

THE CREATION OF THE CONDITIONS FOR
CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS
DEVELOPMENT IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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The authors present a historical application of the consociational theory of democracy to Imperial Austria (1867-1914) as well as the Czechoslovak First Republic (1918-1938) and interwar Slovakia. The consociational model guarantees minorities a say in government while protecting their interests, thereby helping to preserve democracy in societies with deep ethnic, religious, or other divisions. The authors contend that the nine favorable conditions and the four characteristics of consociational democracy apply, in varying degrees, to the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy and interwar Czechoslovakia. They demonstrate the extent to which Imperial Austria, although never fully democratic, was developing in the direction of consociationalism because it employed, to some degree, proportionality, segmental autonomy, minority veto, and grand coalitions. Interwar Czechoslovakia was not a failed democracy because, in the creation of governments, the evolution of its political institutions, and the implementation of policies, it exhibited all four characteristics of consociationalism. The examination of Slovakia concentrates on how government institutions, particularly the Provincial Office, fostered cooperation among Slovaks and between Slovaks and the central authorities in Prague, thereby undermining the notion of centralism and Czech domination. The authors' explanation of the development of democracy in Central Europe has implications for interpreting current politics in the region and generally for the historical development of consociational democracy.