

T. G. MASARYK

Presidential Authority and the Limits of “De-Austrianization”

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From the very first days of the existence of Czechoslovakia, multiple ideological factions and interest groups faced one another within the country. On the one side was the overwhelming majority of the citizens who became part of the new state without having contributed significantly to the elimination of the Habsburg Monarchy. On the other side was the group consisting of persons who had participated actively in the resistance as well as members of the Czechoslovak army legions. They claimed a share in the administration and leadership of the young state. Under these specific conditions, the role of a central integrative element fell to the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš G. Masaryk. The “liberator president” effectively took the place of Emperor Franz Joseph I, who had played a very similar role in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The present study retraces Masaryk’s efforts to establish a “perfect” state on the ruins of the Czechoslovak part of the former Habsburg Empire – mediated through the process of “de-Austrianization” he formulated, which primarily referred to the development of a sense for the state.