Mirna Makovac, Mgr.
Balkan, Eurasian and Central European Studies
Karlovo sveučilište u Pragu

FRANTIŠEK PALACKÝ'S VISION FOR AUSTRO-SLAVISM: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The objective of this article is to examine the emergence of Austro-Slavism as well as its influence on František Palacký's political beliefs and ideas. In addition to that, theGerman interpretation of Central Europe through the concept of "Mitteleuropa" will be used as a comparative idea in order to explain the historical context of Austro-Slavism and the threat it posed to the Czech nation. Throughout the annals of history, the Germans and the Czechs have held divergent interpretations of Central Europe. While the Germans viewed it as a political tool to advance their national objectives, the Czechs saw it as a means to foster unity and collaboration among diverse populations. This article will concentrate on the Czech perspective of Central Europe, as exemplified by František Palacký, a prominent Czech historian and a central figure in the Czech national movement.

Keywords: *František Palacký, Austro-Slavism, Pan-Slavism, Mitteleuropa*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Habsburg Monarchy was one of the most conservative monarchies in Europe during the 19th century. It was a multiethnic monarchy inhabited by Germanic, Slavic, Romance, and other ethnic groups, held together by the conservative Foreign Minister and then Chancellor Klemens von Metternich. Among these groups, before the significant revolutions of 1848, nationalconsciousness existed fully among Germans, Poles, and Hungarians who, because of their nationalist aspirations and political capabilities, posed a danger to the monarchy.[1] The dissemination of liberal ideas in the Habsburg Monarchy was a late development, taking place twenty years after the liberal revolutions in Western Europe in the 1820s. The spread of liberal ideas in Austria and the turning of the bourgeoisie against the emperor was mainly caused by the dissatisfaction of the workers primarily with the working conditions in the rapidly spreading industrial revolution. On the other hand, revolutions occurred in other parts of the Habsburg Monarchy due to dissatisfaction with the Habsburg court and German domination, which in turn led to a strengthening of national consciousness, national demands, and open hostility to the court.[2]

---

1   M. RAPPORT 2009: 3–7.
2   J. R. RATH 1953: 4–7.

Some of the territories where rising national consciousness and German domination were the most prominent were the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia which were ethnically mixed with German and Czech populations. The social and political differences between these two groups were notable. The Germans, who were wealthy and held important positions with aristocratic status, ruled the lands, while the Czech population was mostly lower class and worked in agriculture and trade.[3] In addition to that, the Germans often denied the Slavic character of the population inhabiting Bohemia and Moravia referring to them as "Czech-speaking Germans". The idea of incorporating Czech lands and fully Germanizing them was not uncommon either and the creation of the German nation started to be more frequently discussed within the concept of "Mitteleuropa". In such conditions, the Czech national consciousness grew stronger, and František Palacký, a prominent politician and historian who developed the political program of Austro-Slavism, appeared on the political scene.[4]

2. THE YEAR OF UPHEAVAL: THE 1848 REVOLUTIONS AND MITTELEUROPA

The year 1848 is remembered in European history as a politically turbulent year known as the "Spring of Nations" in which a series of revolutions broke out in most European countries. The old system of Europe ruled by empires, emperors, feudalism, and absolutism established in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna began to slowly collapse and was replaced with the ideas of liberalism, nationalism, democracy, and patriotism.[5] One of the key pillars of the revolutionary movements was liberalism, an ideology that regards individual freedom as the fundamental starting point and a benchmark for evaluating all societal institutions.[6] In addition to liberal principles, the revolutionary movements were fueled by the severe economic, social, and agrarian crisis in Europe, characterized by increasing unemployment, poverty, and food shortages. The ideals of democracy, equality, freedom, and fraternity gained traction among the young middle-class population, who established their own newspapers, clubs, and other forums to discuss political and social issues.[7] The primary demands included resolving the economic crisis and reforming the political system, as well as abolishing the old class society, liberalizing the economy, establishing a constitution, and enabling participation in political life.[8] At the same time, this period saw the emergence of nation and nationalism as a political movement, advocating for the unity, interests, and rights of the nation within the confines of a single ethnic state.[9]

Following the Napoleonic Wars and the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, thirty-nine German states, including Prussia and Austria, formed a Confederation, interconnected by the customs union *Zollverein*. After the French February Revolution, limited protests occurred in smaller German states. However, the situation shifted when news of Austrian Chancellor Metternich's ousting

---

3   S. Z. PECH 1973: 463.
4   Z. L. SUDA 2001: 225–227.
5   *revolucija 1848-49* – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=52630 (accessed December 5, 2022).
6   *liberalizam* – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=36345 (accessed December 5, 2022).
7   *1848, the European People's Spring* – https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/political-europe/1848-european-people%E2%80%99s-spring/1848-european-people%E2%80%99s-spring (accessed December 5, 2022).
8   *revolucija 1848-49* – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=52630 (accessed December 5, 2022).
9   *nacionalizam* – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=42695 (accessed December 5, 2022)

spread. The revolution swept across all German states, with a growing desire for German unification and the conflation of liberalism with nationalism. However, the unification of Germany posed several challenges. Firstly, the form of the newly established German state was unclear, as the decision had to be made between a parliamentary monarchy or a democratic republic. Secondly, defining state borders was complicated due to the presence of ethnic diversity within the territory. Finally, the question of Austria's involvement in the new German state sparked debates, as it was unclear whether its territory should be incorporated or not. The question of Austria's involvement caused a heated discussion at the Frankfurt Parliament, where representatives from all German states were gathered. Two options were presented: *Kleindeutsch* (Germany without Austria) and *Grossdeutsch* (Germany with Austria). The public was divided about which option to support, as many Germans opposed the idea of conservative and Catholic Austria being part of their new state, while others did not want to be dominated by Protestant Prussia. The *Grossdeutsch* solution also posed the threat of dissolving the Habsburg Monarchy if Austria was incorporated into the German state.[10] However, the parliament's plans were never realized as its members were expelled for their excessively liberal views. This debate continued until 1866, when Prussia and Austria went to war and Prussia emerged as the dominant power in Germany, resulting in the implementation of the *Kleindeutsch* solution.[11]

Both of the parliament's options included incorporating the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia, which had a mixed German and Czech population and were previously part of the Holy Roman Empire, making them a natural fit for the German state. German was the language of administration in the Czech lands and many intellectuals wrote in it.[12] This is one of the reasons why Czech historian František Palacký was invited to the Frankfurt Parliament as the representative of Czech lands, but he declined, as will be discussed later. The inclusion of the Czech lands was closely tied to the German concept of Central Europe or *Mitteleuropa*, which focused on German nation-building and the creation of a German identity. The idea was based on establishing German cultural dominance over the region and forming a federation or confederation of countries under German or Habsburg control.[13] *Mitteleuropa* was used in the 19th century as a political tool by Austria and Prussia to increase their power over central European territories. Whoever controlled the region also held sway over German lands. *Mitteleuropa* was based on the notion of *Kulturnation*, which meant that all territories where German was spoken and German culture dominated should be united. Many scholars at the time believed in German superiority over other smaller peoples of Central Europe and that the Germans had the right to rule and exploit their lands, lest the Russians take the opportunity.[14] These German ideas and threats fueled the strengthening of Czech national consciousness and their alignment with other Slavs and Vienna. They also influenced František Palacký, who saw the salvation of the Czech nation in the support he could receive from Vienna.

---

10 M. RAPPORT 2009: 106, 117, 131–132.
11 B. STRÅTH 2008: 172.
12 M. RAPPORT 2009: 132.
13 T. CIPEK 2004: 597.
14 J. BRECHTEFELD 1996: 12–16.

3. RESISTING HEGEMONIES: THE EMERGENCE OF AUSTRO-SLAVISM IN PALACKÝ'S VISION

František Palacký was born in 1798 in Hodslavice, a Czech-German village in Moravia, in a poor Protestant family. During his education in Bratislava, he developed an interest in liberal and national issues, particularly in the topics of national rights and independence. He then extensively studied, read, and wrote about Czech history and historical figures. One of his most notable works is "The History of the Czech Nation," in which he aimed to showcase Czech history and the nation's centuries-long aspirations for independence and against absolutism. He covered Czech history from the earliest times to 1526, and outlined the differences between the characters of Czech and Germanic people that made the two nations incompatible. In the 1830s, he co-founded *Matice česká*, a center for language development and standardization that aimed to publish works in the Czech language. Palacký is considered the main figure of the Czech national movement and is referred to as the "Father of the Nation".[15]

Palacký's idea of Central Europe, as well as the general Slavic view, arose in response to German expansionism (*Drang nach Osten*) and Russian aggression. Johann Gottfried Herder, a German philosopher and one of the first to write about the Slavs' role in history, influenced Palacký and many later politicians and intellectuals. Herder believed that the Slavs were historically peaceful people who only fought in self-defense and that they should play a role in building a humane and democratic society. Palacký adopted this idea, seeing the Slavs as peaceful people who always sought equality, democracy, and peace, and who should therefore lead the building of a democratic society within the Habsburg Monarchy.[16] Palacký held an idealized view of the Czech people as peaceful, hardworking, courteous, and hospitable, who were often victims of politics and wars. He similarly believed the ancient Slavs preserved traditions and progressive values such as democracy, liberalism, brotherhood, modernism, and progressiveness, centuries before Western Europe claimed them. On the other hand, he saw the Germans as the opposite of the Slavs – aggressive, conquering, and feudal, lacking inclination towards progressive democratic ideals that the Czechs had.[17]

In 1848, Palacký was invited to attend a session of the All-German Parliament in Frankfurt, as Bohemia and Moravia were considered German lands. He declined the invitation and, in his letter, wrote: "*I am not a German – at any rate I do not consider myself as such (…) I am a Bohemian of Slav descent and with the little which I possess and can do have devoted myself totally and forever to the service of my people. This people is, indeed, a small one, but has always been a distinct one and one existing for itself.*".[18] This quote reflects his nationalistic views and a strong sense of identity as a Bohemian of Slavic descent, as well as his pride in his ancestry and cultural heritage. He distanced himself from Germans and their politics by emphasizing his loyalty and devotion to his people, as well as the belief in the unique and separate identity of the Slavic peoples. The All-German Parliament's session in Frankfurt, aimed at drafting a constitution to unite the divided German states, caused fear among neighboring nations, particularly the Czechs. Palacký recognized

---

15 R. G. PLASCHKA 1973: 36–39, 41–43.
16 T. CIPEK 2004: 600.
17 R. G. PLASCHKA 1973: 41–43, 45.
18 F. PALACKÝ 1948: 303.

the potential harm of an aggressive German policy towards the Slavs and Austrians and thus developed his theory of *Austro-Slavism*.[19] He wrote: *"When I cast my glance beyond the frontiers of Bohemia I am impelled by natural as well as historical causes to direct them not towards Frankfurt but towards Vienna, and there to seek the center which is natural and is called to secure and to protect for my people peace, freedom and justice".*[20] Palacký saw Vienna, and not Frankfurt, as a place of security for the Czech nation that will serve the needs and interests of the Slavic peoples and protect them from German expansionism. This idea represented the basis of Austro-Slavism as a political ideology advocating the preservation of the Habsburg Monarchy as the primary interest of Slavic residents. The Austroslavists emphasized the diversity of Slavs in the monarchy, advocated for Slavic cooperation, and called for a restructuring of the monarchy into a federal state of equal peoples. The ideology was popular among Czechs, Slovaks, and Croats, but lacked support among Poles as their focus was on establishing an independent nation-state.[21]

Although one of the reasons for the emergence of Austro-Slavism was German nationalism, the Russian aggressive policy in Europe also played a significant role. Palacký, being Slavic himself, shared the concerns about the growing power of Russia, and was wary of their potential to interfere in other nations using "help to the Slavic brothers" as an excuse. However, the aggressive nature of Russian policy *"driven by its natural instinct"* contradicts and puts into question the idea of a peaceful Slavic character that Palacký advocated. Palacký viewed Russia differently from other Slavs and feared its expansionism that might *"lead to a new universal monarchy that is an incalculable and unutterable evil, a calamity without measure and end, which I, a Slav body and soul, would therefore in the interest of humanity mourn no less, even though it would be primarily a Slav one".*[22] Russian expansionism wouldn't only have disastrous consequences for the Slavic peoples, but for the whole of Europe and humanity. That is why, according to Palacký, all the peoples of Central and Southeast Europe (Romanians, Hungarians, Greeks, Albanians, and Slavs) were too weak to stand up against the major European powers and could only do so *"when a single and firm bond unites them all with one another"*.[23]

In this fight between small nations and European powers, Slavs should join together under the protection of Austro-Hungary. Palacký's conception of Central Europe was based on the right of the Slavic people to self-determination and sovereignty. He saw the realization of this in the establishment of federalism within the Habsburg Monarchy where the Slavs would have equal status as Germans. Its democratic Central Europe would be made up of united Slavs who would fight with the help of Vienna against German, Russian, but also Hungarian aggressive policies. For this reason, Palacký was not against the Habsburg Monarchy, nor did he plan for the Czechs and other Slavs to form their own independent states, but rather saw in Vienna the protector of the Slavs. Palacký believed that the establishment of federalism in the multiethnic Habsburg Monarchy would result in peace between the various peoples and the politically independent development of the Slavs would be enabled on the basis of their historical and natural right to self- determination. In 1848, Palacký presented this idea at a session of the Austrian Parliament inKroměříž. He proposed the

---

19 R. G. PLASCHKA 1973: 41–43, 45.
20 F. PALACKÝ 1948: 307.
21 *austroslavizam* – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=4695 (accessed December 5, 2022).
22 F. PALACKÝ 1948: 304.
23 F. PALACKÝ 1948: 304.

creation of eight autonomous units, consisting of German-Austrian, Italian, Polish, Czech, Illyrian, South Slavic, Vlach, and Hungarian countries. Although the borders of the proposed autonomous entities did not always align with nationality, Palacký still believed in the principle of self-determination for all peoples in the Habsburg Monarchy. After all, national boundaries in the Monarchy were difficult to determine due to the mixed populations.[24] After the session of the Austrian Parliament in Kroměříž, the idea of Austro-Slavism reached its peak the same year, this time in Prague, at the Slavic Congress.

4. UNIFYING SLAVIC VOICES: THE SLAVIC CONGRESS AND THE HEIGHT OF AUSTRO-SLAVISM

Since Palacký refused to participate as a representative of the Czech lands in the parliamentary session in Frankfurt, inspired by the idea of Austro-Slavism, Slavic unification, and mutual assistance, between June 2 and 12, 1848 he organized a Pan-Slavic Congress as a counterbalance to the All-German Parliament in Frankfurt.[25] The purpose of the congress was to address the oppression of Slavic lands in Central Europe by German and Hungarian policies and to promote the idea of Austro-Slavism and Slavic unity. The congress was attended by around 350 representatives from all Slavic countries in Europe, except Bulgaria. The idea of a Pan-Slavic congress had existed prior to 1848, largely due to the efforts of Czech intellectuals, but the congress became a pinnacle for the idea of Austro-Slavism.[26]

The outcome of the Slavic Congress was the "Manifesto to European Nations," which emphasized freedom as a fundamental human right. The Manifesto called for an end to all forms of oppression against Slavic peoples and equal rights for all citizens. It was addressed to the Austrian Emperor and stated that equal rights would save the oppressed Slavic nations and their culture in the Habsburg Monarchy, bringing them equal freedom to that of German and Hungarian citizens. The Manifesto ended by expressing the desire to hold a similar congress across Europe to solve European problems and establish a new political and social system. The Slavic CongressManifesto, produced during a time of liberal ideals and demands for national freedom and self- governance, was a reflection of similar demands made by not only the Slavic peoples but also the Hungarians and Germans. It is noteworthy, however, that while the latter two groups were advocating for the respect of their national interests, they simultaneously neglected to acknowledge the rights of other nations. The delegates of the Slavic Congress, as evidenced in the Manifesto, advocated not only for the rights of Slavic peoples but for the rights of all oppressed peoples throughout the world. This cosmopolitan outlook made their demands distinct and exceptional, compared to those of other nations. Despite the production of the "Manifesto to European Nations," and other congress conclusions, they were not put into practice and remained a dead letter. Additionally, the unity among the Slavic nations began to deteriorate.[27]

At the Slavic Congress of 1848, the delegates placed particular emphasis on the plight of Slavs within the Habsburg Monarchy. The chair of the congress, František Palacký, presented his vision

---

24   T. CIPEK 2004: 602–606.
25   E. HORVÁTH 1934: 630.
26   J. MACŮREK 1948: 329–335.
27   J. MACŮREK 1948: 329–335.

for the establishment of federalism within the monarchy which in 1865 he published under the title "Idea of the Austrian State". Despite its comprehensiveness, Palacký's proposal was not embraced by the Austrian court due to the fear of inciting dissatisfaction among the nationalist German and Hungarian populations, which were perceived as being stronger than the Slavic one.[28] Neverthe-less, Palacký's ideas about Slavic unity and the need for a federalist system played a significant role in the development of Slavic nationalism.

5. THE SHIFT IN SLAVIC NATIONALISM

The suppression of the 1849 revolution and the establishment of centralist and absolutist poli-cies strengthened the power of Austria and Hungary. Disillusioned with Austrian politics and losing hope for change, Palacký came to the conclusion that the Germans would always seek dominance over the Slavs. Toward the end of his political career, he shifted his focus to Pan- Slavism and Rus-sia, which he no longer viewed as a threat to the small nations of Central Europe.[29] The concept of Austro-Slavism was gradually fully replaced by Pan-Slavism, which gained particular popularity among Central European Slavs, as it was a response to Pan-Germanism and the policies of the Habsburg Monarchy. Over time, Pan-Slavism spread to Russia, where it adopted a more aggressive, expansionist character, with Russian Pan-Slavists envisioning Russia as a protector of oppressed Slavs who would adopt the Orthodox faith, Cyrillic script, and Russian language. Other nations also utilized the concept of Pan-Slavism to further their own national interests.[30] The decline of Aus-tro-Slavism marked a significant shift in the development of Slavic nationalism, as more and more Slavs began to look beyond their immediate borders and seek solidarity with other Slavic peoples.

6. CONCLUSION

Austro-Slavism and Palacký's ideas about federalism had a lasting impact on the course of Slav-ic history and paved the way for the emergence of Pan-Slavism. His political beliefs and ideas were shaped by the events of his time and the changing political landscape of the Habsburg Monarchy. Palacký's vision of Austro-Slavism may not have been fully realized, but it remains an important chapter in the history of Slavic nationalism. Palacký's advocacy for federalism within the Habsburg Monarchy was in stark contrast to the German concept of *Mitteleuropa*, which envisioned a cen-tralized and dominant Germany at the heart of Europe. This difference in ideology highlights the tensions between the Slavic and German populations in the Habsburg Monarchy and the struggle for power and influence within the empire. Additionally, Palacký's ideas influenced not only the Czech lands but also other Slavic nations within the Habsburg Monarchy. He advocated for greater autonomy and recognition of Slavic cultural and linguistic rights within the empire. Despite the po-litical turmoil and suppression of Slavic nationalism during his lifetime, Palacký's legacy continued to inspire future generations of Slavic intellectuals and political leaders.

---

28   T. CIPEK 2004: 606.
29   R. G. PLASCHKA 1973: 52.
30   H. KOHN 1961: 323–326.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

J. BRECHTEFELD, 1996 – Jörg Brechtefeld, *Mitteleuropa and German Politics: 1848 to the Present,* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

M. RAPPORT, 2009 – Michael Rapport, *1848: year of revolution*, London: Abacus, 2009.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

T. CIPEK, 2004 – Tihomir Cipek, Ideja Srednje Europe Františeka Palackog, *Časopis za*

suvremenu povijest, 36, Zagreb, 2004, 597–607.

E. HORVÁTH, 1934 – Eugene Horváth, Russia and the Hungarian Revolution (1848–9), *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 12, London, 1934, 628–45.

E. KOHN, 1961 – Hans Kohn, The Impact of Pan-Slavism on Central Europe, *The Review of Politics*, 23, Cambridge, 1961, 323–33.

J. MACŮREK, 1948 – Josef Macůrek, The Achievements of the Slavonic Congress, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 26, London, 1948, 329–40.

F. PALACKÝ, 1947 – František Palacký, Letter declining a seat in the Frankfurt Parliament (1848), *Slavonic and East European Review*, 26, 1948), 303–308.

R. G. PLASCHKA, 1973 – Richard Georg Plaschka, The Political Significance of Frantisek Palacky, *Journal of Contemporary History,* 8, New York, 1973, 35–55.

S. Z. PECH, 1973 –Stanley Z. Pech, Czech Political Parties in 1848, *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes*, 15, 1973, 462–487.

R. J. RATH, 1953 – Reuben John Rath, The Failure of an Ideal: The Viennese Revolution of 1848, *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly,* 34, New York, 1953, 3–20.

B. STRÅTH, 2008 – Bo Stråth, Mitteleuropa: From List to Naumann, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11, 2008, 171–83.

Z. L. SUDA 2001 – Zdenek L. Suda, The Curious Side of Modern Czech Nationalism, *Czech Sociological Review*, 9, Prague, 2001, 225–34.

WEB-PAGES

É. ANCEAU, 2020 – Éric Anceau, *1848, the European People's Spring*, Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe [online], https://ehne.fr/en/node/12439 (accessed December 5, 2022).

Austroslavizam – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=4695 (accessed December 5, 2022).

Liberalizam – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=36345 (accessed December 5, 2022).

Nacionalizam – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=42695 (accessed December 5, 2022).

Revolucija 1848–49 – http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=52630 (accessed December 5, 2022).