

COMMEMORATIVE CONUNDRUMS: THE CREATION  
OF NATIONAL DAY CALENDARS IN INTERWAR  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY

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A primary function of national days is to legitimise the existence of the nation-state and strengthen the collective identity. This comparative study on the creation of national days in interwar Czechoslovakia and Hungary asks to what extent national days could unify these newly-independent countries. This question is answered through an analysis of the debates and conflicts that surrounded the construction of the national day calendars. The attitudes of the various, often competing, groups are analysed and special attention is paid to the views of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia towards Hungarian and Czechoslovak national days. In interwar Hungary the commemorations of St Stephen and the 1848-49 revolution, both of which had a commemorative tradition before 1918, were “multi-vocal” symbols, which could be interpreted in multiple ways, thus making them successful unifying symbols for the state. In contrast, in Czechoslovakia the national day calendar consisted mainly of newly created national days that lacked a tradition, and controversial commemorations, such as Jan Hus Day. Rather than being “multi-vocal” these cultural symbols exemplified the rigid ideological positions of competing groups, exacerbating the cleavages within society. They thus failed to provide a comprehensively unifying narrative for the new state.