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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE CZECH LANDS 1849–1939*

Abstract

This text summarises the results of extensive research into the relationship between the state and universities in 1849–1939, i.e. between the so-called ‘Thun reform’ and the closure of Czech universities by the Nazis. The focus is on the state’s respect for the privileged position of universities and the monitoring of tensions arising from the clash between legislation and the universities’ day-to-day operations, resulting mainly from satisfying the economic needs of universities on the one hand, and the interpretation of the responsibility and discipline of their academic staff towards the state and society on the other. The research shows the advancing erosion of the so-called Prussian (Humboldt’s) concept of an autonomous national-oriented university and the difficult search for a democratic alternative in interwar Central Europe’s unstable political and economic conditions.

Keywords: university autonomy, state higher education policy, management and personnel regulations, 1849–1939

I

When the government was deliberating over a new law on the position of university teachers in 1935, the rector of Charles University in Prague sent the following dramatic protest:

One common feeling has predominated amongst the teaching bodies at Charles University: unease, bitterness and humiliation. The government’s law on the curriculum blows like an ill wind through the universities as it is biased against them and disregards the special significance and mission

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of universities, which have been the nursery of science, benefitting both the state and humanity.¹

The letter expressed the university's consternation at governmental reform and was aimed at addressing the apparent crisis in university autonomy. Therefore, the rector's letter can be seen as an epilogue to the almost 100-year development in the relationship between universities and the state in the Czech lands, which was based on the so-called 'Humboldt–Thun concept' of the university.

This article aims to summarise the research results from the project 'State Financing and Universities in the Czech Lands 1849–1939'. The project emerged from the thesis that the principles of the Humboldt (or Prussian) university were brought to the Habsburg monarchy via Leo Thun's reforms from 1849 to 1852, and remained in their basic form until the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands and the closure of Czech universities in 1939. At the same time, the project was based on the hypothesis that the legal regulations governing the relationship between universities and the state were in many ways unclear and incomplete and reflected problems in responding to the existence of four fundamental limitations: the universities' long historical tradition; the global character of the university's existence; the specific position of universities in terms of the expert services they provided to the state and the public; and the changes to tertiary education as a result of the creation and emancipation of more and more specialised colleges and departments, which altered and usually reduced the historically dominant influence of universities. The vagueness of the legal regulations created ample space for the consensual character of higher-education policy in Cisleithania² and later Czechoslovakia, which, apart from the will of the legislature, primarily focused on traditions, national and international public opinion, current political conditions, and the peculiarities of the agenda dealing with universities.

This study was therefore based on the research potential of two methodologies. The most important was the legal-historical approach, augmented by the study of social practice to grasp the consensual

¹ Archiv Univerzity Karlovy (hereinafter: AUK), Akademický senát 1882–1951, k. B7/41, Zpráva komise k osnově zákona – zrušení zákona č. 79/1919 Sb.

² After the separation of Hungary in 1867 from the former Austrian Empire, the Austrian part of the dual monarchy was informally referred to as Cisleithania.

features of a higher-education policy which often sought compromise. To a lesser extent, and more evident in some sub-aspects of the project which fall outside this short text, we also use economic history approaches because, during all transformations of the legal relationship between the state and universities and the social practice of ministerial officials and university representatives, universities remained almost utterly dependent on the state budget during the period under review.³

II

INTERPRETING THE REFORMS OF LEO THUN

Thun's reform of universities in the Habsburg Empire reflected the successful reforms of the Prussians, culminating in the establishment of the university in Berlin in 1810 associated with Wilhelm von Humboldt. However, recent literature shows that Humboldt's influence on the Prussian reforms was less than previously thought. Its importance for the reform was not very much reflected upon at the time and came to the fore only in 1960, thanks to the work of Helmut Schelsky.⁴ Recent works point to the importance of Schelsky's work for our interpretation of the "Humboldt phenomenon" and reduce its significance for the whole Prussian reform. Nevertheless, Humboldt's name remained a slogan in the ongoing debates about the university's past and future. Despite some differences in their overall direction, the reforms in the Habsburg monarchy were similar to those of the Prussians: firstly, the introduction of university autonomy to deal with academic issues, thus freeing universities from the rigid supervision of the state from the pre-March era; and secondly, an emphasis on the harmony between teaching and research which would lead the Habsburg monarchy to become more competitive internationally.⁵

³ Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park, 2002), 71; Georg Loscher, Violetta Splitter, and David Seidl, 'Theodore Schatzki's Practice Theory and Its Implications for Organization Studies', in Stewart Clegg and Miguel Pina e Cunha (eds), *Management, Organizations and Contemporary Social Theory* (New York, 2019), 115–34.

⁴ Helmut Schelsky, *Einsamkeit und Freiheit: Zur sozialen Idee der deutschen Universität* (Münster, 1960), 6–7.

⁵ Sylvia Paletschek, *Die permanente Erfindung der Tradition. Die Universität Tübingen im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart, 2001), 27; Thomas Becker, 'Diversifizierung eines Modells? Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universitäten 1810, 1811,

Leo Thun, Minister of Religion and Education (1849–60), occupied centre stage at the beginning of the reforms, and he is regarded as the ‘face of the reforms’, including those which continued in the direction set by him even after his resignation as Minister. The completion, and in a sense a summary of the partial reform steps, was the act ‘On the organisation of university offices’ from 1873, at a time when Thun was no longer in office.

Nevertheless, Leo Thun became a symbol of a new era in the history of universities in the Habsburg Empire, similar to Wilhelm von Humboldt in Prussia. In both cases, it can be said that these were largely political slogans associated with their names, as the authorship of the reforms by both men was not absolute, and the changes continued even after they lost influence over the development of education. In both cases, historians’ interpretation of their work in the twentieth century plays a significant role.⁶ One interesting issue for our research was the social practice that emerged from the regulations of Thun’s reforms, particularly the transformation of social practice, which highlighted the pressure for change in the interpretation of legal regulations. These were the results of problematic issues arising in the university agenda, particularly in legal-philosophical and economic areas, but also had a significant share of historical themes.⁷

The research on which this work is based has highlighted four main strands in the conflict over the interpretation of the legal regulation of Cisleithanien universities, and Czechoslovakia was to inherit these conflicts with very few changes:

a) The laws clearly defined universities as state administrative bodies.

In academia, however, the acceptance of this fact by individuals, as well as entire professorial bodies, was gradually replaced by ideas

1818’, in Rüdiger vom Bruch (ed.), *Die Berliner Universität im Kontext der deutschen Universitätslandschaft um 1810, um 1860 und um 1910* (München, 2010), 43–69.

⁶ Hans Lentze, *Die Universitätsreform des Ministers Leo Graf Thun-Hohenstein* (Wien, 1962), 274–82.

⁷ *Id.*, *Die Universitätsreform des Ministers Leo Graf Thun-Hohenstein* (Wien, 1962); Helmut Engelbrecht, *Geschichte der österreichischen Bildungswesens*, iv (Wien 1988), 221–31; Christof Aichner, ‘Die Umsetzung der Thun-Hohensteinschen Reformen an der Universität Innsbruck’, academic dissertation, Universität Innsbruck (Innsbruck, 2014), 98–105; Dieter Langewiesche, ‘Die Humboldtsche Universität als nationaler Mythos. Zum Selbstbild der deutschen Universitäten in ihren Rektoratsreden im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, ccxc (2010), 53–91.

about service to the nation, science, or humanity, all of which were significantly different depending on the history of the university in question, the academician's discipline, the language used in teaching, as well as generational differences. In terms of the actors' social practice – both on the part of academics and the state representatives – we found many cases whereby problem situations were created both deliberately as well as unintentionally, and issues arose which gradually changed the relationship between the state and universities.

- b) By fundamentally adhering to the idea of universities as part of the state administration, the state was willing to acknowledge certain peculiarities in its treatment of universities, particularly concerning their historical tradition and strong links with the global *universitas* network. However, with the development of the natural and technical sciences in the 19th century, technical universities became more emancipated, and in the interwar period, this spread to agricultural and art schools. Higher education became increasingly fragmented and diverse, while the once-respected law concerning university privileges began to be questioned, again impacting more on social practice than legislation.
- c) A hierarchy developed within university groups as well as in the groups within the technical universities. This was not established by law but by minor regulations and, above all, by tradition. At the top of the hierarchy were the Viennese universities, which were assumed to provide expertise and first-class research and would operate as state representatives before an international public.⁸ The other universities were prescribed more of an educational role, which did not envisage top-class research being carried out. The hierarchy was closely linked to the position of German as the traditional language of internal communication within academia. With the emancipation of Polish and Czech as academic languages, the dominance of the German language and thus of the Cisleithanian universities began to wane. The universities became part of the “struggle of the Cisleithanian nations for statehood”,⁹ and

⁸ Jan Surman, *Universities in Imperial Austria 1848–1918. A Social History of a Multilingual Space*. (West Lafayette, IN, 2019), 275–77.

⁹ Rudolf Springer, *Der Kampf der österreichischen Nationen um den Staat*, part 1: *Das nationale Problem als Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgrage* (Leipzig–Wien, 1902).

as a result, the legal regulations governing them came under the pressure of social practice.

- d) Some university representatives put pressure on the state by arguing for an extensive interpretation of autonomy – i.e. its expansion from purely professional matters towards areas such as professional codes, disciplinary proceedings and autonomous decision-making in the use of state-entrusted funds. The specific objectives were that both work assessment and the disciplining of professors be carried out by professorial committees from the relevant universities rather than the state authorities, and then to transfer decisions on the use of funds (allocated by the state budget for the relevant year) from the Ministry of Education to bodies within the universities.

III

UNIVERSITIES AND INTEGRAL NATIONALISM

Being aware of how sensitive the administration of the universities' specific agenda was, a higher-education review by the Cisleithanian Ministry of Religion and Education created a particular level of communication with universities, respecting the self-stylisation of their representatives as being different from other state officials. Academic self-governance was occasionally described as being similar to judicial self-governance.¹⁰ Despite all the sensitivity of the Cisleithanian ministerial officials – often appreciated *ex post* by academics – the Cisleithania state was often confronted by problems and conflicts to which the existing legislation offered no clear solutions, so these had to be found on an *ad hoc* basis, usually through an agreement between the interested parties. The Cisleithanian authorities demonstrated considerable flexibility and creativity when tackling many problems, including sensitive political issues connected to national emancipation and how it was reflected in the work of universities.¹¹ The state had managed to resolve conflicts over which language was to be used in teaching at the universities in Cracow and Prague Technical University, as well as in the most awkward case, which resulted in the division of Prague university into a Czech and a German university in 1882.

¹⁰ František Havelka, *Služební právo státních úředníků a zřízenců* (Praha, 1937), 138–9.

¹¹ Karl Adamovich, 'Hochschulverwaltung und Universitäten', in *100 Jahre Unterrichtsministerium 1848–1948* (Wien, 1948), 43–52.

These listed examples were resolved mainly thanks to an agreement between moderate representatives from the two nationalities in Bohemia – the conservative-liberal Old Czechs on the Czech side and the German liberals – who together represented the wealthy and educational elites of the two nationalities.¹²

The erosion of the political influence of Old Czechs and German liberals in the 1880s resulted from the increasing politicisation of the public and the extension of the voting franchise, which facilitated the rise of a political culture known as integral nationalism.¹³ The term denotes the permeation of national issues into all social issues and conflicts of the period, including social, economic, class, and gender issues. Within this political climate, colleges and universities, in particular, were able to mobilise an intensely politicised public in support of their cause, even for something as seemingly trivial as the symbols of national identity and emancipation. As a result of Cisleithania's fragile political situation, the activation of public opinion in defence of university interests could have a significant impact – we might recall that Alfred Windisch-Graetz's government fell in 1895 because of an apparently parochial dispute over a gymnasium in the Slovenian town of Celje/Cilli.¹⁴

Higher-education conflicts could damage Cisleithanian politics, even though the agreement reached over the Prague universities (1882) proved to have long-term stability. An example here is the Czech-German negotiations on national peace in Moravia (1905), from which the question of the university was eventually excluded due to its threat to stall the entire negotiations. The relations between Czech and German universities (less technical universities) in Prague were also of great importance for the negotiations on national peace on the eve of the Great War.¹⁵ Conflicts involving academics and students

¹² Národní archiv, Praha (hereinafter: NA), Fond Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty (hereinafter: FMŠNO), k. 1026, sign. 4a.

¹³ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York, 1965); John A. Hall, 'Nationalisms: Classified and Explained', *Daedalus*, cxxii, 3 (1993), 1–28; Miroslav Hroch, *The Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge, 1985); Oszkár Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, IL 1961).

¹⁴ Peter Vodopivec, 'Die Slowenen und die Habsburgermonarchie', in Dušan Nečák et al. (eds), *Slovensko-avstrijski odnosi v 20. Stoletju/Slowenisch-österreichische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Ljubljana, 2004), 51.

¹⁵ Karel Kazbunda, *Otázka česko-německá v předvečer Velké války* (Praha, 1995), 371–5; František Jordán et al., *Dějiny university v Brně* (Brno, 1969), 82–91.

led to creating a *modus vivendi* whereby schools that were divided linguistically but linked by tradition existed side by side along with one another, rather than be linked as had been the original intention of the agreement when the division was made.

There was very little in the way of scientific cooperation, while the occasional confrontations (e.g. the Badeni Crisis 1897; the anniversary of the Kutná Hora decree 1909) alternated with more extended periods of calm.¹⁶ Latent conflictual themes included the administration of objects and places of symbolic value, which was also linked to the succession of the two universities from the medieval Charles University. There were also annual debates concerning, *inter alia*, the equitable allocation of funding from the state budget with regard to the number of students; the need for investment; expenditures on research; and the presentation of results abroad.¹⁷ The substantive nature of the debate gradually became more complicated due to the public engagement of some professors, whose activities brought themes from academic circles into politics and vice versa. Apart from a small but very active core of politically committed professors, most of the teaching staff were apolitical and focused mainly on the specialised aspects of their academic work. However, in some instances, they could be influenced by the above-mentioned political activists. The more conservative-minded professors, based mainly in the theological faculties, began to lose influence due to religious plurality at the universities (similar to the case of Catholic student organisations), and some academics also became involved in recent anti-clerical campaigns. These were usually politically active professors with the support of at least part of the

¹⁶ NA, Presidium místodržitelství 1891–1900, karton (hereinafter: k.) 2556, sign. 873/2 8/22/7 (Zpráva popisující pražské prosincové nepokoje roku 1897, 6.1.1898 předložená pražským policejním ředitelstvím prezídiu místodržitelství and Zpráva rektora Kadeřávka ministru kultu a vyučování odeslaná 3. 12. 1897 omlouvající zapojení univerzity do událostí); Oliver Rathkolb, 'Gewalt und Antisemitismus an der Universität Wien und die Badeni-Krise 1897. Davor und danach', in Oliver Rathkolb (ed.), *Der lange Schatten des Antisemitismus. Kritische Auseinandersetzungen mit der Geschichte der Universität Wien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Wien, 2013), 78–9; David Smrček, 'Politika ulice, nebo politici v ulicích? Fenomén vůdců davu během pražských nepokojů roku 1897', in *Moderní dějiny*, xxviii, 2 (2020), 1–22; Václav Vojtíšek, *Universita Karlova a boj Němců proti universitnímu zákonu 1920* (Praha, 1932) 26.

¹⁷ Julian Dybiec, *Finansowanie nauki i oświaty w Galicji 1860–1918* (Kraków, 1979) 21.

students but rarely holders of higher academic positions.¹⁸ The social practice of professors was influenced by the work of parliamentary representatives in the legislative bodies, such as the mathematician František Tilšer (1825–1913) and the physiologist František Mareš (1857–1942). They showed other professors the advantages to be gained from influencing public opinion and even the upper echelons of Cisleithanian politics through sophisticated lobbying on behalf of universities, including various types of political bartering.

The activities of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk represent a milestone in the gradual politicisation of the academic sphere (1882–1914). From the start of his professional career in 1882, Masaryk was seen as a highly controversial figure by both his colleagues and state officials. His interpretation of history and philosophy diverged significantly from the rules and methods of academic work common in the relatively conservative Prague academic environment, which did not differ much from the standards known from Vienna or Western European universities. His interpretations of contemporary issues and the formulation of ethical-philosophical principles were supposed to serve as guidelines in one's own private and public life. A victim of the machinations of rival professors, officials, and some Czech political representatives, Masaryk was admired by many students from different disciplines who were attracted by his lectures on sociology, which were often ethical commentaries on current events rather than on purely academic matters. It was characteristic of Masaryk's social practice that his university lectures were viewed critically as being more like sermons, while his concept of Czech history came under specific criticism from the circle of historians around Jaroslav Goll, the influential leader of an academic school of precise research methods and detailed source work.¹⁹

¹⁸ Stanislav Balík, Lukáš Fasora, Jiří Hanuš, and Marek Vlha, *Český antiklerikalismus. Zdroje, témata a podoba českého antiklerikalismu 1848–1938* (Praha, 2015), 63–70; Lukáš Fasora and Anna Pečinková, 'Autonomie vysokých škol a jejich financování v českých zemích v letech 1848–1939', *Český časopis historický*, cxviii, 1 (2020), 87–8.

¹⁹ Ctirad Václav Pospíšil, *Masaryk iritující a fascinující* (Praha, 2018), 165, 181; Stanislav Polák, *T.G. Masaryk. Za ideálem a pravdou*, part 3: 1893–1900 (Praha, 2004), 45–6, 112–13, 118, 171; Walter Rüegg, *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, iii (München, 2004), 269; Evžen Strouhal, 'O přátelství T. G. Masaryka a V. Strouhala podle jejich korespondence', *Pokroky matematiky, fyziky a astronomie*, xlvi, 2 (2001), 128–33.

The politicisation of tertiary education affected individual institutions differently. Most of the activists were from the law and philosophy faculties, far fewer from the medical faculties, and hardly any from the theological disciplines, where the professors' views were more in line with the policies of the nationally radical bourgeois parties – professorial nationalism was interested in historical symbolism and language. However, when it came to social and economic matters, it was elitist and inactive within the context of mass politics. The professors from technical and agricultural universities were more reticent to speak out on the language question; historical symbolism meant little to them. In general, there was more focus on their own expertise and cooperation with the commercial sector. Technically-oriented academics became a counterweight to the university scholars who had previously dominated in determining the subjects of 'national interest' in higher education and in other spheres. While the main political direction of academics at universities reflected the ideas of the national bourgeois parties (with left-wing socially-oriented liberalism remaining a minority strand), the agricultural universities were firmly integrated into the Agrarian camp, while during the interwar period, left-wingers and radical left-wingers were to be found at the technical universities.

The arguments of integral nationalism proved to be very effective instruments for strengthening the decision-making autonomy of professorial bodies and academic senates. Integral nationalism had great mobilisation potential with the public, forcing the authorities of the multi-ethnic Cisleithania and the Czechoslovak nation-state to tread carefully and seek compromise. Other arguments can be considered secondary and were at times merely cover tactics used to strengthen the privileged standing of academicians. These include historical references to the ancient autonomy of the university corporation; attempts to prove the uninterrupted possession of the property as evidence of the proprietary-legal nature of Charles University's existence; ceremonies that showed why universities were entitled to be recognised as the nation's intellectual leaders; and the participation of national universities in the global network of universities and their supposed joint endeavour to elevate humanity.

IV
THE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF UNIVERSITY
REPRESENTATIVES PROMOTING AUTONOMY

The increasing pressure on the Cisleithanian states to complete the network of universities can be considered the major success of the university representations, who cooperated here with political and economic representations from the crown lands and the nationalities. The division and nationalisation of the Technical University in Prague into two (German and Czech) technical universities (1869–75), and also the addition of the Czech Technical University in Moravia (1899) to the technical higher education in Moravia (the German Technical University in Brno was established in 1849) can be counted as successes of the Habsburg policy of national peace.²⁰ Therefore, a great success was the division of the Prague university into separate Czech and German universities in 1882. The two universities were declared equal successors to the medieval university. There was hope that the organisational changes would permanently impact higher education, as they had been achieved through an agreement between the Czech and German sides, with the state guaranteeing that the newly-established schools and institutes would be fully equipped.

At the same time, however, this contained risks, as the demands of the universities and their political backers had not been met; most of the professors and departments from the Technical University and the university in Prague transferred to the German Charles-Ferdinand University and the German Technical University respectively; while the process of building adequate counterparts in the new Czech Universities proceeded too slowly according to critics of the government. The government defended itself by referring to the tremendous financial burden which universities placed on the state budget.

Our research into the state's investment in higher education was hampered by the incompleteness of the data and the series of statistics. The primary source was data from the reputable journal *Minerva* for 1897–1914 and the preliminaries of the budgets for the individual universities based on the State Budget Act of the Czechoslovak Republic.

²⁰ Otakar Franěk, *Dějiny české vysoké školy technické v Brně*, part 1: *Do roku 1945* (Brno, 1969), 38–40, 45–7; Václav Lomič and Pavla Horská, *Dějiny Českého vysokého učení technického*, i, part 2 (Praha, 1978), 9–37; Jiří Pernes, *Škola pro Moravu. 100 let Vysokého učení technického v Brně* (Brno, 1999), 15–22.

The data for the Cisleithanian period highlights the great difficulties in establishing a method for allocating the funds, i.e. distributing them. The allocation of funds per student enrolled differed dramatically. It also shows that the amounts from extraordinary budgetary expenditures (i.e. finances usually directed towards the university's development) fluctuated considerably, and it can be assumed that the sums involved were the subject of intense political lobbying. Based on the available data, the financing system up until 1914 was beneficial for universities where the language of instruction was German and for universities outside the capital. The Viennese universities, though, had a higher proportion of their own income at their disposal, which more than offset their disadvantaged position in allocating state funds. The funding for Cracow University was relatively generous and slightly less so for Lviv University. The system, however, put the Czech universities at a disadvantage as they received a below-average contribution per student, while in addition, Czech universities had to build and equip their workplaces entirely from scratch.²¹

In the case of the Czechoslovak method of funding, our knowledge of some important data is also limited. However, the whole system appears more transparent and was based on the parity of funding for Czech and German universities, linked to the number of students. Investment in equipment undoubtedly benefited the Czech universities, particularly in the mid-1920s, when several new universities were built with instruction in Czech. Czechoslovakia regarded education as its flagship policy, and in the 1920s, expenditures on education, including tertiary education, rose sharply compared to the pre-war era. After the fluctuations caused by the economic crisis in 1931–2, the state returned to the relatively generous funding of universities, though with a change in priorities – the technical universities were in a better position in the allocation of extraordinary public expenditures at the expense of the other universities, which can be seen as the state's attempt to invest in technological changes in farming to help with its revival following the devastating economic crisis. The emphasis on increasing the state's defensive capacities in the 1930s also played a role.²²

The need to invest heavily in the development of universities and increase the number of students who wanted to study in their

²¹ *Minerva. Jahrbuch der gelehrten Welt* (Straßburg, 1892–1905).

²² *Finanční zákon Republiky československé* (Praha, 1919–1938).

language made it practically impossible for the Cisleithanian parties to find a generally acceptable method of dividing the finances amongst the individual universities. The German side defended the privileged position of universities with German as the language of instruction, citing the international prestige for the monarchy and first-class research, particularly in the case of the Viennese schools. In the case of the universities located in Bohemia, the Germans asked for parity with the state investments in Czech universities. However, these universities were at a disadvantage as they had been established later, which meant they lacked infrastructure and equipment. They, therefore, demanded that this fact be taken into account, together with their rapidly rising number of students. The Czech-German rivalry was also affected by arguments about the position of universities with Polish as the language of instruction in Cracow and Lviv, which were thought to be worse off in terms of equipment in comparison with the Viennese metropolitan universities, though better off than the late-developing Czech universities, as was confirmed by our research into the state budget.²³

The German, Czech and Polish universities used extensive lobbying to protect their interests, which caused numerous difficulties for the government. From the 1890s, the agreement between the universities and their political overseers became increasingly tenuous and the “struggle of the Cisleithanian nations for statehood” – in the form of arguments solely in favour of one’s own nation and the obligation of the state to support its interests – began to make themselves felt on university grounds. One sensitive matter was the inability of the Czech and German sides to agree upon the establishment of a university in Moravia, an issue that affected all of the negotiations concerning national conciliation in higher education. There were plans to establish a Czech university, a German university, and even a bilingual one. In addition to siting the university in the predominantly German provincial city of Brno, there were also proposals to locate the Czech university in a smaller Moravian town, where it would not pose such a threat to the position of the Germans in the province. Although the idea of having a university outside of the cultural centre without a library or a faculty hospital seemed very risky, it was a possible way

²³ Jan Surman, *Universities in Imperial Austria 1848–1918. A Social History of a Multilingual Space* (West Lafayette, IN, 2019), 142–56; *Minerva. Jahrbuch*.

out from the crisis Cisleithanian politics found itself in at the time. The Czech demands for improved tertiary education in Moravia were at least partly met when the Czech Technical University was established in Brno in 1899, although until the end of the monarchy, there was to be no agreement on a general university.²⁴

The Czechoslovak Republic then inherited the problem. To the applause of the Czech university representatives, the leaders decided to proceed energetically, even if somewhat thoughtlessly. In 1919 a Czech university was established in Brno almost at the same time as two Czech agricultural universities, which together were to change the character of higher education in Moravia.²⁵ The objections and demands of the Germans were wholly disregarded. Controversial areas within the higher-education agenda were dealt with speedily to prevent the Czechoslovak Germans from having a say in the matter – whether it be at the Revolutionary National Assembly, to which Germans were only admitted after the elections in 1920, or at the Paris Peace Conference (1919).²⁶ At the same time, the Czechoslovak government promised the Allied powers they would support the existence and further development of German higher education (Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 1919). Schools with instruction in German were guaranteed parity in funding with their Czech counterparts.²⁷ Throughout the entire interwar period, the Czechoslovak governments had to

²⁴ Karel Kazbunda, *Otázka česko-německá v předvečer Velké války* (Praha, 1995), 371–5; Maria Kostner, *Die Geschichte der italienischen Universitätsfrage in der Österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie von 1864 bis 1914*. Diss. (Innsbruck, 1970); Gustav Otruba, *Die Universitäten in der Hochschulorganisation der Donau-Monarchie: Nationale Erziehungsstätten im Vielvölkerreich 1850 bis 1914. Student und Hochschule im 19. Jahrhundert: Studie und Materialien* (Göttingen, 1975), 75–155; Robert D. Anderson, *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford, 2004), 234–40; Dan Gawrecki, ‘Versuche um die Gründung einer Universität in Troppau im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert’, in Elmar Schübel and Harald Heppner (eds), *Universitäten in Zeiten des Umbruchs. Fallstudien über das mittlere und östliche Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wien–Berlin, 2011), 59–68; Jarosław Moklak, ‘Łwów i Triest. Uniwersyteckie dążenia Ukraińców, Włochów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców (1908–1914)’, in: Janusz Pezda and Stanisław Pijaj (eds), *Europa Środkowa, Bałkany i Polacy* (Kraków, 2017), 241–8.

²⁵ Alena Mikovcová, *Historie Mendelovy univerzity v Brně v datech a obrazech* (Brno, 2014), 13–7.

²⁶ Archiv Poslanecké sněmovny Parlamentu České republiky, volební období 1918–1920, zápis ze zasedání 17.7.1919; 8.1.1919; 15.1.1919; 14.1.1920.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, zápis ze zasedání 14.1.1920.

fend off attacks from Czech nationalists, who received considerable support from professorial bodies at Czech universities calling for some German universities to be either scaled back or closed, with the savings being diverted to Czech schools.²⁸

However, the most explosive issue turned out to be the relationship between the two universities in Prague. Their latent rivalry, which could be traced back to the shortcomings of the outdated agreement from 1882, was exacerbated by a dispute over the insignias of the ancient university of Emperor Charles IV. The German university kept the original insignias, and copies were made for the Czechs. Although the two universities had been declared *de iure* to be the successors of the ancient university, this symbolic dispute led to conflict between nationalist radicals on both sides. The Czechoslovak government attempted to force through the matter in 1920 when it declared that the Czech university was the one and only successor of the tradition, transferring to its administration all of the symbolically important attributes of Charles University: the name, the use of the old university buildings, and the archives and insignias. However, the law was never fully implemented, mainly due to the leadership's concerns about its effect on the republic's international reputation. The leadership of Charles University forced the transfer of the insignias in 1934, but at the price of participating in the organisation of street demonstrations by students, including the occupation of the German University buildings and attacks on German (and Jewish) symbols in Prague. The 'Insignia Affair' (Insigniáda) of 1934 famously symbolised the end of the idea of the university's supranational role in the service of humanism and tolerance. Left-wing Czechs sharply condemned the Insignia Affair as chauvinistic and anti-Semitic, and a large number of intellectuals also responded critically, and the scandal damaged Czechoslovakia's international standing. Of course, this was not the only crisis: the academic bodies were shaken by attitudes towards the controversial issues of the time – the Spanish Civil War, the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Alliance, the crackdown on liberal intellectuals in allied Romania, etc.

The controversial involvement of universities in politics, which damaged their reputation in the eyes of the public, went hand in

²⁸ 'Resoluce IV. sjezdu čsl. národní demokracie o vysokých školách', *Věstník Československého ústředního svazu učitelů vysokoškolských*, xxi, no. 1–2 (1929), 32.

hand with public attitudes towards malpractices in the everyday work of universities. Scandals highlighting the personal animosity between professors or unfair practices in promoting posts had been commonplace for a long time, but they had remained out of the public eye. The professorial bodies successfully resolved disputes internally and avoided providing the state authorities with an excuse to interfere or even for the press to become interested. However, in 1914–40 repeated harsh criticisms of colleagues' work by sociologist and philosopher Josef Král attracted the public's attention and led to litigation. Nevertheless, Král still preserved the intact authority of the faculty as a sovereign in deciding on habilitations; he challenged only the quality of the habilitation work, not the faculty's decision.²⁹ However, in 1929 this traditional culture of downplaying problems relating to academic self-governance was exposed by a scandal that caught the public's undivided attention – the 'Saturník Affair' (1929–35). The otherwise banal matter of occupying a professorial chair and a power struggle between two cliques of professors took on much greater significance, as for the first time in Czechoslovakia, it led to a detailed publication of the whole controversy and the background to the scandal. The affair highlighted widespread corruption within academic governance: the unresolved issue of assessing the quality of scientific work and publications; ethically dubious methods of promoting particular interests when appointing professors; nepotism and 'academic inbreeding' in the unfair promotion of teachers' own students, etc. In 1929, it was no longer possible to speak of the unfortunate legacy of the Habsburg times, as had often been preferred before, but rather to acknowledge a clear demonstration of systemic failure in the relationship between the state and the university. It was shown in great detail how interest groups worked in the faculty, what role kinship between academics played, and especially – how the whole faculty had a strong tendency to hide all ambiguities, doubts about quality, and disputes from the public.³⁰

²⁹ Josef Král, 'Dr. Edvard Beneš – Strannictví', *Česká mysl, časopis filosofický*, 15 (1914), 70–9; Zdeněk Nešpor, 'Josef Král', *Sociologická encyklopedie* https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Kr%C3%A1l_Josef [Accessed: 30 May 2021].

³⁰ Naďa Štachová, 'Theodor Saturník – mediální hvězda? Několik poznámek k nejsledovanějšímu sporu meziválečné právní historiografie', in *Polemiky a spory v právně vědě* (Olomouc, 2010), 29–39; Ladislav Vojáček, 'Učitelé právnických fakult v právní úpravě meziválečného Československa (se zvláštním zřetelem na poměry v Brně)', *Časopis pro právní vědu a praxi*, 3 (2007), 237–45; Otakar Sommer,

Soon after the ‘Saturník Affair’, other problems began to surface in universities. In 1930 the government signalled its willingness to energetically engage in the problems linked to the economic crisis by strengthening its grip over the running of the state and all institutions financed from its resources. The government declared its readiness to remove obstacles to vigorous reforms and, among other things, to weaken parliament’s influence in controversial matters of power, which also included the supervision of universities, including German universities, in Czechoslovakia. In 1931–2, several problems were uncovered in the management of universities – overpriced orders for equipment or orders given to companies with which the universities were closely linked. Consequently, in 1932 the government established the Economic Administration of Higher Education Institutions, which assumed a large part of the management agenda of universities.³¹ The government also began to urge, and even force, universities to find ways to increase their income from sources outside of the state budget. The technical universities were successful, with some significant examples of cooperation with the commercial and non-governmental sectors, while this tended to apply only to pharmacy or psychiatry in the other universities.³² Overall, however, the almost complete reliance of universities on state funding barely changed.

As a result of the increasingly complex international political situation, the rise of Hitler and the radicalisation of the internal opposition, the Czechoslovak government began to prioritise the need to defend the state,³³ which required strategic services provided by the universities. When it became clear that the universities were incapable of effectively cooperating with the armaments industry, criticism began to grow of academic self-governance which, following years of being in a privileged position, was incapable of creating the conditions for the fundamental development of strategic sectors such as the production of aircraft and automobile engines, radiocommunications, and fortifications. There were proposals to place universities under

Od Bohuše Riegra k Theodoru Saturníkovi (Praha, 1935); Otakar Sommer, *Strach z diskuse. Nový příspěvek k autonomii vysokých škol* (Praha, 1935).

³¹ NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1028, sign. 4/3 J; k. 1020, sign. 3 II.

³² *Ibid.*, sign 4/3; *ibid.*, k. 1122.

³³ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky. Československo v krizi a v ohrožení (1930–1935)* (Praha, 2018), 73–7.

the supervision of state authorities and the army, while international (mainly French) experts supervised professorial bodies within strategic disciplines. The main criticism was levelled at the technical universities. At the same time, universities, in general, were criticised for supposedly producing too many graduates from the humanities and being unable to support the development of the natural science and technical disciplines at secondary schools. This criticism reached its culmination in 1935–6. The government demanded that universities quickly address their shortcomings, but the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1938 prevented most of these plans from being put into action.

V

SOLUTIONS TO THE CRISIS OF THE 'HUMBOLDTIAN' CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

At the same time, as academia inclined towards a broad interpretation of its autonomy in the 1880s and 1890s, and professorial bodies became increasingly unwilling to recognise state control over their affairs, the first critical voices of this strategy also began to be heard. In the beginning, these critics were to be found among the members of the faculty themselves. These were usually *les enfants terribles* within the teaching staff; people who were often disgruntled due to imagined slights from the professorial bodies or influential members, or people whose career advancement had been interminably slow. The arguments were similar – drawing attention to the professorial bodies' disregard of external control, the almost feudalistic practices of professors in some faculties, nepotism, and the teachers' preference for their students over the competition from outside. Professors in both Germany and Cisleithania were criticised and ridiculed through the symbolically important description of them as 'mandarins', a term used in a scathing polemic by Masaryk within the Czech context.³⁴ As a result of the absence of instruments and methods to assess academics' performance in their research, publications, and teaching, those critical voices usually had to fall back on personal experiences and vague impressions. As a result, any

³⁴ Fritz K. Ringer, *Die Gelehrten. Der Niedergang der deutschen Mandarine 1890–1933* (Stuttgart, 1983); Tomáš Masaryk, 'Jak zvelebovati naši literaturu naukovou', *Athenaeum*, 2 (1885), 272–88.

mistakes or even transgressions were difficult to prove and could easily be dismissed by academics.

The tools at the Cisleithanian states' disposal to reform higher education were insufficient for any wholesale intervention. The integral nationalism of the politicians from the Cisleithanian nations meant that the state leaders became moderators in the debates between national representatives. The attempts at effective state leadership were met negatively and jeopardised the very stability of the state. This was also the case with higher-education institutions, particularly the universities, which were seen by national representatives as national property and the jewel of national culture. However, the Cisleithanian states did at least send their representatives to meetings held by the higher-education departments of the German ministries of education organised by the Prussian Ministry of Religion and Education, in particular at the behest of Friedrich Althoff, the director of the higher education section of the Prussian Ministry of Religion and Education. Although the Cisleithanians only attended as observers, this did grant them the opportunity to follow in detail the Prussian educational administration's attempts to push through important innovations across the entire agenda.³⁵

The 'Althoff System' has been analysed thoroughly in the past, and its objective was to transform the state administration of higher education into real policy.³⁶ University autonomy was to be preserved and even strengthened by increasing work efficiency. Althoff was under no illusions about the willingness of the majority of professorial bodies to address their shortcomings; hence he attempted to establish rules of work and models that would bring about effective change. Part of Althoff's agenda consisted of pressurising professorial bodies to

³⁵ Walter Hoflecher, 'Zum Einfluß des deutschen Hochschulwesens auf Österreich', in Bernhard Vom Brocke (ed.), *Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Wissenschaftspolitik im Industriezeitalter. Das 'System Althoff' in historischer Perspektive* (Hildesheim, 1991), 155–85.

³⁶ Manfred Nebelin, 'Die Rechtsuniversität Straßburg als Modell und Ausgangspunkt der deutschen Hochschulreform', in Vom Brocke (ed.), *Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 61–8; Günther Wendel, 'Aktivitäten Althoffs zum *Wegenetz europäischen Geistes*. Die Einbeziehung ost- und südeuropäischen Universitäten in das *System Althoff*', in *ibid.*, 123–54; Bernhard Vom Brocke, *Hochschul- und Wissenschaftspolitik in Preußen und im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1882–1907: das 'System Althoff'*, in Peter Baumgart (ed.), *Bildungspolitik in Preußen zur Zeit des Kaiserreichs* (Stuttgart, 1980), 9–118.

make them more responsive to the demands of practice (responses to developments in the labour market, applied research) and implementing a more flexible selection process to bring in dynamic figures with original approaches to scientific problems, including foreigners. Althoff was aware that it would not be possible to introduce these changes in Prussia or Germany through a new higher-education act, as the resistance from academics and their political backers would have been too substantial. Therefore, he decided to bring about reform through a change in the statutes of some universities and through various controversial means of applying pressure, involving behind-the-scenes machinations and the transfer of personnel. There was also controversy over Althoff's tendency to prefer employees who were loyal to the ideology of the Prussian state, while he looked down with suspicion on potential opponents such as Roman Catholics, Jews, and Social Democrats.

In Cisleithania, the 'Althoff System' was applied only sporadically.³⁷ The ambitious Viennese universities with the strongest links to the 'international' network of academic cooperation signed up to its objectives, though less so to its methods. Conversely, there was a deafening silence from the Czech lands due to the Prussian origin of the reforms. In the Czechoslovak parliamentary debates from 1919 to 1920, there were several politicians with academic backgrounds who were familiar with the basic principles of the 'Althoff system' and attempted to introduce into the legislation at least some of the tools geared towards greater efficiency within universities.³⁸ The result, though, was disappointing, as in the post-revolutionary atmosphere, the higher-education agenda focused primarily on rapidly dealing with old grievances – actual and alleged – and establishing new universities with Czech as the language of instruction, rather than on properly thought-out legislation governing their work.

After several false starts, the first signals that the government was prepared to consider changes to the higher-education legislation

³⁷ Walter Hoflechner, 'Zum Einfluß des deutschen Hochschulwesens auf Österreich', in Vom Brocke (ed.), *Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 155–85; Charles McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700–1914* (Cambridge, 1980), 307.

³⁸ NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1213, fols 544–555 (est. Vysoká škola obchodní); Otakar Sommer, 'Další úkoly Č.Ú.S.U.V.', *Věstník Československého ústředního svazu učitelů vysokoškolských*, xii, 1–3 (1921), 19–23; František Weyr, *Paměti 2. Za republiky (1918–1938)* (Brno, 2001), 104.

appeared in 1929. The area of interest was the professional position of university professors. This was part of the state's attempt to strengthen the position of executive power at the expense of legislative power and weaken the autonomy of different groups in society. It was one of the first responses at the start of the republic's severe economic and political problems. The subject of reform was principally the disciplinary code for university professors, which was modified during the post-revolution period to transfer disciplinary codes to the universities themselves. The last remnants of state supervision left over from the old monarchy (the participation of a judge as a member of the committee dealing the disciplinary offences) were thus swept away. Academics were awarded unprecedented privileges. Other issues, such as the establishment of open selection procedures or the periodic evaluation of work, were somewhat less contentious.³⁹

The government's proposals to increase its supervision were met with shock within the academic community, one expression of which was the letter in the introduction. There was a protracted debate over these changes until 1937, although with no clear resolution. The university representatives combined forces to rework the proposed amendment several times, though differences in their positions gradually began to appear. These divisions were mainly along national lines: it transpired that the German universities were basically against any reforms that strengthened the state's influence over their work.⁴⁰ The radicalisation of their position on matters of national interest and the maintenance of university autonomy led to diplomatic pressure from abroad being applied on the Czechoslovak government. The Czech universities were more amenable to reform, though even they were worried about interference from state bodies which might affect the pluralism of opinions. Like the Germans, they were also concerned that the amendment could be misused politically against professors who were insufficiently loyal to the government.⁴¹ There was greater

³⁹ Augustin Miříčka, 'Otázky reformy vysokoškolského disciplinárního řádu', *Věstník Československého ústředního svazu učitelů vysokoškolských*, xxv, 2 (1935), 32–42; NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1028, sign. 4/3 J; *ibid.* k. 1020, sign. 3 II.

⁴⁰ Moravský zemský archiv, Německá technika B34, fasc. 682, fol. 674 (Memorandum rektorů); *ibid.*, k. 640, fol. 819; *ibid.*, k. 690, fol. 476.

⁴¹ NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1027 (Vyjádření pražského arcibiskupa Karla Kašpara ze dne 16.9.1933); AUK, Akademický senát, k. 41, sig. B7; *ibid.*, Právnická fakulta, k. 2 (Autonomie vysokých škol zápisy z let 1936–1937); Archiv

openness towards regulating work efficiency, with the professorial bodies gradually (mainly in 1936–7) succumbing to the concerted criticisms from government authorities, the army, and the industrial sector, as well as their awareness of the threat to the country.⁴² There were also differences between the Czech institutions. From the outset, the amendment was more acceptable to the technical colleges than universities.⁴³ The technical schools (including the agricultural schools) showed significantly less interest in autonomy. They felt the universities were leading them into disputes that they had no interest in, while they were more open to working efficiency, cooperation with the commercial sector, and responding to developments in the labour market. In contrast, the universities (and their arts and law faculties in particular) resisted reform with typical historicism and the defence of their allegedly crucial role in national life. In this regard, any efforts at evaluating their work performance were seen as ridiculous by their very nature. The medical and natural-science disciplines took a more objective approach to the issue.

The resistance was broken by a consultant's report drawn up in 1936 by the Ministry of Education on the matter of amendments to disciplinary codes at universities in allied countries. The comments from academics showed that the republic's precarious political situation had forced professors to establish a credible concept of a democratic university that would stand up against foreign models that were attractive to various sections of the public, namely the Soviet and Nazi systems.⁴⁴ Academics attempted to form their own line of development of post-Humboldtian university autonomy, where they followed the

Vysoké školy báňské Ostrava, VŠB Příbram 1849–1957, i. č. 18 (Zápisy profesorského sboru 1937), 9.2. 1937.

⁴² NA, FMŠNO, k. 1214, sig. 71.; *ibid.*, k. 1215, sign. 71.; *ibid.*, k. 1216 sign. 71.

⁴³ Archiv Parlamentu České republiky, Fond Národní shromáždění, IV. volební období (18.6. 1935–21.3. 1939), Výbor kulturní, schůze dne 14.11.1935; *ibid.*, Výbor kulturní, schůze výbor ze dne 14.11.1935 a 5.2.1936.

⁴⁴ Hans Huber, *Der Aufbau des deutschen Hochschulwesens* (Berlin, 1939); Ferdinand von Ursula, Hans-Peter Kröner, and Ioanna Mamali (eds), *Medizinische Fakultäten in der deutschen Hochschullandschaft 1925–1950* (Heidelberg, 2013), 29–152; Vilibald Bílek and Ladislav Niklíček, 'K hlavním otázkám historie československo-sovětských lékařských styků v letech 1918–1952', *Československé zdravotnictví*, xxix, 41 (1981), 133–46; Jakub Jareš, 'Poválečná reforma českého vysokého školství a její kořeny', academic dissertation, Charles University (Praha, 2016), 45.

examples of the French, Belgian and Swiss, with the state having a more pronounced influence. However, these ideas were never to be implemented due to the breakup of the republic.

The state was able to implement more changes in the economic sphere, which it had not entirely abandoned during the time of the monarchy or the radical post-revolutionary reforms. In 1927–8 ideas surfaced about the need to supplement the system of university autonomy in teaching, research and personnel policy with economic autonomy.⁴⁵ These ideas envisaged a change to the budget whereby a section of the budget for the university would go towards its autonomous administration. However, the economic crisis of 1929 made this proposal untenable, and instead, the state proceeded to exert even more control over the management of universities, particularly over investments. In 1932 the Economic Administration of Universities was established, which monitored any requests by academics for investment funds. Thanks to its activities, the state budget was able to make considerable savings. In the beginning, there was no shortage of absurdities, such as the monitoring of small investments in the form of office shelves, but within a few years, the relationship between government officials and academics stabilised. From the outset, academics were confronted with the discovery of several irregularities bordering on criminal behaviour, which led them to stop behaving so obstructively towards the authorities quickly.⁴⁶

The epilogue of these attempts at reform within higher education can be seen in several decrees issued by the executive during the Second Republic (October 1938 – March 1939). The state interfered significantly in university autonomy, arguing that unity was necessary for a time of national catastrophe, removing the privileges of various social groups and using the Agrarian Party's slogan of familiarising academics with the work of the lower classes.⁴⁷ The changes mostly affected professional regulations, which were significantly modified to weaken academic bodies' autonomous decision-making. The objective was to try to ensure at least the temporary employment of Czech professors leaving Bratislava University under pressure from Slovak

⁴⁵ AUK, Akademický senát, k. 234, i.č. 3414.

⁴⁶ NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1028, sign. 4/3 J; k. 1020, sign. 3 II.

⁴⁷ Edvard Reich, 'Námítky, pochybnosti, kritiky', *Československý zemědělec*, xx, 46 (1938), 1.

nationalists, and to a lesser degree, the employment of Czech specialists from the abandoned borderland of Czechoslovakia. The impression of the national catastrophe from the Munich Conference in 1938 and the objective need to resolve grave personnel problems influenced academic bodies that the changes occurred without any resistance.⁴⁸

VI CONCLUSIONS

In the mid-nineteenth century, the attempts by the Cisleithanian states to increase efficiency in universities led to reforms aimed at transferring some of the Prussian or Humboldtian principles to higher-education policy. The states recognised the freedom to teach and research, combined with partial autonomy in decision-making, as the basis for university efficiency. In conjunction with the Habsburg state abandoning its policy of creating an Imperial Austrian nation-state (the efforts of Emperor Joseph II and during the so-called Bach era 1849–60), the Danube monarchy developed a system of national universities which then used the principle of university autonomy to further their own interests while reducing the level of state interference. Just as the nations of Cisleithania ‘fought for statehood’ amongst themselves, the representatives of the national universities fought amongst themselves over public resources. A system of complex relationships developed between the state and the universities (acting as national institutions) based on the school traditions and prestige, the recognition of the specific needs of the academic sector on the part of the state and the public, as well as on the contemporary political conditions.

The extensive autonomy afforded to universities reached its height shortly after the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic when university representatives took advantage of the political situation and their alleged position as the ‘calling card’ of national culture to implement important changes within the professional code. This practically eliminated any meaningful state supervision over universities’ personnel policies. There were three positive factors for the vision of university autonomy: a) the tradition of Cisleithanian universities’ autonomy;

⁴⁸ Archiv Masarykovy univerzity, A 3 Lékařská fakulta A II, k. 1 (Adresa ze dne 27.2.1939); NA, FMŠNO, Praha 1918–1949, k. 1111, sign 51.a; *ibid.*, k. 1026, sign. 4a, 4b.

b) the Czech national triumph expressed by the establishment of the nation-state, in which the Czech academic elites had a large share; and c) the obligations of the Czechoslovak state towards national minorities (and thus also German universities) expressed by the Treaty of Saint-Germain (1919). At this time, the only effective instrument of state influence was the funding agenda for universities. Even this, however, became the subject of efforts by universities to transfer it to an autonomous decision-making system in the mid-1920s.

The relationship between the state and universities was fundamentally altered by the economic crisis in 1929. The extreme urgency of the situation brought to the surface long-standing problems of work efficiency at universities that led to the formation of a powerful group of critics. The attempts by the state to sponsor a post-Humboldtian university model – which can be considered as a democratic response to the higher-education systems in Germany and the Soviet Union – highlighted the considerable differences within the academic community over whether to accept state supervision. The German universities' stubborn, almost outright resistance meant the Czechoslovak government could only come to a partial agreement with university representatives. As a result, the idea of effectively reconstructing the Humboldtian system for the needs of a democratic society in the twentieth century lay in tatters.

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