Social scientists accept that Austria after the Second World War fits the pattern of consociationalism, a form of democracy that ensures representation for all segments in deeply divided societies. Many also contend that the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, after the fall of communism, and its successors, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, exhibit consociational features. Nevertheless, few consider the roots of consociationalism in these states, and those who have done so have presented only cursory explanations or erred in applying the theory. In reality, consociational arrangements began to develop in the Habsburg Monarchy, during the latter half of the 19th century. Consociational democracy also existed in Austria from 1918 until the middle of the 1920s and in Czechoslovakia from 1918 until the 1938 Munich Agreement. When viewing these historical cases, many scholars mistakenly see certain political traits as failures of democracy; in fact, they are means of ensuring inclusion and political compromise. After presenting a brief overview of the consociational model, this article will consider three cases of consociationalism in Central Europe: the progress of Imperial Austria toward democracy, the Czechoslovak First Republic as a consociational state, and Slovakia's democratic development within interwar Czechoslovakia.

The political scientist Arend Lijphart (born 1936) developed the consociational model in reaction to two long-standing but insufficiently examined themes in the comparative study of democracy: first, the claim that social homogeneity is a prerequisite for stable democracy; and second, the largely unquestioned equation of democracy with majority rule. By examining political institutions and practices in...
his native Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s, and by expanding this analysis to include the Austrian Second Republic, Belgium, and Switzerland, Lijphart argued that plural societies with segmental cleavages—those societies in which parties and private associations tend to be organized along linguistic, ethnic, religious, or ideological lines—can build stable democracies. He and other political scientists have applied the theory fruitfully to a number of such plural societies, including Colombia, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia between 1989 and 1992, India, Lebanon, Luxembourg, and Malaysia, while some scholars have identified consociational characteristics in nondemocratic states, such as Bolivia, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, the Ottoman Empire, Paraguay, the Soviet Union, Uganda, and Yugoslavia.\(^3\) Scholars have used the consociational model to assess a growing number of other political systems, including those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Canada, Congo, the European Union, Fiji, Gambia, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kashmir, Kenya, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Montenegro, Netherlands Antilles, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Republika Srpska, Rwanda, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela.\(^4\) Recent studies even have begun to apply consociational theory to city-level politics in Aceh, Baghdad, Belfast, Brussels, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kirkuk, and Sara-
Most important, in the last decades, such deeply divided societies as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, and post-apartheid South Africa have adopted consociational democratic solutions.

To curtail conflict, consociationalism ideally includes representatives of every major group in the decision-making process, while it excludes from consideration particularly divisive issues, such as language, education, and religion. It accomplishes these tasks through four vehicles. First is the grand coalition. Although the term conventionally refers to cabinets involving all of the major political parties, the defining feature of a Lijphartian grand coalition is that it includes members of all of the major groups or segmental cleavages in a given country. Lijphartian grand coalitions, therefore, may be grand coalitions in the conventional sense, but they also may involve alternative arrangements, such as mandatory representation in cabinets for major linguistic or other groups, a system of advisory councils outside the cabinet, or the allocation of the presidency or premiership to members of specified groups. In this article, a partial grand coalition indicates governments that nearly conform to the Lijphartian grand coalition model but exclude one of the major groups and perhaps some less important groups. Second is segmental autonomy, which might include territorial federalism, autonomous but publicly funded schools for each group, and separate personal laws concerning marriage, divorce, child custody, child adoption, and inheritance. Third is proportionality, which refers to the fair distribution of seats among groups through the use of electoral formulas, districts with exclusive nominating rights for minority parties, reserved seats for minority representatives, overrepresented minorities, or artificial parity in awarding mandates. It often extends to the proportional allocation of civil service jobs and public funds. Finally, the minority or mutual veto empowers members of minority groups to block legislation that threatens their interests. This often is an informal practice, and in well-functioning consociational democracies, its actual use is rare.

Lijphart listed nine conditions that favor consociationalism, none of which are either necessary or sufficient for its success. In other words, it is possible for consociationalism to fail, even if all nine conditions are met, and it is possible, although unlikely, for it to succeed without meeting any of them. The first two are the most important: 1) the absence of a unified majority based on ethnicity, religion, or ideology; and 2) the lack of large socioeconomic disparities among the groups. There are seven remaining favorable conditions: 3) the presence of a relatively small number of

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groups; 4) the existence of groups that are "roughly the same size"; 5) a population that is relatively small; 6) the presence of "external dangers" that "promote internal unity" to stave off occupation or partition; 7) a series of "overarching loyalties", such as a unifying national identity or a monarch, that can appeal to all segments of the society; 8) a concentration of groups in geographic areas that facilitates territorial federalism; and 9) "traditions of compromise and accommodation" that historically bind together the various segments in order to govern the state.\footnote{Lijphart: Democracy in Plural Societies ch. 3 (cf. fn. 2). – Lijphart: The Puzzle of Indian Democracy 262-263 (cf. fn. 2).}

The 1867 Ausgleich made the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy two distinct constitutional entities, Imperial Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary, which shared a common monarch and a number of joint institutions. There were common ministries of foreign affairs, the military, and joint finances. Otherwise, each half of the Dual Monarchy had its own cabinet, with individual interior, finance, and other ministries, and each had its own legislature – the Imperial Austrian Reichsrat and the Hungarian Országyûlûs. In the Austrian half of the monarchy, significant restrictions on democracy resulted from several factors: dualism itself, since the Reichsrat lacked jurisdiction over Austro-Hungarian joint interests; the executive, who was unelected and formally unaccountable; the upper house, which also was unelected; and the 17 provincial governments, which handled specific policy areas in a federalist arrangement and had diets that never fully adopted universal manhood suffrage. Although Austria did not become a democracy at that time, a series of electoral reforms gradually moved its representative institutions in that direction. As of 1907, universal manhood suffrage applied to the lower house of parliament, and voter turnout remained high in elections, which involved competition among numerous, ideologically diverse mass parties.\footnote{In the decade before the First World War, the contrast between Imperial Austria, which was beginning to display features of consociationalism, and the Kingdom of Hungary is worth emphasizing. In Hungary, ongoing restrictions on voting rights and the absence of federalism helped concentrate power in the hands of a Hungarian-speaking elite that increasingly pursued a policy of Magyarization toward the non-Hungarian minorities.}

With its population of Czechs, Germans, Italians, Poles, Rusyns, Slovenes, and Ukrainians, along with smaller ethnic groups, including Croats, Jews, Roma, Romanians, and Serbs, Austria was very much a plural society. Political parties, public organizations, and private associations were divided along segmental lines. Several favorable conditions for consociationalism were present, including the absence of an ethnic or ideological majority. Most of the population was Catholic; however, ethnic and ideological factors prevented Catholicism from acting as a unifying political force. Imperial Austria also had a rough balance in group size, socioeconomic interests that cut across ethnic lines, and a common tradition of Habsburg rule. Certain other factors were ambiguous or negative: external threats were both unifying, in that they could encourage loyalty to the dynasty, and divisive, such as irredentism that inflamed nationalist tensions; a history of both conflict and cooperation among the political elite; a large number of groups; some geographically dispersed groups;
and a relatively large population, which in 1910 was approximately 28,572,000. In short, although conditions were not ideal, Imperial Austria had good potential for successfully adopting consociational politics.

The Imperial Austrian system of government gradually approximated all four characteristics of consociationalism. The distribution of parliamentary mandates by ethnic group was increasingly proportional, and after the earliest electoral reforms, no group had a majority. Civil service employment also was increasingly proportional. Language controversies notwithstanding, bureaucrats communicated with the local populations in their own languages. Precedents existed for partitioning universities along ethnic lines, and the language of primary and secondary education increasingly corresponded to local language use. These developments, along with the ongoing segregation of organizations, furthered segmental autonomy.

The structure of the executive and parliamentary procedure provided a de facto minority veto by allowing small groups to obstruct legislative action. One colorful illustration of this is the famous Badeni crisis, in which violent obstruction by German elected representatives led to the repeal of the controversial language ordinances for Bohemia and the downfall of the government of Count Kasimir Felix Badeni (1846-1929). While the crisis was hardly a model of democratic parliamentary politics and did much to harm the parliament’s long-term legitimacy, it demonstrated how a legislative minority could block policies that harmed the interests of the group they represented. Such action also could prevent the imperial government from bypassing the legislature in order to enact certain policies. Furthermore, although Imperial cabinets never embraced the ideal of the grand coalition, at least in the strict sense, they tended to include representatives from the three largest ethnic groups – Czechs, Germans, and Poles – and a diverse cross section of parties. The main exception was the Social Democrats, but grand coalitions frequently exclude important parties. The threat of obstruction required that governments maintain the tacit backing of a supermajority, thereby significantly broadening their effective base within the legislature.10

Even stronger parallels to consociationalism occurred in the regional interethnic compromises in the crown lands of Moravia, Bukovina, and Galicia as well as the city of České Budějovice, although the latter two never took effect because of the First World War. These were part of a general trend, since there was talk of similar

9 For example, Austrian grand coalitions, for many years after the Second World War, included the Social Democratic Party (SPO) and the conservative Austrian People’s Party (OVP), but not the national-liberal Austrian Freedom Party (FPO). Similarly, although Switzerland’s so-called magic formula has required inclusion of the four largest parties in the cabinet, the specific parties it included have varied over time.

compromises in the Crown Land of Bohemia and the city of Olomouc as well as in
Bosnia and Herzegovina, the administration of which Austria and Hungary shared.
These compromises typically involved arrangements to secure the representation of
all major ethnic groups through Wahlkataster (registers of voters), each with its own
mandates in the provincial diets or town councils. Minorities typically were over-
represented, enabling them to block legislation that threatened their interests. For
example, the 1905 Moravian Compromise designated 73 seats in the diet for Czechs,
40 for Germans, 30 for provincial aristocrats and great landowners, 6 for the cham-
bers of commerce members, and 2 for high ecclesiastical figures. Czechs, who were
in the majority, had less than half the seats, while Germans, constituting about 28 per-
cent of the population, were overrepresented in the diet, since Germans predomi-
nated among the provincial aristocrats, great landowners, chambers of commerce
members, and high ecclesiastics. The reorganized provincial executive committee
included 4 Czechs, 2 Germans, and 2 great landowners. Furthermore, there were
separate school boards, at the provincial and local levels, and school children
received an education in their own languages; however, Moravia, unlike Bohemia,
did not have separate Czech and German universities.

These reforms, as well as those in the other provinces, may have been consocia-
tional, but they did not create completely democratic systems. Electoral reforms
between 1867 and 1907 introduced universal manhood suffrage on the parliamentary
level. By contrast, while the provincial diets gradually expanded suffrage, they
retained the older system of curial voting, whereby major socio-economic groups
each had a specified number of seats, a system that heavily overrepresented capital-
ists and great landowners. While many provinces eventually added an additional
curia, elected through universal manhood suffrage, they still retained the traditional
curiae. Furthermore, the Kaiser continued to appoint both Landeshauptmänner
(provincial governors) and imperial ministers.

Historians’ accounts of the Austrian Parliament have been largely negative.
Nevertheless, an explosion of parliamentary, provincial, and party histories in recent
decades has led to a more nuanced view of the Reichsrat and a greater respect for its
accomplishments. Criticisms of the Austrian parliament often reflect an implicit
Westminsterian or majoritarian bias. Meanwhile, unfamiliarity with the political sci-
ence literature on consociationalism has led historians to misinterpret consociation-
al elements in both the overall political system and in the various regional comprom-
ises.

Soloman Wank (1930-2014) presented several commonly cited criticisms of the
Moravian and other compromises: they were the result of peculiar local conditions
and were inapplicable elsewhere; they were not actual compromises but rather a sep-
oration of groups; and they were undemocratic because they consolidated the priv-
ileged position of the aristocracy and the ethnic minorities, thereby blocking hopes
for fundamental change.11 The first of these objections is problematic, given the
broad range of conditions under which consociationalism is said to be feasible and

11 Wank, Soloman: Some Reflections on the Habsburg Empire and Its Legacy in the National-
given Lijphart’s insistence that none of his nine favorable conditions are strictly necessary. One cannot rule out the possibility that such compromises might have worked in Bohemia or elsewhere, and their spread suggests that they had a broad appeal. The second objection is actually a basic premise of consociationalism because the apparent loss of fraternity inherent in the compromises is the price for stable legislative politics. Even the critics concede that they did just that. Finally, the third objection is actually more concerned with oligarchy than with consociationalism. It is reasonable to suppose that the gradual expansion of the suffrage, on all levels of Austrian politics, might have continued, had war not intervened. Further, successful provincial oligarchic compromises fostered a tradition of elite accommodation, a favorable condition that could have facilitated future, more democratic consociational developments. Finally, the overrepresentation of Germans and other minorities is a standard consociational mechanism for defending minority interests.

An additional set of criticisms arises from a growing historical literature on national flexibility in the Habsburg Monarchy, a literature that challenges the “realism of the nation” by examining such phenomena as national indifference, multilingualism, dynastic loyalism, and individuals changing national identities or holding multiple ones simultaneously. Drawing on and reacting to that literature, critics of the ethnicizing of politics are particularly concerned with the negative consequences of establishing national Wahlkataster and segregated schools. According to this line of criticism, not only did these policies falsely presume a population divided along clearly defined national lines, but they also involved a significant intrusion of gov-

government into private life, in order to determine the correct identity of individuals, thereby setting a dangerous precedent for ethnic group membership trumping citizenship.

In arguing that consociationalism “increases the plural nature of an already plural society”, consociational theory acknowledges the somewhat artificial character of group distinctions that, nevertheless, promote democratic stability. Critics raise important concerns about the possible consequences, for ordinary citizens, of such arrangements, and this, in turn, suggests possible new areas for research, specifically into the question of whether nationalist abuses of consociational arrangements were unique to Imperial Austria. Even so, scholars must not overlook Austria’s important contributions to practical politics. Nations may not be real, but nationalists are a reality, and any means of guiding their political activities in a less conflictual and a more democratic direction is worth taking seriously. Unknowingly, Austrian politicians experimented with policies that have become standard tools for promoting democratic stability in divided societies decades before political scientists even recognized or named them.

Building on Imperial Austria’s proto-consociational legacy, interwar Czechoslovakia evolved as a consociational democracy. The Czechoslovak First Republic had 18 governments, in its two decades of existence, including 3 bureaucratic cabinets. Mixed cabinets of politicians and experts were the rule, all governments were coalitions, and no government lived out its term. German parties, which represented 23 per cent of the population, refused to participate in the parliament until 1920; however, once they had entered the cabinet in 1926, they remained a part of all governing coalitions until the end of the republic. While these and other features of the Czechoslovak political scene, during the 1920s and 1930s, have been baffling for many, even for a few political actors at the time, they do not provide evidence that the republic’s democracy was inherently faulty. Instead, they are manifestations of consociationalism.

Czechoslovakia met all nine of Lijphart’s favorable conditions. First, there was no unified majority because the multinational population included Czechs (50 per cent) and Slovaks (16 per cent), Germans (23 per cent), and small percentages of

15 Lijphart: Democracy in Plural Societies 42 (cf. fn. 2).
16 The consociational literature already addressed many concerns these critics raised. Specifically, a general consensus has developed among political scientists in favor of “liberal consociationalism”, which allows individuals to self-select their group membership, as opposed to “corporate consociationalism”, in which ascribed traits define fixed groups. See McEvoy/O’Leary: Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places 27-28 (cf. fn. 2) – McGarry/O’Leary: Iraq’s Constitution (cf. fn.4). Both defenders and critics of Imperial Austria’s regional compromises can benefit from the broader perspective that the consociational literature provides.
17 Although Imperial Austria predates the consociational model, a number of its intellectuals, in particular the Austro-Marxists, foreshadowed important consociational themes through their theory of “personal autonomy”. See Lijphart, Arend: Introduction: Developments in Power Sharing Theory. In: Lijphart: Thinking about Democracy 3-22, here 4 (cf. fn. 2).
Hungarians, Rusyns, Jews, Poles, and Roma. There was no predominant ideological tendency, although socialism, agrarianism, and Christian socialism attracted the greatest amount of support. In terms of religion, Catholics formed 74 per cent of the population; however, even though most were Czechs and Slovaks, they did not act with one voice, and many Catholics, especially Czechs, were indifferent about religion. Second, despite the fact that the Bohemian Lands were far more industrialized and wealthier than the eastern provinces, the living standards in the east, when viewed as a whole, improved in the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, the segments in the country had no great disparities in socioeconomic status, since there were similarities in the living standards of industrial workers and agriculturalists, both of whom formed the majority of the population. Notwithstanding that Germans were overrepresented as owners of industry and finance, there were plenty of Czech industrialists, financiers, and large landowners, and some even were Slovak, Hungarian, or Jewish. Third, there were not many segments, when one considers that there were three main ethnic groups, two main religions, and three predominant ideologies. Throughout the 1920s and well into the 1930s, there were fewer than ten major political parties, representing five different political currents: socialism, agrarianism, and Christian socialism, the strongest, as well as communism and the conservative liberalism of the wealthy. The success of the anti-system Sudeten German party in the 1935 elections enabled German nationalism to stake a claim as a major political current, with only one seat less than the Republican (Agrarian) Party, but it had no allies with whom to form a governing coalition. Fourth, the most important segments of the society were reasonably balanced. Half the country was Czech, while the other half was a mixture of ethnic groups, including Slovaks; nonetheless, the common ethnic origins of the Czechs and Slovaks did not guarantee unity, despite the ideology of Czechoslovakism. In terms of religion, no group – Catholics, Protestants, those who were not religious, and those who were religiously indifferent – had an advantage in numbers. Even though the 1920 elections gave the Social Democrats a significant plurality of seats in the National Assembly, after the 1925 election, the party with a plurality generally had an advantage of only a few seats. Fifth, the country’s population was small, in comparison to some of its neighbours, yet it was larger than Europe’s other consociational states. Sixth, the republic had its

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18 There is a large body of literature, which is too lengthy to present here, that considers the ethnic groups of Czechoslovakia. Examinations of the relationships among Czechs, Germans, and Jews in Prague, for example, has a long history that began shortly after the Second World War, with such works as Eisner, Paul: Franz Kafka and Prague. New York 1950. – It continues with the excellent contribution by Koeltzsch, Ines: Geteilte Kulturen. Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag (1918-1938). München 2012 (Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum 124).

19 Statistická ročenka Republiky československé, 1935 [Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1935]. Praha 1935, Table II-7, 7 (ethnicity), and Table II-10, 8 (religion).

share of external threats. Of the five states that bordered Czechoslovakia, only Romania never claimed any of its territory. Seventh, Czechoslovakia had overarching loyalties, since economic, religious, and ideological divisions cut across ethnic lines. The president until 1935, Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850-1937), was, in many respects, a surrogate monarch who gained the respect of all ethnic groups. Antonín Švehla (1870-1933), the Republican leader, was another adroit politician who served to unite divergent interests. Occasionally, ethnic origin and shared religion bound together Czechs and Slovaks. Civic nationalism, at times, prompted ethnic groups to support coalition governments, certain policies, and economic prosperity. Even sport, such as the renowned soccer World Cup team of 1934, cut across ethnic lines. Eighth, despite some mixed areas, the ethnic, ideological, economic, and to some extent, religious segments were concentrated geographically. Ninth, elite cooperation was common. In politics, as in economics, compromise and accommodation were multifaceted. During the First Republic, various political parties entered governing coalitions and cooperated in the legislature, while leading politicians, of many colors, met informally, and those who cooperated with the president gathered in a grouping known as the Hrad. These were extensions of the sort of cooperation that existed among the parties, despite their disputes in the press, before the First World War and even during the war, when the parties formed groupings to establish common responses to policies and to present various demands. Finally, many political leaders also enjoyed long-term personal friendships that predated the creation of the republic.

Czechoslovakia exhibited all four components of consociationalism, the first of which is the grand coalition. Throughout the interwar years, the most common coalition type, accounting for 13 out of 15 political cabinets, was some form of Lijphartian grand coalition, that is, a broad coalition that provided wide ethnic, ideological, and denominational diversity. The first 6 cabinets of this type, beginning in 1921, were partial Lijphartian grand coalitions because, even though Czechs and Slovaks in the major parties always held ministerial posts, the governments did not contain representatives from the important German segment. Then, from 1926 to 1929, the cabinets included the so-called activist German parties, and from 1927 to 1929, they included the nationalist and autonomist Hlinka Slovak People’s Party (HSĽS), but they did not involve the socialists. The following seven cabinets, between 1929 and 1938, were full Lijphartian grand coalitions, with Czechs and Slovaks in the statewide parties (despite the departure of the HSĽS from the government in 1929) as well as Germans. The total length of time for both types of

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21 The 1934 FIFA World Cup team, which lost in the finals to Italy, included 18 Czechs, 2 Slovaks, 1 Hungarian, and 1 German, who was the noted player Ehrenfried Patzel (1904-2004).
22 The two other cabinets, in 1919-1920, were part of the Red-Green Coalition of socialists and Republicans. The second, incidentally, was a minority coalition that depended on the cooperation of parties to the right in the legislature.
23 The Hlinka Slovak People’s Party received several invitations to join governments in the 1920s but never did so. The party, once simply known as the Slovak People’s Party, eventually took on the name of its founder, Andrej Hlinka (1864-1938).
Lijphartian coalition cabinets was impressive: they covered 15 years of the republic’s existence of 20 years, roughly half for the partial and half for the full Lijphartian grand coalitions. It is apparent that the politicians felt comfortable working with the consociational grand coalition model and strove to strengthen it, even in the worst situation. For example, after the German activist parties had lost their constituencies to the fascist Sudeten German Party, in the second half of the 1930s, the coalitions still always included one or two of the German activist parties. Furthermore, over time, the governments not only were regularly full Lijphartian grand coalitions but also were more commonly oversized, that is, they included at least one more party than they needed to form a majority in the legislature.

A Lijphartian grand coalition extends beyond governing coalitions to include other official and unofficial links among the segments, as in the case of interwar Czechoslovakia. In the 1920s, politicians cooperated through the extraparliamentary and extraconstitutional Pětka (Committee of Five, 1920-1925) and its successors, the Šestka (Committee of Six, 1925-1926), and the Osmička (Committee of Eight, 1926-1929). These committees drew together the leaders of the governing parties, and they had parallel institutions in the leadership and committees of the National Assembly that, along with strict party discipline, made certain there was legislative support for government measures. Even after socialist demands brought about the end of these informal committees, the party leaders found it necessary to meet, in a similar fashion, in the Political Committees (1929-1938) that were part of each cabinet.

Czechoslovakia was not federal, and no area was formally autonomous, but there were mechanisms to recognize regional diversity, thereby assuring a measure of segmental autonomy, consociationalism’s second component. Legislation provided for the use of minority languages in the bureaucracy and schools. Electoral districts guaranteed that ethnic groups had representation in the legislature. Quite significant was that, beginning in 1918, the Ministry with Full Power for the Administration of Slovakia, which dealt with Slovak affairs, the state Land Office, which carried out the land reform, and the Ministry of Schools had branches that operated in Bratislava. Ruthenia had an appointed governor and vice governor, and like Slovakia, it had branch ministries in Uzhhorod. Then, as of July 1927, Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia had uniform administrations that consisted of government-appointed provincial presidents as well as assemblies, with Prague appointing one-third of the representatives and the inhabitants electing the remaining two-thirds. Some of the branch ministries remained in Bratislava and Uzhhorod. Finally, in 1937, the government devised plans for making Ruthenia autonomous, but it only took the initial steps toward that end.24

Czechoslovakia had formal and informal means of ensuring proportionality. Voting districts gave ethnic groups a proportional share of representatives in the legislature – Czechs with about 50 per cent of the seats, Germans with about 25 per cent.

24 Národní archiv v Praze [National Archive in Prague, NA], Předsednictvo ministerské rady [Presidium of the Ministerial Council, PMR], microfilm 8195, inventory number 2962, carton 4131, Protokol ze schůzí ministerské rady [Protocol of the Meeting of the Ministerial Council], meeting 41, 19 March 1937.
cent, Slovaks with about 17 per cent, and the remaining 8 per cent for the other minorities. The parties allotted the leadership positions in the National Assembly, according to the election results and in a way that further satisfied ethnic, ideological, and socioeconomic interests. Proportional representation of competing ideological groups was apparent in the parties represented in the legislature, all of the coalition governments, and in the dominance the major parties had over certain ministries and their staffs. Even though no formal procedures existed to guarantee positions for the minorities, Czechs and Slovaks did not exclusively control the bureaucracy. Before the peak of the Sudeten German crisis, the cabinet of Prime Minister Milan Hodža (1878-1944) agreed to employ more minorities and to provide minority firms with more government contracts, especially in minority districts. The officer corps and ministries of health, social welfare, justice, and railways all contained minorities. Schools were proportional, a result of the language law, and schools in Slovakia generally taught in Slovak, even though the students would have found Czech to be intelligible. At times, respect for minority concerns came in other forms, such as the state’s 1925 recognition of two additional religious holidays, 5 June, for commemorating Sts. Cyril (827 or 828-869) and Methodius (815 to 820-885), who appealed primarily to Catholics, and 6 June, to celebrate the religious reformer Jan Hus (c. 1372-1415), who had inspired the Hussite and Czech Brethren Churches.

In 1922, in Znojmo, Czechs and Germans forged an agreement for representation on the city council that reduced interethnic tensions, an echo of the regional interethnic compromises that had emerged during the Habsburg Monarchy. Even many civic groups, including certain sport clubs, reserved leadership places for minorities. Of course, instituting more proportionality guarantees was one way that the republic could have strengthened its consociational character.

Finally, while the country had no formal mutual or minority veto, such an arrangement functioned within the framework of elite cooperation, including the extraparliamentary and extraconstitutional committees. To overcome roadblocks, resulting from tacit mutual vetoes, logrolling allowed political parties to back each other’s proposals. The mutual veto was apparent in March 1921, with the resignation of Karel Engliš (1880-1961), as finance minister, owing to the objections of Alois Rašín (1867-1961), the influential National Democrat, about Engliš’s handling of the economy.

An example of logrolling was the June 1926 approval of higher agricul-

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25 NA, PMR, microfilm 8195, inventory number 2960, carton 4131, Protokol ze schůzí ministerské rady [Protocol of the Meeting of the Ministerial Council], meeting 38, 18 February 1937, item 7, 18-19, “Otázky menšinové” [Minority Questions].
26 On national days in interwar Czechoslovakia, see the article of Andrea Talabér in this issue of Bohemia. – For the immediate political repercussions of the politicians’ actions on 6 June 1925, see Miller, Daniel E.: Forging Political Compromise. Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party 1918-1933. Pittsburgh 1999 (Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies) 140.
27 Johannes Florian Kontny’s research on this topic resulted in his study “Securing Political Rule in the Periphery? The Transformation of Municipalism in Eupen and Znojmo/Znaim After the First World War (1918-1922)”, which appears in this issue of Bohemia.
tural tariffs, with the support of the clerical parties, in return for an increase in the state salary, or *congrua*, for the clergy, which the Republicans backed.  

The consociational model also explains Slovakia’s position within the Czechoslovak First Republic. Contrary to the interpretations of most historians, a debilitating clash among the centralists, who supported a unitary state, the nationalists, who demanded autonomy, and the minorities, which the nation-state had estranged, was not characteristic of Slovak politics. In fact, Slovak centralists, nationalists, and minorities cooperated to set policy within Slovakia and to safeguard Slovak interests, within the larger context of the Czechoslovak state.

An atmosphere of cooperation existed among the Slovaks from 1918 onwards. Representatives of all the prewar Slovak parties signed the Martin Declaration of 31 October 1918, which endorsed Slovakia’s incorporation into the Czechoslovak state. They then proceeded to form a single fraction in the Revolutionary National Assembly, while interparty cooperation was also the norm in more than 300 local national councils, which had emerged in the wake of the Habsburg Monarchy’s dissolution. From 1920 onwards, an array of competing parties appeared to have replaced interparty cooperation, yet they all continued to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state.

The benefits the Slovaks accrued from their incorporation into Czechoslovakia bolstered the spirit of consensus. The introduction of universal suffrage enabled the Slovaks to occupy the vast majority of the elected local government posts in Slovakia, to secure all of the senior official appointments in Slovakia, such as sheriffs and high court judges, and to obtain approximately one-fifth of the seats in the new Czechoslovak National Assembly. In addition, the majority of schools in Slovakia saw their language of instruction changed from Hungarian to Slovak (rather than

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With their augmented freedoms of speech and assembly, Slovaks experienced the emergence of new Slovak political and cultural institutions and the expansion of existing ones as well as an explosion of Slovak publications and participation in mass parties.\(^{32}\)

The presence of prominent Slovaks, occasionally even nationalist Slovaks, as ministers in each of the governing coalitions throughout the interwar period, and the fact that a Slovak was prime minister from 1935 to 1938 reinforced broad and enduring support for Czechoslovakia’s preservation. Moreover, the Slovaks’ presence and influence in the bureaucracy increased, over the course of the republic’s existence. By the 1930s onwards, the overwhelming majority of officials in Slovakia came from the local population, and the number of Slovaks working in government ministries in Prague expanded exponentially.\(^{33}\)

The Slovaks wielded a de facto veto over government legislation, and Slovak pressure had a significant impact on Czechoslovak policy making; it influenced the land reform legislation in 1919; it forced the government to abandon its policy of colonization on the great estates; it impeded ambitions to separate the church and state; it obstructed the unification of the two separate law codes of the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia; it blocked plans to centralize the minting of coinage, in order to protect a mint in Slovakia; it made certain that Slovak, rather than Czech, was the language of instruction in Slovak schools; it checked the pro-Soviet tendencies that occasionally surfaced in Czechoslovak foreign policy; and it encouraged the government to adopt a protectionist trade policy that benefitted Slovak farmers but crippled the exports of Czech manufacturers.\(^{34}\)

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Throughout the interwar period, the Slovaks possessed a degree of political autonomy that many historians and social scientists underestimate. The staffs of the Slovak National Council and the Ministry with Full Power for the Administration of Slovakia were exclusively Slovak and came from across the political spectrum. From 1923 to 1928, Slovakia had six regions, each of which had a Slovak sheriff and a largely elected assembly, four of which never experienced an occasion when a single party had a majority of delegates. Thus, Slovak control of local government and interparty cooperation already was the norm in Slovakia in the 1920s.35

In 1927, the Czechoslovak National Assembly passed a sweeping reform of local government, which came into effect in 1928 and created four regional offices in Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia. Each had a president and an assembly of elected and appointed members, which had legislative powers equivalent to a government ministry and oversaw the activities of the presidents. Historians in Slovakia and elsewhere have downplayed this development as, at most, a positive step. They have insisted that, throughout the interwar period, Czechoslovakia remained a centralized, unitary state and that the clash between Slovak nationalists and advocates of direct rule from Prague fractured Slovak politics.36

Almost alone among scholars, Róbert Letz (born 1967) asserted that the Slovak Provincial Assembly’s establishment produced a “consensual effort” among Slovak politicians...
“to assist the economic and cultural development of Slovakia, regardless of their political persuasion”. 37

In the Slovak Provincial Assembly, which oversaw the work of the Provincial Office, no party ever obtained a majority of the 38 elected seats. The 18 delegates the central government appointed came from both government and opposition parties. The rationale for their selection was to take advantage of their technical abilities and to maintain a delicate ideological balance. In the end, roughly half the seats in the assembly and precisely half the seats on the various subcommittees that drafted policy were in the hands of parties that supported the governing coalitions in Prague, while the remainder went to a range of opposition parties, including representatives of the Hungarian, German, Jewish, and Rusyn minorities. 38 In this sense, the Slovak Provincial Assembly operated on the principles of a Lijphartian grand coalition.

Interparty cooperation was the norm, resulting in debate that was of a high quality and usually free from political grandstanding. Although the president of the Provincial Office had the power to issue decrees, comparable to the heads of all central government ministries, he ensured that his decisions had the input and support of all parties, whose representatives scrutinized and debated all proposals. For example, although the Provincial Office had no revenue-generating powers, each year it drafted a budget and negotiated the total outlay with the central government in Prague. The draft budget then went to the Provincial Assembly for deliberation, which provided an opportunity for the assembly’s members to engage in a wide-ranging debate that touched on all policy areas of the central and regional governments. Representatives raised and addressed complaints, put forth amendments, and voted on the constituent parts of the budget and the budget as a whole.

Every budget obtained the approval of the majority of the elected members of the Provincial Assembly, including representatives of the opposition parties. That backing usually was overwhelming. Allowing the opposition parties to help draft the budget, extract concessions, and exert a de facto veto, all behind closed doors, cemented broad support for the budget. 39 This arrangement broke down on only

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39 Pocisk, Jozef: Funkcia krajinského prezidenta a krátké medailónky osobností úradu [The
one occasion. In 1933, the leading opposition party, the HSLS, voted against the budget to protest the arrest of its supporters who had disrupted an official celebration of Slovakia’s Christianization. In response, the authorities first postponed and then abandoned judicial proceedings against those in custody, and the HSLS voted for the budget in every subsequent year.  

The increase in the powers and influence, from 1929 to 1939, of the Slovak Provincial Office underlined its effectiveness. It employed a growing number of officials, established a series of branch offices across Slovakia, took control of a number of quasi-official associations, oversaw and published the first systematic program for research into economic and social conditions in Slovakia, introduced a new transparency policy for Slovak local government by publishing its decisions and deliberations, and invested heavily in the modernization of Slovakia’s infrastructure. Politicians from across the political spectrum lauded all of these achievements.

The depictions of the First Czechoslovak Republic as a centralized state are clearly wide of the mark. There was a broad consensus among Slovak politicians in support of Slovakia’s incorporation within Czechoslovakia. In return, the Slovaks benefited from the expansion of the suffrage and the new freedoms of speech and assembly, enjoyed a cultural renaissance, influenced the central government’s policy making, and possessed their own vigorous and influential local government. A vocal autonomist movement existed, to be sure, but its rhetoric must not mask the existence of a tradition of compromise, which consociational theory illuminates.

Concluding Remarks

The histories of Imperial Austria and the Czechoslovak First Republic demonstrate the evolution of consociational democracy in Central Europe, both in terms of its


40 National Archives of Great Britain, FO, 371 (Political Department, General Correspondence)/19495 (from 1935). – Felak: “At the Price of the Republic” 101-111 (cf. fn. 36).


42 Krajinský vestník pre Slovensko, 10 January 1936.

43 Autonomy was not only a demand of many Slovaks but also Rusyns. Unfortunately, space prohibits a full consideration of the applicability of the consociational model to Ruthenia during the interwar years.
strengthening, in areas where it was once in its nascent form, and in the extension of its geographical reach into the former Hungarian areas of Slovakia and Ruthenia. In the years before the First World War, Imperial Austria, a proto-consociational semidemocracy, displayed some features of consociational democracy. Its governments approximated the Lijphartian grand coalition model. Elections were increasingly proportional, not only for the Reichsrat but also in the regional interethnic compromises as well as in civil service appointments and education. The diets in the crown lands and the influence localities had on the schools institutionalized a degree of group autonomy. The scuttling of certain policies, frequently through seemingly unconstructive legislative obstruction, pointed toward the principle of mutual veto. These four traits of consociationalism intensified after 1918, as the Czechoslovak First Republic gradually became a fully consociational democracy. The politicians of the republic commonly constructed some form of Lijphartian grand coalition when building cabinets, a pattern that extended to the extraconstitutional and extraparliamentary groups of party leaders and then, beginning in 1929, to the Political Committees of the cabinets. As in Imperial Austria, proportionality was evident in the legislative elections, but it appeared in many other aspects of society, including civic associations. After 1918, there were small steps toward autonomy for Slovakia and Ruthenia, and the 1927 provincial law was a major step in that direction. Mutual vetoes no longer meant obstruction, as they once did in Imperial Austria, but merely a threat to the amiability of the parties within a Lijphartian grand coalition, and logrolling enabled both sides to enact what otherwise might have been controversial policies. Within Czechoslovakia, the spirit of consociationalism extended to the Slovaks and Rusyns, who, during the latter years of the Kingdom of Hungary, had little experience with building compromises. In particular, the Slovaks, either as individual politicians in various parties or through the HSĽS, joined in the Lijphartian grand coalitions that governed the state. Aside from elections, proportionality was manifested in the Provincial Assemblies. Similarly, the negotiations for the Slovak budgets, after 1927, demonstrated that the opposition parties wielded an informal veto. All the parties involved in drafting the budget extracted concessions and always reached a consensus. The process demonstrated that the Provincial Assemblies (even more than the Ministry with Full Power for the Administration of Slovakia) and the local governing of the schools were advancements in Slovak autonomy.

The consociational model has served as a tool to explain the success of democracy in deeply divided societies and to resolve conflict in such places as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, and South Africa. It can also serve as an analytical tool, suggesting ways in which existing consociational states might deepen the consociational experience, in order to better accommodate all the segments of their societies. The model gains additional usefulness through its application to historical cases. Examining consociationalism’s historic roots in Austria-Hungary and interwar Czechoslovakia enables researchers to understand its origins and to account for the consociational features that emerged in Austria after 1945, in Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism in 1989, and after 1993, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Furthermore, applying the consociational model corrects some of the
errors of interpretation, which are present in the historical literature, that dismiss the
democratic aspects and significance of pre-1914 Austrian politics and portray the
democracy of the Czechoslovak First Republic as defective or merely a case of
Czech domination. No state perfectly employs consociationalism, nor does conso-
ciationalism preclude the failure of democracy. When deeply divided societies
struggle to adopt democratic ideals, as did Imperial Austria, or when a conso-
ciational democracy stumbles, as with interwar Czechoslovakia, which could have
done more to integrate Slovaks, Germans, Rusyns, Hungarians, and other minorities
into the state structure, the consociational model provides an instrument to gauge
shortcomings. Democracy is not synonymous with majoritarianism, and stable
democracy is possible in deeply divided societies. Given the great variety of institu-
tional arrangements that might be deemed democratic and the particular demands of
deeply divided societies, it is crucial that historians and social scientists appraise both
democratic success and failures with the appropriate standard. When used as a tool
to view the past, consociationalism can provide not only a means of assessing the
progress of a deeply divided society toward building democracy but also the correct
reasons why forays into democratic politics in such a polity failed.