain cases, even outright anti-liberal. Most importantly, a peculiar trajectory is pointed out, that was to a certain degree common to the countries of the region, and was marked by a profoundly nationalist turn that occurred during the elapsing years of the nineteenth century. The general overview thus aims at illustrating the interplay between ideologies, organized political movements and political languages within the context of rapidly changing political cultures of the late nineteenth century Central Europe.

NATIONAL LIBERALISM – A CENTRAL EUROPEAN PECULIARITY

In terms of both ideologies and political party traditions it may be argued that in the Central European lands a distinct type of liberalism, peculiar to this region evolved through the nineteenth century. For much of this period “the word ‘national’ acted as more or less synonymous with ‘liberal’” and “the term ‘national’ alone was sufficient to arouse suspicions of liberal associations.”¹ To an extent this applies to Southeast European countries as well, in many of which “national liberals” also played visible if not central roles, but with rather different, region-specific characteristics, which to a considerable extent distinguished them from their Central European counterparts.²

¹ Maciej Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship: liberal and national ideas in nineteenth century East-Central Europe*’, *Ab Imperio*, 3–4 (2000), 69–90, 80.

² Stemming from different political cultures, the liberalisms of Southeast European lands had different ideological foundations, often, as was the case in

In Central Europe the national ‘revivals’ and unifications of the long nineteenth century were projects pursued primarily by the liberals. Liberty as the liberals’ core political ideal was perceived also – and sometimes even primarily – as “liberty for the nation”, that is national emancipation and unification, nations typically being perceived as “collective individuals”.³ Similar could furthermore also be said for related liberal ideas and principles such as citizenship, limited government, free trade, self-determination, reason, progress, individualism, civilization, and civil society, with which “nationalism occasionally coalesced ... or nested within”⁴, at some other points also resisting at least some of them.⁵ The struggle for constitutional order, civil liberties and equality before law went hand in hand with projects of nation building, based on the notions of cultural or ethnic nation (often at the same time joined by arguments, based on historical rights). Different socio-cultural contexts and absence of nation states (up to 1867 in Hungary, 1871 in Germany and up to 1918 elsewhere) also impacted the emergence of political configurations and landscapes, different to those of Western Europe.⁶

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Central Europe, liberalism as a political force, visibly arising and becoming an increasingly important political factor after the uprisings of 1848, was especially marked by a strong connection with nationalism. One could therefore speak about traditions of ‘national liberalism’ as a common designation for a number of related ideologies and movements, distinctive for Central Europe, of which the German “National

Serbia and Bulgaria, sharing many traits with what in Western and Central Europe would be more commonly referred to as “radicalism”. Perhaps the most striking difference was the high degree of “socially constructivistic” outlooks, which were characteristic for both the profoundly “elitist”, anti-democratic brand of Romanian national liberalism as also for the rather “populist” and democratic Bulgarian and Serbian liberals. See Diana Mishkova, ‘The Interesting Anomaly of Balkan Liberalism’, in: Iván Zoltán Dénes (ed.), *Liberty and the Search for Identity. Imperial Heritages and Liberal Nationalisms in a Comparative Perspective* (Budapest and New York, 2006), 399–456.

³ Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 79.

⁴ Michal Freedon, ‘Foreword’, in Dénes (ed.), *Liberty*, ix–xi, x.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ This also affected the characteristics of the relation between liberals and conservatives. (Iván Zoltán Dénes, ‘Liberalism and Nationalism: An Ambiguous Relationship’, in Dénes (ed.), *Liberty*, 1–17, 6–7.)

Liberal Party” can serve as a prime example. Due to the initial lack of competition in this field from the side of conservatives and Catholics were the mid-nineteenth century liberal parties throughout “national” and nationally based, which was distinctive for Prussian, Austrian, as well as South German lands.⁷ A close relationship between liberalism and nationalism thus evolved⁸, albeit also an uneasy one, as proven for instance by the case of National Liberals, who had to ‘sacrifice’ many of their earlier liberal demands for the sake of the German unification under the Prussian leadership.

National liberals perceived themselves as the main driving force of modernization, which strongly coincided with their nation-building projects. Being “the national party constructing modern national culture and identity”⁹, they also strived to create a modern middle-class civil society, thereby looking towards ‘western’ (primarily British) levels and models of economic development. Indeed, a general impression that one might get is that for the Central European national liberals the category of ‘state’ occupied at least an equally if not a more central place as ‘liberty’ did.¹⁰ As nationalists and modernizers the national liberals were often statist, centralists, opponents of free trade and therefore proponents of economic protectionism. At the same time, however, they usually advocated relatively free economic order inside their countries, marked by a relative absence of state intervention. Strengthening of the national economy was perceived as a very important part and necessary step towards consolidation of the nation and general modernizing efforts. This could sometimes lead to adoption of neo-mercantilist economic doctrines, such as the ones of Friedrich List¹¹. Even more importantly, the traditions of “enlightened

⁷ Lothar Gall, ‘Einführung’ in Dieter Langewiesche (ed.), *Liberalismus im 19. Jahrhundert, Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1988), 23–7, 26.

⁸ Denes, ‘Liberalism’, 6.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 1.

¹⁰ Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 70.

¹¹ See Roman Szporluk, *Communism and nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (Oxford 1988). During the “seven fat years” (*Die sieben fetten Jahre*) between 1866 and 1873 the Austrian German *Verfassungspartei* pursued a free trade policy. After the *Börsenkrach* of 1873, however, they swiftly turned to various protectionist measures and did so without much hesitation. (Cf. Friedrich Gottas, ‘Liberale in Österreich und Ungarn – Versuch einer Gegenüberstellung’, in Gábor Erdődy (ed.), *Das Parteienwesen Österreich-Ungarns* (Budapest, 1987), 47–70, 58–60.

absolutism” of Joseph II and of Frederick the Great were commonly “invoked by the liberals as their own.”¹²

The nation state, often, though not always, being the central goal of the nationalists, was at the same time also perceived as a means for modernization, and therefore attributed the peculiarly powerful role.¹³ In cases of Catholic lands a distinct feature of national liberalism was moreover the strong secularist orientation, as it was believed that the powerful, supranational ‘universalist’ institution presented a danger for the primacy of the national idea and an obstacle to social modernization.¹⁴ This corresponded to a way of differentiating between two main groups of liberal parties – the ‘northern’ one, struggling mainly with conservatives on socioeconomic issues and the ‘southern’ one, defined primarily by its opposition to Catholicism on the grounds of culture and *Weltanschauung*.¹⁵

In the Habsburg monarchy the evolution of liberal politics went hand in hand with national movements. One could therefore speak about a number of national liberal traditions, of which the German one was the first to appear and, due to the economically and culturally stronger position of Austrian Germandom at that time, initially also the strongest one. In Hungary, liberalism also took roots early, but in a specific form of ‘gentry liberalism’. Due to the lack of nationally-minded middle classes, a special ideology developed within the liberally oriented nobility, foremost the landed gentry, which assumed the role of the “tiers état” or “le juste milieu”.¹⁶ Such type of liberalism was distinctive for all the three main rivaling parties of post-1867. From 1875 on a major part of Hungarian politics, including both

¹² Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 71.

¹³ Cf. Freedon, ‘Foreword’, x; It needs to be added that the “state” in question did not necessarily imply a completely independent nation state, what is best demonstrated exactly by the case of Cisleithanean national liberalisms.

¹⁴ Cf. Lothar Höbelt, ‘Die deutschnationalen und liberalen Gruppierungen in Cisleithanien: von den Vereinigten Linken zum Nationalverband’, in Erdódy (ed.), *Das Parteienwesen*, 77–90, 87: “Primäres Kriterium für den österreichischen Liberalismus war immer schon mehr der Antiklerikalismus französischer Prägung als der vielgeschmähte Manchesterliberalismus englischer Provenienz gewesen.“

¹⁵ Cf. Lothar Höbelt, ‘Die deutschfreiheitlichen Österreichs. Bürgerliche Politik unter den Bedingungen eines katholischen Vielvölkerstaats’, in Langewiesche (ed.), *Liberalismus*, 161–71, 161, 167.

¹⁶ Miklos Szábo, ‘The Liberalism of the Hungarian Nobility’, in Dénes (ed.), *Liberty*, 195–237, 201–2.

the party of Ferenc Deák, as well as the one of Kálmán Tisza, was united in a single ruling party: the Liberal Party.¹⁷ Due to restricted franchise and with help of gerrymandering the Hungarian liberals enjoyed a safe majority until the end of the century.¹⁸ A similar kind of gentry liberalism developed among Poles in Galicia as well.¹⁹

The Czech liberals followed the German ones swiftly, although it may at the same time be argued that their evolution reached its peak when Austrian German liberalism was already in decline.²⁰ The Slovenes, however, residing in economically less developed areas and having a less diversified society, dominated by peasants and lower-middle classes²¹, entered the political stage a bit later. Initially their national movement acted as unified with its conservative wing dominating over the more liberally-minded and nationally more demanding one. A completely independent liberal party backed by a narrow but growing stratum of nationally-minded entrepreneurial class that had earlier lacked²², appeared only in 1890s.

The Austro-German liberals were not simply *die Liberalen*, but *Deutschliberale*, whereas the Czech and Slovene ones initially simply took the name of the “National Party.” Nationalism and liberalism were thus connected intrinsically. During the larger part of the 19th century this nationalism did not imply hostile attitudes towards other nationalities and may, due to its relatively inclusive and tolerant character, be considered as a liberal one. Particularly, the 1860s nationality politics of the Austrian German liberals – that after the December constitution of 1867 referred to themselves as *Verfassungstreue* –

¹⁷ István Diószegi, ‘Die Liberalen am Steuer. Der Ausbau des bürgerlichen Staatssystems in Ungarn im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts’, in Langewiesche (ed.), *Liberalismus*, 484–99, 492–3.

¹⁸ Gary B. Cohen, ‘Nationalist Politics and the Dynamics of State and Civil Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1867–1914’, *Central European History*, xl, 2 (2007), 241–78, 255.

¹⁹ Cf. Maciej Janowski, ‘Marginal or Central? The Place of the Liberal Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Polish History’, in Dénes (ed.), *Liberty*, 239–72, 250; and Szábo, ‘The Liberalism’, 204.

²⁰ Cf. Hans Lemberg, ‘Das Erbe des Liberalismus in der ČSR und die National Demokratische Partei’, in Karl Bosl (ed.), *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik als Multinationaler Parteienstaat* (München, 1979), 59–78, 76.

²¹ Cohen, ‘Nationalist’, 248.

²² Peter Vodopivec, *O gospodarskih in socialnih nazorih na Slovenskem v 19. stoletju* (Ljubljana 2006), 14–15.

was largely distinguished by a position of an educated, ‘enlightened’, forward-looking elite the door into which, at least theoretically, was not barren to anyone. Being liberal to them to a large extent meant being German. And vice versa – it was the culture and *Bildung* that one possessed and not the ethnic roots which enabled membership in the German liberal ‘community’.

Important to point out in this regard is that the German-speaking Jews were not merely perceived as belonging to the German nation but were represented in quite high numbers in the national liberal movement. A very good example was Adolf Fischhof, a German Liberal Austrian politician, publicist and writer of Jewish origin. He was a German nationalist, an Austrian patriot and a determined advocate of cultural and language rights for all the nationalities of Habsburg Empire.²³ In contrast to many of his liberal contemporaries from the *Verfassungspartei* (Constitutional Party of which he himself was never a member) he also spoke against merger with the German Empire, defending the idea of Austria as a *Nationalitätenstaat* (nationalities’ state or multinational state, as opposed to a *Nationalstaat*), founded and guided by a higher ethical ideal of justice and securing all of its nationalities with same rights and dignity.²⁴

Following the 1848 call of František Palacký, the Czech National Party (*Národní strana*), despite being displeased by the Austro-Hungarian settlement, remained loyal to the united constitutional Austria as a guarantee for a free cultural as well as political development of its Slavic nations. And it is important to stress that none of the Austrian national liberal movements advocated full-blown separatism or complete abandonment of the Habsburg framework. As it will be demonstrated later, even their *fin-de-siècle* heirs, being far more pronouncedly and exclusively nationalist did not – with the exception of a few most radical factions – aim at destroying Austria. The universally valid distinction between national movements as such and aspirations for independent nation states²⁵ thus deserves an especially careful consideration in the case of the old Austria.

²³ Cf. Ian Reifowitz, ‘Threads Intertwined: German National Egoism and Liberalism in Adolf Fischhof’s Vision for Austria’, *Nationalities Papers*, xxix, 3 (2001), 441–58, 441–4.

²⁴ Cf. Adolf Fischhof, *Oesterreich und die Bürgschaften seines Bestandes* (Wien, 1870²), 7–8, 51–2.

²⁵ Cf. Janowski, ‘Wavering Friendship’, 78.

The national liberalisms among the other ethnic groups of Austria modeled themselves partly on the German example, at the same time being in an increasing conflict with it. The German liberal *Weltanschauung*, however universalistic, inclusive and ‘cosmopolitan’ it may have been, could, when observed from a different angle – the one of aspiring national movements of the Austrian Slavs for instance – give an impression of paternalist if not outright hegemonic attitudes. Moreover, the national movements of the Austrian Slavs, including those that may without much hesitation be labeled as national liberal, such as both the ‘Old’ and the ‘Young Czechs’, as well as the ‘Young Slovenes’, commonly avoided or even rejected the ‘liberal’ label, because in their perception it bore a strong German connotation.²⁶

This conflict also had a practical significance, since the Austrian post-*Ausgleich* electoral order was formed in a manner in which German liberals had a majority in the Imperial Council, although the German speakers represented only roughly one third of the Cisleithanian population. The ruling German liberals were therefore clinging to centralism, which enabled them to stay in power for the time being. Generally speaking, they perceived the national aspirations of Austrian Slavs as backward-looking and conflicting with the principles of liberalism, and therefore representing a danger for the German urban liberal culture.²⁷

Despite the ostensibly conflicting inner logic of national liberalism – that is the sometimes uneasy relationship between the ‘national’ and the ‘liberal’ components – the ideas and political culture espoused by the discussed national liberal movements still possessed a considerable degree of unity. Albeit differing from one another – especially in regard to the social power and status of the proponents of particular national liberalisms – and perhaps not disposing with a fully coherent ideological complex, they had a general character that could be deemed as fairly ‘liberal’. Liberal in terms of the universalistic nature of their national ideals²⁸, the relatively cosmopolitan character of the culture they represented and fostered, their modernizing aims and belief in

²⁶ Cf. Lemberg, ‘Das Erbe’, 62.

²⁷ In the 1860s, a joint front began forming in opposition to the German liberals, composed of representatives of Slavic nationalities, including liberals, and German conservatives. A decade later these forces united in Eduard Taaffe’s *Iron Ring* coalition.

²⁸ Cf. Janowski, ‘Wavering Friendship’, 71 and 78.

cultural and economic progress through education and gradual social reform, the relatively high degree of cultural, religious and national tolerance, their secularist orientation, and – last but not least – their strict adherence to the principles of constitutionalism, Rechtsstaat and equality before law.

Moreover, until 1870s the national liberal groupings in Austria were united also in terms of organization. Not only the liberal movements of particular nationalities were not yet splintered, but also the *Verfassungspartei* was still open to non-Germans without demanding from them the denouement of their heritage, especially if it was framed in terms of the regional (crownland) culture and not nation. Particularly in the cases such as the Slovene one, where the unified national movement was dominated by conservatives, claiming to be ‘liberal’ could often mean identifying with the ‘German party’ as well.²⁹

The 1867 constitution, which was not a success merely for the centralist German liberals (not to mention the significance of 1867 for the Hungarian ones) but may – in view of the civic as well as national rights that it instituted – in a certain sense be regarded as a step forward for liberals of all the national variants, made liberalism in the Habsburg Monarchy victorious. At the same time, however, it soon began its slow decline which took the form of a number of processes in the decades to follow, that made it become both less united and less liberal. These processes may be summed up as follows: a) Diminishing trust in the liberal economic ideas, due to the long economic crisis following the 1873 *Börsenkrach*, as well as a general reaction against individualism³⁰; b) Disorientation connected primarily with the inability to cope with the ongoing political developments moving towards mass politics (resulting also in the higher parliamentary representation

²⁹ This could sometimes bring forward grave personal dilemmas. Very illustrative of this is the case of Dragotin Dežman (Karl Deschmann), who initially acted as one of the protagonists of the Slovene national ‘revival’ but due to his adherence to German high culture and liberal values later ended up in the German camp, condemned by Slovene nationalists as a ‘renegade’. Vincenc Ferer Klun, another Slovene Patriot, switched to the German Constitutional camp due to his opposition to the 1868 Concordat and what he saw as intertwining of Slovene politics in Carniola with the Catholic church. (Vodopivec, *O gospodarskih*, 49).

³⁰ Cf. Robert Hoffmann, ‘Gab es schönerianisches Milieu? Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie von Mitgliedern des Vereins der Salzburger Studenten in Wien’, in Ernst Bruckmüller (ed.), *Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie*, (Vienna-Cologne, 1990), 275–98, 277.

for non-German nationalities, as well as the strata of population that “did not share the liberal *Weltanschauung*”³¹; c) Ideological diffusion and transformation, connected with competition, influence and eventual takeover by radical currents within the movement and resulting in continuous loss of liberal identity, usually in favor of a more pronouncedly nationalist one; d) Disintegration and a series of splits within the liberal movements; e) Mostly unsuccessful attempts to transform in terms of organization from *Honoratiorenparteien* to modern, mass political parties.

LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY RECONFIGURATIONS,
THE “NATIONALIST TURN” AND THE HEIRS
OF NATIONAL LIBERALISM

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the evolution of national liberal political traditions was increasingly influenced by ever more powerful radical democratic, nationalist and socialist ideological currents. The process was accompanied by the general political and social developments leading on one side to a society increasingly marked by class divisions, and on the other towards mass politics. Already as the ruling parties in the German Empire and up to 1879 in the Austrian half of the Habsburg monarchy (the period of *Hochliberalismus*) the liberals had to accept many compromises. Even more, the organized liberalism had to adapt to changing conditions of political life and unfolding political realities. The political participation broadened and mobilization intensified enormously up to the introduction of universal suffrage for men in 1907. At first, liberals tried to resist the change, as for instance the leaders of *Verfassungspartei*, aware of the dangers “from below” coming from the nationalist masses that were threatening the continuation of their power. They thus saw their “best defence” in “the maintenance of the restricted suffrage system”³², based on separate curiae, electoral census and partly indirect representation.

The first visible division that emerged during 1870s could, roughly speaking, be labelled as the one between the ‘left’ and ‘right’

³¹ Cf. Albert Fuchs, *Geistige Strömungen in Österreich 1867–1918* (Vienna 1984), 10.

³² Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York, 1981), 125.

liberalisms. This development was most far-reaching in the German Empire, where it resulted in formation of completely separate and mutually competing parties, whereby it was the 'left' that distanced itself from Bismarck and the increasing role of his governments in economic matters, including the social legislation.³³ In Austria, where the split was initially less drastic, the 'right' denoted a moderately conservative³⁴ and rather elitist approach to politics, whereas the 'left' implied more democratic and more sharply nationalist tendencies and demands.³⁵ Such splits took place in 1871 in the Austrian German case when a more pronouncedly nationally oriented³⁶ Progressive Club (*Fortschrittsklub*) formed itself on the left wing of *Verfassungspartei*, and 1874 in the Czech one, as the Young Czechs fully seceded from the Old Czech National Party, forming their own "National Free-minded Party" (*Národní strana svobodomyšlná*). The actual reasons for the formal separation into two parties were mostly of practical political nature though, with both parties continuing to represent 'complementary parties' of the same movement.³⁷

Particularly in Austria and most significantly among its Germans, the conservative and elitist political stance of the *Altliberalen* was facing increased criticism by the more radical younger generations, which triggered a gradual but persistent 'nationalist turn' that would reach its peak by *fin-de-siècle* and profoundly change the character of Austrian (post)liberalism. The relationship between the 'liberal' and 'national' components of national liberalism began to change from 1870s on, with the 'national' coming to visibly prevail over the 'liberal' by 1900. Nationalism was gaining in strength and intensity and was also adopting new integral and radical forms, including even the ones based on racialist ideas. Examples from the German Empire also reveal a gradual decline (although not an extinction) of

³³ Cf. Dieter Langewiesche, 'Liberalismus und Bürgertum in Europa' in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1988), 360–94, 374–5.

³⁴ Gottas, 'Liberale', 66.

³⁵ Cf. Harm-Hinrich Brandt, 'Liberalismus in Österreich zwischen Revolution und Großer Depression', in Langewiesche (ed.), *Liberalismus*, 136–60, 154.

³⁶ Klaus Berchtold, 'Grundlinien der Entwicklung der politischen Parteien in Österreich seit 1867', in Klaus Berchtold (ed.), *Österreichische Parteiprogramme 1868-1966*, (Vienna, 1967), 11–108, 73.

³⁷ Bruce M. Garver, *The Young Czech Party 1874–1901 and the Emergence of a Multi-party system* (New Haven, Conn., 1978), 79–80, 82.

the liberal, moderate and relatively tolerant kind of nationalism in favor of the more aggressive forms – in the extreme case even ones based on racist notions³⁸. Especially during the years between 1890 and 1914 the national liberal synthesis got “attacked and subverted”³⁹ in the everyday politics of Germany, with the majority of liberals compromising their ideals “by embracing a fervent and often intolerant nationalism, militarism and governmental paternalism”⁴⁰.

The period between 1880s and about 1910 marks “a clear watershed in the history of national movements and ideas”⁴¹ during which a new, illiberal nationalist ideology entered the Central European political stages, rejecting liberalism and “accusing it of cosmopolitanism, egoism, materialism and neglect of national issues”⁴². Radical, exclusive, plebeian, anti-modernist and aggressive new nationalism certainly manifested itself in its ‘purest’ forms in the cases of such movements as the Austrian Pan-Germans, the Polish National Democrats and – to a slightly lesser extent and a bit later – the Czech State-Right Radicals.⁴³ The ‘old liberalism’ and ‘new nationalism’ (in terminology suggested by Maciej Janowski), thereby found themselves in a complex interplay in which the national liberals tried to adapt to the new circumstances, among other by stressing “more and more the national element of their programme.”⁴⁴

Pieter Judson⁴⁵ claimed that the radical nationalist turn, taken by a considerable part of Austrian German (post-)liberalism represented the application of the German liberal principles to the fullest degree, and not their betrayal. Regardless of whether one agrees with such a position or not, it is, however, undeniable that the last quarter of 19th century brought radical concussions of social and political life

³⁸ Cf. Eric Kurlander, ‘The Rise of Völkisch-Nationalism and the Decline of German Liberalism: A Comparison of Liberal Political Cultures in Schleswig-Holstein and Silesia 1912–1924’, *European Review of History*, ix, 1 (2002), 23–36, 28.

³⁹ Zoltan Michael Szaz, ‘The Ideological Precursors of National Socialism’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, xvi, 4 (1963), 924–45, 932.

⁴⁰ Bruce B. Frye, ‘The German Democratic Party 1918–1930’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, xvi, 1 (1963), 167–79, 167.

⁴¹ Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 82.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 84.

⁴³ Cohen, ‘Nationalist’, 267.

⁴⁴ Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 84.

⁴⁵ See Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor, 1996).

which led to the weakening of liberal ideology, transformation of liberal politics and its partial disintegration. Moreover, within the scope relevant to this paper, concussions of this kind did not affect merely the German liberal movement but others as well. The Czechs or the Slovenes may not have had “a Schönerer” or “a Dmowski” within their ranks, which did not mean, however, that *Volksgemeinschaft* type ideals of social organization of a Slavic brand⁴⁶ or exclusionary and aggressive stances towards the national other (most often the German or the Jew)⁴⁷ were absent. Last but not least, the new style of politics, marked by mass mobilization and rhetoric that aimed primarily at emotions rather than reason, from 1880s came to distinguish an ever growing part of Cisleithanean politics regardless of nationality.

The ‘old liberalism’ and the ‘new nationalism’ may also be considered as representing two ideal types. The majority of the actual cases in Cisleithanean politics were of a ‘mixed’ nature, the tendency indeed moving from inclusiveness towards exclusiveness, from modernist towards anti-modernist perspectives, from universalism towards particularism, from a gentlemanly towards a street discourse, and from elitism towards mass politics. Especially in the last point the new nationalists did not “break with the old liberal heritage” with the ‘metamorphosis’ being gradual and “the new national ideology” taking much from the old.⁴⁸ The new nationalists mostly retained the basic liberal mottos (such as freedom and progress) but less of a liberal spirit. The most visible result on the level of party politics was that the national liberal spectrum became very fragmented, a development that (particularly in the Austrian German case) preceded the major electoral reforms of 1897 and 1907.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See for instance: Peter Vodopivec, ‘Ruski mir, južnoslovenska zadruga in slovenski liberalci’, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, xlvii, 1 (2006), 65–78.

⁴⁷ Similarly as in the Alpine lands, there were virtually no Jews living in Slovene-speaking Austrian lands. Nevertheless did “anti-Semitic attitudes” distinguish the Slovene liberal camp from its beginnings in the 1860s all the way into the interwar. (Cf. Jurij Perovšek, ‘Vprašanje idejnega, političnega, socialnega in narodnega sobivanja v liberalni politični misli in praksi med leti 1891–1941’, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, li, 1 (2011), 93–126, 102 and Marko Zajc, ‘Jud kot Nемец, liberalец, kapitalist: o slovenskem antisemitizmu v zadnjih desetletjih habsburške monarhije’, in I. Šumi et al. (eds.), *Slovenski Judje: zgodovina in holokavst: pregled raziskovalnih tematik* (Maribor, 2012), 108–17.)

⁴⁸ Janowski, ‘Wavering Friendship’, 83.

⁴⁹ Höbelt, ‘Die Deutschfreiheitlichen’, 166.

The space between the “old liberal” *Verfassungstreuer Großgrundbesitz* (Constitutionalist Big Landowners) and the racially nationalist Pan-Germans was wide, nuanced and included various factions, whereby it is hardly possible to draw a clear line where the liberalism would end and the anti-liberal nationalism begin. One possible dividing line, marking the end to the “old consensus of liberal and national ideas” could be the “attitude towards the Jewish question”⁵⁰, namely the absence or presence of anti-Semitic stances and rhetoric. The famous *Linz Program* of 1882, expressing radical democratic, nationalist and (semi)socialist⁵¹ leanings of the younger generation of liberals, some of which later became Social Democrats, other radical nationalists, originally did not include anti-Semitic principles. The threshold was passed only in 1885 when the twelfth point was added by Schönerer.⁵²

Georg von Schönerer with his fervent racially based anti-Semitism and violent political style can hardly be considered a liberal in any possible sense of this word. With moderate, although already more integralist nationalists such as Julius Derschatta or Otto Steinwender⁵³, though, the case is more complex. And similar considerations may also be valid for Karel Kramář⁵⁴ in the Czech, or Ivan Hribar⁵⁵ in the Slovene case. What is clear is that in all the discussed national cases a persistent tendency towards integral nationalism may be observed. It also impacted the national liberals such as the Young Czechs who

⁵⁰ Janowski, ‘*Wavering Friendship*’, 84.

⁵¹ Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria* (London, 1988²), 145.

⁵² The twelfth point stated: “The removal of Jewish influence from all sections of public life is indispensable for carrying the reforms aimed at” (Pulzer, *The Rise*, 147).

⁵³ The stance of *Deutschnationale Vereinigung* – a radically national faction founded by Steinwender in 1887 after secession from the nationalist *Deutscher Klub* – on the Jewish question was “Neither anti-Semitism nor resistance to it will be adopted as parts of the programme; the matter is left to the individual conscience of members”. The party was not “united on the anti-Semitic issue” and “the Jewish question was, in Steinwender’s words, ‘by no means the most urgent’” (Pulzer, *The Rise*, 150). On the other hand, the program of national liberal *United Left* from 1885 still explicitly rejected anti-Semitism, whereas the one of the re-united *United German Left* in 1891 was silent on this issue (*ibidem*, 151).

⁵⁴ See Jan Bilek and Luboš Velek (eds.), *Karel Kramář (1860–1937), Život a dílo* (Prague, 2009).

⁵⁵ See Igor Grdina *et al.*, *Hribarjev zbornik* (Ljubljana, 2010).

were trying “to retain old constituencies, capture new support, and compete with radical nationalists, agrarians, and social democrats for votes from within their own language groups.”⁵⁶ Even in Hungary, where the extremely limited franchise enabled the liberals to remain firmly in power, the policy of the liberal party became increasingly nationalist by the end of the nineteenth century, being marked by suppression and Magyarization of national minorities.

In Polish politics, the transition “from the nationalism of the left to the nationalism of the right”⁵⁷ happened as well during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, although the liberals still perceived themselves as the “guardians of the national idea.”⁵⁸ In Galicia liberalism survived only in its western part.⁵⁹ The network of voluntary associations was to a large extent taken over by the National Democrats with their ideology of “national egoism”. Similar processes occurred throughout Cisleithania, being however more gradual and having more ambiguous results. Outside Vienna politics, and particularly in the provincial associational life of the Alpine lands and Bohemia, it is possible to discern a rather general pattern of inheritance between old liberalism and new nationalism with many nuances and a high degree of merging between the two.⁶⁰

Another indicator of transforming liberal politics was the emergence of new notions, which in the last third of nineteenth century began to partly replace the ‘liberal’ label. In a more diversified political landscape of unified Germany, this to a larger extent corresponded to the division between left and right liberalism.⁶¹ Whereas the latter, united in the National Liberal Party retained the old liberal name, new labels such as ‘progressive’ (*fortschrittlich*) and ‘free-minded’

⁵⁶ Cohen, ‘Nationalist’, 267.

⁵⁷ See Heinrich August Winkler, ‘Vom linken zum rechten Nationalismus. Der deutsche Liberalismus in der Krise von 1878/79’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, iv, 1 (1978), 5–28.

⁵⁸ Janowski, ‘Marginal’, 262.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 261.

⁶⁰ Höbelt, ‘Die Deutschfreiheitlichen’, 166; Garver, ‘The Young Czech’, 116 and Harry Ritter, ‘Austro-German Liberalism and the Modern Liberal Tradition’, *German Studies Review*, vii, 2 (1984), 227–48, 240.

⁶¹ Jürgen R. Winkler, *Sozialstruktur, politische Traditionen und Liberalismus, Eine empirische Längsschnittstudie zur Wahlenentwicklung in Deutschland 1871–1933* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 63.

(*freisinnig*) appeared on the left.⁶² The term ‘liberalism’ was becoming increasingly unpopular also in other Central European lands.

Both the ‘progressive’ (*napreden*) and the ‘free-minded’ (*svobodomiseln*) labels were adopted by Slovene liberals, who in 1894 founded their own political organization – The National Party for Carniola (*Narodna stranka za Kranjsko*), renamed in 1905 as the National-Progressive Party (*Narodno-napredna stranka*). The same was distinctive for the Czech lands as the label of ‘free-minded’ was also in the official name of the Young Czech Party (*Národní strana svobodomyšlná*). The ‘progressive’ label was adopted by the Radical Progressive Party (*Strana radikálněpokroková*), and later by Tomáš Masaryk’s Czech Progressive Party (*Česká strana pokroková*). In the Austrian German context, in addition to the latter (*fortschrittlich*) designations, such as “German freedom” (*deutschfreiheitlich*) and “German national” (*deutschnational*) were most prevalent. In Hungary the Liberal Party bore the name of *Szabadelvű Párt*, which could be translated as “Free-minded Party”. The post-1905 liberals in the Russian partition of Poland referred to themselves as “Progressive Democrats”.⁶³

All this coincided with splits in organized liberalism, as well as adoption of certain originally liberal principles by parties, stemming from other traditions. Broadening of the franchise after the electoral reforms of 1882 and 1897 (not to mention the one of 1907) and diversification of political life in the last decades of the 19th century introduced new types of parties, whose characterization did not correspond to the simple dichotomy between conservative and liberal. Moreover, the national liberals encountered ever growing problems with their central claim of representing the entire ‘nation’.⁶⁴ They were very reluctant to abandon the idea of the national unity and renounce their status of ‘the national party’, despite these claims getting ever more constantly refuted by the political reality increasingly marked by class-based divisions, and other types of interest politics.

⁶² Rudolf Vierhaus, ‘Liberalismus’ in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze & Reinhart Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 3 H-Me, 4. Auflage (Stuttgart, 1992), 741–85, 743–4, 782.

⁶³ Janowski, ‘Marginal’, 261.

⁶⁴ Cf. Jiří Malíř, ‘Systém politických stran v českých zemích do roku 1918’, in Jiří Malíř (ed.), *Politické strany: vývoj politických stran a hnutí v českých zemích a Československu 1861–2004. 1. Období 1861–1938* (Brno, 2005), 17–58, 19.

On the one hand it could be argued that by the end of the nineteenth century the notion of liberalism within the realm of real politics got “reduced to the party of modernity.”⁶⁵ As they found themselves in changing political environments, the parties and factions stemming from national liberal traditions, began adopting various courses. Some of them took conservative positions, thus clinging to the selected liberal ideals assumed to have been already achieved. On the other hand the old opposition between ‘liberal’ and ‘radical’⁶⁶ also began to lose its early and mid-nineteenth century meaning, especially in regard to the left or, generally speaking, younger liberalism, which had already been leaning in a “Jacobin” direction. Proponents of that wing, particularly the ones claiming to represent the newly enfranchised lower middle strata, would often begin to flirt with socialist or radical nationalist ideological currents (sometimes turning hostile towards modernity), which contributed to the already begun fragmentation of liberalism as a political force. From the turn of the century onwards, in terms of party politics it is therefore perhaps more feasible to talk about “heirs of liberalism” distinguished by a fuzzy ideological mix, combining (or at least allowing for coexistence of) elements of ‘petty bourgeois’ radicalism, non-Marxist socialism and integral nationalism with some remaining liberal residue. The German People’s Party in the Austrian Alpine lands, the State Rights Radicals in the Czech lands or the National Radical Youth as the inner opposition to the Slovene liberal leadership, are some good examples of this trend.

From a normative ideological point of view it could perhaps even be legitimate to say that the liberals ceased to be national by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ From the perspective of party traditions, however, it is equally true that parties continued to exist, inheriting the tradition of national liberalism in terms of organization, social base, their rootedness in specific milieus as well as a form of diluted ideology. They also continued to be labeled as such by the broader public and their political opponents, although some of them might

⁶⁵ Dénes, ‘Liberalism’, 1.

⁶⁶ The notion ‘radical’ itself started to gradually disappear after 1850 as a special party label only to reappear in a different form after 1900 and especially 1918, carrying more specific meanings like ‘radical right’ (or ‘left’) and ‘radical nationalist’. See Peter Wende, ‘Radikalismus’, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5: *Pro-Soz*, 113–33, 131–3.

⁶⁷ Cf. Dénes, ‘Liberalism’, 2.

have retained even less of a liberal spirit and culture than parties founded on a different ideological basis. In the Austrian German case, it may, of course be perfectly legitimate to consider all the mass movements that arose during the 1880s – the Christian Socials the Social Democrats and the ‘new’ German nationalists or the “three groups of the German democratic movement”⁶⁸ – as the inheritors of the national liberal traditions. However, the former two movements adopted a profoundly new and well-defined ideological basis (Catholic social teaching, Marxism) and fused with the already existing non-liberal political currents (Catholic conservatism, labor movement). The German nationalists, on the other hand, mostly retained the basic liberal mottos (freedom, progress), thereby putting more stress on the national component, radicalizing it and changing their political style. In 1908 most of these factions, except for the two ‘extreme poles’ of remaining few Viennese liberals of Jewish heritage and the Schönenererians, allied themselves in the *Nationalverband der Deutschfreiheitlichen Abgeordneten*.⁶⁹

STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND NEW MANNERS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Developing the famous ideal-typical method, Max Weber devoted substantial attention to the topic of political parties and was first to establish the general distinction between ‘parties of notables’, ‘honorific parties’ (*Honoratiorenparteien*) or elite-based parties on one side and modern “mass parties” on the other. The former party type, “distinguished by a particular pattern of restricted representation, limited to socially elevated group, which, on the grounds of exercising important social functions, claims the right to speak for the people as a whole”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “Die in den achtziger Jahren gespaltenen drei Gruppen der Deutschdemokratischen Bewegung” (Karl Bosl, ‘Gesellschaft und Politische Parteien in der Donaumonarchie und in den Nachfolgestaaten’, in Bosl (ed.) *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik*, 7–21, 14.)

⁶⁹ Höbelt, ‘Die deutschnationalen’, 86 and Pulzer, *The Rise*, 142. The inclination of liberals and nationalists “to split was rivaled only by their desire to coalesce again, and in 1910 they were, as they had been in 1867, once more one party-though the father is unlikely to have known his own child.” (*ibidem*).

⁷⁰ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber* (Chicago, 1989), 125.

were gradually disappearing (and had to disappear in Weber's view!)⁷¹, making place for the newly developing type of mass parties that were to become dominant in parliamentary life. These were associated with the development of mass democracy (the democratic party "machine"), modern bureaucracy and the process of "spiritual proletarianization".⁷² The distinguishing marks of the mass parties as contrasted to the parties of notables were "highest unity of leadership and strongest discipline".⁷³ The transition from the first type to the other was not sudden⁷⁴ but slow and gradual, and parties close to either of them co-existed within the same political landscapes. In contrast to the honorific parties "characteristic in particular of traditional liberalism"⁷⁵, the mass party ideal type was to a large degree based on the real life example of Social Democracy.⁷⁶ The former type was founded on and oriented towards world-view, whereas the latter was led by professional politicians.⁷⁷

Another feature of the *fin-de-siècle* political life in Central Europe were the so-called political "camps" (*Lager, tabori*). They united political parties and their increasingly mobilized broader following, together with field organizations, as well as various officially non-partisan associations. The three principal camps could include the Catholic conservatives (i.e., the camp of political Catholicism), the Marxists (i.e., the Social Democratic), and an ideologically less defined group, usually falling under such labels as 'liberal', 'progressive', or 'free-minded' though often reduced to simply 'national'. Political camps could also be closely tied to specific social and cultural milieus, which was specifically distinctive for the latter camp, whose parties

⁷¹ Regina F. Titunik, 'Democracy, Domination and Legitimacy in Max Weber's Political Thought' in Charles Camic, Philip S. Gorski & David M. Trubek (eds.), *Max Weber's 'Economy and Society', A Critical Companion*, (Stanford 2005), 143–63, 154.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Munich, 1921), 423; Quoted from: J. P. Mayer, *Max Weber and German Politics, A Study in Political Sociology* (London, 1955²), 114.

⁷⁴ Mayer, *Max Weber*, 82.

⁷⁵ Mommsen, *The Political*, 14.

⁷⁶ See Georges Haupt, 'Model Party: the Role and Influence of German Social-Democracy in South-East Europe' in Haupt, Georges, Peter Fawcett & Eric Hobsbawm, *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871–1914: Essays by Georges Haupt* (Cambridge, 2011), 48–80.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 100.

represented the most direct heirs to the nineteenth century national liberal traditions.

Often divided into a number of parties on both ideological and professional or social grounds,⁷⁸ the *fin-de-siècle* camp of national liberal heirs could include factions ranging ideologically from the moderate secular conservatism to the non-Marxist brands of socialism. Since these traced their roots back to 19th century national liberalism, the appeal to the national idea served as the sole strong unifying link, central ideological concept, and the main point of identification. Additionally, anticlericalism and usually also some aversion towards Marxist ideas of class struggle represented important common denominators. By 1918, the liberal camp was thus defined largely not by what it was (ideologically committed to liberalism), but by what it was not (non-Catholic, non-Marxist, etc.). Genealogically, the parties of the camp of national liberal heirs were liberal; ideologically, however, they had already been departing for decades from the traditions in which they rooted. Their remaining liberality or illiberality thereby varied between the nations, lands, local contexts, and particular parties, depending on the particular political circumstances, as did the degree and nature of their nationalism.

Further social diversification and continuous development of interest politics gave way to yet another division taking place at the turn of the century, as the agrarian and the national socialist or national labor currents emerged within the broader national liberal spectrum⁷⁹ and afterwards attempted to emancipate themselves from the national liberal heirs. At least in the Czech case they succeeded completely, making the discussed tri-partite division into camps obsolete by forming their own independent movements. The German Agrarians on the other hand remained connected with other “national” parties, whereas in the Slovene politics the discussed process commenced only after 1918 and also never reached its conclusion.

⁷⁸ Cf. Cohen, ‘Nationalism’, 266.

⁷⁹ Cf. Detlef Brandes, ‘Die Tschechoslowakischen National-Sozialisten’, in Bosl (ed.), *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik*, 101–53 and Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the nation: activists on the language frontiers of imperial Austria* (Cambridge Mass., 2006), 69.

AFTER THE WORLD WAR

Political conditions and institutional arrangements were throughout the second half of the nineteenth century undergoing a gradual but steady process of transformation towards a system, distinguished by participation of broad masses. The exact dynamics, course and pace of this process varied from country to country but nevertheless the direction was the same so that by the end of the century “politics in a new key” (Carl E. Schorske) were already a matter of fact and an ever more determining factor in Central European political life. Gradual transformation of party systems towards ones based on bureaucratic organization posed a problem to traditional liberal – as well as conservative – parties striving to transform into mass or popular parties in order to survive in the new circumstances. Such attempts could also contribute to considerable ideological changes and mutations, sometimes bringing about major digressions from the nineteenth century liberalism. The discussed structural transformations along with new ideological currents had far-reaching consequences and could, in turn, impact the transformations of very meanings and functions of the political term ‘liberal’. Moreover this often coincided with the emergence of new labels used either to mask or do away with liberalism.

The discussed ‘nationalist turn’ of the Central European national liberals and their political heirs reached its peak by the turn of the century and continued to develop further into the interwar period. With democracy becoming the institutionalized norm of political life, again new self-designations and party names were put into the foreground by the political forces that may be treated as heirs to the national liberal traditions. Their still mostly unsuccessful endeavors to create mass parties were often conducted under the firm of ‘democracy’ or ‘national democracy’. This was well reflected in the cases of the Slovene national liberal heirs, who in 1918 united in the Yugoslav Democratic Party (*Jugoslovanska demokratska stranka*), the left liberal German Democratic Party (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*), as well as the Hungarian National Democrats (*Nemzeti Demokrata Párt*). In Austria, the marginal *Bürgerlich-demokratische Partei*, uniting the few remaining Viennese liberals, was overshadowed by the prime representative of the Austrian ‘third camp’ – the heterogeneous but pronouncedly anti-Semitic Greater-German People’s Party (*Grossdeutsche*

Volkspartei), whose key founding group were the Viennese National Democrats (*Nationaldemokraten*). In the Czech lands, the Czechoslovak National Democrats (*Československá národní demokracie*) acted as the most direct heirs to the Young Czechs⁸⁰, as well as the State Rights Progressives, thereby also uniting some members of the former Progressive and Old Czech Parties. All in all, it can be claimed that in most of the cases the national component continued to be increasingly stressed over the liberal one, which was quite often explicitly rejected by the parties in question. In economic regard the interwar national liberal heirs mostly moved into direction of national solidarism, later also introducing corporatist elements.

Partial abandonment of classical liberal tenets largely distinguished the contemporary organized liberalism to the 'West' as well. What makes the Central European developments specific in this regard is their direction, which unlike the emergence of currents of 'new' or 'social liberalism' in the West, to a notable degree led towards adoption of anti-liberal and radically nationalist positions. Partial exceptions in this regard were Germany, where liberal party traditions certainly continued with the German Democratic and German People's Parties – although in a rather diluted form⁸¹ – and, above all, Czechoslovakia, where the discussed nationalist turn was not so radical and where it could even be claimed that political developments to an extent corresponded to the ones in Scandinavia and Western Europe.⁸² It was however the president Masaryk and his circle that could be counted as supporters "of what may be called social liberalism" (Milan Znoj)⁸³, and certainly not the National Democrats as the most direct heirs to the national liberal party traditions, with whom the Masaryk's circle was in constant conflict, and whose principal ideological paradigm was Czech nationalism.

⁸⁰ Cf. Lemberg, 'Das Erbe', 68.

⁸¹ Cf. Bruce B. Frye, 'The German Democratic Party 1918–1930', *The Western Political Quarterly*, xvi, 1 (1963), 167–79, 172.

⁸² Garver, *The Young Czech*, 308.

⁸³ See Milan Znoj, 'Depolitizace humanistické vize Evropy. Od Masaryka k volnému trhu', in Petr Hlaváček (ed.), *České vize Evropy? Manuál k naší evropské debatě*, (Prague, 2014) and 'The welfare state as a third way between capitalism and revolutionary socialism' in Zlatica Zudová-Lešková *et al.*, *Theory and Practice of the Welfare State in Europe in 20th Century* (Prague, 2014).

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