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IMAGINING MEMBERSHIP: THE CONCEPTION OF EUROPE  
IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF T.G. MASARYK AND  
VÁCLAV HAVEL<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** A decade after the fall of Communism in Europe, the Czech Republic's membership in the European Union is still a matter of a relatively short waiting period of 4 years. Not so the imagination of this membership and the creation of a political concept created to promote this goal: the specific Central European policy initiated by Thomas G. Masaryk and revitalized by Václav Havel. Despite the deep differences in the political thought and philosophical orientations of both Presidents, not to mention the historic rupture of 41 years of Totalitarianism, their perceptions of Europe as an Imagined Community are identical.

**KEY WORDS:** choice, democracy, human transcendence, identity, membership, Europe

INTRODUCTION

In October 1997 the EU foreign ministers agreed on the European Union's enlargement towards 'the East'. In the Amsterdam Treaty, the future membership of three states of the Visegrád treaty, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, was set as one of the Union's goals for the near future (*NZZ*, 3.10.1997). Bilateral negotiations with these states and Estonia and Slovenia, which fulfill the *acquis communautaire*, started on 31 March, 1998 (*NZZ*, 1.4.1998).

Following the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989, EU membership as well as integration into NATO, which was accomplished in March 2000, became the most important Czechoslovak, and then, after the separation of 1993, Czech, foreign policy goals. Slovakia, the fourth Visegrád state, has been denied bilateral negotiations because she did not sufficiently fulfill the political conditions stipulated by the *acquis*; in the Agenda 2000, the European Commission's statement clearly points out that the decision to postpone Slovakia's bilateral



*Studies in East European Thought* 52: 203–226, 2000.

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negotiations was based on the ‘functional lack of the democratic system and the instability of the institutions’ (*MP 9/97: 21*).

Referring to the successful economic reforms and the stable democratic institutions of the Republic, Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus stressed as early as 1995 that economic and political transformation had been completed to such an extent that the gap between Western democracies and the Czech Republic ‘has almost disappeared’ (*...od zemi Západu [se] dnes už příliš nelišíme*) (LN, 12.8.1995). President Havel, the former dissident and a founder of *Charter 77*, made it clear that membership of the EU was not only a goal of the process of economic transformation, but far more importantly a task belonging to the democratic consolidation of the Central European region and thus of European and international interest. A united Europe based on the principles of mutual cooperation, civil society, democracy, and equal rights among culturally distinct countries would be the best guarantee against nationalist hatred (Havel 1995: 15–16).

Ever since achieving state sovereignty in 1918 as well as in 1989,<sup>2</sup> imagining the state as a member of democratic Europe has been a long-term goal on the Czechoslovak foreign policy agenda, influenced to a large extent by the democratic presidents Masaryk and Havel.<sup>3</sup> To realise this membership both presidents regarded an active Central European policy as the most suitable instrument of Czechoslovak/Czech foreign policy. This was due not only to their perception of the geopolitical position of a relatively small country lying in the sensitive region between Russia and Germany, but also to the political instabilities of the newly emerged states in 1918. Considering her past under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the first Czechoslovak Republic can be called a stable democracy, based on the population’s deep and widespread consent for a democratic system. The neighbouring states of Poland, Hungary, and Germany, on the contrary, surrendered to their internal autocratic forces. While in Hungary the regime of General Horthy took power after having abolished the Socialist Republic of Béla Kun, the emerging German National-Socialist Party promised to be a real alternative to Weimar democracy’s inability to deal with Germany’s economic problems stemming from the reparations of World War I. In Warsaw, General Piłsudski took power

in 1926 with the aim of establishing a Polish nationalist-autocratic government.

The concept of Central European policy is based on Masaryk's and Havel's virtually identical conception of the state. Although they differ philosophically as much as an existentialist thinker may differ from a romantic philosopher, both incline to an eclectic style of thought based on the realist perception of political realities and appropriate means for achieving political ends, which represent in their view *steps toward* (Masaryk), and the *choice of* (Havel), *a transcendent ideal*.<sup>4</sup> As the conception of Europe as an Imagined Community in the thought of both Presidents is based on democracy as a moral prerequisite, viz., the ethical imperative of internal national affairs and international politics, the first section below is an historic introduction to Masaryk's legitimation of the Czechoslovak state. State-building is directly related to the building of the Czecho-Slovak nation; the section is an introductory and explanatory prerequisite to understanding Masaryk's notion of the state as well as the state-ideology of Czechoslovakism. The conceptual mistakes in the notion contributed to the separation of the Federation in 1993. The section dealing with Masark's Central European Policy is followed by a section on Havel's concept. Given that Havel did not have to build the state from ground up – even though his commitment to democratic transition may to some extent be understood as state-building since it entails fundamental institutional re-building – I shall focus on his concept of Central European policy. The section dealing with the philosophical legitimation of democracy as expression of Humanity (Masaryk) and responsibility for Humanity as existential choice (Havel) is followed by a final section on Europe as Imagined Community, which represents in the thought of both men the transcendent and moral goal 'guiding' concrete policies.

## BUILDING THE CZECHOSLOVAK NATION-STATE

'I always wanted to pursue the politics of resurrection.' (*politiku buditel'skou*)  
(Čapek 1946: 69)

As a 19th century philosopher, raised in the multi-ethnic Danubian Monarchy, Masaryk favoured an independent nation-state unifying the Czech and Slovak people. In 1914 he revealed his plan to Robert Seton-Watson, a British historian: Independent Czechoslovakia should consist of Bohemia, Silesia, Moravia, and the territory of Northern Hungary settled by the Slovak people (Masaryk 1930: 8). Masaryk's wish to unite these territories and people implied a direct attack on the dualistic structure of the Danubian Monarchy as the fundamental territorial and political principle of Austro-Hungarian rule following the Compromise of 1867 (*Ausgleich*). The compromise with Hungary had put an end to the permanent separatist threat of the Hungarian national movement, which served as the role-model for the independent movements spreading among the various nationalities.

Although Masaryk had served two mandates in the Imperial Council in Vienna, he never achieved high popularity among the populace until the breakout of World War I. With the quarrel of the manuscripts in 1889 'Realism', his philosophical method in dealing with politics, found its beginnings as an intellectual movement. In the protracted debate on the authenticity of the manuscripts found in 1817/18 at Königinhof and Grünberg, which seemed to provide evidence of the glorious Czech Medieval past of Libuše, Masaryk defended a German Bohemist, who had identified them as forgery. So had Joseph Dobrovský, the 'Father of Slavonic Linguistics', 70 years earlier. By siding with a German in a nationalist debate, Masaryk exposed himself to Czech society's national chauvinism. As an enlightened, scientific, and non-religious view of politics, national goals, and cultural life, 'Realism' aimed at building a critical opposition to Czech mainstream politics and an alternative method of dealing with national tasks and cultural questions. Although the supporters of 'Realism' were organized as a party, the movement lacked a clearly defined political program. On the landscape of the emerging mass parties in the 1890's, Masaryk's Czech

National Party (the Realists) (*Česká Strana Lidová realistická*) was too small and élitist to gain significant support.

Masaryk got his first mandate as a member of the Young Czech Liberal Party from 1891 until 1893; due to his shift from pragmatic politics toward a general ethical foundation of national Czech policy, he reentered the political scene only in 1907 as representative of his own second party, the Czech Progressive Party (*Česká Strana Pokroková*). His second mandate, with reelection in 1911, lasted until the outbreak of war in 1914. During the time of his two mandates in the Imperial Council in Vienna, during which he opposed the traditional Czech Liberal parties as well as the Monarchy, Masaryk had argued in favour of democratizing the Imperial administrative structures; he legitimized the claim for administrative and political autonomy of the Czech nation by appealing to the Historic Law of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown.

But the Historic Law did not legitimate the inclusion of the territory settled by the Slovak population in Northern Hungary. In order to include the Slovaks and their territory into his draft of the future state, Natural Law served as the foundation for his argument. Considering the Slovak language as a dialect of the better developed Czech language, he regarded the Slovaks as lesser developed members of the Czech nation, as smaller brothers. Masaryk deliberately denied Slovak its position as the officially codified language of the Slovak people. In regard to the ideology of Czechoslovakism, he was another proponent of Czech dominance, all the more so as he was an expert on Slovak national and political ideas.

The ideology of Czechoslovakism was based on Jan Kollár's concept of *Slovanská vzájemnost* (Slav Mutuality). The idea of common kinship of Slovaks and Czechs had a long tradition in the thought of the *intelligentsija* of both nations and from a Herderian romantic concept of nations it had turned into a philosophical and cultural force. Finally, it served as political basis for arguments in favour of cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks against the foreign rule of both Austrians and Hungarians. In his famous poem *Slavy dcera*, Kollár praises the natural kinship of all Slavs forming a nation (*národ*) divided into 4 branches (*větv*y) according to the 4 main languages: the Russians, the Poles, the Czechoslovaks, and the

south-slav Ilyrians (Kovač 1997: 34). Kollár's Slav Mutuality served also as the basis for the Ideology of Panslavism that was emerging in the second half of 19th Century. Panslavism, in a phrase, aimed at unifying all oppressed Slav brothers under the political leadership of the Russian Czar.

Among the many cultural and literary 'awakeners' such as František Palacký, Karel Havlíček, Ján Hus, and Kollár was the Slovak vicar L'udovít Štúr (1815–1856). Masaryk often referred to their importance for the Czech national awakening. For political motives, however, he did not pay attention to Štúr, who was the leader of the failed Slovak national independence movement in 1848 and the creator of the official codification of the middle-slovak dialect as Slovak written language (D'urica 1995: 76–77). In contrast to the still weak national movement, which had to deal with a strong assimilative Magyarization policy threatening the cultures and languages of the minorities, the codification of 1843 represented a clear political act against Hungarian pressure. Štúr's concept of a Slovak territorial and political autonomy ruled directly by Vienna, not Budapest, represented a *pendant* to Palacký's concept of Federative Austroslavism, which Masaryk in earlier days had favoured. Also, Štúr's political engagement for social, religious and minority rights on behalf of the Slovak people can be compared to Masaryk's own policy aiming at democratizing the still prevailing aristocratic conditions of the Czech lands. But Štúr's conception of an independent Slovak nation and his own Czechoslovak nation-building ideology were mutually exclusive. By the time a Czechoslovak nation-state had become a real political option, most of the Slovak political élite supported Masaryk's concept (Kirschbaum 1987: 22). Referring to the Slovaks as co-nationals but favouring Czech dominance, the Slovak issue became part of Masaryk's nation-building ideology:

Consider how, in our consciousness, we regard the Czech Lands, Moravia, and finally Slovakia as separated units! ...2 million *Czechs* (*2 miliony Čechu*) are living on *Hungarian territory* ... (Masaryk 1990: 87; italics mine – JB).

Slav ethnicity and the Czech language were considered fundamental political and philosophical principles of the Czechoslovak nation-state. Masaryk's nation-building ideology was rather an expression of Czech national independence and dominance than a real

creation of a unified Czechoslovak identity, let alone a Czechoslovak nation.

Masaryk's conceptual mistake had its direct consequence in Czechoslovak policy, as it served to legitimate the Czech centralist approach to the state's administration and institutions during the time of the First Republic. The cultural, social, and economic gap between the two peoples, who had never lived together nor shared a common history, increased; the Slovak opposition to the Czech claim for dominance was expressed by the strongest party, HSL'S (Hlinka's Slovak People's Party), led by the Catholic priest, Andrej Hlinka. Also, the passivity of the Slovak population and the resistance of the political elite to the economic development planned by Prague led to the enforcement of Czech dominance. The perception of the Czechs as leaders urging the Slovak people to be subject to a state policy out of harmony with their national and religious customs was one of the reasons that led finally to the break up of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1993.

#### MASARYK'S CONCEPT OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLICY

Building the Czechoslovak state was also a task for international, more precisely Central European, cooperation. Masaryk supported the Poles' and Romanians' independence movements, as well as the Illyrian movement. In order to convince the Allies to liquidate the Habsburg Monarchy, representatives of the nations living under Austro-Hungarian rule including Poles, Rumanians, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Southern Slavs, Czechs, and Slovaks, organized a meeting in September 1918 in New York, held under the motto 'The Will of the People of Central Europe'. Already in 1917, Masaryk had initiated a similar meeting in Kiev. In its final resolution, the *Mid-European Democratic Union*, chaired by Masaryk, expressed its demand for a new Central European order which should be based on the principles of national self-determination and democracy (Kozák 1968: 102). In his memorandum to U.S. foreign minister Lansing of 20 July 1918, Masaryk claimed Czechoslovak independence, comparing the situation of the Czechs and Slovaks to that of the Poles, whose situation set a precedent as Poland's independence

had been declared a goal of victory in President Wilson's Program of 14 Points (Kozák 1968: 34).

The *conditio sine qua non* for lasting peace and a stable European order was a free Central Europe based on equal rights among the states (Masaryk 1994b: 163). Given the geopolitical situation of the Central European nations permanently threatened by larger neighbours, Masaryk focused on a future policy of cooperation, called 'barrier' (*bariéra*); the policy of 'barrier' represented a fundamental principle of his political programme of 'New Europe' (*Nová Evropa*):

Freed and united Poland, freed and united Bohemia and Slovakia, freed and united Southern – Slavs . . . will build a barrier against the Germans (*bariéru proti Němcům*) . . . this barrier is characterized as a defensive one . . . the Romanians and the Italians, too, have understood the threat of Germany . . . it is a barrier of Slavs and Romans (*bariéra slovanská a romanská*). (Masaryk 1994b: 164, 165)

Edvard Beneš, close friend, political pupil, foreign minister of the First Czechoslovak Democratic Republic, and Masaryk's successor to the presidency tried to implement the Central European 'barrier'. Together with Poland, Czechoslovakia entered the French pact system, which was conceived as a defensive agreement against Germany. Furthermore, Beneš became involved in building a defensive agreement against Hungary; in spring of 1921, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia signed the pact called *Little Entente* (Hoensch 1992: 50–51). The first concrete sign of cooperation was set already for Easter, 1921: with Italy's support the members of the *Little Entente* were to prevent the return of the Kaiser. The former Kaiser had in mind a return to Budapest in order to restore Habsburg rule in Hungary. Although Poland did not enter the pact, mainly due to its conflict with Czechoslovakia over the Teschen border, the *Little Entente* stabilized the political situation in the Balkans until the Munich Agreement (Hoensch 1992: 51).

#### HAVEL'S CONCEPT OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN POLICY

. . . is a clear sign that the phenomenon of Central Europe is still alive in the thoughts of the Central Europeans . . . we understand Central Europe as an integral part of Europe . . . it is logical that we . . . want to integrate with her military, economic, and political structures. (Havel 1995: 74–75)



Just as Masaryk became President following the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, so did Havel find himself head of state in the aftermath of the socialist system's collapse in 1989. Unlike Masaryk, however, his task was to rebuild Czechoslovakia's sovereignty, formerly limited by Soviet rule. As with Masaryk, Havel's commitment to democracy was complemented by an attempt to stabilize the immediate neighbourhood of the Central European region.

Havel was convinced that under communist rule the engagement in behalf of Human Rights would be more successful when pursued in cooperation with dissidents of other socialist countries. Thus, members of the Polish *KOR* (*Komitet Obrony Robotników* – Committee for the Defence of Workers) and *Charter 77* met in August 1978 with the intention of deepening their contacts and developing a concept of common commitment (Havel 1990b: 499). However, the second meeting, planned to take place on the Czechoslovak-Polish border, was prevented by the Security Forces of both countries.

Havel's conception of Central European policy can be described as a continuation of Masaryk's thought. Due to Czechoslovakia's altered geopolitical situation and, in the course of time, the emergence of the Czech Republic, Havel's thought naturally differs from Masaryk's. But the underlying political and moral principles are almost identical: cooperation between Central European states as a way of dealing with the Soviet (German) threat and democratic statehood as a guarantee of peace. Thus, EU membership as the embodiment of the imagined cultural and political 'westernness' of the state turned out to be the logical historical consequence of Central European solidarity.

Unlike Beneš and Masaryk, whose primary tasks were the establishment of democracy and the territorial consolidation of the new state within the international system, Jiří Dienstbier and Havel saw themselves confronted with a third difficulty: the Janus-faced prospect of integration and disintegration. The process of integrating with the EC and NATO had to start with the exit from the Warsaw Treaty and COMECON. This step turned out to be crucial for cooperation among the Central European states: Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary applied joint pressure in negotiating

their withdrawal from the old pacts with the Soviet Union. But on their way back to Europe the individual states avoided creating the impression of being closely related to one another.

When Milan Kundera published his essay '*Un occident kidnappé oder die Tragödie Zentraleuropas*' in 1984, he provoked the renaissance of the term *Mittleuropa*, which had disappeared after the end of World War II.<sup>5</sup> Kundera's main argument stresses that the Central European states lie only territorially in the middle of Europe; in their political and cultural roots they clearly form a part of Western Europe. The tragedy of their existence consists in the brutal Asian-barbarian rule administered under Soviet Communism. By failing to take into account that Marxism-Leninism and Socialism were 'intellectual products' of Western European philosophy, Kundera's conclusion that Russia and her culture did not belong to Europe was not only based on a mistaken historical interpretation, it also put in question the existence of a distinct Central European culture and identity. This idea was strongly opposed by the other main protagonists in the debate: Giörgy Konrad from Hungary, the Pole Adam Michnik, and Havel. These intellectuals aimed at undermining the term 'Soviet Block' by stressing that Budapest, Warsaw, and Prague did not just lie on the western border of the Soviet Empire, but that these countries represented singular cultural units different from Russia as well as from the West. The debate in the form it took in the 1980s seems to have been an intellectual preparation for Central European cooperation, which had its beginnings in the 90s, as some of the political actors designing the latter agenda had been dissidents participating actively in the discussion.<sup>6</sup>

Accepting the invitation of Havel and Dienstbier to meet at Bratislava, the presidents of Poland and Hungary met in April 1990 in order to discuss the disintegration of Soviet structures. Havel started the official dialogue on the future self-positioning of the states in Europe with the question whether the three countries would be willing not to throw obstacles in each other's ways; and if so, whether they could agree on a policy of mutual assistance (Dienstbier 1999: 4). A particular difficulty was the fact that on the one hand each government was aware of the importance of applying joint pressure on the Soviet-Union. On the other hand, no state wished to create overly strong ties to any other, let alone institution-

alize Visegrád, because they jointly feared that such an organization would be perceived by the West as a new Central European block (Vachudová 1993: 40). With the signing of the Visegrád Declaration in January 1991, Havel, Walesa, and Antall stressed that in spite of identical goals and identical problems left over from the Socialist Era, Visegrád was to be understood only as an informal forum for consultation and coordination (Vachudová 1993: 40).

Despite this stated goal Visegrád soon became the political body preparing CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement), as the only common interest of the newly independent states lay in deepening their economic ties by abolishing trade obstacles. The first concrete result of the Visegrád Group was the signing of CEFTA in December 1992 in Cracow. In the following years, Visegrád virtually ceased to exist. Each state pursued its own path toward European integration. In addition, due to Slovakia's 'overstretched' understanding of national sovereignty propounded by the government coalition of HZDS (Movement for a democratic Slovakia) and SNS (Slovak National Party), tensions among the member states increased.

In the meantime, the Czech Republic has reached one goal in the process of her integration. Bilateral negotiations with the EU on terms of membership have started. Several years earlier, Havel had stressed that the Union's philosophical and historical sense is embodied in the respect of Civil and Human Rights, political and economic pluralism, and parliamentary democracy (Havel 1991: 64). The EU's clear postponement of Slovakia's membership negotiations has indirectly led to a 'revival of Visegrád': since the election of the democratic opposition under Mikulaš Džurinda in September 1998, which can be understood as the people's reaction against the anti-European policy of the Mečiar government, relations with Slovakia have improved. The new government has expressed the wish to establish tighter political cooperation with the Visegrád members. Moreover, the opportunity to support Slovakia's new government and by so doing to stabilize its still weak democracy appeared to be the common wish of Prime Ministers Zeman (Czech Republic), Buzek (Poland), and Orban (Hungary); at their meeting of 22 October 1998, they agreed to resume joint projects and expand polit-

ical and economic consultations (Dienstbier 1999: 7; Weydenthal 1998).

#### DEMOCRACY AS PHILOSOPHICAL LEGITIMATION OF THE STATE

Masaryk and Havel have been the only democratically elected presidents of Czechoslovakia. Both statesmen's political engagement for democracy in a rule-of-law state has earned them respect worldwide. Both suffered under the repression of authoritarian systems. While Masaryk had been able to deal with censorship in the Danubian Monarchy's administration by his prudence in publishing, Havel's texts and dramas were available only as *Samizdat*. Due to his realism, Masaryk was able to take part as a representative in the Viennese Parliament as well as to organize an exile policy at the crucial moment of decision. Havel had to undergo interrogations and received various prison sentences but did not cease to demand respect for Human Rights. Although they differ in their philosophical convictions, the two thinkers' notions of a legitimate state are identical.

#### MASARYK'S HUMANITY

Masaryk's conception of Central European policy is directly related to his understanding of national independence in a sovereign and democratic state. Modern, liberal democracy and national independence represent the fundamental basis of the state; the only form of a Czechoslovak state acceptable to Masaryk is a Czechoslovak democratic state granting Human Rights and establishing the framework for a liberal market economy.

Masaryk's anthropocentrism, his sensitivity to political, social, and economic inequality as well as his religious convictions respecting God as the Creator of all things are fundamental principles within his notion of democracy. As an enlightened and universalist view of the world and relations among individuals, modern democracy promotes the concept of individualism as its essential aim is to protect individual freedom. As human beings are equal by nature, the democratic conviction expressed by the motto

of '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*' is best compatible with individuality. Masaryk had read Marx carefully; unlike Marx, however, he understood equality in terms of equal rights, e.g., equality before the law, not as economic equality.<sup>7</sup> According to his notion of equality, absolute and permanent economic equality granted by the rule of the working class is directly opposed to democracy. However, in order to realize political rights, the fundamental social needs required for the exercise of political rights have to be provided by the polity; education, food, shelter, the choice of employment, and access to independent information do contribute to the equality of chances. Thus, equality as a prerequisite for achieving individuals' freely chosen ways of life means equal chances and conditions, or, in contemporary terms, the 'individual's starter kit' provided by the legal framework of liberal democracy .

However, equality and liberty alone do not by themselves suffice to ensure democracy. *Fraternité* as Humanity, as the expression of mutual sympathy, enforces the principles of liberty and equality. Influenced by Hume and the Christian Commandment of Love, Masaryk's understanding of Humanity involves relations among equal individuals and as such is genuinely opposed to hierarchical structures such as the Catholic Church or the Habsburg Monarchy. Due to his ethical and anthropocentric view of human beings, who by virtue of their nature are capable of sympathy and compassion as well as hatred and egoism, he considers the rule of aristocracy and theocracy as deeply anti-Christian, immoral. By guaranteeing freedom from intervention by the state as well as freedom of self-determination, democracy as *permission* and *ability* (Sartori 1992: 293) represents a system logically consistent with the possibility of ending its own existence by the very procedure upon which it is based: elections and voting. Therefore, the fundamental and affirmative consent of the people, the democratic consciousness of the 'New Man' (*Nový Člověk*), based on the principles of Humanity, is the best safeguard for the political system (Masaryk 1930: 541).

Masaryk favors a liberal democratic system within a rule-of-law state. The Constitution, the separation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers, self-governance of the smallest units, checks and balances, the respect of Human Rights and minority rights in

a parliamentary democracy are not limited just to internal state politics.

#### HAVEL'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMANITY AS EXISTENTIAL CHOICE

Philosophically, Havel is influenced mainly by Jan Patočka, the co-founder of *Charter 77*, and Martin Heidegger, both of whom came out of the phenomenological movement.<sup>8</sup>

Like Masaryk, Havel thinks of democracy as the only form of a moral social and political order. However, Havel's thought differs from Masaryk's by reason of the former's perception of the twentieth century's crisis of human identity, which has led to the loss of responsibility for Humanity as the moral dimension which should underpin every political action. Socialist society's experience of the rule-of-ideology was characterized by extreme egalitarianism and materialism which are incompatible with genuine individual self-determination and the existence of alternative belief systems. Thus, Havel's legitimation of democracy shows features similar to Masaryk's: based on an anthropocentric-existentialist view of the individual, liberal democracy limited by minority rights represents a set of normative principles which are of universal validity. Unlike Masaryk, however, the History of Mankind is not perceived by Havel in a romantic, determinist light; he regards History not as a movement toward a transcendent ideal, but as the field of human action which permanently provides all possibilities for transcendence in human existence. The possibilities of History and Political History thus are the same in every period; over time only decisions and choices have altered. The individual has thus always had a choice among various existential possibilities. Havel's own choice was responsibility for human values as embodied in the *Leitmotiv* of the French Revolution, the active engagement in behalf of Human Rights and Democracy. The choice is sustained by Jan Patočka's ethos of responsibility as the only form of resistance to political oppression. Responsibility represents a transcendent ethical value, which determines the individual as human, in a sense that highlights human activity. Responsibility conceived in passive terms as a philosophical ethos in the absence of concrete results or concrete agency

in daily life is no responsibility at all. In other words, it is *acts of responsibility*, moral acts, which contribute to human identity, not vice versa; morality cannot be shaped and defined according to the needs, wishes, affections, and longings of Mankind (Patočka 1992: 316). Furthermore, Havel's notion of the individual and his sense of human existence show clear affinities with Heidegger's philosophy, when he speaks of *Andersheit der Welt* (strangeness, *jinákost světa*) and 'Geworfenheit' (thrown-ness, *vržen do světa*) as the originary experiences of human life (Havel 1992: 314). Thus, overcoming existential alienation, which manifests itself as loss of freedom due to materialist instrumentalisation of the individual (*Verdinglichung an das Dasein*), represents already an act of existence: the revolutionary turn to Human Identity as the sense of existence (Havel 1992: 332). This movement towards Being, 'Sein', the choice of one's own identity, is of existential importance. It is of universal validity and independent of place and time: responsibility for the self means responsibility for the other and the world, the 'I' is only a modality of the 'You', the other, and thus a modality of all human beings. Responsibility is expressed in acts which represent an existential universal possibility for each and all and are not limited by time, place, wealth. Thus, in the simplest terms, retiring to an Indian monastery or membership in a religious group cannot be universal solutions as not everybody is capable of going to India or being religious. One universal act embodying responsibility on behalf of Human Identity is the consistent struggle for Human Rights, the refusal to emigrate for fear of a prison sentence (Havel 1992: 289).

The consolidation of democracy requires the affirmative consent of the populace. Referring to the past, Havel describes the psychological consequences of Socialist rule as a moral catastrophe, as the people had been urged to say what they did not think (Havel 1990a: 236). He stresses the need for a new democratic consciousness which is based on individual responsibility for the self, the others, and the state. This 'existential revolution' in the name of democratic consciousness can be interpreted as the renaissance of *fraternité* based on ethical values such as truth (*pravda*), responsibility (*odpovědnost*), reason (*rozum*), and morality (*mravnost*) (Havel 1991: 109). Neither the democratic state as an institution or a system of rules, procedures, and agendas, nor a democratic Consti-

tution are capable of protecting individuals against the abuse of power. The extent to which ideologies can change and psychologically manipulate individuals was demonstrated by the emergence of National-Socialism in Germany and Marxism-Leninism in Russia. The best warrant against the decay of democracy is a pluralist, tolerant, and critical society, a modern civil society, which represents a 'human, moral, mental, and cultural state' (*stát lidský, mravní, duchovní a kulturní*) (Havel 1991: 108). Like Masaryk's, Havel's understanding of the state built and shaped constantly by the polity whose state of mind and mentality are based on democracy as ethical value has no exclusionist limits of whatever provenance. Dualist categories such as 'good-bad', 'wealthy-poor', 'successful-unsuccessful' cannot be means nor moral criteria for defining human or national identity. Although Havel clearly prefers the democratic system, thus drawing a distinction between 'democratic' and 'non-democratic', he speaks also of a 'multi-cultural world', which has its roots in 'human transcendence as the common origin of all cultures' (Havel 1995b: 108).

#### DEMOCRACY AS MORAL FUNDAMENT OF SUPRA-NATIONALITY

As mentioned before, Masaryk and Havel think of democracy as an ethical principle of universal validity. Thus, democracy's values and its implementation are of international interest, particularly in the instable political environment of postwar Central Europe:

Democracy outwards, in foreign policy, is based on the friendly organization and enforcement of Internationality (*mezinárodnosti*) . . . in a *general democracy* the oppression of one nation by another is not possible . . . (Masaryk 1925: 441, italics mine – JB)

Masaryk's conviction that the international system would be more peaceful with the growth of democracies and his remarkably progressive understanding of global politics as the movement toward a permanent merging of internal affairs and foreign policy (Masaryk 1925: 473), are not only a sign of the postwar *Zeitgeist*. The importance of international forums such as the *League of Nations* and the need for deepened cooperation was obvious; all the same, the sovereignty of states remained the first prin-



ciple of international politics and International Law. The international community was neither willing nor capable yet to set up an active organization implementing the principles of International Law, never mind the institutionalization of an international conflict-preventing policy. With respect to the emerging ideologies of National-Socialism and Fascism and the rule of Marxism-Leninism, Masaryk's understanding of the importance of democratic cooperation for a stable peace in Europe is very progressive. He shares President Wilson's view of the correspondence of individual and national self-determination (Kovtun 1987: 189–190). Although he didn't actively promote the creation of a Central European institution, given that consolidation of Czechoslovakia's democracy was the main task on his political agenda, he remained a European politician convinced that only a general democratization of the European states would guarantee peace and stability.<sup>9</sup>

What lies behind his idea of a European order which is normatively justified by democracy? The conceptual similarity to Kant's text 'Zum ewigen Frieden' (On Perpetual Peace), written in 1795, is striking, particularly when focusing on the optimistic understanding of time. Kant regards the rule of republics as a fundamental condition for stable peace and is convinced of the importance of time for progressive political developments (Kant 1992: 103). However, Masaryk did not appreciate Kant's philosophy, as he blames him and German Idealism generally for having contributed to the immoral predominance of human reason by their insistence on extreme subjectivism. Likewise, Masaryk considered the Kantian focus on international (public) law as the only means to bind the republics to be a *consequence*, not the basis, of democratic consciousness and the political will to peace. Therefore, it may be assumed that he was unfamiliar with the Kantian concept of 'Perpetual Peace' which is based on the friendly, transparent, and democratic cooperation of the republics (democracies).

Masaryk's notions of history, processuality, and time are crucial for his concept of international relations. According to his rational theism, to attempt to imagine a world without the existence of God as the origin of everything is an undertaking characterized by pure irrationality. Influenced by Herder's romanticism, he regards the history of mankind as a progressive development towards an ever

increasing humanity. Since History's various epochs are not a matter of coincidence, but follow a certain plan, neither God, nor his plan for mankind, nor the future can be discovered by human beings. But Divine Providence appears in history; each epoch and each nation bear the sense of its existence in themselves (Masaryk 1990: 9). This sense of existence, the task of the time in question, can be discovered by human beings. Each nation is a creation of God and therefore has equal rights as well as its own tasks and skills which express its individuality. Because all nations were given reason as a weapon by God, they should make use of it by fighting against inhuman and illegitimate rule (Herder 1989: 634). Therefore it is a Divine Right to fight authoritarianism as the very expression of political inhumanity. Masaryk combines this argument of Herder's with his own philosophical legitimation of democracy, as he is convinced that History has entered the phase of political self-determination. He interprets the task of his epoch as the struggle for political independence and a democratic state. Since democracy as a normative principle of politics is of universal importance and validity, its reach cannot be restricted. Therefore, the First World War is perceived by Masaryk as Global Revolution (*Světová Revoluce*): having abolished the aristocratic rule of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire, Russia's Czarism and the German *Kaiserreich*, all of which lacked moral justification, the human struggle toward freedom and humanity embodied in the democratic system has to be continued. He is well aware that this epoch is characterized by immense difficulties when he speaks of a 'transitional stage between theocracy<sup>10</sup> and democracy' (Masaryk 1925: 350).

One could suppose that Masaryk conceived Humanity in a deterministic fashion, as the ultimate goal of Human History, in a manner recalling the principle of Marxist Historical Materialism. However, I would label Masaryk's determinism a 'mild determinism', because he was convinced that History, its ends as well as its development followed the plan of God, which could not be discovered by human reason. Individuals should focus their agency on increasing Humanity in their own time; this did not mean, however, that History by virtue of scientifically discernible laws was determined to end in a future humanist or communist paradise, where states would be either run by the people or entirely

nonexistent. Nor does it mean that the process could be planned and realised by human beings, as Marx, and before him Hegel, had believed. Masaryk was convinced that individuals do not act only according to the laws of their social class in favour of Socialism nor according to the commandments of Humanity in favour of democracy – the process could be disrupted. Masaryk clearly foresaw such a disruption in History’s movement toward Humanity when in 1927 he warned against Germany’s rise: “On several occasions I have called your attention to the fact that we have to face a renewed and strong, not a defeated, Germany.” (Masaryk 1994a: 239).

#### MEMBERSHIP OF EUROPE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE POLITICS OF MORALITY

The term ‘membership’ connotes exclusion as it implicitly means a separation between members and non-members. ‘Membership’ based on universal values, however, connotes processuality, change, future, time; in the long term it is therefore potentially open if not inclusionist. Today’s Europe is embodied in the European Union and represents territorially former ‘Western Europe’; the countries included are not only linked by fundamental economic ties, but above all by European values of democracy and the respect of Human Rights. While Masaryk’s concept of Central European cooperation as a coalition of democracies did not become institutionalized, Havel’s Central European initiative resulted in the creation of Visegrád and CEFTA. Thus, on the level of political facts, Visegrád may be interpreted as the realization of Masaryk’s ‘New Europe’ in the sense that the group, guided by its intention to realize the historic task of our time, fulfills it by realizing the political programme of Central European cooperation.

Both presidents imagine their state as a member of Europe, i.e., ‘Western Europe’, which they connote as the cultural and political embodiment of the Humanist Enlightenment. Philosophically, both conceive membership in Europe as membership in the pre-institutional, intellectual, cultural, and humanist community of democratic states. Paraphrasing Anderson’s concept of nation on the supra-national level, democratic Europe represents an *imagined community*, which shows the same features as a nation: it is

*imagined, limited, and sovereign* (Anderson 1991: 6–7; emphasis added). The community called Europe is *imagined*, because the Europeans share the political and cultural memory of the crucial epochs in their history: the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the ripping asunder of the ‘Iron Curtain’ which initiated the breakdown of Communism. It is always *limited* by territorial boundaries, but these may shift as the number of democratic European states increases. And it is *sovereign*, as it has abolished not only Empires based on aristocratic rule and legitimized by theocratic institutions, but above all the Empire which by virtue of a scientific *Weltanschauung* aimed at realizing a terminal freedom and the equality of Mankind. The Community’s sovereignty, finally, is legitimized by the sovereignty of its members since the single states themselves represent sovereign sub-units. Europe represents a mental *community*, an enlightened and democratic supra-individual state of mind based on the perception of mutual *fraternité* or, in Anderson’s words, “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1991: 7).

Defining membership as common action based on commonly set agendas and rules, common interests and, in particular, shared values, the imagination of being European is identical with democratic consciousness, which both presidents regard as a fundamental condition for democracy. Philosophically, democratic consciousness and identity are identical with European consciousness and identity. European identity as post-national identity does not deny national, civil or regional identities, nor can these be replaced. But the self-imagination of Europe, its cultural and political identity, co-exists as a facet of multiple identities (Matušík, 1994: IX).

Furthermore, membership connotes reliability, transparency, the ability and will for self-protection and assistance in stabilizing the immediate territorial environment. Given the imposed, foreign determination of the threatened Central European region, which both Presidents personally experienced, they are aware of the need for protection and security. Besides shared values and mutual cooperation among the single members, European membership likewise means protecting the democratic polity against internal threats such as social and economic difficulties, which have a polarizing effect on the population. Externally, non-democratic systems have

a genuinely destabilizing effect on relations with the neighbouring states, as the case of Slovakia under 'Mečiarism' clearly demonstrated. As part of their Central European concept, the existential security of the democratic state represents for both Presidents a task of Humanity as well as, at the same time, a pragmatic method of proof: the imagined European membership can emerge only by realizing Europe, i.e., 'Western' Europe, the fundamental principles of the Imagined Community of Europe in their region. In other words, intellectual and spiritual European membership can come into being by *being European* in Central Europe, by taking on European identity in realizing European politics of Democracy and Human Rights. Institutional membership as membership of EU, thus, is the political and territorial consequence of *being European*.

Particularly after 1918 and 1989, the mental and political borders of Europe have had to be redefined. Enforcing Central European cooperation means more to Masaryk and Havel than longing for institutionalized guarantees of wealth and security. It means the evidence of European identity; the proof of the mental, philosophical, and political existence of Europeanness in the region called Central Europe. But the philosophical and political importance of their Central European concepts at the beginning and end of the Millennium is not represented only in both Presidents' commitment to the establishment of democratic institutions on the national level and their emphasis on Central European democratic cooperation. Their Central European policy and their understanding of democracy are meant as the attempt to overcome the exclusionist stereotype originating in the 18th century and dividing Europeans ever since, viz., the stereotype of 'East' and 'West', which connotes the distinction between 'Enlightened Europe' and 'Despotic Asia'. This perception of the self (European) and the other (Non-European, Asian) has its roots in the Herderian romantic perception of European Christianity and was rationalized and materialized by Hegel's philosophy of World History (*Weltgeschichte*), more precisely his theorem of the development of World History. While Herder speaks of 'Asian Despotism as the burden of Mankind' which affects only the nations willing to surrender to it<sup>11</sup> (Herder 1989: 464), Hegel defines Europe and Asia as intellectual entities divided by World History and its permanent

process toward its end; he determines Europe as the Centre and Final point of World History<sup>12</sup> (Hegel 1996: 101). By attempting to overcome this traditional *topos* of European philosophy, which particularly under Soviet rule led to distinct popular patterns of perception of 'East' and 'West', Masaryk's and Havel's political ideas represent contributions within the tradition of Enlightened Democratic Europe, and therefore the intellectual enlargement of the Imagined Community called Europe.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am most grateful to Ricardo Blaug and Edward Swiderski for their helpful comments on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I will not deal with the postwar Czechoslovak democracy of 1945–1948 in this paper. As the emerging Cold War between the Soviet Union and the USA determined the political future of the Central European states liberated by the Red Army, the government's decision to claim economic aid provided by the Marshall Plan led to the Communist *Putsch* in 1948. Czechoslovakia's weak postwar democracy had virtually neither the time nor the chance to prevent its socialist future. Also, the widespread sense of deception following the West's 'betrayal' in Munich of 1938 might have been a factor contributing to the relatively friendly perception of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party at the end of the war. However, the communist party's seizure of power was a clear act of violence against Czechoslovakia's democratic constitution.

<sup>3</sup> I will not deal with Havel's and Masaryk's biographies. The translations of Czech and German texts are my own. Key concepts in the original language are quoted in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> On Masaryk's and Havel's eclecticism and the question of a philosophical influence see part III, pp. 288–344, in Josette Baer (1998) *Politik als praktizierte Sittlichkeit. Zum Demokratiebegriff von Thomas G. Masaryk und Václav Havel*, Sinzheim, GE.

<sup>5</sup> For a summary of the various standpoints of the debate see Timothy Garton Ash (1990) *Ein Jahrhundert wird abgewählt. Aus den Zentren Mitteleuropas 1980–1990*, München/Wien, pp. 163–196. The German edition is a collection of Ash's essays published in 1989 and 1990. The original titles are: *The Uses of Adversity. Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*, New York 1989; *We the People. The Revolution of '89*, Cambridge 1990. See also George Schoepflin, Nancy Roots (eds) (1989) *In Search of Central Europe*, Cambridge UK.

<sup>6</sup> Prof. Dr. Jaroslav Šabata, member of *Charter 77* and political adviser to President Havel from 1989 until 1992, pointed out that the idea of Central European cooperation had its roots in the dissidents' debate following Kundera's essay. The collapse of 1989 had created a political situation, in which the realization of this idea had become a political possibility. My interview with Prof. Šabata took place

on 29 May 1996 in Opava. Also, sharing Šabata's point, Dienstbier confirms the importance of the debate for the realization of the Visegrád concept (1999:4).

<sup>7</sup> On Masaryk's critical perception of Marxism see Masaryk (1990), *Socialism*, pp. 13–22, in: *Ideály humanitní, vybrané spisy T.G.M.*, Praha.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of Havel's thought and his perception of Phenomenology see Baer 1998, chapt. 2.2.1.

<sup>9</sup> In this context see the memoirs of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, the intellectual father and founder of the Paneuropean movement in the Interwar period. Coudenhove-Kalergi highly esteemed Masaryk's concept of a 'New Europe' based on the peaceful cooperation of democracies. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1923) *Panuropa*, Wien/Leipzig.

<sup>10</sup> Masaryk uses the term 'theocracy' to mean the rule of clerical institutions such as the Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church, which provide aristocracy as 'the individuals chosen by God' with religious legitimation. In Masaryk's view aristocratic and theocratic rule lack religious and political legitimacy as neither system is based on popular consent. Neither do aristocratic and theocratic systems guarantee free choice or the legal equality of the citizens.

<sup>11</sup> 'Der Asiatische Despotismus, diese beschwerliche Last der Menschheit, findet nur bei Nationen statt, die ihn tragen wollen ...'

<sup>12</sup> 'Asien ... ist der Weltteil des Ostens für sich, während Europa teils das Zentrum, teils der Endpunkt der Weltgeschichte ist.'

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