

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The proposed project aims at creating a comparative analysis that would focus on those political forces of interwar Austria, Czechoslovakia and Slovene part of Yugoslavia, whose essential common markers were heirship to the national liberal traditions and/or adherence to the respective political camps. It is therefore essentially a continuation of my previous work conducted in connection to my MA thesis, whereby I intend to substantially broaden the scope and deepen the analysis. This shall be done both in terms of geographical space and topics taken under observation.

My MA thesis, bearing the title *Vanishing National Liberal Traditions*, focused on the case of interwar Slovene political parties most often referring to themselves as “progressive” and commonly labeled as “liberal” on part of Slovene historiography, as well as the general public. In my work these parties were being treated as the main Slovene political forces, which either descended from the pre-WWI national liberal tradition or were perceived as its heirs, and were put into the general context of Central European political history. The main aim and purpose of this case study was to analyze the policies and stances of the observed parties and politicians in order to determine the extent they departed from the original national liberal course. Some possible answers to the question, whether it was still proper to speak about continuity of national liberal party tradition in the interwar Slovene politics, were thereby indicated.

As described above, my past work is meant to provide the foundation for the future project primarily in terms of theoretical approaches and methodology and much less concerning the subject matter. For that reason, before proceeding to the latter, some additional remarks are needed.

The principal feature of both my past and future projects has been that their focus has lain on behavior of agents in real politics, which genealogically – in terms of political party traditions - possessed liberal background or were at least commonly labeled as such due to their position inside the political spectrum (e.g. their delimitation towards other political groups). At the same time, one should in my view not treat these political forces as representatives of “liberalism” without employing a degree of critical reflection of that very term. Bearing in mind the interwar time frame, it could also be completely appropriate to label the object of my analysis as “liberalism after liberalism” or simply “post-liberalism”. During that era liberal politics were faced by especially great and troublesome challenges in adapting themselves to the developing realities of political life and gradual transformation of the party systems. The nature of organized liberalism was deeply affected by general socio-political developments. New manners of politics and changed party landscapes faced the “liberals” with lack of orientation, as well as diversity of orientations or alliances. Last but not least this also resulted in different approaches to politics and therefore also different attitudes to the original liberal ideas. Nevertheless, there still existed political parties, which were perceived either by themselves or by the public as representing the heirs or at least successors of the old national liberal traditions. As such they have also been closely examined by historiography.

Representing the pillar of my project, the concept of “liberalism”, has been treated in my work primarily on the level of political realities and as a *political label* denoting agents in constantly

changing political environments, being part of respective political language and having a highly contingent content¹. Understood as such it has had a dual significance, serving both as the basis of analysis and a point of critique. I therefore find it important to stress that I have been using the notion of “liberalism” more or less for the purpose of orientation and inside the context of Central European politics along with related designations as “progressive” and “free-minded”, which were also distinctive for that region. At the same time, however, the notion “liberalism” on more normative levels of its use and understanding – as a political philosophy and as an ideological pattern - could not be left completely ignored, since the critical evaluation of its use on the level of real politics seemed indispensable for the task.

One of my main aims has been trying to find out what “liberal” meant inside certain spatial and temporal context and especially which courses did the movements bearing that label adopt during the interwar period. Nonetheless, I have been striving to pursue this question in a critical way, on the premise that the liberal label, contingent as it may be on the level of historical political realities, should not be taken at a face value and in the strictest sense of the word. The parties, on which I have been focusing, bore the designation of *liberal*, without necessarily following a ‘proper’ liberal course, i.e. the one which could be seen as founded on or corresponding to principles developed by liberal political thinkers from John Locke to John Stuart Mill. Moreover, I would argue that, due to the political transformations of fin-de-siecle and generational change, they also to a considerable extent departed from the 19th century national liberal ideology, significant for their predecessors. The crucial question has of course been, how far had they departed and which were the continuities, if any. Excavation of surviving liberal elements in the case of liberal heirs and understanding their mutations thereby presented and presents the most important challenge.

In my PhD research I intend to build upon the Slovene case study, as well as the theoretical and contextual frameworks that accompanied it, applying the above mentioned questions and strategies to a broader and essentially comparative field. In upgrading my project I hereby aim to proceed into two directions.

Already my MA thesis included some comparative elements, which will serve as a basis for creating a full fledged comparison. Most of my attention will not be devoted to the already discussed Slovene case, but to the Austrian and Czechoslovak ones. Those will first be analyzed independently, to be later compared between each other and to the Slovene one. Among other, this would be done in order to find possible common political courses and ideological patterns among interwar national liberal heirs of former Cisleithania, as well as to try discerning common meanings of the liberal label, as employed inside this broader

¹ “Liberalism” represents a very broad notion, pointing into many directions. First and foremost, liberalism is a political philosophy or, more precisely, a group of philosophies. At the same time, the “liberal” label can be applied to a broader and even less unified set of *Weltanschauungen*, uniting individual ethical stances, common human ideals, as well as political ideas¹. These can be seen as having certain philosophical foundations but are also very receptive to influences, emanating from concrete circumstances space and time.

Last but not least it also designates a large and heterogeneous group of political traditions, presenting itself therefore as a common denominator of certain historical actors in real politics – movements, parties, personalities, etc.. “Liberalism” on this level, as it usually treated by political history, reveals itself as a constantly changing phenomenon, essentially dependent on its temporal and spatial locations, whereby the regional, national and cultural contexts play a major role.

perspective. In addition, the synthesis of the results gained from the case studies and their comparison could eventually be placed in a broader European framework and ‘asymmetrically’ compared to analogical political patterns of East Central or Southeast Europe. Secondly, the selection of questions addressed will be broadened. Beside the analysis of partisan policies, stances and discourses, as reflected in manifestos, party press, propaganda and speeches, it is to include more of the problems related to history and critical analysis of political concepts. Most importantly, the possibility of observing the political phenomena in question from another angle – conservatism instead of liberalism – will be put forward and discussed with help of theories and treatises of Michael Freeden, Jörn Leonhard and German *Geistesgeschichte*. On the other hand, more attention will also be devoted to the ‘classical’ viewpoint of political history, providing a deeper insight into the distinct national party configurations and political behavior of discussed parties. For instance, special attention would be given to differences in their attitudes towards social democratic parties inside their given political landscapes.

When treating the case of the interwar Austrian republic, my choice of subjects to be analyzed will be based on the clearly visible tri-partite division into political camps. Beside the Catholic and Marxist camps, the far strongest political forces in the Austrian interwar “2 ½ limping (*hinkend*) party system”², also a third, substantially weaker one was present. Most often named by historiographers simply “the third camp” (*das dritte Lager*) or “German nationalist camp” (*Lager der Deutschnationalen*), it has been also referred to as the “middle classes camp” (*bürgerliches Lager*)³ or “national liberal camp” (*national-liberales Lager*).⁴ The main representative of the third camp was the Greater-German People’s Party (*Grossdeutsche Volkspartei*), which loosely united 17 German nationalist and national liberal groupings but took a gradual path toward the far right to finally align itself with the National Socialists in the 1930’s. There also existed an independent agrarianist party, the *Landbund*, having its own special agenda but at the same time more or less acting as an ally of the above mentioned GdVP. Common for both parties were German nationalist orientation, anti-clericalism and opposition to Marxism. I will focus my study on the Greater German People’s Party and politicians as Johann Schober and Franz Dinghofer and base it on a doctoral dissertation by Isabella Ackerl⁵. Research is to be conducted primarily in the Austrian State Archives and Vienna University Library.

As regards the interwar Czechoslovakia – more precisely its Czech part – the political landscape was more diversified and one could hardly treat it as divided into three camps. The non-Marxist and non-Catholic parties were more numerous, espoused various political leanings and did not form a uniform camp. In addition to the National Socialists and Agrarians, far weaker Czechoslovak National Democrats (*Československá národní demokracie*), existed as part of the informal ruling *petka* coalition. This party could be labelled as representing the most direct heir to the pre-WWI Young Czech Party (*Národní strana svobodomyslná*), thereby also uniting some members of the former Czech Progressive Party (*Česká strana pokroková*). My inquiry will therefore focus on National Democrats and their long-time leader Karel Kramář,

² *Lexikon zur Geschichte der Parteien in Europa* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1981), p. 442.

³ Krzysztof Glass, Barbara Serloth, *Das Selbstverständnis des österreichischen Liberalismus* (Wien/Poznań: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Mitteleuropäische Studien/Humanior, 1997), p. 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵ Isabella Ackerl, *Die Großdeutsche Volkspartei 1920-34* (Vienna: 1967).

whereby a study by Martina Winkler⁶ focusing on his political career would serve as one of the starting points before proceeding to research work in Prague.

Already during my MA studies I devoted much attention towards studying the Austrian case, gaining solid ground knowledge. In order to enable my study of the Czechoslovak case on a comprehensive level, I also intend to enroll into a summer course of Czech language. I hope that the scheme of my project, my previous work on the topic and my scholarly interests recommend me as an eligible candidate for the PhD program at the Central European University.

⁶ Martina Winkler, *Karel Kramář (1860–1937). Selbstbild, Fremdwahrnehmungen und Modernisierungsverständnis eines tschechischen Politikers* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002).