

# THE FAILED BELGIANIZATION OF POST-COMMUNIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA: IMPACTING FACTORS AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE

Stefano Braghioli

PhD candidate in Comparative and European Politics,  
Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP),  
University of Siena  
braghioli@unisi.it

## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

*This article aims at highlighting the dynamics which determined the process of disgregation of Czechoslovakia from a comparative perspective, adopting the Belgian process of State decentralization as a functional interpretative lens.*

*This work represents the first attempt to tackle this issue from a comparative perspective, beyond the boundaries of CEE. I assume that Belgium and post-communist Czechoslovakia faced similar challenges of both political and socio-cultural nature. In the two countries the long-lasting ethno-linguistic divisions did alter the nature of inter-party political competition and of the society as such. However, despite these common traits the attempts towards unitary federalism produced opposite outcomes. The aim of this work is therefore to identify the factors which determined such different outcomes.*

## Introduction

In the mid-1980s - following Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the pace towards democratization initiated in Poland and Hungary – a slow process of liberalization developed in Czechoslovakia under the pressure of both the communist reformers and the non-communist counter-elites.<sup>2</sup> The Czechoslovak version of *perestroika* undertaken by Gustáv Husák, the head of the Communist Party (Czech: *Komunistická strana Československa*, KSČ), represented a timid attempt to solve the socio-economic troubles of the country within the framework provided by the fundamental principles of socialism. According to the reformist leader Lubomir Strougal<sup>3</sup>, two objectives appeared to characterize these efforts: a call for a modest decentralization

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<sup>2</sup> Following Huntington's typology of democratic transitions, the Czechoslovak democratic course can be labelled as *transplacement*, which implies a joint action by the communist reformers and the democratic forces. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1991). 151-163.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir V. Kusin, "Lubomir Strougal: An Interpretation," *RFE/RL Background Report*, 4 February 1988, 1-5.

of state economic administration and a moderate emphasis on individual political rights and civil freedoms, as defined by the Helsinki process<sup>4</sup>. The hesitant approach of the Czechoslovak elites irritated both the Soviet leadership and the growing reform movement. The governmental inaction was mainly due to the fact that the country did not face serious economic problems in the previous decade - unlike the USSR, Hungary, and Poland, where the catastrophic effects of the initial steps towards economic liberalization could already be seen in the late 1980s. The deteriorating economic conditions, coupled with other endogenous and exogenous factors, set in motion the snowball process which would have provoked the definitive break-up of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the span of a couple of years.

This article aims to comparatively analyze the dynamics which led to the process of disgregation of newly-democratized Czechoslovakia as a unitary entity and to the creation of two independent states – the Czech Republic and Slovakia – in 1993. I will focus my attention on the period which goes from the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989 to the so-called ‘Velvet Divorce’. On the other hand, given my firm persuasion that ‘history matters’ and that the events of the past affect both the present and the future, I will look back at Czechoslovakia’s past throughout its interwar democratic experience and the communist period to identify the historical sources which determined the post-1989 course of the events.

The second step of my analysis implies an innovative comparative attempt which will adopt the Belgian model of state decentralization as a functional interpretative lens to better understand the political and institutional developments that took place in Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s. This work represents the first systematic endeavor to tackle this analytical problem from a comparative perspective, beyond the boundaries of CEE. This attempt originates from the assumption that the two countries faced similar political and socio-cultural challenges. In the two countries the long-lasting ethno-linguistic divisions did profoundly alter the institutional setting of the state and the nature of inter-party political competition along with their societal pattern. Despite these common traits, the attempts towards unitary federalism produced opposite outcomes. In this essay I will demonstrate that a combination of multifaceted factors contributed to determine a hardly-avoidable institutional deadlock and, in the long term, the breakdown of joint Czech-Slovak statehood. I will prove that this state of things has been primarily determined by the nature of the still embryonic party system and the communist legacy.

In my work I will make use of the concept of *belgianization* since I believe the pattern of decentralization initiated by the pro-federation Czechoslovak elites following the

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<sup>4</sup> The slow process of internal liberalization was marked by growing pressures from the civil society within the framework provided by the Charter 77 movement. Full text of the charter available at [http://libpro.cts.cuni.cz/charta/docs/declaration\\_of\\_charter\\_77.pdf](http://libpro.cts.cuni.cz/charta/docs/declaration_of_charter_77.pdf).

breakdown of the communist regime shares many similarities with the process of devolution started in Belgium in the early 1970s. In both countries, the establishment of an interconnected polycentric platform of government, aimed at facilitating multilevel cooperation through decentralized institutional structures, was thought to be the only possible answer to the high level of inter-communal fragmentation. The Belgian federal model appears to follow a particular *sui generis* course towards the realization of an incremental reorganization of the public institutions along ethno-linguistic lines. The primary aim of this compounded multilevel structure is to *synthetically* interlink the human elements of the citizenry within the common framework of the federal mosaic. Considering my analytical aims, I will mainly focus on two distinct dimensions which seem to be particularly relevant in this regard: the nature of the institutional framework of the newly-enfranchised Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) and the development of the Czech and Slovak party system(s) in the early 1990s. In the course of my analysis I will try to highlight the role of these aspects in the failure of the federative process which led to the so-called Velvet divorce. Given these premises, the identification of the long-lasting historical roots of the 1993 split will be of great relevance. I assert that the legacy of the past (say, the First CSR and the communist period) strongly affected the fate of the joint statehood in the early 1990s and, in the end, fatally jeopardized the attempts to establish a Belgian-style multinational polity.

My analysis will be structured as follows. In the *first part* of this work I will define the peculiarities of the Belgian model specifically and the key traits of the federal attempts in divided societies in general. In the *second part* of my article I will figure out the historical sources of the recent outcomes. Hence I will analyze the long-lasting tensions between centralist, federal, and secessionist instances in Czechoslovakia, with particular reference to the intrinsic roots of the Slovak nationalist claims and with an eye at the legacy of the pre-1989 period. In the *third part* I will analyze the mix of factors that produced the breakdown of the joint statehood from the Velvet Revolution to the Velvet divorce. Following a neo-institutionalist perspective<sup>5</sup>, I will interpret the development of the country's party system as a function of the structures of government and the latter as a product of the intra-societal cleavages. In line with this assumption, particular emphasis will be paid to the evolution of the Czechoslovak parties from the First CSR to the 1989-1992 experience. In the *final part* of my work I will develop some general conclusions.

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<sup>5</sup> A frequent critique to the neo-institutionalist approach is that – even if the structures of powers (rules and institutions) clearly have a role in determining actors' political behaviour - they are first established and then shaped by men, in other words, they are human products. The problems are therefore determined either by actors' misperception or by deficit of information. However, in the Czechoslovak case (unlike in the Belgian case), given the absence of regime continuity, it is impossible to identify any link between the “constitutional providers” and the “users of the Constitution”. This disconnection at actor level made it impossible any change to the constitutional order after the regime change, thereby provoking an institutional deadlock whose final effect was the falling apart of the joint statehood.

## **Institutional Consensualism and its Political Consequences**

To better understand the Czechoslovak case from a comparative venture point, I am now going to define the basic features of the Belgian federalism (throughout its gradual process of development), I will thereby provide an interpretative lens for a fruitful comparison with the institutional and political developments in the CSR in the early 1990s and for the detection of the factors which determined the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993. In the following pages I will first deal with the institutional side of Belgian federalism, and then I will spend some words in presenting the evolution of the party-system.

### **1. The Nature of the Belgian Federalism and its Impact on the Belgian Party System**

An essential peculiarity of what I am going to label as the ‘belgianization process’ is the *incremental but constant* federalization and decentralization of the structures of the centralist state. In both Belgium and Czechoslovakia several common triggering factors appeared to strongly push for changes in the balance of power between the central and the regional levels. Two key dimensions played a relevant role, namely the ethno-linguistic diversity of the country and the socio-economic unbalance between the constituent parts.

*First*, since the foundation of the modern Belgian statehood in 1830, French-speaking Wallonia represented the economic and cultural centre of the country. Considering the leading-position of the South part of the Kingdom and the Francocentric vision shared by the liberal elites, the French idiom gained a special status and was informally considered as the *very* official language of the state. Moreover, at the highest levels of education the teaching language was French. The admission to higher education was essential for entering the political and institutional heart of the Kingdom’s civil power. Education represented, therefore, a useful tool for the dominant national elites in order to selectively co-opt loyal Flemish prominent personalities and to ghettoize the Dutch-speaking autonomist forces. A similar phenomenon of linguistic imbalance took place in the newly-enfranchised CSR. In the early 1920s, the Language act recognized the ‘Czechoslovak language’ as the official language of the state. According to Bakke “it should be noted that status as a ‘tribe’ of the state-forming ‘Czechoslovak nation’ protected the Slovaks against the use of Magyar in Slovak areas, *but not against the use of Czech*”<sup>6</sup>.

*Second*, from the inception of the Industrial revolution in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century French Wallonia (like Czechia) became an early industrial boom area, whereas the Dutch Flanders (like Slovakia) remained agricultural and economically and politically

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<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Bakke, “The Principle of National Self-Determination in Czechoslovak Constitutions 1920-1992,” *Central European Political Science Review* 10 (3: 2002): 6.

outdistanced by the South part of the country. In the early 1970s, Wallonia provided a good example of a modern, industrial, and secularized region led by liberal elites and represented the core of the Belgian middle class, while Flanders was still marked by pre-modern, agricultural, and counter-reformist traits. The main part of the Northern elites was composed of politically-inactive landowners who developed strong personal ties with the French-oriented centre in order to gain fiscal and economic rewards. In addition, considering the non-secularized traits of the Flemish provinces, this region provided the popular basis for the development of the Catholic party and represented the stronghold of the agrarian and conservative forces following the adoption of the universal male suffrage in 1893.<sup>7</sup> The political decline of Flanders has clear historical roots which date back to the loss of economic and intellectual power under Spanish, Austrian, and French rule. The heavy taxation and rigid political control imposed by the Spanish rulers and the consequences of Franco-Austrian conflict severely undermined Flemish political and economic structures. Next I will discuss the socio-economic unbalances between Czechia and Slovakia and many similarities with the Flemish case will emerge.

Using Rokkan's interpretative framework, Flemish *counter-elites* can be seen as opposing the process of nation-building promoted by the Walloon leadership, and the two groups seem to represent the two opposing poles of centre-periphery cleavage<sup>8</sup>. In the Belgian case (unlike in Czechoslovakia) the growing frustration and discontent was channelled by the elites via a gradual political enfranchisement of the Flemish population. Considering the growing economic weight of Flanders and the actual risk of secession, Belgian elites initiated an incremental process of federalization of the state institutions. Two milestones of the reform process marked the inauguration of the federative process: the 'Pact *between* the Belgians' (1970) and the well-known Egmont Pact (1977)<sup>9</sup>. In 1970, the Flemish and Francophone communities were established and provided with wide competences in matters of language and culture. In addition, larger autonomy was conferred to the three regions (say, Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), which were therefore granted relevant influence at the federal level vis-à-vis the political centre. Both the communities and regions have their own direct elected assemblies and their responsible executives. In 1984 the German linguistic community was officially established together with the Flemish and the Francophone ones. Finally, in the summer of 1993, a constitutional reform officially recognized Belgium as a federal state. The traditional Belgian PR has been

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<sup>7</sup> Martine DeRidder, Robert L. Peterson, Rex Wirth, "Images of Belgian Politics: The Effects of Cleavages on the Political System," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 3 (1: 1978): 83-208. See also Piet van de Craen, "What, if Anything, is a Belgian?" *Yale French Studies, Belgian Memories*, No.102/2002, 24-33.

<sup>8</sup> Stein Rokkan, "The Structuring of Mass Politics in the Smaller European Democracies: A Developmental Typology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10 (2: 1968): 173-210.

<sup>9</sup> The Egmont Pact covered agreements on a number of various topics: 1. The establishment of autonomous councils and executives (a government) for the three communities in Belgium (established in 1970 within the framework of the Pact between the Belgians); 2. An agreement on the linguistic relations in Brussels and the periphery; 3. A reform of the country's institutions along federal lines.

progressively shaped by the federal reform, thereby further fostering the eminently intra-communal structure of the party systems and preventing the emergence of statewide political organizations. A good indicator of the high level of decentralization and multilevel cooperativism reached by the Belgian system of government is the number of legislative assemblies (8 parliaments) which interact within the constitutional machinery of the state. Among others, this set of reforms implied the transformation of the bicameral parliamentary system along regional and ethno-linguistic lines, thereby guaranteeing an effective say to the substate entities (in cooperation with the central institutions) on every piece of legislation which *could* virtually affect the inter-communal balance. All in all, the Belgian political consensualism (which was initially developed by the national elites as a reaction to the increasing political polarization produced by the state/church cleavage and the monarchy issue in the aftermath of the War) proved to be a working answer to the growing inter-societal fragmentation<sup>10</sup>.

The institutional changes - as was largely predictable – affected the features of the Belgian party system as well as the coalitional patterns. The highly polarized political environment determined a vertical fragmentation of the Belgian society (pillarization) which appeared to be increasingly divided according to partisan lines of frail. The emergence of the ethno-linguistic cleavage contributed to a further deconstruction of the society and of the political spectrum, thereby cross cutting the already tangible ideological divisions and creating societal pillars which lack any structural connection at citizen level. Keeping aside the role of the nationalistic parties, the traditional *grandes familles* (the Liberals, the Catholics, and the Socialists) gradually divided along ethno-linguistic lines. However, they by and large maintained common ideological roots which facilitated the creation of interparty cooperative mechanisms. According to Rokkan

in Belgium the established elite identified with the French language throughout the country and the Flemish opposition expressed a class cleavage: the Liberal associations and the Catholic hierarchy were for a long time able to maintain channels of communication between the two cultures but could not prevent the foundation of regionalist-federalist parties after World War I.<sup>11</sup>

Given the lack of the connections among the members of the linguistic communities at the bottom of the pillars, the only way to secure the tenure of the joint statehood appeared to be the establishment of a highly-structured dialogue among the partisan

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<sup>10</sup> The resulting institutional structure is highly complicated, comprising the federal level (House of Representatives, Senate, King), the community level (Flemish, French, and German Community Council, Joint Commission), the state-region level (Flemish and Walloon Region, Brussels-Capital), and finally the language-region level (Dutch-, French-, German-speaking, and Bilingual Region). For further details see Articles 4 [Linguistic Regions] and 68 [Group Balance] of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium. Retrieved from [http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/be00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/be00000_.html).

<sup>11</sup> Rokkan, "The Structuring of Mass Politics," 203.

organizations. Mutually disconnected communities were therefore bridged through a close dialogue among their political representatives within the framework provided by the multilayered federal system.

In the span of ten years the major political organizations of the country restructured themselves along ethno-linguistic lines, thereby originating three distinct intra-communal party systems: the Catholics split in 1968, the Liberals in 1971, and the Socialists in 1978. The Christian-democrats, who regarded the underdeveloped and frustrated Flanders as their main stronghold, were keener to represent the political and economic interests of the Flemish voters. The Socialists resisted the divisive tendency until 1978, mainly because most of their voters were located in the highly industrialized Wallonia and in the district of Brussels.

In his well-known *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (1999) Lijphart defines the institutional characteristics and the basic traits of the consociational model of democracy. The consociational state coupled with decentralized institutions does not solve the complexity of divided societies all at once, nor it does remove the ethnonational cleavages. It does, however, render them manageable and the periodical inter-communal crises controllable, thereby reducing the risks of dramatic institutional shocks which would put in danger the existence of the polity. In Lijphart's work Belgium towers as the case which appears closest to the consociational idealtype. According to Lijphart

the successful establishment of democratic government in divided societies requires two key elements: power sharing and group autonomy. Power sharing denotes the participation of representatives of all significant communal groups in political decision making, especially at the executive level; group autonomy means that these groups have authority to run their own internal affairs.<sup>12</sup>

In his analysis of the Belgian *verzuiling*, he identifies four necessary conditions for a consociational system to succeed. The elites must: 1. be aware of the dangers of political fragmentation at societal level; 2. share the commitment to the state unity; 3. be able to establish a well-structured dialogue aimed at connecting the constituent communities from the top; 4. have the will to compromise for the sake of the federation<sup>13</sup>.

## II. The Czechoslovak Case

### 1. *The Pre-1989 Background*

In this section I will discuss the historical developments which influenced the political course of post-communist Czechoslovakia and eventually determined the failure of

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<sup>12</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2: 2004): 97.

<sup>13</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics*, 21 (2: 1969): 207-225.

the joint statehood in the early 1990s. I will focus my attention on two distinct periods, the First Czechoslovak republican experience (from 1920 to 1938) and the post-WWII communist era (from 1948 to 1989).

### *1.1 The First Czechoslovak Republic: The Development of a Unitary State*

Unlike most interwar cases, Czechoslovakia represents an example of democratic survival in CEE as it “remained a functioning parliamentary democracy throughout the interwar period [until the German invasion in 1938], thus offering a sustained period of party evolution for analysis”<sup>14</sup>. Following the proclamation of national independence in October 1918, a democratic constitution - patterned after the French model - was approved in 1920. In the meanwhile, the principle of proportionality was introduced in order to secure the highest degree of equality within a strongly fragmented political system marked by a large degree of ethnic heterogeneity: “the number of parties competing for votes oscillated between 16 and 29, of which 7 to 11 were parties of Czechs and Slovaks, while the rest were German and Hungarian”<sup>15</sup>. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, Sudeten Germans and Hungarians of Slovakia were incorporated into the new state, together with Czech and Slovak constituent (*statotvorné*) peoples<sup>16</sup>. To prevent the emergence of ethno-linguistic threats from the German and Hungarian national minorities, the highest level of autonomy was granted to the two nationalities within the framework of the unitary structure of the state. Given the centralized nature of the republic, the formal constitutional rights were granted by the centre and no independent power of action was provided to the regional level.

The greatest challenge endeavored by the new political leadership concerned the construction of a sovereign state by joining two units, distinct in ethno-cultural as well as socioeconomic and historical development: Czechs in industrially and economically developed Bohemia and Moravia, previously subject to the Austrian half of the dual monarchy, and Slovaks in the poorer Hungarian half. Since its establishment, the political centre of the national government and the administration appeared to be monopolized by Czech functionaries, provided the lack of expertise among the Slovaks. This factor powerfully increased the sense of general frustration among the Slovak counter-elites and fostered their mistrust towards the Czech centre.

Within the constitutional framework of the state there was no formal recognition of Czechs and Slovaks as two distinct nations. The preamble of the 1920 Constitution stated

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<sup>14</sup> Carol Skalnik-Leff and Susan B. Mikula, “Institutionalizing Party Systems in Multiethnic States: Integration and Ethnic Segmentation in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1992,” *Slavic Review* 61 (2: 2002): 292.

<sup>15</sup> Eduard Taborsky, “Czechoslovakia’s experience with P.R.,” *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 26 (3/4: 1944): 50.

<sup>16</sup> Skalnik-Leff and Mikula, “Institutionalizing Party Systems,” 292-314.



*We, the Czechoslovak nation, desiring to consolidate the perfect unity of our nation, to establish the reign of justice in the Republic, to assure the peaceful development of our Czechoslovak homeland, to contribute to the common welfare of all citizens of this state and to secure the blessings of freedom have in our National Assembly this 29th day of February 1920 adopted the following Constitution for the Czechoslovak Republic*<sup>17</sup>.

Only in 1938, the moribund parliament of the CSR approved a constitutional amendment which eventually recognized the Slovaks as a separate and sovereign nation<sup>18</sup>.

The asymmetries and the structural imbalances between the founding entities have clear historical sources. The Slovaks suffered a significant organizational deficit in comparison to the more favorable conditions for political development in Czech Austria. Following the establishment of the Bohemian Diet in 1861 and the 1867 constitutional compromise, Czechia embraced the Austrian path towards the extension of political rights and experienced male universal suffrage since 1907, whereas Hungarian Slovakia encountered much more limitations of political participation (restricted suffrage) as the central elites were actively involved in Hungarian national struggles and vigorously sustained the process of Magyarization of Slovak lands. Therefore they seemed to be hostile to the emergence of rival ethnic identities in the electoral arena and institutional life. In this sense, the re-emergence of nationalistic sentiments in Slovakia (both during the experience of the ‘Slovak state’ in the 1940s and in the newly-democratic CSR in the early 1990s) implied a revanchist escalation and the growth of anti-Hungarian feelings among the public and the elites.

When Slovakia was artificially merged with Moravia and Bohemia in 1918, it encountered the more politically mature Czech elites arisen from a more open and inclusive electoral politics under the Austrian rulers<sup>19</sup>. The collapse of Habsburg Empire “facilitated an alliance of the Czech workers and bourgeoisie against the prospect of pan-German domination and an independent state embracing also the Slovaks of Hungary seemed the most viable alternative”<sup>20</sup>. All in all, the establishment of the new democratic joint state clearly characterizes as a Czech-led operation. Bohemia and Moravia provided most of the administrative and political elites, while prominent Slovak personalities (such as Presidents Tomáš Masaryk and

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<sup>17</sup> Elisabeth Bakke, “The Principle of National Self-Determination,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Dorothea H. El Mallakh, *The Slovak Autonomy Movement, 1935-1939* (Columbia University Press, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Ethnic Diversity, Democracy, and Electoral Extremism: Lessons from Interwar Poland and Czechoslovakia*, Preliminary Draft, December 18, 2004, 1-8. Retrieved from [http://www.politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/4734/wittenberg\\_s05.pdf](http://www.politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/4734/wittenberg_s05.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> John Coakley, “Political succession and regime change in new states in inter-war Europe: Ireland, Finland, Czechoslovakia and Baltic Republics,” *European Journal of Political Research* 14 (3: 1986): 191.

Edvard Beneš) were selectively co-opted. The new state characterized as a substantially secularized Catholic country since the liberal Czech political elites were able to temper more deeply religious Slovak Catholics, thereby robustly reducing the impact of religious cleavages on the fate of Czechoslovak democracy.

Considering the Czecho-centric and unitary nature of the state, the pro-independence claims of the Slovak counter-elites flowed under the surface of the republican structure as latent forces which, however, never disappeared. The central power did great integrative efforts in order to mitigate the role of ethnicity, perceived as a threat to state unity. Provided the high level of ethnonational fragmentation of the political system, informal cooperative tools were adopted by the political elites in order to preserve the democratic institutions and to temper Slovak nationalism.

Largely responsible for the political stability of democratic Czechoslovakia was the so-called *Pětka* (The group of five). This behind-the-scenes consociative forum, composed of the leadership of the five major parties<sup>21</sup>, constituted the informal backbone of the government and designed a virtuous pattern which contributed to the success of democracy in interwar Czechoslovakia. Moreover, it succeeded in moderating ethno-linguistic conflicts as it controlled the access to governing power, thereby conditioning political cooptation of junior partners to the acceptance of the new polity and its constitutional basis<sup>22</sup>. Accordingly, after 1927, the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (Slovak: *Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana*, H'SLS)<sup>23</sup>, which accepted the joint democratic statehood, "won inclusion in governing coalitions, thus acquiring leverage in the allocation of state budgetary resources".<sup>24</sup>

After Munich, the Czech lands became a German protectorate, whereas Slovakia was reorganized in 1939 as a formally independent statehood under the leadership of the H'SLS. Although it was practically little more than a Nazi 'puppet state', it retained a symbolic significance throughout the communist period and the democratic joint CSR as the first state-building attempt.

## 1.2 *The Federative Experiments during the Communist Regime*

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<sup>21</sup> The *Pětka* included the leaders of the five main Czechoslovak parties: Social Democrats, National Socialists, National Democrats, Agrarians and Catholics.

<sup>22</sup> Stefano Braghiroli, "The Challenges to Democracy in the Interwar Period: Lessons from the Past Relevant Today. Poland, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia in an Extended Rokkanian Perspective," *CEU Political Science Journal* 2 (4: 2007): 375.

<sup>23</sup> The HSLs was founded by the rightist Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka and originated from a voluntary merger with other parties in November 1938. The party became – under the leadership of Jozef Tiso - the dominant political force in the pro-Nazi and clerical Slovak state and reformed the constitution according to authoritarian lines. It promoted anti-Semitic policies patterned after the German model. It also established the fascist militia known as Hlinka Guard in 1938. See Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination," 9.

<sup>24</sup> Skalnik-Leff and Mikula, "Institutionalizing Party Systems," 302.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, a fresh constitution was adopted in May 1948. The substantial application of the new chart was largely influenced by communist pressure even if it officially maintained formal references to liberal-democracy. The mismatch between the form and the actual institutional practice produced frequent constitutional blackouts driven by the communist government. In 1968, a new chart was eventually adopted which fully embraced the principles of socialist democracy.

The postwar constitution recognized the existence of two distinct Czech and Slovak nations. The preamble of the chart declares that “the Czechs and Slovaks, two brotherly nations, members of the great Slav family of nations, lived already a thousand years ago jointly in a single state”<sup>25</sup>. An illustrative example of the integrative attempts undertaken by the communist leadership is provided by the Košice Agreement (a sort of Czechoslovak Egmont) “which promised a departure from the interwar republic’s centralism in the formulaic recognition of Czech and Slovak political status of ‘equal with equal’ and provided a separate institutional base for Slovak political organization”<sup>26</sup>. It provided the basis for a formal regionalization of the polity. The system of ‘asymmetric federalism’ introduced by the 1948 constitution played a determinant role in the definition of the Slovak feelings towards the federation - again seen as a Czech realm - and robustly affected the nature of the belgianization process *à la tchécoslovaque*. According to Stepan “in a democratic asymmetrical federal system the constitution makers, in order to ‘hold together’ the polity in one peaceful democracy, may give constitutionally embedded special rights for distinct member of the federation”<sup>27</sup>. The model of asymmetric federalism implied the coexistence of central structures of government and Slovak regional institutions. For Slovakia it meant the establishment of a republican parliament (the Slovak National Council<sup>28</sup>) and a republican government in Bratislava coupled with an autonomous Slovak section of the Communist Party. None of these provisions existed in the Czech lands.

Although these reforms were thought to moderate Slovak frustration and to guarantee greater (formal) political weight within the socialist state, in facts they boosted the disenchantment of the Slovaks and increased the appetite for independence, rather

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<sup>25</sup> Jan F. Triska, *Constitutions of the Communist Party-States* (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University Press: 1968). 396.

<sup>26</sup> Skalník-Leff and Mikula, “Institutionalizing Party Systems,” 309. See also Bakke, “The Principle of National Self-Determination,” 10.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred Stepan, “Multi-Nationalism, Democracy and “Asymmetrical Federalism” (With Some Tentative Comparative Reflections on Burma),” *Technical Advisory Network of Burma*, WP 02/2002, 3.

<sup>28</sup> The Slovak National Council was established during the liberation war under the German occupation. In December 1943, various groups that would be involved with the government in exile, Czechoslovak democrats and communists and the Slovak army, formed the underground Slovak National Council, and signed the so-called *Christmas Treaty*, a joint declaration to recognize Beneš' authority and to recreate Czechoslovakia after the war. The council was responsible for creating the preparatory phase of the Slovak National Uprising.

than satisfying it<sup>29</sup>. The asymmetrical provisions made even more evident that the central level was a prerogative of the Czech elites. This *sui generis* federalism contained two components, namely, a federal government which had power over the entire country and detained the definitive sovereignty and a national council that *nominally* ran internal affairs within Slovakia. The asymmetry stemmed from the absence of the latter in the western part of the country. It implied that “Czech interests were always represented in federal policy, while Slovaks, because their representation was concentrated at the republic level, were relatively powerless at the federal level”.<sup>30</sup> Asymmetric federalism appeared fully functional to the objectives of the communist elites, thereby providing a conditional answer to the Slovak issue without requiring the decentralization of any real authority.

In 1960, given the growing Slovak discontent, a set of constitutional amendments formally widened Slovaks’ nationality rights. In addition, in 1968 a new Soviet-style chart was approved. It turned the name of the country into Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR), thereby claiming that “the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia”<sup>31</sup> (Article 4). The chart went beyond the recognition of two distinct nations, thereby acknowledging “the indefeasible right of self-determination as far as a separation, respecting the sovereignty of each nation and *its right freely to create for itself the way and form of its national and state life*”<sup>32</sup>. The new constitution - drafted during the Prague Spring but adopted following the process of ‘normalization’ - reshaped the characteristics of the Czechoslovak federalism, thereby substituting the principle of proportionality between the two *statotvorné* with the principle of equality, abolishing the institutional imbalances between the two halves of the country<sup>33</sup>. *First*, the federal asymmetry was eliminated with the establishment of a Czech National Council. *Second*, the federal assembly was made bicameral, with an upper chamber (House of Nations) divided into two equally sized Czech and Slovak sections according to the principle ‘one nation, one vote’ and a lower chamber (House of the People) elected through proportional representation. Similarly to the Belgian case,

in some cases, designated in the constitution, legislation required a simple majority in the lower house and in *each section* of the upper house; constitutional changes needed three fifths majorities in the same three instances. This implied that one fifth of the deputies to the upper house could block all constitutional changes<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Henry Cox and Erich G. Frankland, “The Federal State and the Break-up of Czechoslovakia: An Institutional Analysis”, *Publius* 25 (1: 1995): 77-82.

<sup>30</sup> Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State,” 78.

<sup>31</sup> William B. Simons, *The Constitutions of the Communist World* (Alphen aan der Rijn: Amsterdam, 1980). 710.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 582.

<sup>33</sup> Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State,” 79.

<sup>34</sup> John Elster, “Transition, Constitution-making and Separation in Czechoslovakia”, *European Journal of Sociology* 36 (1: 1995): 109.

Great attention should be paid to these federal provisions since they robustly impacted the post-1989 development of the country. In this sense, the 1968 chart provided the constitutional basis of the newly-democratic Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and may therefore be regarded as “a unique example of a text that came into life only after death – after the abolition of the regime whose affairs it was supposed to regulate”<sup>35</sup>.

## 2. *From the Velvet Revolution to the Velvet Divorce*

Prior to analyzing the events that provoked the break-up of the federal union, three relevant institutional aspects (recommended by President Havel and his entourage) deserve to be clearly fixed. *First*, the loyalty to the principle of legal continuity<sup>36</sup> (unlike in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany). *Second* and consequentially, the respect for the no-longer on paper sovereignty of the two republics and recognition of their right of secession. *Third*, the adoption of a proportional system at republic-level<sup>37</sup>.

Following the course of the events in the communist bloc, several members of the KSC “called for moves toward democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, perhaps in the form of discussions at a Polish-style round table that would include representatives of the government and of the opposition”.<sup>38</sup> In the late 1989, talks between the reformers and the pro-democracy leaders in Prague and Bratislava defined the path towards a full political enfranchisement of the country. The discussions were held separately in Czech lands by the Civic Forum (Czech: *Občanské fórum*, OF) and in Slovakia by the leadership of Public Against Violence (Slovak: *Verejnost' proti násiliu*, VPN). The two pro-democracy groups were in ‘umbrella organizations’ which gathered a variety of dissimilar opponents of the communist regime which shared the only common aim to challenge the *status quo*. Considering the initial ethno-national partition of the anti-communist forces and their proto-partisan nature, it would have been extremely difficult to create *ex post* a unitary party system, thereby reducing the impact of the Slovak disgregative claims. According to the principle of legal continuity, the first important decision adopted by the OF and VPN leaderships implied the maintenance of the pre-1989 existing parliament in charge. This did not prevent a process of preliminary lustration: in November the assembly was purified of its most radical and obnoxious members<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>36</sup> Three points appear particularly noteworthy: *First*, the Slovaks had equal numbers of representatives in the House of Nations. *Second*, a majority was required in each of the two sections of the upper house. *Third*, for constitutional changes a qualified majority in both the houses was required.

<sup>37</sup> Taborsky, “Czechoslovakia’s experience with P.R.,” 50.

<sup>38</sup> Kevin Devlin, “Prague Spring Leader Calls for Czechoslovak Round Table,” *RFE/RL Background Report*, August 18, 1989, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Elster, “Transition, Constitution-making”, 112.

In the summer of 1989 the democratic leadership and the pro-reform communist elites defined the next steps towards democracy in order to finalize the transition process. A new constituent ‘short parliament’ should have been elected in 1990 in order to approve the fresh democratic constitution of the federal republic. The experimental idea of a 2-year parliament appeared not particularly successful. Indeed, given the short life of the new legislature, most of the parties rapidly became involved in electoral politics, thereby trying to maximize their votes for 1992 general elections. A second fault step proved to be the introduction of the proportional representation at republic-level, adopted under the influence of presidential pressures.<sup>40</sup> The requirement to capture *over five percent in a single republic, not in the whole country* made the formation of two party systems inevitable. According to Olson (once again similarly to the Belgian case) this institutional framework produced “two party systems, each one concentrated in one of the two Republics within the larger federation and constructed political parties within, not across the salient division in society”<sup>41</sup>. In this way Havel sought to achieve two different aims, consistent with his post-materialist political perspective. On the one hand, he did not want to exploit the dominant position of the Civic Forum. On the other hand, considering his well-known opposition to party politics, he wanted an electoral method that would have allowed the selection of independent (non-partisan) candidates.

One of the most evident effects produced by the institutional system was the growth of ethno-national polarization between the two main pro-democracy movements and the rise of internal political struggles. Political and ethnic divisions jeopardized the attainment of a long-term constitutional agreement which was thought to finally substitute the 1968 constitution<sup>42</sup>. More in general, the Slovaks’ boycott of every federal attempt was made possible by the egalitarian rules contained in the 1968 socialist constitution (Article 41 on Constitutional amendments). The overstressed principle of legal continuity seems to have produced the seeds of the institutional deadlock and, more in general, a weakening of the constitutional momentum “as an informal coalition was soon formed between the Slovak patriots/nationalists and the Communists which, playing the rules of the 1968 Constitution, was able to stall the urgent reform legislation”<sup>43</sup>. The 1990 elections created a federal parliament dominated by Civic Forum and Public Against Violence (170 seats out of 300), with the Communists (the only statewide party) and the Christian Democratic Union (Czech: *Křesťanská a demokratická unie*, KDU) gaining respectively 47 and 40 seats.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>41</sup> David M. Olson, “Dissolution of the State: Political Parties and the 1992 Election in Czechoslovakia,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 26 (3: 1993): 301.

<sup>42</sup> A good indicator of the growing tension between Czech and Slovak forces is the semantic debate over the official name of the state known as the ‘hyphen debate’ which took place in the federal parliament in the spring of 1990. For further details see Bakke, “The Principle of National Self-Determination,” 14. See also Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State,” 82.

<sup>43</sup> Milos Calda, *Constitution-Making in Post-Communist Countries: A Case of the Czech Republic*, Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, September 2-5, 1999.

The other minor parties ranged between 12 and 16 seats<sup>44</sup>. The limited duration of the constituent legislature accentuated the divisive claims within the two pro-democracy groups, which restructured themselves along partisan lines. In February, the OF split into two groups, the conservative Civic Democratic Party (Czech: *Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS) led by the Federal Minister of Finances, Vaclav Klaus and the pro-Havelian anti-partisan Civic Movement (Czech: *Občanské Hnutí*, OH). The former can be labelled as a moderate right-wing party representing the interests of the Czech middle class, characterized by a pragmatic approach<sup>45</sup>, whereas the latter emerged as a more open group displaying a civic and social character as it was mainly composed of non-partisan politicians. The same phenomenon took place on the Slovak side. The disintegration of VPN began in March 1991, when Vladimir Meciar founded his own political party: the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (Slovak: *Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko*, HZDS). Meciar, the former leader of the VPN, exited the organization when he was ousted from his position as Slovak Prime Minister by an internal plot driven by the pro-unity partners. He claimed the realization of a Slovak third way and supported a gradual approach towards market economy, more compatible with Slovakia's economic backwardness. According to Ambrosio, Meciar's support for a loose confederation was functional to Slovakia's interests: "the real issue was whether or not the Slovaks would be able to block the process of economic reform in Czechoslovakia. Not only did Meciar demand that the Slovaks have a veto over any reform package, but the federal system itself necessarily required a consensus-based government"<sup>46</sup>. The clash of interest between the free-marketist ODS and the social-populist HZDS appeared to be no longer grounded merely on an 'idealistic' ethno-national divide, but on incompatible political programs both aimed at driving the country towards mutually-irreconcilable directions. In addition, the pro-federation liberal elite who led the Velvet Revolution had been progressively wiped out. As the post-materialist Havelian elites represented the only political and trans-communal force with a strong commitment to the federation, centrifugal forces came to increasingly dominate the scene. This made an inter-communal constitutional agreement virtually impossible. Even if the structures of government appeared suitable for consensual Belgian-style politics, one aspect appeared to inevitably jeopardize the pro-unity efforts. Given the growing disagreement between the elites both on issues of national sovereignty and on the socio-economic direction of the federation (in terms of market vs. equalization), the political representatives of the two republics proved unable to connect the two societies. Unlike in the Belgian case, the divisions at the bottom of the societal pillars could not be overcome by a cooperative behaviour at the top. This represented a by-

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<sup>44</sup> Jaroslav Hudeček, Zdenka Mansfeldová and Lubomir Brokl, "Czechoslovakia," *European Journal of Political Research* 22 (3: 1992): 381.

<sup>45</sup> The neoliberal doctrine, individuals' self-promotion, and free-marketism represent the basic and founding principles of the party. For further details see The Statute of the Civic Democratic Party. Retrieved from <http://www.ods.cz/eng/party/statutes.php>.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, "The Breakup of Czechoslovakia and the Calculus of Consociationalism," *Institute on East Central Europe WP* 1/1997, 4.

effect of the communist past, which produced high levels of societal fragmentation, low interpersonal trust, and a general deconstruction of the political life of the country<sup>47</sup>.

Given the persistent constitutional deadlock, the centrifugal trend was fostered by the 1992 elections, which created favourable conditions for the peaceful divorce. In the Czech Lands, the ODS-KDU coalition prevailed with 40% of the votes in both the houses. In Slovakia, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia also achieved 34% of the votes. No party succeeded in gaining seats in both the republics<sup>48</sup>. The 5% threshold provided electoral incentives to those parties that displayed a consistent nationalist rhetoric. Following this process of political disgregation of the centre also the Communist Party faced increasing inter-communal divisions<sup>49</sup>. Both the ODS and the HZDS received more seats in the Chamber of Nations than their percentage of votes: ODS-KDU were apportioned 37 out of 75 of the Czech seats and the HZDS received 33 out of 75 of the Slovak seats, thereby securing both of them an effective veto power in the Federal Assembly. In June 1992 an agreement was reached on a Swiss-style federal cabinet according to the following formula: 4 (ODS) + 4 (HZDS) + 2 (Others)<sup>50</sup>. This decision showed the loss of power of the federal institutions and at the same time reduced the legitimacy of the centre vis-à-vis the republic-based National Councils, which emerged as the very centre of the political power. Despite the consensual character of the 4+4+2 formula, a *Pětka*-style selective cooptation was no longer possible as

the federal government, selecting Slovak allies had now to meet the test of representativeness at the republic level, institutionally embodied in the Slovak prime minister and cabinet as well as in the pattern of party alliances in the Slovak National Council. It was the Slovak Republic government, and not the 'Prague' Slovaks, who were on the front lines in negotiating a constitutional bargain<sup>51</sup>.

Considering the crystallization of two distinct Czech and Slovak party systems, the break-up of the federation became not only plausible but inevitable. Unlike in the Belgian case, the leading democratic forces did not share any inherent state-wide attitude, or any common ideological vision. Given the high level of political deconstruction experienced during the communist regime, the development of a common 'myth of the origin' comparable to the Belgian *grandes familles* would have

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<sup>47</sup> Søren Riishøj, "Development of Parties and Party Systems in Central Europe," *Political Science Publications*, No. 19/2007, 18.

<sup>48</sup> In the 1992 elections the ODS tried to cross the border of the republic by forming a coalition with the Slovak-based Democratic Party/Civic Democratic Union. However the Slovak partner failed to break the 5% clause. See Calda, *Constitution-Making in Post-Communist Countries*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> In 1990 the KSČ became a federation of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Communist Party of Slovakia. Later, the Communist Party of Slovakia changed its name to the Party of the Democratic Left and the federation broke up in 1992.

<sup>50</sup> Cox and Frankland, "The Federal State," 85.

<sup>51</sup> Skalnik-Leff and Mikula, "Institutionalizing Party Systems," 312.



been inconceivable. On the other hand, the unitary tradition of the interwar CSR and its commitment to a cooperative style of government was too far in the past to exert any real influence.

After the collapse of the socialist system, the desire of political unity declined under the pressure of nationally-oriented Slovak claims coupled with Czech inertia, leading to the fragmentation and the increasing partisanization of the umbrella organizations. Both ODS and HZDS started to consider the National Councils as the primary source of their popular legitimacy. It is particularly noteworthy that after the 1992 general elections Vaclav Klaus preferred the Czech prime ministership to the Presidential appointment as head of the federation. An additional factor fastened the process of division, that is, the strengthening of Klaus and Meciar's opposite stances towards economic reforms. This factor was coupled with a stronger nationalistic rhetoric from the Slovak side. Even if the only relevant party explicitly advocating the division of the country was the minor Slovak National Party (Slovak: *Slovenská národná strana*, SNS) that obtained only 15 seats out of 300, it became progressively evident that both ODS and HZDS had silently abandoned the perspective of a federal Czechoslovakia. Indeed, as the adoption of a working market economy was "Klaus' first priority, it was undoubtedly in his interest to abandon the deadlock federal centre by initiating Czechoslovakia disintegration"<sup>52</sup> since the Slovaks were perceived as an obstacle to reform. On the other hand, Meciar came to accept the separation as the only way to reduce the hardships of market reforms in Slovakia. In this regard, Klaus made clear that there could be no exceptions to the privatisation process and that the only two feasible alternatives were "the preservation of the present federation or the complete disintegration of the state"<sup>53</sup>. Meciar's counter-proposal clearly showed that the time was running out. He suggested a *functional* 'loose confederacy' with joint armed forces where Slovakia would have retained its own independent foreign and *economic policies*<sup>54</sup>. He suggested the two 'sovereign republics' to adopt their constitutions first and, after that, the ratification of a Maastricht-style 'state treaty' which would have allocated the competences between the federal 'devolved' centre and the republics<sup>55</sup>.

In the second half of 1992 the process of disgregation became faster and irreversible. In July, Meciar's deputies vetoed Havel's re-election as President of the country. On July 17, the Slovak National Council approved a declaration of independence (*svrchovanost*). Finally, on July 22-23 Klaus and Meciar agreed on ending the federation. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia would have taken effect on January 1 1993, thereby culminating in the creation of two independent states. In this respect, one final point deserves to be mentioned. On the eve of the divorce, despite the

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<sup>52</sup> Elster, "Transition, Constitution-making," 231 5

<sup>53</sup> Ambrosio, "The Breakup of Czechoslovakia," 6.

<sup>54</sup> Calda, *Constitution-Making in Post-Communist Countries*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> See Bakke, "The Principle of National Self-Determination," 15.

growing nationalistic rhetoric expressed by the major parties, the overwhelming majority of both Czech and Slovaks populations were in favour of keeping the joint federation (albeit with more autonomy at national level). A survey conducted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in 1991 shows that only 23% of the Slovaks and 13% of the Czechs supported the separation. Other studies reveal the same trend<sup>56</sup>. From this perspective Slovak self-determination seemed to be an issue of minor concern. Neither Klaus nor Meciar wanted to follow the constitutional procedures of state dismantling, rather favoured by Havel and his entourage, since such procedures would have required a referendum among the citizens of the federation. Cox and Frankland maintain that this course is mainly due to the weak mass-elite linkage “as appeared to be the case in post-Communist Czechoslovakia, [where] the relative autonomy of the elites is increased, and the importance of the issues which divided them is amplified”<sup>57</sup>.

It is extraordinarily interesting to appreciate the impact of a dead constitution on the fate of the Czechoslovak joint statehood. On the one hand it was functional to Meciar’s attempts to rebalance Slovakia’s historical inequalities. But on the other hand, in the long run, it prevented unitary forces from overcoming HZDS obstruction and avoiding the country’s institutional deadlock<sup>58</sup>. All in all, unlike in the Belgian case, the Czech and Slovak leadership had few incentives for keeping the union alive, given the lack of consociational political culture (mainly due to the communist heritage which disintegrated the country both politically and socially). Considering the high degree of violence that characterized the international environment in the early 1990s, to the Czech and Slovak elites the end of Czechoslovakia and the peaceful creation of two sovereign nations did not appear as an excessive price to pay. In the era of Bosnian and Rwandan massacres, the process of state disintegration would have been conducted quietly and through political negotiations. Moreover, given the nonexistence of ethnic hatred and national overlap among the citizenry, a violent outcome would have been out of question. The split did not imply territorial disputes, given the fact that less than 1% of the population of each republic resided in the other and both the republics had a distinct historical capital inside their national borders, unlike in the Belgian case where Brussels represents a region itself located across the linguistic border and is densely populated by both the linguistic groups.

## Conclusions

This article analyzed the double efforts endeavoured by pro-unity Czechoslovak elites (mainly by President Vaclav Havel and his entourage) aimed at both consolidating the newly-established democratic order and redesigning the institutional structure of the

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<sup>56</sup> Michael J. Deis, “A Study of Nationalism in Czechoslovakia,” *RFE/RL Research Report*, 31 January 1992, 8-13.

<sup>57</sup> Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State,” 87.

<sup>58</sup> Attila Agh, *The Politics of Central Europe* (Sage Publications, 1998). 149-150.

state towards the creation a Belgian-styled decentralized federation. The attempt to safeguard the unity of the state and to recognize Slovakia (increasingly marked by growing nationalistic sentiments) as a full ‘equal partner’ in the federation proved in the end to be too ambitious. In 1993 the dream of a multinational Czechoslovakia composed of ‘two coequal fraternal nations’ finally fell apart, 74 years after its conception. Why did it happen? This article aimed at analyzing the developments that took place in the country in the early 1990s and at identifying the historical sources which determined the course of the events, thereby trying to provide an answer to this question from a comparative perspective. I therefore presented the main historical, cultural, and political sources which, to a great extent, contributed to determine the final outcome. Accordingly, I emphasized the role played by the long-lasting ethno-linguistic divisions on the Czechoslovak constitutional patterns as well as on its party politics throughout three distinct periods of the institutional life of the country: the interwar First CSR, the communist era, and the democratic rebirth in the early 1990s.

It implied an analysis of the characteristics of the Czechoslovak way towards state decentralization and, more in general, towards the definition of cooperative political milieu which was thought to provide a functional platform for a closer dialogue among the political representatives of the two disconnected Czech and Slovak communities, within the framework provided by the multilayered federal system. Like in the Belgian case, it was thought to counterbalance the lack of inter-communal societal linkage at the bottom through the establishment of consociational structures of government at the top. I labelled this process as *belgianization à la tchécoslovaque*. All in all, the comparative analysis of the two cases proved to be a valid interpretative tool to better recognize the social, institutional, and political factors which

**Table 1. Belgium vs. Czechoslovakia: Comparative Assessment**

Cases	Conditions				Effect
	Divided and fragmented society	Formal/substantial consociative arrangements	Community-based party systems	Post-totalitarian heritage	
B	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
CSR	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

jeopardized the attempts to create a consociational Czechoslovakia.

In light of the aforementioned Lijphart’s arguments, despite a number of similarities between the two countries both in the characteristics of the institutional solutions adopted by the pro-unity elites and in the degree of societal fragmentation along ethno-national lines, mirrored by the development of distinct communal party systems, four major factors emerge as essential for explaining the failure of the pro-unity attempts. All these factors come out as consequences of the country’s post-communist heritage [See Table 1]. These may be typified as follows: *First*, the no

longer on paper ‘overequal’ provisions of the 1968 constitution adopted under the communist regime powerfully undermined the efforts performed by pro-unity elites, given the lack of a functional linkage between the ‘constitutional providers’ and the ‘users of the Constitution’. Havel’s disproportionate loyalty to the principle of legal continuity did the rest. *Second*, the still embryonic and unstable party system(s) characterized by ‘all nation’ umbrella movements and proto-parties proved to be unable to govern ‘across’ the ethno-linguistic cleavages and to develop a consociational inter-communal platform to overcome the divisions in the society. *Third* and consequentially, the rise of Slovak nationalism from the ashes of the communist regime was encouraged and functionally driven by Slovak elites primarily to counter-balance Klaus’ economic reforms. This behaviour created a hardly-breakable holistic linkage between the symbols (National question) and the issues (Slovakia’s economic backwardness) and jeopardized any further cooperative attempt. *Fourth*, the timing of post-1989 liberalization strongly impacted the final outcome. Given the constitutional impasse, the attempt to democratize the country and to decentralize its unstable structures at the same time appeared to be too ambitious for new Czech and Slovak elites. The process of nation(s)-building did inexorably jeopardize the restructuration of the state.

I wish to conclude by quoting Cox and Frankland as they nicely summarize the reasons which determined the failure of Czechoslovak consensualism: by definition, consensual elites hold a common belief in the desirability of institutional relations, and their disagreements center around specific decisions (policies) rather than the rules for making decisions (institutions). Conflictual elites, however, lack this common belief in the salience of existing institutions and center their disagreements on the institutional forms instead. Elite consensus may well be an important *precondition* for a successful federation<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Cox and Frankland, “The Federal State,” 88.

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**Appendix 1. Belgium and Czechoslovakia: developmental paths of the two polities**

		<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Czechoslovakia</b>
<b>Initial environment (t0)</b>	<i>Late state formation (Rokkan)</i>	Kingdom of Belgium (1831)	First CSR (1920)
	<i>Artificial merge of divided societies (language &amp;</i>	Walloons + Flemish (+ Germans)	Czechs + Slovaks (+ Germans + Hungarians)
	<i>Economic imbalances</i>	Industrial Wallonia (Brussels) vs.	Industrial Czechia vs. agricultural
	<i>Political / institutional predominance of one unit within the centralist structure of the state</i>	French-speaking community	Czechs
<b>Political consequences (t1)</b>	<i>Development of anti-centralist political elites (Rokkan)</i>	Flemish autonomist movements (VU and VB)	Slovak nationalist movements (H'SLS and SNS)
<b>Restructured environment (t2)</b>	<i>Restructuration of the institutional setting towards higher decentralization</i>	Pact between the Belgians (1970), Egmont Pact (1977),	Košice Agreement (1948), constitutional
	<i>Development of intra-communal party systems</i>	Party split along ethno-linguistic lines (1970s)	Party split along ethno-linguistic lines (1989-1990)
	<i>Overconsensual constitutional arrangements</i>	Consensual bicameralism + 3 regions + 3 communities	Consensual bicameralism + Czech and Slovak National Councils

## Appendix 2. Ethno-linguistic cleavages and Electoral Competition

### Political Pillars and Linguistic Divisions in Belgium

		Party Families			
		Socialists (Workers Party of Belgium)	Liberals (Liberal Party of Belgium)	Catholics (Confessional Catholic Party)	Outsiders
Linguistic Communitie s	French	PS	MR	CDh	FN
	Dutch	SP.a	VLD	CD&V	VB
	German	SP	PPF	CSP	PDB

SOURCE: The Federal Parliament of Belgium [<http://www.fed-parl.be/index.html>].  
 LEGEND: Socialist Party (French: *Parti Socialiste*, PS), Reformist Movement (French: *Mouvement Réformateur*, MR), Christian Democrats (French: *Centre Démocrate Humaniste*, Cdh), National Front (French: *Front National*, FN), Socialist Party-Another Way (Dutch: *Socialistische Partij-Anders*, SP.a), Flemish Liberal and Democrats (Dutch: *Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten*, VLD), Christian Democratic and Flemish Party (Dutch: *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams partij*, CD&V), Flemish Interst (Dutch: *Vlaams Belang*, VB), Socialist Party (German: *Sozialistische Partei*, SP), Party for Freedom and Progress (German: *Partei für Freiheit und Fortschritt*, PFF), Christian Social Party (German: *Christlich-Soziale Partei*, CSP), Party of the German speaking Belgians (German: *Partei der deutschsprachigen Belgier*, PDB).  
 NOTE: The names of the pre-1968 unitary parties are listed in parenthesis.

### Federal Elections in Czechoslovakia

	1990				1992			
	Czech Republic		Slovak Republic		Czech Republic		Slovak Republic	
Party	% of Votes	Seats	% of Votes	Seats	% of Votes	Seats	% of Votes	Seats
OF	53	68	-	-	-	-	-	-
VPN	-	-	33	19	-	-	-	-
KSČ	13	15	14	8	-	-	-	-
KDU	9	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
SNS	-	-	11	6	-	-	9	6

<b>Others (1990)</b>	8	9	30	17	-	-	-	-
<b>ODS-KDU</b>	-	-	-	-	40	55	-	-
<b>OH</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>HZDS</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	34	24
<b>KSČM</b>	-	-	-	-	14	19	-	-
<b>SDL</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	10
<b>Others (1992)</b>	-	-	-	-	21	25	18	30

SOURCES: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) [<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>]; Carol Skalnik-Leff and Susan B. Mikula, "Institutionalizing Party Systems in Multiethnic States: Integration and Ethnic Segmentation in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1992," *Slavic Review* 61 (2: 2002), 309. LEGEND: Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Czech: *Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM), Party of the Democratic Left (Slovak: *Strana demokratickej ľavice*, SDL). NOTE: The other abbreviations of the Czech and Slovak parties listed in the table can be retrieved from the text.